

Halifax and Calder Valley ***Rail Views***

*a newsletter of rail users
and campaigners*
Spring 2019

What a difference a year makes

After the May 2018 omnishambles and poor service through Autumn, Calder Valley Line users had every reason to be up in arms about January's fare rise. For years, "justification" for increases has been revenue to improve services, a somewhat threadbare argument by the end of last year. December saw timetable changes focussing on performance. And, to be fair, reliability and punctuality do now seem to be improving. But commuters from east Leeds local stations to Bradford and Calderdale now have significantly longer and less convenient journeys, forced to change trains in Leeds. The December timetable improved the Halifax-Leeds clockface pattern but wrecked Bradford-Halifax-Huddersfield with a ridiculous journey time increase. Apparently easy-to-solve problems with the late evening service at Mytholmroyd and Sowerby Bridge remain unfixed despite repeated mentions. At least our Preston trains, hopefully to be restored to Blackpool in May, now go through to York again, and are mainly fast Leeds-York.

A year previously, December 2017, we had celebrated opening of Manchester's brand new Ordsall Chord line, with Calder Valley trains extended to the south side of the city. This was to be a stepping stone to regular hourly services to Manchester Airport, but when (if?) this will now happen is unclear because of lack of track capacity though Manchester Piccadilly. We agree priority should be a service that is reliable. But if the enhancements don't happen it will be a massive let-down.

What a difference a year makes.



Charter writes to Mr Grayling

Surely the gantry in this Man Vic shot should have overhead line electrification (OLE) wires by now! Electric trains are at last in service on the Bolton line but progress eastwards seems painfully slow. News last autumn suggested the Department for Transport and Network Rail were disinclined to put up the OLE Stalybridge to Huddersfield, saying partial wiring of the York-Huddersfield-Manchester route would do for the 2019-24 TransPennine Route Upgrade (TRU). Electric Railway Charter campaigners wrote to the Secretary of State. We asked for full TRU wiring, plus 4-tracks around Mirfield to help the Brighouse Line, followed by electrification of the Calder Valley Line and a rolling programme. A DfT official replied briefly that £2.9bn would be invested from this spring, promising detail to follow. Now, according to Modern Railways a magazine's writer Roger Ford, Network Rail might take up the challenge of gap-free TRU wiring within the government's £2.9bn budget for the gapped scheme. Which could be good news. See ***Charter update*** with this newsletter and at www.electriccharter.wordpress.com.

HADRAG: The Halifax & District Rail Action Group

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speaking out locally for rail improvement

Calder Valley timetable — May 2019 and beyond

- We want immediate issues sorting and longer term ambitions delivering for a better service at local stations.



AFTER LAST year's ordeal for passengers, and (let's not forget) staff, what should be priorities be for the Calder Valley train timetable? HADRAG is clear that a timetable that delivers a convenient and reliable service for existing passengers who depend on rail for work, business or leisure must top the list — meaning punctuality but also good service patterns, where, for example "2 trains" or "4 trains" per hour means a useful "clockface", avoiding uneven gaps. As one example, at present Sowerby Bridge has 3 trains/hr to Leeds at 04, 22 and 54 minutes past. Exact times vary from hour to hour, another annoyance. The "22" is via Brighouse, so the 2 trains/hour to Halifax and Bradford are only about 10 minutes apart. We agree perfectly even 15, 20 or 30 minute intervals are an impossible ideal, particularly with a mix of stopping and semi-fast services, but think more care could be taken over these issues.

We are waiting to see details of the May 2019 timetable. Big changes are not expected, but there are some issues that we believe the Northern as train company and Network Rail as track and "system" operator can and should sort out.

Valley stations evening service

Since last May the last train from Bradford to Sowerby Bridge and Mytholmroyd has run half an hour earlier than before, with obvious effects for people who work evenings as well as the evening leisure economy. There is also a two hour gap in late-evening service from Manchester to these two stations. Both problems are because trains run non-stop between Hebden Bridge and Halifax and look easy to solve by simply inserting stops. This would have a small effect on overall journey times. Recent linespeed improvements mean we now often see trains waiting for time at stations. Surely, we argue, late at night it is more important to run a comprehensive service to get people home than meet journey time targets. Apparently Northern are not allowed to introduce any changes that would worsen performance; but it's to see how that would apply here. We still hope the extra stops may be introduced.

Brighouse line issues

The train service requirement (TSR) specifies 2 trains/hour Leeds-Brighouse. But the direct train at 20 past via Dewsbury overtakes the 07 past via Bradford. It's almost as bad in the other direction with the trains from Brighouse via the two routes... →→

Is this fair?

Deansgate, Manchester: picture from a year ago, different story. This was the first day of the Ordsall Chord (Sunday 10 Dec'2017), the train a Calder Valley-Manchester Oxford Road service. These were to be extended as an hourly service to the Airport, but instead, in May 2018, reverted to terminating at Victoria. This probably improved punctuality.

May 2019's timetable should be what last May was supposed to be. But we are not holding our breath for Airport trains. According to franchise train service requirement "TSR3" these should be hourly 7 days/week from next December, but the issue is capacity on the "Castlefield corridor". Much-needed extra platforms were planned at Piccadilly in Northern Hub plans complementing the Ordsall chord. but were put on hold by the DfT. Meanwhile it seems the the Ordsall chord is limited to 2 trains/hour.

It's not just that we want to go to the Airport. Calder Valley trains serving Deansgate, Oxford Road, Piccadilly would be good for people who work on the south side of the city; attend university; want to visit theatres or Castlefield attractions; or connect with trains on an easy route to the Midlands, or trams to Salford's Media City or (soon) the Trafford Centre. Whilst we wait and hope for such benefits TransPennine Express runs two trains every hour from North East England to Manchester Airport, round the Ordsall Chord. Is this fair? Maybe one of TPE's Airport trains should take the direct route from Stalybridge into Piccadilly, making way for a Northern Calder Valley service round the curve.

CV timetable...

→ [FROM PAGE 2] ...arriving within a few minutes of each other. Surely a serious rethink of the CVL timetable is needed?

HADRAG has a special concern for the Brighouse Line. It's not just that we campaigned from 1985 to 2000 to get the line reopened and have been arguing ever since for a better service. With Elland station due to open in three years, the line needs much better. Worth mentioning here that we believe Sowerby Bridge and Brighouse stations each serve a potential catchment population as great as Hebden Bridge and Todmorden combined. But the upper valley stations have a much rather better service.

Northern made late changes to their December plan to avoid having a train standing idle for an hour in Leeds. This improved an uneven clockface pattern from Halifax station towards Leeds. Huddersfield-Halifax-Bradford journey times were improved in one direction. But southbound the train towards Huddersfield is not only booked to stand for 4 minutes in Brighouse but also for 5 minutes at signals whilst the other train comes off the single track Bradley curve. Halifax-Huddersfield timing should be about 22 minutes but is now 34! It is almost as though this service is the very last thing to be considered by the train planners

Strong desires

We hope to see our Blackpool trains back in May. One Calder Valley train an hour should be going to Chester. Franchise commitments for December'19 include an extra Bradford-Manchester service every hour, as well as the strongly desired south Manchester (and Airport) service via the Ordsall Chord and Piccadilly. With Manchester capacity limitations and a sensible caution about avoiding a further timetable crisis, there is concern about how long these enhancements may be delayed.

For HADRAG the extra train every hour is a strong desire not because we want another stop-skipping "fast", but for a better deal at intermediate stations. Littleborough area stations need the daytime trains to Halifax and Bradford they have lacked since 2014. Low Moor needs Manchester trains. Surely Sowerby Bridge easily justifies three an hour to Manchester (as well as the Blackpools) and should be served by the Airport trains (whenever we get them). And what about more trains for Mytholmroyd which is soon to get a big new car park? All of this should be made easier by linespeed and signalling capacity improvements that are now fully commissioned between Bradford and Manchester.

And we need previously established cross-Leeds connectivity, cut in Dec'18, to be restored with regular through trains for people around Garforth who need to come to Bradford and Calderdale for work or leisure. All of this is about the local economy.

HADRAG is pressing for improvements not just through Northern but with West Yorkshire Combined Authority, Transport for the North and Network Rail. —JSW



Brighouse enjoys Grand Central trains to London and has seen fastest growing footfall of all Calder Valley stations, despite a poor local train service.

The HADRAG diary

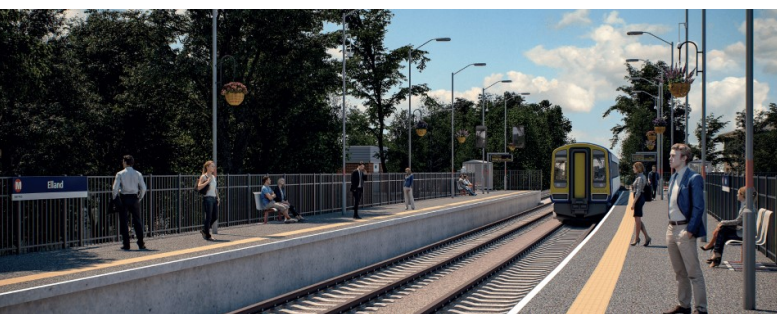
Hectic times! HADRAG wants a decent train service that attracts more and more people away from congested roads for work, business, cultural and leisure activity. We submitted views to the Rail Delivery Group/Transport Focus "[Easier Fares](#)" review which reported recently (see RDG website at <https://www.raildeliverygroup.com/about-us/>); and also to the [Williams Rail Review](#)'s initial listening phase. Williams is looking at how UK rail might be better organised in the future and any individual can submit views up to 31 May (<https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/williams-rail-review>). More on all this in next issue of this newsletter in a couple of month's time, plus details of our AGM (being planned for early June). Meanwhile next HADRAG Committee meeting is Monday 18 March, 7.30pm at the Old Post Office, Winding Rd, Halifax HX1 1SJ (note change of both date and venue). Committee meeting are open to all HADRAG members to join the discussion.

Join us! *If you like the sound of what we do you should find a membership form with this newsletter. Current members please don't forget to renew for 2019!*

ELLAND PROGRESS – AND QUESTIONS

WHEN it comes to investing public money you can't "just do it". Every project must jump a course of hoops. Elland station's Outline Business Case is due to be signed off at West Yorkshire Combined Authority as we write this. Detailed plans should now be developed and Full Business Case (FBC) is due by the end of next year, allowing work to start in 2021. That puts station opening in Spring 2022. We have some concerns about how the project might be affected by the TransPennine Route Upgrade. TRU is the

POINTS on the line



Huddersfield Line electrification and capacity project, a "CP6" scheme, meaning Network Rail's 2019-24 control period. Work on TRU will mean blockades — weekends and probably some longer periods — of the line through Huddersfield, in turn meaning diversion of TransPennine Express trains via our Calder Valley line through Brighouse and Elland. We really hope this will not mean Network Rail saying "We can't stop trains at Elland because we need to run too many diverted services along the route". CP6 begins in a few weeks but, lacking a communicative fly on the wall at Network Rail HQ, it is still not clear what work will be scheduled when. If the works run till 2024 could it mean a two-year delay for Elland? Surely that must not be acceptable. We have waited long enough for a station originally envisaged as part of Brighouse line reopening nearly 20 years ago. But what if there were another possibility? With major works to put up electrification structures, and – we very much hope – add extra tracks, Huddersfield station could be temporarily closed for significant periods. So could Elland be a convenient alternative railhead for Huddersfield passengers? And so could there be a good argument for bringing the Elland project forward and

opening the station sooner rather than later? HADRAG has asked the questions; we shall press for answers.

New trains – stating the obvious

PEOPLE are so used to being on the "Cinderella Line" that if you tell them brand new trains are coming they

tend not to believe it. But Northern's promise when Arriva secured the franchise (late 2015) was brand new trains for Calder Valley services via

Bradford to Manchester and on to the Airport, Chester and Liverpool, plus the established York-Blackpool service. All these services would be branded "Northern Connect", the franchise's new regional express product, by December 2019. We sincerely hope all of this happens though our priority (and we believe Northern's) is a service that works for existing users. It seems new kit can not be expected to work out of the box. The new "Class 195" diesels from Spain are being tested and de-snagged as we write but fingers crossed we might see some of them on CVL trains to Manchester and Chester before the summer solstice. Meanwhile we already have the Leeds-Brighouse-Manchesters going through to Southport. These trains were promised modern class 170 trains from Scotland. The 170s are already familiar on the Harrogate line and are good trains to travel on, a step up from the Class 158s and a giant leap from the crummy "150s" that still make our line look like a 1980s throwback. But apparently there was a "gauging problem" meaning the 170s don't quite fit on the Calder Valley Line. Though we also here that work has been done to make sure TransPennine Express new trains do fit. Latest we hear is the 170s will be used (instead) on Hull-Sheffield Northern Connect services. So either the Calder Valley line will see even more of the new trains (come on, let's be optimistic), or else have to soldier on with 1980s "sprinter" and "express" stock for some time. Oh, and by the way, the hated Pacers, still very much around, really will be going, but the longer it takes to commission the new trains, the longer the old will stay in service. Which is, perhaps, stating the obvious.



HADRAG MEMBERSHIP JOINING/RENEWAL

To join or renew membership of Halifax & District Rail Action Group please send this form with payment (see below) to **Peter Stocks, Membership Secretary, HADRAG, 32 Hillside View, SOWERBY BRIDGE, West Yorkshire, HX6 1AF.**

Membership subs are paid by calendar year.**Thank you!**

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