

HADRAG:

The Halifax & District Rail Action Group
on the Calder Valley Line

J Stephen Waring, Chair, HALIFAX, West Yorkshire

HADRAG issues for Northern July 2018

(as presented at drop-in event, 2.vii.18, with minor corrections/amendments/additions
– forms appendix to July HADRAG Committee minutes)

1 Stations etc

- a) **Location of TVMs** linked to operation of penalty fares scheme. Stations with multiple entrances need TVMs on all platforms. **We have already discussed this with Pete M.** Examples in HADRAG's area:
 - MYT – poor location in shelter facing wrong way; not obvious from either platform. Could better signing be provided? Remote from westbound platform (5 min walk round trip).
 - SOW – location OK or eastbound but needs at least one machine on westbound. Similar issue as at MYT but walk shorter (3min)
 - BGH – no TVMs and not in penalty fares zone yet. Station has 4 entrances.
- b) **Staffing “full/partial”** – when will we know what this means for MYT (partial), SOW (full), BGH (full)?
- c) **Need for retention of traditional booking offices** at HFX, HBD, TOD with development of retail and info services offered.
- d) **Community rail at HFX etc.** HADRAG not a natural station adoption group (we are campaigners) but there are things we may be able to help with to mutual benefit:
 - Noted that community notice case at Halifax is still not in use. We could operate this starting as soon as you like (realistically maybe after end of July!), collecting posters etc from community groups to display and giving basic (uncontroversial) info about our own group.
Pleased to note from meeting that progress being made toward station adoption scheme involving young people/National Citizen Service. HADRAG looks forward to being involved in the autumn.
 - At the new Hfx station (next point) would like to see art work, historical displays etc, mini-museum of local transport history?
 - When a timetable change is due we would be happy to give out copies of new timetable booklets at stations in our area – though we would hope that these would be a single booklet showing all services on the CVL. If we could hand out fliers about HADRAG at the same time, that would be even better!
- e) **Halifax station Gateway scheme:** generally we strongly support vision in concept designs but there are two areas of concern that we hope Northern as TOC would put pressure on Calderdale (and Eureka!) to improve significantly:
 - Parking and drop-off planned to be located on east side of line (more remote from town) with access to station entrance via underpass. Would make access to existing island Platform 1/2 very

indirect: through underpass then up stairs/lift to footbridge, back over footbridge and down to platform. Potentially very inconvenient particularly for disabled and people with luggage, prams etc. Taxis and drop-off need to be on west side of line adjacent to the proposed direct pedestrian route from town. This would also help to ensure the main pedestrian access does not become a remote/threatening area at night. **We believe it would make sense to have at least drop-off (including taxis and disabled access) at front (W side) of station; issue may be desire of Eureka! to retain lucrative car park at N end of site.**

- Platform 3 proposal and future-proofing. Proposal to build out P3 to serve existing P2 track would require canopy to be widened to give adequate shelter. Of greater concern, by building across vacant track-bed this threatens future possibility of bringing a third operational line back into use. Whilst we understand Network Rail does not currently see the need for a third track it is clear that it could facilitate future service patterns with more trains, closer headways into station, and terminating or reversing services.

We hope Northern as TOC will press for best solutions for present and future rail passengers.

f) **Station cleaning.** As always appropriate to record excellent work done by HFX station cleaner

2 Train services – current issues and longer term aspirations.

- Obvious continuing performance concerns: reliability, punctuality and crowding as always.
- Subjectively we seem to have seen more Class 150 and even Pacers on the Calder Valley Line. Is this the case?
- The new rolling stock can not arrive too soon (including the 170s from Scotland for the Brighouse Line)!

2.1 Present timetable.

2.1.1 We strongly welcome the following aspects:

- (York-)Leeds-Preston(-Blackpool) serving Sowerby Bridge and Mytholmroyd...
- ... giving increased service frequency from these stations to Bradford (2/hr) and Leeds (3/hr)...
- ... which must now be established as the minimum.
- Extension of the 0726 Halifax-Leeds to start back at Hebden Bridge with a return working at teatime.
- More Sunday trains at Brighouse (but not on the Leeds-Brighouse-upper Calderdale-Manchester route).

Disappointed at temporary truncation of York-Blackpool service (but to some extent understand reasons).

Is it possible to predict:

- When York-Blackpool will be fully restored with fast running York-Leeds as in original plan?
- When the Chester and Airport services will be introduced?

Noted that extension of LDS-BGH-MCV train to Southport has gone ahead. This is the least useful of the promised enhancements for the Calder Valley Line; also, we hear, Southport would rather have trains to the Airport.

2.1.2 Specific issues. The following (a)-(g) are examples, not a comprehensive review! All are aspects that we hope can be improved over the next 2-3 timetable changes and by December 2019. (We realise there are limitations on what can be achieved by the end of 2018.)

NOTE: in general issues mentioned for Sowerby Bridge (SOW) also apply to Mytholmroyd (MYT)

(a) Brighouse Line issues

- **“Overtaking issue”.** Direct services Leeds-Bgh via Dewsbury overtake train via Bradford in both directions, reducing effective Brighouse-Leeds frequency from 2/hr to 1/hr. Complies with letter but surely not spirit of TSR. Is this really acceptable?

- Extended journey times in new timetable e.g. Halifax-Brighouse-Huddersfield now full half-hour including 4 min dwell in Brighouse station. In opposite direction trains have 5 minutes extra time Brighouse-Halifax. At least this shows a stop at Elland could be accommodated!
- Leeds-Brighouse-Manchester-Southport trains have extra time Brighouse-Sowerby Bridge (presumably for pathing at Milner Royd). It would be better if these trains dwelt slightly longer in Brighouse station rather than stand at signals at Milner Royd.
- Loss of useful connections upper Calder Valley-Huddersfield by change at Brighouse/Mirfield. Routing via Halifax is possible but stopping pattern of trains in upper valley means travel by rail from MYT/SOW to HUD is now impractical. Passengers would be better advised to go by train to Brighouse and then use the X63 bus.
- **When there is engineering work at weekends** (as for example currently in the Bradford area), Northern Brighouse trains are often replaced by buses, even though the Brighouse line itself is not closed and in fact diverted Blackpool/Manchester-Leeds trains run through Brighouse non-stop between Halifax and Leeds. Could not these diverted trains stop at Brighouse, as they usually appear to have sufficient time to do so? We have raised this on a number of occasions in the past **and on some occasions have seen it happen.**

In general it is difficult to avoid the impression the Brighouse line is right at the bottom of train planning priorities.

(b) SOW and MYT evening service from Manchester

- 2-hour gap in service back to these two stations from Man Vic (2120 then 2322), despite trains running through fast in between. We asked about this early in May and formed the impression it might be unintentional and intermediate services might be altered to stop. Please can this be done?

(c) Morning commuter gaps

- As mentioned above, **good news** in the May timetable was the 0728 HFX-LDS train (the GC unit) starting back from Hebden Bg with a return working at teatime. **This train is now essential** to maintain an acceptable clockface pattern towards Leeds (without it here would be a gap of 24 minutes in the Halifax-Leeds commuter service).
- Despite previous point, Sowerby Bridge commuters have no train to Leeds between 0724 and 0753 having previously had trains to Leeds in this period at 0726, 0741 (to York), 0748 (via Brighs) and 0759.

(d) Clockface patterns. Some of the following examples deviate significantly from even-interval 4/hr:

- Halifax towards Leeds at xx01, 12, 34 and 43 (including 22 minute gap)
- Leeds to Hebden Bridge xx18, 20, 36, and 51 (including 27 minute gap).
- Leeds-SOW/MYT 3/hr is reasonably **good** in both directions (18, 36, 51 from Leeds; 03, 23 and 52 from SOW).
- Leeds to Halifax at xx07, 19, 36 and 51 seems reasonable but the xx19 catches up with the xx07 and is only 8 minutes behind it by Halifax. In addition there are annoying variations in timings from hour to hour.
- Sowerby Bridge-Manchester xx06 and 22; the second train is the fast and is only about 11min behind by Manchester making this little better than an hourly service. Slightly better in reverse direction.

In all of the above there are inconvenient variations from hour to hour, likely to cause people to miss trains (examples below).

(e) Journey times (slack schedules), hourly variations and anomalies. In addition to Brighouse line issues in (a) above:

- some slightly extended times Halifax-Leeds.
- variations in precise timings from hour to hour e.g. from Halifax to Leeds train from Preston sometimes xx59, sometimes xx01. Can lead to people missing trains!
- Other examples of individual anomalies: extended journey times by a few trains into Manchester because of dwell time/padding in Rochdale area. Also 2120 Manchester-Leeds: standard pattern would be 2125 (so people could easily miss it); effectively this train waits for time at Hebden Bridge and Bradford to give standard arrival time in Leeds.
- Bradford-Manchester timings and stopping pattern. Westbound trains that do not stop at SOW and MYT seem to take as long as those that do. Reinforces view that more trains could stop at Sowerby Bridge!

2.2 Dec 2018/Dec 2019 developments and beyond

2.2.1 General points.

The promised enhancements must be introduced – including:

- The promised Calder Valley-Manchester Airport trains, which provide valuable connectivity across Manchester (not just for people catching planes).
- The promised additional (3rd) hourly Bradford-Manchester to provide regular fast services whilst improving the service for local stations such as Mytholmroyd and Low Moor, as well as stations such as Sowerby Bridge which serve significant urban areas and commuter catchments.
 - ***the above without damaging service patterns or performance for existing (pre-May 2018) passengers. There must be a golden rule that enhancements do not make the service worse for existing users.***
- The through services to Chester, Southport and Liverpool are perhaps a lower priority for most CVL passengers but we see them as important for wider regional connectivity, connectional possibilities for longer distance journeys, and for bringing visitors to our area for business and leisure purposes. We trust these cross-Manchester services can be robustly timetabled. Priority must be to improve reliability, punctuality and capacity.
- It is not necessary to have 2 trains/hour from Todmorden to Southport!

2.2.2 Specific ideas and concerns

(a) Sowerby Bridge. A study of local government ward boundaries suggests that Sowerby Bridge station serves a potential catchment area equal in terms of population to that of Hebden Bridge and Todmorden combined. But even after recent improvements SOW has a significantly poorer service than TOD and HBD.

- Since SOW is designated a Northern Connect station we hope that all Northern Connect services will stop. (It has been suggested this might happen but not confirmed.)

- SOW has potential to justify at least 3 trains/hour to both Manchester and Leeds (as well as the York-Blackpools).

(b) Manchester Airport (MIA) trains – maximising the benefits. We hope the benefits of cross-Manchester connectivity provided by recent investment in the Ordsall Chord will be spread to as many local stations as possible. We therefore think:

- Calder Valley-Airport trains should serve stations such as Sowerby Bridge and Littleborough.
- Low Moor could be served by the Airport trains providing a much needed second service each hour at a potentially important south-Bradford railhead.
- Linked to the above, the Calder Valley-MIA trains should continue to start back from Leeds in December 2019. Perhaps, if any, the Liverpool trains could start at Bradford, although at the franchise announcement in December 2015 there was a statement that Halifax-Leeds would become 5/hour. Would it be logical to suggest that if the CV Liverpool and Chester trains are to be “fast”, the MIA trains could be “semi-fast”?
- The Blackburn-Burnley-Manchester “Tod Curve” service should go to the Airport (rather than Southport as now). This was a franchise aspiration but has yet to be confirmed. This would allow more stations west of Todmorden to be served by Airport trains. For example the Tod curve trains could serve the Littleborough-Airport market.

(c) Littleborough area-Halifax/Bradford. Daytime weekday inter-peak trains linking Smithy Bridge/Littleborough/Walsden with Halifax/Bradford ceased at the May 2014 timetable change.

- Again, we hope the introduction of an additional Bradford-Manchester train each hour from the end of 2019 will allow this through journey opportunity to be restored.

(d) Chester-CV-Leeds service. Given that one of the purposes of this service is to maintain a reasonably fast service Warrington-Leeds:

- Should not this be the service with the headline fastest Calder Valley (**MCV-LDS**) journey time?
- Would it not also be better if it ran via Sowerby Bridge and Dewsbury calling at (Elland and) Brighouse but running fast Brighouse-Leeds?

(e) Journey time and accommodating additional stops. Network Rail has estimated a Bradford-Manchester of 52-53 minutes on completion of the Calder Valley linespeed and signalling improvements, with stops at HFX, HBD, TOD and RCD, using existing rolling stock (Class 158). The new rolling stock is expected to have improved performance. It seems reasonable therefore to conclude that at least one additional stop – at Sowerby Bridge – could be made by the fastest services Bradford-Manchester without breaching the requirement of a journey time of under 55 minutes.

(f) Brighouse Line and Elland station. In terms of catchment population Brighouse has similar potential to Sowerby Bridge. It serves at least two local government wards but has a much poorer train service than either Todmorden or Hebden Bridge (which serve two wards between them). The same argument can be made for the planned new station at Elland. We hope a start to improving the Brighouse Line service can be made by December 2019, including

- Improving the aspects mentioned in 2.1.2(a) above, including the “overtaking” issue and the poor connections upper Calderdale-Huddersfield.
- Operating the Leeds-Brighouse-Rochdale-Manchester service on Sundays to encourage new weekend leisure travel along the length of Calderdale.
- With Elland station due to open “by 2022” (we hope perhaps even earlier), we hope timetables from 2019 will include specific provision for all trains that at present service Brighouse to stop at Elland.

- Significant improved of the Elland Brighouse service will be required – see next section.

3 Strategic development ideas beyond 2019

3.1 *There is a clear need to improve the train service along the Elland-Brighouse corridor.* Under the draft Local Plan, just approved by Calderdale Council and now to go out to formal consultation prior to Government decision, major areas of housing development – including two garden villages within a mile of Brighouse station – as well as business development are expected in lower Calder dale. Improved train services will therefore have massive potential. It will no longer be acceptable for the Brighouse line service to be squeezed into the timetable as if it were (forgive us – as sometimes seems) an inconvenient afterthought! We hope the following will be considered as developments in the second half of the franchise:

- Increased service frequency for Elland and Brighouse (additional to sensible resolution of the “overtaking issue”).
- Fast service Brighouse-Dewsbury-Leeds. Present service takes 31 minutes. The non-stop running time is 17 minutes with existing rolling stock. One or two stops might be sensible with a target journey time of 20 minutes (about 23 min from Elland). If this were the existing service from Manchester via Rochdale it would cut upper Calderdale-Leeds journey time by more than 10 min.
- In connection to the above there would be a need for an additional local stopping service along the Dewsbury Line which might start from Halifax or be a Huddersfield line service.
- A service to meet demand for work/educational/personal/social/leisure travel upper Calderdale-Huddersfield. This could be an additional hourly service from Preston and east Lancashire or it could start from Rochdale/Manchester; in either case it would serve upper Calderdale stations and go to Huddersfield and possibly beyond (Sheffield/Manchester/Wakefield/York).

3.2 **Further aspirations** – perhaps to be developed for future franchises but in which we would hope the present franchisee would be interested!

(a) **New services via extant alternative routes.** For example trains from East Lancashire/Calderdale/Huddersfield to York via Wakefield and Castleford using the Castleford-Milford Junction link. This would provide:

- additional capacity for journeys to/from York avoiding the congested Leeds station and
- potentially faster journeys.

(b) **Reopenings.** For example the Crigglestone Curve (between the Mirfield-Wakefield and Wakefield-Barnsley line) for a new fast service from Bradford to Sheffield serving Halifax, Elland, Brighouse, Mirfield and Barnsley.

(c) **Electrification**, reviving the idea of a rolling programme across the North. The Calder Valley Line was top-ranked scheme of the March 2015 task force report. HADRAG is one of four groups who launched the Electric Railway Charter in May 2018 (www.electriccharter.wordpress.com).

JSW

www.HADRAG.com

1.vii.18, 8.vii.2018