

**Minutes of Copeland Rail Users' Group at Seascale Methodist church hall on 12 August 2017
at 1350**

Present: David Andrews, Martin Bibby, Lynette Gilligan, Nigel Gilligan, Carrol Johnson, Keith Murray, Tony Potts (in the chair), Alf Sharing, Terry Taylor, Ann Walker-Bayliss, Steve Wood, Graham Worsnop

Apologies: Adrienne Calsy, Liz Clegg, Hilary Hemm, Steve Hemm, Doug McDevitte, Margaret Sharing, Marjorie Taylor

1 Minutes of the meetings of 10 June and 8 July were approved.

2 Matters arising

June Minute 4 2018 timetables Our comments have been sent to the Community Rail Partnership.

Minute 8 Timetables Northern's timetabling team are dealing with the issues of timetables not showing trains south of Barrow and out of date announcements on customer information screens. It was suggested that trains crossing at St Bees should be avoided where possible as this can mean the crossing being closed for up to 15 minutes. Reinstating the passing loop at Nethertown would be a help. This would be taken to our meeting with the community rail partnership. It was noted that the customer information screen at Seascale at least still refers to the April strike.

Minute 9 Accessibility at St Bees Northern have replied:

The Harrington hump on the up platform (towards Barrow) has been in place to accommodate the rolling stock and its doors. The only issue is that Network Rail have not signed the platform back into our portfolio of stations, hence why Northern are still operating selective door operation on these platforms. Until such a time that the platform is signed back selective door operation will remain. Our Estates Department/Station Manager are well aware of the situation. Regarding the hump on the down Network Rail were originally going to replace the ramp to become stock appropriate, however they stipulated that they would have to lift the original hump - which Northern made the decision that this was not an effective solution, given the stock will go in 2019. Northern would be left with a non conformant piece of equipment due to its location. I can appreciate that this does not help the customers in the short term – the conductors do however have the ability to operate the on board ramps if customers are finding it hard to board. If customers advise them of this option then I am sure they will only be too happy to help.

It was agreed to ask the community rail partnership about extending the northbound hump.

July minute 5 Community rail liaison meeting It was noted that Martin Keating had been told that Jonathan Parr was willing to continue looking after Corkickle and the matter of needing groups rather than individuals to adopt stations would be raised again at the next meeting as several stations are now looking tattier. Tony noted that Northern are only issuing passes now to adopter groups and he would query the decision.

Minute 12 Sellafield rail users' e-group This is purely a group of people who are notified of delays and cancellations but it was felt it might be useful to arrange a meeting at Sellafield to

get first hand reactions from commuters.

3 Tony's report

The following July report was emailed to members before the meeting:

Plans have been shown for a new footbridge at Sellafield Station. Work is due to start on 10 July and will last for about three months. During this time a temporary replacement footbridge will be available. I'm sure that people will know of other footbridges which are in need of refurbishment, replacement or even installation.

The Tyne Valley Rail Users' Group had its meeting at Haltwhistle on 8 June. The speaker was Arriva Rail North's Northern Stakeholder Manager NE Peter Myers. As the Newcastle and Carlisle line will be part of the Northern Connect system, much development is expected. Northern Connect in Cumbria goes from Carlisle to Newcastle, and Barrow and Windermere to Manchester Airport, but we are left out. We are, however, promised extra trains and units in future years, and shall wait and see.

August report:

After a successful meeting at Millom addressed by Trudy Harrison MP, at least one member of the Sellafield Limited (SL) Train User Group has e-mailed her, had an acknowledgement (19 July) and an answer (24 July). I shall read out the reply. I must stress that the SL train user group is very informal, being simply a list of employees who use the trains and who can be contacted in the event of any disruption.

It wasn't until after the meeting that I learned that Trudy had met promoters of the Penrith – Keswick line restoration campaign, showing that she is very rail –minded.

The cancellation of electrification schemes in the north is very disappointing, after all the Northern Powerhouse promises. As for Mr Grayling to say that passengers don't care whether the train is diesel or electric, those of us with long memories will recall British Rail's "Sparks Effect", when once electrification schemes were completed, the numbers of passengers soared. There's all this fuss about diesel road vehicles polluting the air, yet the government is going against this by cancelling electrification.

I'm told that Class 769 trains, which are being converted from ex-Thameslink Class 319 electrics by having a diesel engine fitted, are to run between Windermere and Manchester Airport from May 2018. According to the Furness Line Action Group (FLAG) newsletter, Northern is to explore the possibility of deploying alternative-fuel hybrid trains on the route by 2021, "removing the need to construct intrusive wires and masts in the National Park". FLAG also say that Class 769 will also be used between Barrow and Manchester Airport from May next. In spite of an article in the *Whitehaven News* (13 July) saying that Northern's new trains will be run locally, we know that all we are to get are refurbished Class 156 units.

Problems with loco hauled trains are still occurring. It is no wonder that the road coaches to and from Sellafield is doing well when railway passengers are let down so often. Some years ago, I was given details of a log of journeys between Barrow and Sellafield from 1999 to 2001, which showed how often trains were late or overcrowded.

Installation of the new footbridge at Sellafield station was due to start on 31 July.

As part of a movement to protest about the bias towards the south in railway investment, a petition by the think tank IPPR North had attracted 31,000 signatures by 31 July.

Along with three others, Brian Irwin, Craig Johnston and Cedric Martindale, I was interviewed by a *News and Star* reporter on the report that Chris Grayling wants commuter trains to be entirely standard instead of first class. Part of the interview appeared in the 26 July edition.

The *Sunday Times* (30 July) carried a table of train punctuality. Northern was about half-way down the list, with only 1% of trains over 60 minutes late or cancelled. This information was taken over four weeks ending on Sunday 23 July, and I wonder how many of the 1% were on our line.

My initial fears when HS2 was announced that it would be at the expense of the rest of the network seem to be coming true, as it would appear that other schemes are being cancelled as well as the electrification mentioned above.

The threat of strikes seems to have receded for now.

I wasn't able to attend the last open day of the West Cumbria Mining. At the time of writing, planning consent was still awaited.

We remain somewhat confused about the position on new trains in Cumbria and the question would be raised again.

Although work on the Sellafield footbridge was supposed to have started in July with a temporary bridge nothing has happened yet.

It was noted that there can be problems at Barrow if passengers have been unable to pay on the train because of the lack of a ticket machine and it needs more than one person to sell tickets.

4 Community rail liaison meeting 29 June

We met with Dawn McGough from the community rail partnership and Martin Keating of Northern. Main points are that we are still awaiting details of station improvements and various problems were discussed; Sellafield toilets will be improved; the idea of notices on stations about walks was welcomed (the partnership were still raising finance for leaflets but will not pay for them); Terry will receive timetable leaflets and we could keep some stocked on unstaffed stations; we are asked if we have any comments on timetable design; there is a list of unadopted stations (Kirkby in Furness, Foxfield, Drigg, Corkickle/Seascale (no response from current adopters), Sellafield (reserved for apprentices), Braystones, Nethertown, Parton (reserved for Parton Youth Group), Harrington, Flimby, Maryport (waiting for hub to be complete) - Shackles Off could be approached about trespassing and adoption; help with social media; and publicity for Sunday trains.

On timetables we replied and were thanked for the response:

- Not much to suggest about timetables:

- Cover could include symbol for ticket machines

- Minimum connection times add Preston 8 minutes, Manchester Piccadilly 10 minutes

- Footnotes for trains eg from Newcastle or to Windermere should include booklet numbers for them if not arrival/departure times

- Really useful would be some connection times at Carlisle, Lancaster and Preston to major centres such as London, Birmingham, Newcastle, Glasgow and Edinburgh as on TPE timetables.

Terry said that the problem with young people on the tracks was years ago and linked to the former St Bees school but he would raise the possibility of station adoption with Shackles Off.

5 Correspondence and administration

Rail user express for June, *Rail North West* summer edition, *Connections express* for July and August, *Cumbrian Railways Association newsletter* for autumn and *TransPennine Express stakeholder update* for July have been circulated.

West Coast Mining The planning application has now been submitted to the county council and representations were made. There is some useful information but the critical part is that after 2022 there are not enough train paths north for the six trains a day each way envisaged without splitting the Maryport-Wigton signalling section into three. However the plan does not seem to take into account even Arriva's 2018 timetable (not released when the work was done) let alone the potential demands, mainly of Nugen if the development goes ahead. (Incidentally that suggests an additional 20 trains a day between Whitehaven and Workington.) It certainly doesn't include the aspirations that have been expressed for a further increase in passenger capacity to provide half hourly services north of Whitehaven and possibly south of Millom. The development would also add to current escalating delays in single line stretches. The road transport section also refers to workers possibly using the proposed Mirehouse station.

Punctuality figures for the last five weeks to 11 August deteriorated when compared with the last meeting when timed at Whitehaven partly due to two signalling problems and more loco failures as well as a strike. 82% (89% last month) of loco hauled trains and 86% (90%) of DMUs were within five minutes of their timetabled time on weekdays (91% (96%) and 94% (97%) within ten minutes); on Saturdays 88% (91%) of loco hauled trains and 81% (83%) of DMUs (88% (94%) and 88% (88%) within ten minutes); Sundays 97% (100% - 100% (100%) within ten minutes). There was a poorer record of 6 (2) loco hauled and 7 (3) DMU cancellations. The cancellations are categorised as traction problems (5 loco 1 DMU), crew (2 DMUs), late arrival (2 DMUs), planning (2 DMUs and safety (loco). The *Sunday Times* on 6 August published figures for delays and cancellations which appear to miss some trains and include freight.

Virgin TransPennine Express and Caledonian Sleeper now sell **advance tickets** up to an hour before the train's departure. Northern have announced that they are doing the same up to 125 minutes before departure on certain journeys but there is nothing on their website for advance tickets from Cumbrian stations except bizarrely Staveley to Manchester stations and Manchester to Staveley and Windermere – nothing from Barrow or Carlisle. They need to be booked online. This will be raised with Northern.

Network Rail's 2017-18 railway upgrade plan includes 'We are developing exciting plans for future projects, including working closely with the NuGen nuclear project, and other partners, to deliver a £400m investment on the Cumbrian coast.'

Nethertown now has a Harrington hump. We would again press for more stops at Nethertown and Braystones (ideally request stops on all trains).

Bootle John Little had asked whether there could be a memorial about the incident at Bootle station in 1945 when a goods train carrying detonators exploded. The *North West Evening Mail*

report on 20 March 2015 said:

SEVENTY years ago tomorrow a village was spared what could have been a major disaster thanks to the bravery of a rail locomotive crew.

A blazing train of ammunition wagons – actually depth charges – was isolated a safe distance from Bootle Station, eight miles north of Millom, before it blew up, ripping up 100 yards of track and leaving a huge crater.

We are able to tell the detailed story of what happened thanks to retired train driver Les Jackson, from Wistaston, Crewe, and Syd Williams, treasurer of the Manchester Locomotive Society.

Mr Jackson writes: “Towards the end of the Second World War, on March 22 in 1945, the people of Bootle had a very near disaster – only to be averted by the quick action of the crew of a freight train approaching the village at 10.15pm.”

Mr Williams tells us that the train was a Midland 3F, No 3579, heading towards Carnforth with 58 wagons. The seven closest to the locomotive were filled with the explosive depth charges from Buckhill, Broughton Moor.

The driver – who was killed – was Harold Goodhall and the fireman was Norman Stubbs, both being based at Workington.

Mr Jackson, who started work on the railways in 1952, said Mr Goodhall was a workmate of his father, Harry.

Harry told his son that there had been a swap of drivers on that train 70 years ago with a Mr White.

Mr Jackson said: “I suppose there is still no plaque on Bootle Station to remember the bravery of the train crew that night?”

Mr Williams said there had been other wartime explosions where rail crews had seen locomotives named in their honour.

On that night 70 years ago the driver and fireman had been working hard to maintain the steam pressure on what was a long and heavy train.

After going through Eskmeals there was a long, straight climb to Bootle and towards the end of the climb sparks were coming from the locomotive’s chimney.

Fireman Stubbs looked back as they passed Bootle and noticed a reflection of flames from the station buildings.

The signalman at Bootle also spotted the flames from one of the explosives wagons and sent a “stop and examine” signal to the next box at Silecroft.

This warning halted a passenger train from Barrow at Silecroft Station and probably saved many lives.

Mr Williams said: “The goods train was brought to a stand approximately a quarter of a mile south of Bootle Station.

“Fireman Stubbs said that he jumped from the loco before it stopped which put him opposite the burning wagon.”

Despite the fierce heat he was able to uncouple it and then with the help of the driver they were able to isolate it from the other explosives wagons.

Stubbs then went down the line to place warning detonators on the track to stop approaching trains.

He placed only one before the wagon exploded, hurling him 50 yards.

Remarkably, he was uninjured and continued placing the detonators.

With the help of the guard, Stubbs managed to get the rest of the damaged train to Silecroft station.

He was presented with the George Medal by King George V at a ceremony in Buckingham Palace.

He also received the Daily Herald Order of Industrial Heroism – known as the “Workers’ Victoria Cross”.

The driver was killed in the explosion and was highly commended for his bravery and quick action.

Mr Williams said: “It is an illustration of the many dangers that railwaymen – and women – undertook on a regular basis, as a matter of course and without complaint, during the wars years.”

There is mention of the event on an interpretation panel at the beach but it was felt it would be good to have a memorial in place for the 75th anniversary on 20 March 2020 and this would be raised with the community rail partnership. Cumbrian Railways Association has some information and the parish council should be interested.

County council transport spokesperson remains Keith Little. David Brown is **Arriva Rail North's** new managing director.

Acorp and Transport Focus – it was agreed to ask Transport Focus to speak at the next AGM (alternative the Cumbria Local Enterprise Partnership). As Acorp should have annual meetings with community rail partnerships we would ask if they took place and if we could be involved.

Email from **Whitehaven Heritage Action Group** which has been replied to and someone may attend our meeting:

I write on behalf of Whitehaven Heritage Action Group, who recently visited Whitehaven Railway Station to see what improvements might be made to what is a key gateway for visitors to the town.

Members were gratified to find the station precincts in relatively good order. Painted woodwork and metalwork was in a reasonable condition, flower tubs were planted up, though some of the tubs were beginning to rot. Weeds around building and platforms were under control. It was noted that there were large tracts of weeds growing from the stonework beside the tunnel, the stone lintel over the tunnel appeared to be crumbling and there was a lot of litter on the lines themselves, but these were tasks beyond the scope of WHAG to rectify. Some large white wooden gates on the periphery of the boundary were in a poor state.

It was also noted that a rack of bikes available on the platform under the Bike and Go scheme were quite rusty and did not look as if they had been used for quite some time. It begged the question whether they were roadworthy, who maintains them and how often? If they weren't being used members felt that perhaps they should be removed, rather than left to rust away as a bit of an eyesore on the platform.

The use of old diesel trains on the west coast line and the noise and emissions they produce continue to be a high cause for complaint among many residents in the Whitehaven area, but I am sure you are already well aware of this situation and are giving it your full attention.

Members have asked me to pass on their observations to CRUG (Cumbria Rail Users Group) in the hope they may be of some use to you in your endeavours and lend weight to any improvement campaign of your own you may be pursuing.

Reply:

Thanks for your email. It does back up our observations at Whitehaven and I will report it to our meeting next month.

We are awaiting a station upgrade for Northern shortly to be carried out over the next year or so but it is likely to be addressing areas such as what we see as the inadequate waiting facilities and, we hope, uneven platforms where large puddles can form in wet weather as well as more customer information and perhaps improved ticket machines. We have been campaigning for some years for raised platforms and now have so-called Harrington humps (they were pioneered there) on both platforms, recently extended on platform 2, but would like this to be further extended. If you look at Corkickle station (are you going to?) you will see that it has a raised platform throughout. I would have thought you would have also looked at the old platform 3 now out of use on the far side of the through line which is in an untidy state.

With regard to the two items you mention, we are concerned that the bikes are hardly ever used which is a shame for the start of the C2C cycleway (not that they are necessarily the most appropriate for that) and Hadrian's cycleway along the coast where a gentle cycle for a few stations and return train would be appropriate and we have tried to encourage that along with similar walks. The loco hauled trains are with us until late 2019 when we should just have a fleet of refurbished diesel multiple units which are much quieter.

If you would like to come along to one of our meetings to talk about these issues you would be most welcome – just let me know.

Liz Clegg emailed:

I am interested in anything from the train company about over carrying, especially of minors. I don't think that my daughter has had a formal response from Northern to her complaint about the overcarrying of her daughter yet.

Also, the **Muncaster Microbus** has a new, small vehicle, which will be able to meet trains. We would welcome ideas as to how this could work. A suggestion is that we publicise meeting a specific train at a specific station. Then we distribute the passengers to their final destinations, eg pick up passengers from Seascale and take them home to Drigg, Eskdale and Ravenglass. Also, if we can get the volunteer drivers, we could collect passengers from later trains at Millom or Whitehaven.

It might make it possible to get to London and back in one day.

Members were interested in the idea and felt that the most likely possibility was to connect with an evening arrival at Millom such as the 2010 and take passengers further up the line.

Parking charges at Whitehaven increased on 8 August from £2 to £3 a day (£14 a week, £45 a month and £365 a year). They also increased at Barrow, Carnforth and Grange to £5 and Ulverston to £4 a day. Although the Furness Line Action Group are incensed at the increases members felt that charges were reasonable and less than it costs to park in towns otherwise and considerably less than on the west coast main line. The effect in Whitehaven is that it is usually possible to find a space now.

The spring 2017 issue of Transport Focus' **National Rail Passenger Survey** is out.

Generally there is a pleasing 3% improvement in satisfaction in the last year.

As far as Northern is concerned it shows 83% of passengers satisfied with their journey, up 2% on last year but lower than the regional train operators' average of 87%. On satisfaction with stations the figure is up 3% at 84%, the regional average, and on trains again up 3% to 74%, below the 79% average. This is hardly surprising given the state of the fleet.

In detail there are significant improvements on the station figures for connections to other public transport up 7% at 74%, shelter facilities up 5% at 77% and provision of information about train times and platforms is up 4% at 89% – the last two reflecting the work done on stations and figures that we would expect to improve again significantly in the next couple of years as improvement plans come to fruition.

For trains satisfaction for scheduled speed of journey is up 7% at 86% (regional average 90%), cleanliness of the outside of trains up 4% at 67% – something we have had less cause to complain about locally recently – and punctuality 4% at 83%. The only significant fall was for personal security on board down 3% at 75% and common to most operators, presumably as a result of terrorist attacks.

Northern's figures remain lower than the regional average on most counts, particularly on trains rather than stations which must reflect the state of the fleet at present. Northern scores higher on car parking and shop facilities on stations. On trains they are well below the average on frequency, upkeep, information during the journey, seat comfort and particularly dealing with delays which is the main concern across the whole network.

It is perhaps dealing with delays that concern us most at present. When trains break down it seems to paralyse the line for hours seemingly without the possibility of single line working (where there are two lines) and great difficulty in arranging buses. At least information at unstaffed stations is improving.

There are figures for the four Northern regions (in our case West) but they don't differ a lot.

As usual commuters are less happy than business passengers and leisure travellers most forgiving.

Peter Rooke from the Railway Museum in St Bees will be telling the story of the **railways in Whitehaven** on Saturday 19 August at 2pm in the Beacon museum with free entry.

Lakes line electrification has been cancelled by the government in favour of bimode (electric and diesel) trains (though the government seem likely to push ahead with another Crossrail in London).

Haltwhistle station is part of Heritage open days on Friday 8 and Saturday 9 September 1000-1630 including the old booking hall, signal box and walks and Virgin East Coast's Azuma roadshow.

There is a Settle and Carlisle excursion from Carlisle to **York** on 25 November.

The **All the stations** guys travelled up the coast line on 28 July – see them on YouTube <https://www.youtube.com/allthestations> (episode 46, day 83 – Lancaster to Newcastle) – Nethertown has proclaimed as a new favourite station.

6 Membership is now 95.

7 Publicity In the absence of any volunteers David will edit the September newsletter and Nigel December. We need articles and photos sending to David by 21 August. It was suggested that a new poster could be produced for booking offices.

8 Treasurer's report We have a balance of £1048. The future of the Co-operative Bank is looking more secure and it is unlikely that we will need to change banks. We are renewing our advertisement in *Rail North West*. It was agreed to pay the usual £10 to Travelwatch. David would pay £45 to the church for May-August meetings (second authority Tony).

9 Next meeting will be on Saturday 16 September (not 9 September) at 1350 in Seascale Methodist church hall and the 14 October meeting will be at the new Ratty museum at 1400.

The meeting closed at 1526

da 12.08.17