

## Southport – Manchester Rail Services under the New Franchise

Awarded to Arriva Rail North the new franchise will run for 9 years from 1<sup>st</sup> April 2016.

### Issue – loss of Piccadilly services

It is clear from separate statements made by Liam Robinson (Chair Merseytravel/ Rail North Director), Transport for Greater Manchester and a representative of Arriva Rail North that at some point, if unchallenged all Southport line services will be routed to and from Manchester Victoria in the north of the city centre.

Passenger surveys and research demonstrate this will have a severe negative impact for 4 - 500 rail commuters travelling daily from the west of Wigan on a direct service to Deansgate, Oxford Road and Piccadilly stations to the south of the city centre to access their place of work and many more who use the service in both directions throughout the day for business, education and leisure. Moreover, such a change would also impact on travel to Piccadilly for mainline connections elsewhere and the airport.

### Recommendation and Action

With a decision on routes seemingly already taken and proposed timetables to come into effect from as early as December 2017 an immediate and strong challenge is required to Rail North, DfT and the new franchisee.

When the core principle of Rail North's objective is 'connectivity in the North' and the claim is vastly improved services going forward then why is it acceptable for the working and learning population west of Wigan to be so disadvantaged through a deliberate degradation of service?

### Key Findings from Passenger Survey Autumn 2015

Every weekday 1000 passengers take one of the morning commuter services towards Manchester from stations between Southport and Gathurst.

Over 70% will remain on the train until they reach one of the 5 city centre stations<sup>1</sup>.

An overall 60:40 split between those disembarking at Piccadilly and Victoria line stations.

Comments were not sought during the survey but many were made and captured. Priorities expressed by travellers from all stations are for a direct service to their destination and larger, more comfortable trains with certainty they will be able to board a return service in the evening.

**Statement from Arriva Rail North<sup>2</sup>** is consistent with Merseytravel and TfGM's understanding:

- Envisaged routes are Southport-Wigan-Bolton-Victoria and Southport-Wigan-Atherton-Victoria.
- Timetable changes will take effect from December 2017 having been determined and agreed 12 months in advance with a service specification (the routes) contractually bound during 2016.
- Bolton will be the interconnection with Piccadilly and Airport services, which will add a minimum of 20 minutes to an already long journey time.
- One service will extend to Leeds or Bradford (a slow, stopping service and thus of no benefit).
- Pacers will go from 2017, surviving longest on less-used branches and other diesel units will be refurbished 'as new': it is unlikely West Lancashire lines will get brand new stock.

### What is Rail North and our transport authorities going to do about it?

One of our challenges has always been representation with 3 authorities covering stretches of the line from Southport to Gathurst namely from west to east, Merseytravel, Lancashire County Council and Transport for Greater Manchester. All 3 have expressed sympathy acknowledging the evidence embodied in the passenger counts and surveys, and have said they want to look at/ discuss the matter. **But** this appears to be on the premise we have already lost the route and none has committed to getting this reversed. Rail North is apparently talking with the franchisee but it is not known what that means.

<sup>1</sup> Deansgate, Oxford Rd and Piccadilly on the 'Piccadilly line', Salford Central and Victoria on the 'Victoria line'

<sup>2</sup> at a meeting with Southport MP 29<sup>th</sup> January 2016