



Stephen Forde  
Community Rail Officer  
4th Floor, Fred Perry House  
Stockport  
SK1 3XE

Dear Steve

## **NORTHERN RAIL MAY 2018 TIMETABLE CONSULTATION**

We are writing to you on behalf of the 'Woodsmoor Station Friends' regarding the consultation exercise being carried out by Northern Rail in respect to its proposed May 2018 timetable changes.

Specifically, we are very concerned at the changes being proposed to the Buxton Line timetable which would result in a marked deterioration in the level of service provided at Davenport and Woodsmoor stations which would be detrimental to local residents due to:

- A 40% reduction in the number of trains in the morning peak period;
- Uneven timing and spacing of services;
- The daytime pattern of service in either direction not matching, meaning that it would be possible to travel directly to stations such as Buxton but not make the corresponding return journey without having to change in Hazel Grove; and
- The proposal to terminate all services at Piccadilly and the impact on those who go through to Oxford Road/ Deansgate/ Salford/ Bolton and beyond

Annex 1 provides a detailed appraisal of the proposal whilst the following sections provide local context and aim to demonstrate the importance of local rail services to the communities served by these stations as well as the contribution made to strategic objectives at a Greater Manchester level.

Woodsmoor Station was opened by Greater Manchester PTE in 1990 with the key aim of improving rail access to Stepping Hill Hospital although in the subsequent years, the station has developed to be a key transport facility in the locality. In the immediate area it serves the substantial suburban communities of Woodsmoor, Stepping Hill and Great Moor whilst it is also within walking distance of parts of Offerton and Mile End which are not in proximity to any other station. The station is also used by those visiting or working at Stepping Hill Hospital as well as pupils and staff attending Stockport Grammar School and Stockport School.

Davenport Station is longer established and serves Davenport Village and parts of Heaviley and neighbouring parts of Bramhall Park. As with Woodsmoor Station, some of the communities served are a considerable distance from other stations and Davenport Station is therefore key in providing access to the rail network from a large swathe of suburban housing as well as providing access for students of Aquinas College.

As with the majority of areas, a number of sizeable residential developments have been completed with others coming forward including the new developments of about 400 houses on the former MAN Diesel site between Woodsmoor Station and Bramhall Moor Lane. Similarly, within Great Moor, the former site of Cherry Tree Hospital is currently being developed with further housing having recently been completed on the southern edge of Offerton. Therefore, demand for travel, including rail travel can only increase within these areas and it is therefore essential that this can be accommodated sustainably.

The majority of passengers using both stations arrive on foot and only Davenport has a modest sized car park which is not particularly well used. The nearest alternative station to Davenport is Stockport

with Hazel Grove being closest to Woodsmoor and, whilst a very small proportion of users would be able to walk to the alternatives, the distances and time involved would be too great for many, particularly in inclement weather conditions. In addition, there are poor walking routes from Woodsmoor to Hazel Grove station due to the severance caused by the railway lines, Stepping Hill Hospital and large industrial premises in the area.

Although there is a sizeable Park & Ride site at Hazel Grove station, in order to access it, many of those who currently use Woodsmoor Station would need to travel in the opposite direction which would also be unattractive due to the time taken and cost incurred. There is also parking available at Stockport Station although this is aimed for the longer distance market and charged at around £15 per day which would be prohibitively expensive for most users. From a strategic perspective, it cannot be desirable to encourage an increase in traffic volumes on roads in the area, particularly in the context of the Manchester Airport Relief Road and other associated investment which is being delivered to reduce traffic volumes on the A6 which is subject to high levels of peak period congestion and poor air quality.

The Greater Manchester Transport Strategy 2040 sets a number of “*critical transport challenges for Greater Manchester*” which recognise the importance of an efficient, customer-focussed and attractive transport system in achieving key strategic objectives. These include:

- “**Supporting Sustainable Economic Growth**” – through the promotion of an integrated and sustainable transport system which meets customers’ needs, thereby providing access to skills and markets and achieving sustained economic growth;
- “**Improving the Quality of Life**” – ensuring that residents are able to access employment and training, education, healthcare and other key facilities, also making use of services in the southbound direction; and
- “**Protecting the Environment**” – increasing the use of sustainable transport to reduce the impacts of car use, including harmful emissions.

These principles are also reflected in the wider policy framework including the “Draft Greater Manchester Spatial Framework”, “Greater Manchester Rail Policy” and “Greater Manchester Air Quality Action Plan 2016-2021”.

From this brief review of policy documents, the importance of the local transport network as an enabler for the future growth, development and prosperity of Greater Manchester is abundantly clear and the vision of the Greater Manchester Combined Authority is to be commended. It is therefore disappointing and surprising to be facing the prospect of significant service reductions at Davenport and Woodsmoor stations which is in direct conflict with policy objectives and can only serve to undermine progress made in recent years whilst inflicting hardship and inconvenience on hard-working residents of the affected areas.

‘Woodsmoor Station Friends’ and the ‘Friends of Davenport Station’ are fully committed to the future growth and development of the rail system in Greater Manchester and recognise its value in achieving social, economic and environmental objectives. Consequently, we are pleased to spend our own time and energy improving station facilities and raising the profile of rail services within local communities.

Whilst we appreciate the complexity involved in developing rail timetables and the conflicting pressures involved, we feel that the proposed timetable for the Buxton Line falls significantly short of the level of service required to accommodate existing and future demand on this busy corridor. In light of the points we have made above, we would urge Northern Rail to reconsider its proposals.

In conclusion, we would greatly appreciate any assistance you are able to offer in encouraging Northern Rail to reconsider these proposals. Should you have any queries or require further information at this stage, please do not hesitate to get in touch.

Yours sincerely,

Andy Stobbie  
Chairman  
Woodsmoor Station Friends

## Annex 1: Detailed comments on the May 2018 proposed timetable

### 1. Morning peak period services into Manchester Piccadilly

The impact of the proposed changes is most pronounced during the morning peak period for journeys towards Manchester City Centre which is obviously when the majority of journeys-to-work trips are made. The tables below summarise the current and proposed journeys between 0630 and 1000:

#### Current timetable (May 2017)

Woodsmoor	0638	0652	0702	0725	0730	0753	0804	0838	0905	0938
Davenport	0640	0654	0704	0727	0733	0755	0806	0840	0908	0941
Manchester Piccadilly	0659	0711	0725	0745	0750	0810	0825	0900	0926	0958

#### Proposed timetable (May 2018)

Woodsmoor	0627	0713	0727	0813	0827	0927
Davenport	0629	0715	0730	0815	0830	0930
Manchester Piccadilly	0653	0736	0754	0831	0852	0954

These proposals are a cause for concern for the following reasons:

- There is a significant reduction (around 40%) proposed in the number of trains from both Woodsmoor and Davenport stations into Manchester City Centre during the morning peak period. Both stations are heavily used by commuters travelling to Manchester City Centre and footfall has increased steadily in recent years such that the 2015/16 total entries and exits at Davenport was 285,066 (274,848 in 2014/15) and 232,954 for Woodsmoor (219,366 in 2014/15). Considered in the context of other stations in Greater Manchester, both stations are in the top-50 for footfall, even allowing for the busiest station in Manchester City Centre and the district centres. Even with the current level of provision, trains are often extremely busy resulting in passengers boarding at Davenport and Woodsmoor having to stand and we would foresee the proposed service level being unable to accommodate passenger demand. There is a significant amount of additional residential development proposed in the area, including 4,000 new dwellings in High Lane which would add further pressure to services.
- The proposed timing and spacing of journeys is unhelpful. On the current timetable, the 0753 and 0804 departures from Woodsmoor (0755 and 0806 from Davenport) arrive in Manchester Piccadilly at 0810 and 0825 and therefore allow sufficient time for passengers to make the last leg of their journey to their final workplace destinations which might be parts of the Regional Centre some distance away from Piccadilly such as Castlefield, Spinningfields or Salford Quays. Under the proposals, passengers would have the options of arriving 30 minutes too early or too late. It is also notable that the proposals do not include a departure into Manchester Piccadilly between 0829 and 0929 which further reduces the attractiveness of the service and severely limits its utility value, particularly for those who may work flexible hours or start work later due to other commitments. The *'Greater Manchester Rail Policy 2012-2024'* published by Transport for Greater Manchester recommends that stations with between 50,000 and 500,000 trips per annum should benefit from a minimum all-day frequency of two trains per hour and is disappointing that the guidance has not been followed in this instance.
- It is unclear to what extent the impact on particular user groups has been considered. For example, the 0724 Monday to Friday departure from Buxton is used by approximately 50 school children and staff who disembark at Woodsmoor at 0804 and walk to Stockport Grammar school and Stockport School. A large number of FE College students also use this journey and disembark at Davenport station whilst it is of note that Hulme Hall Grammar school is moving to the site of the former Hillcrest Grammar School, within a short walking distance of the station. Secondly, Woodsmoor Station provides access to Stepping Hill Hospital and the proposed reductions in service can only make it more difficult for employees, outpatients and those wishing to visit friends or relatives.

## 2. Interpeak service pattern

There are two specific concerns with the proposed interpeak service:

- The pattern of service in either direction does not match. For journeys from Manchester Piccadilly, Woodsmoor would be served by the journeys terminating in Buxton and the short workings to Hazel Grove, whilst in the opposite direction, Woodsmoor would be served by the short workings from New Mills Newtown and Hazel Grove. In practice, this means that it would be possible to travel directly from Woodsmoor to stations beyond New Mills Newtown but not make the equivalent journeys in the other direction which is inherently confusing from a user perspective. It would also mean that those wishing to reach Stepping Hill Hospital from areas between New Mills and Buxton would need to change at Hazel Grove and wait approximately 30 minutes for the next train to Woodsmoor.
- The spacing of journeys serving Woodsmoor in either direction is very uneven with journeys towards Manchester Piccadilly at xx13 and xx27 and return journeys at xx24 and xx46 from Manchester Piccadilly. Therefore, whilst two trains are being provided within each hour, the proposed spacing, particularly towards Manchester Piccadilly significantly diminishes the value of the service for users.

In addition, the 0938 service moving to 0927 means passengers will have to buy a peak ticket rather than off peak for that service.

## 3. Afternoon peak services from Manchester Piccadilly

In comparison with the proposed morning peak period service into Manchester Piccadilly, the proposed afternoon peak service is slightly better. However, it is notable that the short journeys to Hazel Grove at 1658 and 1723 have been withdrawn. Although there would still be trains to Buxton at 1646 and 1724 which would call at Woodsmoor, the existing services are very well used and usually carry standing passengers. It is therefore difficult to see how the number of passengers could be accommodated with two fewer trains without causing unacceptable overcrowding and/ or leaving passengers behind. It is also notable that the substitution of two car units on the existing services is not unusual which raises safety concerns with passengers.

## 4. Survey findings

Peak time Passengers were surveyed at Woodsmoor Station on 23 and 24 May to confirm the number of users and ascertain the potential impact from the proposed changes. The passenger count tallied with data collected by TfGM, from 0630 to 0938 there were 275 passengers, of which 184 passengers were counted during the peak period 0730-0930.

Passengers were asked what changes they would make to their journeys if the proposals were implemented:

Travel on Another Train from Woodsmoor	111	73%
Travel by Bus	11	7%
Drive	16	11%
Would not make journey	3	2%
Other	2	1%
Would use another Station	9	6%
<b>Total</b>	<b>152</b>	<b>100%</b>

26% of passenger journeys continued on beyond Piccadilly notably to Oxford Road, Deansgate and Salford Crescent

## 5. Comments from survey

The survey we ran attracted over 100 comments. Here are some of the key ones:

Would not be able to get to work on time - ridiculously early or late. Driving would cost too much. Woodsmoor is an essential station for commuters to Manchester and needs investment.

The train from Woodsmoor is already extremely crowded with more and more people getting the train from this station daily. The service needs improvement and more trains not fewer trains. It is absurd that Northern would be wanting to reduce the service. We are already struggling. Do not reduce the timetable - it is totally ridiculous. Low frequency of trains around 8:30 - 9:30 is going to make childcare arrangements much more complicated for our family.

7.27 too early to take children to breakfast club. 8.13 too late to get to work for 8.30

The frequency of the current trains is required, as due to cancellations and delays it is often required that you get an alternative train and these are already overcrowded.

Need more trains and not less. Overcrowding is a big issue to the extent that trains are becoming unsafe. Two carriages at peak times is completely inadequate for the number of passengers.

The 07.13 would not arrive at Stockport in time for my connecting train to Altrincham. I potentially would have to wait at Stockport for 1 hour!

Woodsmoor is a vital bloodline for the local community. The effect it would have on the Hospital is very detrimental when parking is already at a minimum. V.V. detrimental.

This proposal removes the most popular trains for commuters into Manchester. It would delay me getting into work and does not fit with nursery drop off times for my child

Why are the trains being cancelled? There needs to be more trains not less. People need to use the trains more in order to reduce road traffic congestion and carbon emissions. This is not a sustainable decision!

Without the 6.52 I would not get to work

The 9.05 is the best train for me, enabling me to arrive just before 9.30. Catching an earlier train would mean I would arrive too early.

Reinstate 7.50 service. I cannot drop my son off at 7.30 and get to Manchester before 8.30 with the changes. As I catch the first service I can't catch an earlier train. Ox Rd is central for lots of commuters. Picc can add an extra 20 mins walking distance if you work on the Ox Rd corridor. All the early services are full when they arrive at Woodsmoor - 3 or 4 carriages are required, not 2! Oxford Rd station is too small but if all services terminate at Picc that will need major expansion as it now is struggling to cope during peak hours.

I would have to ask work to completely change my working hours as I work 8.30 - 4.30 to fit around childcare/school. It could mean I have to work extra 1/2 hour every day (2 hours/wk) for no extra pay. A longer day. No through trains to Salford Crescent will greatly affect my journeys to and from work adding considerable time and inconvenience to my travel

This seems like a step backwards - trains are already very overcrowded - Woodsmoor and Davenport stations are busier than they have ever been. We need more trains - not less!

The current 7.53 and 8.04 services are already packed on a daily basis. The proposed changes are ridiculous. No train between 7.27 and 8.13 is madness when people need to get to work for 9am. Many cannot drop their children off before 7.45. We pay c.£1k per annum for a substandard service as it is - 40% cut in peak time trains is an insult

When the franchise was taken over there was lots of news about increased capacity, more frequent trains etc. I don't see how this is going to make people's journeys easier on a line that seems to be getting increasingly overcrowded

This would be a change from off-peak to peak! We need an off-peak train shortly after 9.30. we need through trains to Salford Crescent

The 45 min gap is disgraceful - people need to get to work between traditional 8 or 9am hours. I find the proposals unacceptable, services to Davenport and Woodsmoor to all stations is critical to myself and users that won't be represented ie. School children @ Stockport Grammar and students that alight at Davenport. Trains are currently very overcrowded. Reducing service seems outrageous when there is an agenda to get people off the roads and onto public transport. For many people if the journey becomes longer or more overcrowded they will drive instead

I get the train at different times on different days, depending on my working pattern, and they are always busy right the way through to Oxford Road and beyond. The idea of these proposed changes are unpopular and make no sense. It will force many to drive into Manchester.

From looking at the proposed timetable for May 18 there appears to be little logic or thought gone into it. It makes no sense to reduce train times during the rush hour period. The decision to put forward this timetable clearly hasn't been done in consultation with commuters. We are trying to encourage the use of public transport, especially trains to improve congestion as well as the environment. It is an essential public service, not only for commuters but people within communities. By reducing train services, people will struggle to get to work or to Stepping Hill Hospital. Please reconsider your decision.