

# Connexion

*Newsletter issue 124 September 2012*

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## OPSTA

the ormskirk, preston & southport travellers' association

established 1981 (formerly OPTA)

and affiliated with Railfuture, and Campaign For Better Transport

web site - [www.opsta.org](http://www.opsta.org)

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***Bill Board showing the planned development of Burnley Manchester Road station and new services – this newsletter reports on how this was achieved and the lessons we should learn.***

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**General Meeting Wednesday 17<sup>th</sup> October**

**starting 19.30 prompt at Burscough Wharf, with a presentation from our Chairman on latest developments. See Chairman's update for more detail.**

## Membership Renewal Reminder

Most of you will have done so already, but if you haven't your subscription is really important. As reported to the AGM, the association made a loss last year and yet we have agreed to hold subscription fees for another year.

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**A York bound train enters Manchester Burnley Road**

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## CONTACTS

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## Chairman's Update

As I write this, I hope that everyone is recovering from some of the worst flooding in many years. All our local lines were affected, with hardly any trains able to get through Parbold for two days, and other lines suffered cancellations for long periods.

Already and lasting for about eight weeks, late evening services between Southport and Wigan are being replaced by buses while a major track relaying project takes place between Parbold and Southport. We are still trying to find out details of the work, and I will let you know by email and through the website, as soon as we know.

In this edition we go into some detail about a couple of projects. The Todmorden curve, while not in our area, has a lot of similarities to the Burscough curves. So we have been taking a look at how this scheme has got the go-ahead to see what lessons we could bring to our campaigns. And there are some important lessons!

Secondly, after just a brief mention about Midge Hall station in the last edition, we have met with the local council to find out more. We came away with the very clear understanding that the station is a key component in their thinking [see back page].

And we can't forget our other key goals. At a recent Community Rail Partnership meeting we were told that Network Rail is now working on the next phase of planning for an hourly service between Ormskirk and Preston. We must be cautious, because it is a very complex process that can go 'wrong' at any step, but so far the indications are positive, and the working assumption is that an hourly service could start in 2014 or 2015. The new timetable introduced last December has already yielded an encouraging increase in passengers.

The other projects around Burscough, electrification and the curves, are slowly making headway. As with Midge Hall, the key to these projects is the Local Plan. The next step will be a public inquiry by a planning inspector and if all goes well West Lancashire's Plan could take effect as soon as next summer. In the meantime we are continuing to develop our case – with the lessons of the Todmorden curves to guide us.

I met recently with the Shadow Transport Minister Maria Eagle. We rode on the train from Ormskirk to Burscough Junction and then went around Burscough looking at the curves so that she could see for herself how small a job it all is in railway terms.

Another very worthwhile meeting recently was with the Friends of Hindley Station. Following their attendance at our AGM, four OPSTA members (also representing the Friends of Meols Cop and Burscough) accepted their invitation to meet on their patch. Always a pleasure to see the station gardens, it was unsurprisingly, very informing on just how much we have in common on concerns (eg lack of carriages)

and aspirations. We strongly agreed we should aim to be one voice; one of our first initiatives will be to make the case for extending the Atherton line Sunday service through to Southport.

Unfortunately, for our next members meeting on October 17<sup>th</sup> the planned guest speaker has had to cancel. But I would urge our members from all around, especially Midge Hall and Skelmersdale (yes, there is news on that as well), to attend so that we can go into a lot more detail on all of these schemes.

I would also like to present and sign off the conclusions from our 'OPSTA Fare Collection' research and discuss how we take the campaign forward.

Kind Regards, Roger

**Stop press!!!** an announcement from Network Rail stating they have just published the 'Network RUS: Alternative Solutions – Draft for Consultation' on their website: [www.networkrail.co.uk/asp/4449.aspx](http://www.networkrail.co.uk/asp/4449.aspx).

The consultation period will last for 60 days ending on 28 November 2012.

One of the very relevant challenges they address is how to replace ageing diesels without having to invest in the infrastructure needed for electrification. No it's not a return to steam but what they call 'discrete electrification' utilising the ever improving capability of batteries to provide power for much greater distances than the 'last mile' of non-electrified sidings and spurs its application has been limited to until now.

First thought is the potential opportunity for our lines and for achieving our goals with third rail electrics presently terminating at Ormskirk, Southport and Kirkby, and overhead power (for us) at Farington junction.



*Editor's note:*

*Michael McClean submitted this after the last newsletter with the irrefutable observation, 'nothing much changes in 24 yrs'. Maybe from Roger's comments we can still have some cause for optimism.*

*Left: Pacer unit No.142052 pulls away from the WCML onto the Ormskirk Line with the 17.22 ex-Preston train on 25th June, 1988. Until the late 1960's this was the principal route between Preston and Liverpool. Nowadays, InterCity services travel via Wigan and St. Helens Central, while passengers on the Ormskirk line have to change to Merseyrail services at Ormskirk.*

## **Rail Fares**

**(don't expect a green ticket)**

The First Secretary of State for Transport Phil Hammond recently declared that the war on motorists was over. As Private Eye asked, "what war?"

Looking back over the last 15 years of government what has happened in respect of the cost of rail travel in comparison to other forms of transport?

When the new Labour government took power in 1997 John Prescott announced that the policy was to encourage public transport and discourage car use; this policy lasted 12 months.

A Transport White Paper was issued in 1998 but the first draft was rejected by Number 10 because it was too anti car. The subsequent re write was to propose charging cars using out of town retail establishments but with pressure from Tesco this proposal was not included in the document.

Following the fuel protests in 2000 Tony Blair appeared on television and apologised to motorists for high petrol prices and said that fuel tax was needed for schools and hospitals, failing to mention that the previous government introduced the fuel escalator to slow down the increase in the use of cars.

The enlightened Phil Hammond has now stated he has abandoned the policy of encouraging people to use public transport in place of the motor car. He also stated that there would be no road pricing; he could not understand why a 2 coach train should have priority over a line of cars at a level crossing; or why a cyclist should have priority over motorist at traffic lights given cars are faster than bicycles. He even vetoed a proposal to link Heathrow airport with the southern rail system because a number of new level crossings would slow down motorists.

As a result of policies of the previous Labour government between 1997 & 2010 rail fares increased by 66% or 27% above inflation, bus and coach fares by 76%, whilst the cost of running a car went up by 32.5%, a 6.6% fall compared with inflation. Last year rail fares increased by some 6% and are due to increase by the same amount this year.

By stark contrast the last 2 proposals to increase fuel duty by 3% were abandoned.

Why is it we have only the 10th highest petrol prices in Europe and yet we have the highest rail fares by a large margin?

**John Berry**

## Information at Railway Stations

Recently, Northern Rail asked their 'station adopters' to conduct a survey of all posters at their stations. While some of these posters may have a limited value, some provide important information for people, especially visitors, about the area.

During my travels I have started looking at the key posters at stations. Based on as yet limited research, we think there are quite a few problems.

So can we ask our members to check your local station for some of the following?

- The Onward Travel poster is supposed to show details of local bus services at or near the station. I am finding that the information is incomplete and confusing. There is usually a list of destinations reachable by bus. Some of the destinations are not exactly clear – for instance 'Southport Road' – how many of those in West Lancashire? For another example, at Rufford it completely omits details of the bus service between Ormskirk, Tarleton and Preston. While I don't particularly wish to advertise a competing service, the link to Tarleton and Hesketh Bank would be useful for visitors.
- The Welcome Poster is supposed to provide information, for unstaffed stations, of where you can buy rail tickets. Again using Rufford as an example, it states that tickets can be purchased at Parbold and Preston. Have they never heard of Burscough Bridge or Ormskirk?

So can I ask you to take a careful look at the information at your local station, as if you are a visitor and need to find the information you need.

Please send any useful points to Roger Bell at the email address shown or in writing to Colin Wells if you don't have email.

**Roger**

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Editor's note:

Do you have a story to tell? The National Rail Museum is running a project to capture as many railway anecdotes and tales as it can. When I forwarded Mike Perkins' early career recollections as featured here in 2011 (with his permission of course), they asked whether I would include the following request in our newsletter.

And if you do have a story, then please remember to also send to me for inclusion in the newsletter. As ever your letters, reviews and articles would be very welcome.

## **Share your station story**

The National Railway Museum is looking for your station stories.

We're redisplaying our Station Hall. It's a former railway building with many stories to tell. We're making changes to bring it to life by recreating the sights and sounds of visiting an authentic working station.

Your stories will be used to help us develop the Station Hall experience and build a picture of daily life in a busy station. Tell us your stories about travelling by train and working in railway stations.

We're interested in passenger stories about eating in dining cars, travelling in sleeper cars, commuting and going on holiday. We'd also like to hear about your special journeys such as going on honeymoon, emigrating and travelling to school.

If you're a former station worker, we're interested in the job you did, what your day-to-day routine was like, who you worked with and any memorable incidents.

## **How to tell us your story**

Fill in the story form on our website at [nrm.org.uk/stationstories](http://nrm.org.uk/stationstories)

Email to [stationstories@nrm.org.uk](mailto:stationstories@nrm.org.uk)

Post to Station Stories, National Railway Museum, Leeman Road, York, YO26 4XJ.

## **How we will use your story**

Your story may be used anonymously in Station Hall or on our website. People with stories of interest may be approached for more information. Please include your contact details if you're happy for us to get in touch.

You can call 01904 685762 if you have any questions for the Station Stories team.

The Station Hall redisplay will happen in stages throughout 2012. To follow our progress visit [nrm.org.uk/stationhall](http://nrm.org.uk/stationhall)

Station Stories is a partner project of York Stories 2012.



## Lessons from the Todmorden Curve

In April 2014, Burnley will be linked directly again with Manchester. This follows a successful campaign to reopen the Todmorden curve, similar to our efforts with the Burscough curves. Burnley Manchester Road station is currently being substantially upgraded, and the draft timetable shows an hourly service starting at Accrington, then stopping at Burnley, Todmorden and stations into Manchester Victoria.

Manchester Road station was closed on November 6<sup>th</sup>, 1961 and in 1965 the local services to Todmorden via the curve were closed. Before then the basic service ran between Preston and Todmorden, with a couple of through trains between Blackpool and Bradford.

In 1966, a new service started between Leeds and Preston and in 1968 Manchester Road was reopened with new platforms. Since then the route has gone from strength to strength with an hourly service between Blackpool and York.



**Burnley Manchester Road station in 1962.**

So how does this project get the green light while the Burscough Curves seem as far away as ever?

To try to find out so that we can use any lessons, we have been looking into the history of the project.



First, the local MPs and councils have lobbied hard, working together across boundaries. The first glimmer of hope came when it was thought that the scheme would proceed following the finalising of a Multi Area funding agreement between central government and a consortium of councils in East Lancashire in January 2009.

Success finally came in 31 October 2011, when it was announced by Deputy Prime Minister Nick Clegg that the scheme had been granted finance as part of the Regional Growth Fund.

Earlier this year, I was given a copy of a promotional brochure about the project, produced by Burnley Council. So I called the contact given in the brochure who turned out to be none other than the Council's Chief Executive who was very willing to arrange a meeting.

The meeting revealed some important lessons for us:-

- Support of the local MPs has been vital – although there was a change at the general election in 2010, both have played an instrumental role.
- Manchester supported the link for a number of reasons: access leads to growth, the availability of affordable housing and skilled employees being most important.
- Economic regeneration is a key to the project, particularly to assist in the redevelopment of the Weavers Triangle – a major opportunity on the Leeds and Liverpool Canal in the town.
- Economic links to Leeds and Manchester are vital to the future of the job market in Burnley.
- The role of local authorities in the area has been consistent and highly collaborative.
- The strength of leadership from Burnley council is very apparent. The council has spent £150,000 to hire consultants to help to take the project through the Network Rail investment process (known as GRIP).

I think you will agree that there are many direct comparisons between the Todmorden curve and our local aspirations. Equally, there are many similarities in the history of how we came to have the existing situation.

At our next members meeting, we will go into this in more detail. We encourage everyone to think about how we can apply the lessons!

**Roger Bell**

Reinforcing the economic argument for strengthening and improving our rail services from local history and in the present.....

Croston station is the lifeline of the village.

The arrival of the railway line to Croston in 1849 changed the whole social status of the village. Previously a small rural market town, local people were independent and self sufficient. The railway brought not only local employment, but the availability to work in towns like Preston, Ormskirk or Liverpool.

Situated between Preston and Liverpool, Croston had an extensive goods yard consisting of seven sidings on the down side with a capacity for a total of 89 wagons, and on the up side a siding for 38 wagons, plus sidings to Crompton & Co.'s brickcroft.

Some of the last scheduled steam trains used this line right up to the end of steam in august 1968. In the early 1970's, with the rationalisation of the railway network, and the Beeching Cuts, the route between Preston and Ormskirk was reduced to a single line. Passengers for Liverpool now had to change trains at Ormskirk.

Croston station has been unmanned from that date, and the station master's house is now a private dwelling. The goods yard has been passed for the development of 45 dwellings, and the brickcroft has now become an industrial estate.

The railway line is the lifeline of the village. It takes only 15 minutes from Croston to Preston. No traffic hold-ups or parking charges. It is where youngsters first learn to travel without a parent, and find their way back home. Where villagers commute to work, and others to shop or plan days out. It now has a good group of Friends who look after it, and one thing is certain, however much it changes, it will survive.

Kath Almond

FRIENDS OF CROSTON STATION

Embroidered cushions in St. Michael & All Angels Church, Croston. The cushions were made by local women in the 1980's, depicting important aspects of Croston life.



In recognition of the role of our association (referenced by its original name), which has always had strong membership in the village and surrounding area.



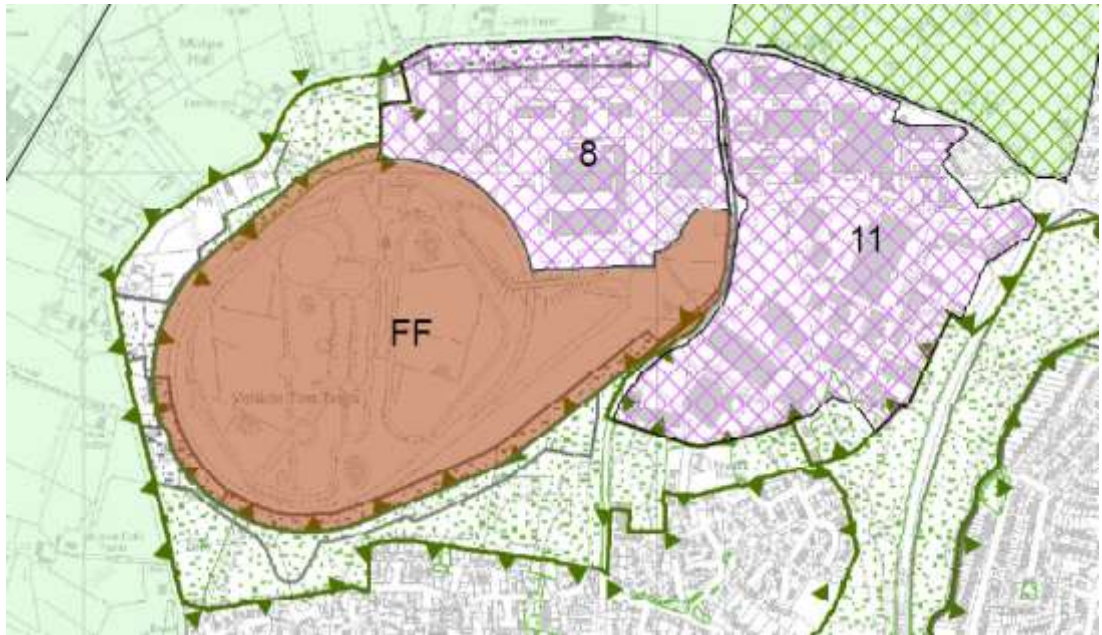
And see over to find where could/ should be the next community serving station.

## Midge Hall

As with all councils, South Ribble is getting close to completing the new Local Plan. This in essence is about allocating land for future house building and employment over the next 15 years.

One of the key sites in the South Ribble plan is the former Leyland Motors test track.

Site of Midge Hall station>> where the road crosses the Ormskirk to Preston (black) line



This map is taken from the Plan. The proposal is, in the area labelled FF, to build up to 750 houses over the term of the plan. The railway line is shown in the upper left, and a careful examination shows that the old Midge Hall station is very close to this new housing site.

Recently Bob Robinson and I met with the planners at South Ribble to get a better understanding of their view of the relevance of the station to this development. It was made clear that the reopening of the station is one of the key infrastructure elements to make this site work well.

As long-time OPSTA members know, we used to campaign actively to get Midge Hall reopened. Over time, we accepted that there was not enough potential traffic to make the numbers work. But we have been keeping an eye on this possible development, because it will create a lot of new traffic.

So to our members, particularly in the area, what do you think?

**Roger Bell**