



# STOCKPORT

METROPOLITAN BOROUGH COUNCIL

## Response to Arriva Northern 2018 Timetable proposals.

Stockport Metropolitan Borough Council (SMBC) welcomes the opportunity to respond to Arriva Northern's proposals for the planned development of their operating timetable for 2018 and beyond.

A successful rail system and network is a vital component of the economic ambitions for Stockport and for Greater Manchester as a whole. If rail is to play its full part in both driving and supporting growth, the future development of the rail network must be designed in line with changing passenger demand arising from changing patterns of economic activity. A number of policy and strategy documents recognise this requirement and have made recommendations to invest in the rail network to enhance local, national and international connectivity which will drive growth.

At present, Stockport's 19 stations account for almost one quarter of all rail demand within Greater Manchester (excluding the central Manchester station demand). Combined with the regional and national connectivity that Stockport station offers, this demonstrates the importance and reliance that Stockport places on rail. Any consideration of future network provision in the borough needs to take into account the extensive investment programme currently underway in Stockport which will improve linkages between the station and the wider town centre as well as generate additional demand as a result of growth.

*([Stockport Rail Strategy](#) – Atkins 2015)*

### Context

Stockport is a large town approximately ten miles to the south east of Manchester. Statistics provided by Nomis, give the following key data concerning Stockport's labour supply. Stockport total population is slightly in excess of 290k, the working population (16 - 64) is over 177k those economically active number 149k.

Stockport's unemployment rate is currently set at 4.3% which compares well with both the Greater Manchester and National averages of; 5.2% and 4.8% respectively. Stockport is a busy and successful town.



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The above heat map from TfGM's 2040 vision document shows commuter flows from the south of Manchester are particularly heavy and dominate the movement of labour in the city region.

The reason for the domination of the south in terms of commuter flows can be seen in the table below. Stockport's working population has a high representation of social groups 1-3; managers / directors, professional occupations and associate professional occupations. 49.7% of all those in employment in the town are in this employment group, compared with 42.6 for the northwest as a whole. Stockport is a major contributor to the growing and increasingly important 'knowledge economy', both in terms of business location and where people choose to live. The decision to live in Stockport stems from a variety of reasons; access to green space, access to education and excellent transport links.



## Employment by occupation (Jan 2016-Dec 2016)

	Stockport (Numbers)	Stockport (%)	North West (%)	Great Britain (%)
<b>Soc 2010 Major Group 1-3</b>	<b>71,100</b>	<b>49.7</b>	<b>42.6</b>	<b>45.5</b>
1 Managers, Directors And Senior Officials	15,000	10.5	9.8	10.6
2 Professional Occupations	35,900	25.1	19.3	20.3
3 Associate Professional & Technical	20,200	14.1	13.3	14.4
<b>Soc 2010 Major Group 4-5</b>	<b>27,900</b>	<b>19.5</b>	<b>21.0</b>	<b>20.6</b>
4 Administrative & Secretarial	15,500	10.9	11.0	10.2
5 Skilled Trades Occupations	12,400	8.7	10.0	10.3
<b>Soc 2010 Major Group 6-7</b>	<b>29,700</b>	<b>20.7</b>	<b>18.4</b>	<b>16.8</b>
6 Caring, Leisure And Other Service Occupations	14,900	10.4	9.8	9.1
7 Sales And Customer Service Occs	14,700	10.3	8.6	7.5
<b>Soc 2010 Major Group 8-9</b>	<b>14,300</b>	<b>10.0</b>	<b>18.0</b>	<b>17.2</b>
8 Process Plant & Machine Operatives	5,800	4.0	7.0	6.4
9 Elementary Occupations	8,500	6.0	10.9	10.7

Source: ONS annual population survey

Notes: Numbers and % are for those of 16+

% is a proportion of all persons in employment

As illustrated above Stockport is a successful town and much of that success is due to its historic links to the rail network, as mentioned previously Stockport benefits from 19 railway stations, many of those stations are among the busiest in Greater Manchester.

The table below shows the latest footfall figures available from the ORR. As can be seen, three neighbourhood stations have total exits and entries of between half and three quarters of a million passengers per year and two further stations are approaching half a million exits and entries.



Station	15/16	14/15
Bramhall	289,976	265,308
Bredbury	211,006	215,662
Brinnington	78,548	71,648
Cheadle Hulme	785,174	750,562
Davenport	285,066	274,848
Gatley	320,370	309,926
Hazel Grove	650,952	658,226
Heald Green	474,766	497,988
Heaton Chapel	757,190	696,518
Marple	454,858	455,470
Middlewood	27,950	25,990
Reddish North	174,334	170,286
Reddish South	38	54
Romiley	301,172	309,260
Rose Hill (Marple)	145,366	155,184
Stockport	3,586,032	3,411,494
Strines	26,074	24,930
Woodley	53,856	50,546
Woodsmoor	232,954	219,366

*From ORR 2017*

In total there are over 5 million journeys made to and from neighbourhood stations across Stockport, with Stockport Central accounting for a further 3.5m. The success of these stations and their services has not been without problems, many of the peak services are now uncomfortably overcrowded and as the service is running at or close to capacity at peak times any service cancellation or train short forming is felt by many hundreds of passengers, often resulting in passengers being left on platforms.

## **Northern's Proposals for 2018 and beyond**

### Overview

It is some considerable time since the timetable received a major review and this is reflected in the fact that the current services offered have failed to keep pace with changing lifestyles, working patterns, growth in passenger numbers and the changes to neighbourhoods and centres served by Northern's commuter services.



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**Weekday commuter services:** As the ORR figures show the railway has become an increasingly popular means of travelling to work; for many people, having abandoned personal car ownership, it is the only practical means of making commuter journeys of over a few miles. Increasingly congested roads make bus journeys too slow and unreliable and the lack of a Metro network in the south of Manchester and beyond makes rail the only option.

The growing popularity of rail services has resulted in high levels of overcrowding on many commuter services this has been exacerbated by aging rolling stock that lacks capacity. These problems look set to increase further with extensive housing development taking place in Stockport and many towns and villages to Stockport's south. This is particularly true of Cheshire East and Derbyshire, where housing and commercial property is being developed in close proximity to almost all of their railway stations along the lines.

Weekends are now, for many people just another working day, in particular for those employed in retail, leisure and hospitality. Many of these types of employment are popular with young people just starting out on their working lives and often live in more affordable housing areas; many of these areas have historically lacked a Sunday service as there was not thought to be a demand. The other side of this equation is of course for the customers for these services, Sunday has become just another shopping day and for many busy working families it's possibly the only day available for major shopping activities.

**Outdoor leisure:** Over the last decade the population of the urban centre has increased enormously yet rail access to outdoor leisure locations has failed to reflect this, in terms of frequency, destination and capacity for cycles and luggage. Young people living in crowded urban centres are increasingly seeking to use their leisure time to access the countryside that surrounds their towns and cities, walking, cycling water sports and climbing have all grown in popularity. Many services to these rural gateways are either sporadic in nature, subject to late start times or completely non-existent on a Sunday.

**Night time economy:** Another major change in lifestyle is the development of the night time economies in the major centres. A common complaint by users of train services in the late evening is the relatively early final service out of Manchester and often large gaps in the evening timetable, leaving visitors to the city centre with decisions to leave shows venues early, or use personal transport or an expensive taxi instead.



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The Council is disappointed that Arriva Northern's overall proposals do little to address these fundamental shortcomings.

## **Arriva Northern's proposals:**

Looking at the proposals across the entirety of the Network there were very few notable changes in respect of either frequency or start finish times. Much of the service is very much as it is now. This largely reflects the Franchise Train Service Requirement, which was, itself, very disappointing and lacking in ambition. This lack of ambition has recently been acknowledged, to a degree by TfGM who have commissioned a South East Quadrant service review, looking beyond the 2018 proposals.

Nevertheless when the Franchise TSR was published and its lack of ambition was raised reassurance was given that the TSR was a baseline rather than a limit on service provision. Looking at the proposals it appears that in very many locations the TSR is indeed the limit and in a number of locations the proposals have failed to reach the basic TSR requirement.

Conversations with Northern have indicated that where proposals have not met TSR requirements that this was an error and would be addressed in follow up proposals, however this still leaves the TSR as being deemed to be adequate, whereas a number of busy stations, notably Woodsmoor and davenport, currently have service levels above the TSR, as timetables have evolved in response to high levels of customer demand. The initial proposals generated a great deal of concern and many resident contacted Council officers and elected members to express their concern. A number of members have also contacted officers to express their objections to some of the proposals made by Northern, these are attached in appendix A.

Looking at lines and their specific issues the Council makes the following Observations:

### ***Hazel Grove / Middlewood to Manchester:***

*Hazel Grove Station:* This is an important and very busy station, with a large natural catchment area and park and ride facility it provides a gateway for many commuters and resident to the south of Stockport ORR estimate the total footfall to be well over 650k / annum.



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The main proposals for Hazel Grove represent a notable increase in service and this is very welcome, however a number of the proposals indicate that many services, inbound and outbound, from 07:00 to 19:00 fall below the TSR. It is assumed that this is a part of the same error that resulted in the schedule for Woodsmoor and Davenport (see below) and that it will be rectified in the same manner.

The other issue of major concern is again the loss of the five morning peak through services beyond Manchester Piccadilly; this will be of great concern to many travellers and is of great concern to the Council who fears the possible impact upon traffic levels through the town centre. The park and ride concept could be seriously undermined by the lack of through services.

*Middlewood Station:* This is a remote station which nevertheless attracts a number of commuters from nearby Poynton and High Lane, its off peak two hourly service frequency is inadequate and could be usefully enhanced by the provision of a request stop to enable leisure visitors to access the area.

It is noted that the TSR for inbound weekday services between 07:00 and 09:59 is for five services, and the inbound TSR for the 22:00 – 0159 is for two services the current offers are three and one respectively. We expect to see the TSR met on these services as a minimum but would ask that serious consideration be given to providing a really useful service through the day.

*Woodsmoor and Davenport Stations:* The proposed service provision for these two stations, along with Heaton Chapel (see below), are the most problematic. The latest ORR figures show that these two popular neighbourhood stations have a combined total footfall of well over 500k / annum. Woodsmoor Station is also key destinations for people travelling to Stepping Hill Hospital, while both stations service Aquinas College, Stockport School and Stockport Grammar School. Aquinas College currently has over 140 students with a Derbyshire address.

*Peak inbound (to Manchester):* Services are currently heavily over-subscribed and passengers are often required to stand in crowded conditions for the entire journey into Manchester. Northern's initial proposal of a service below TSR was, we are now informed, an error and we await a further indication of the proposed service level. As stated above the current above TSR peak service often struggles to cope with the numbers of commuters so any diminution of service would not be acceptable and contrary to the much quoted 'transformational' Franchise Arriva Northern promised when winning the Franchise.



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*Inbound off peak:* It's disappointing to note that the uneven calling pattern inbound against outbound that has long afflicted Heaton Chapel has now been extended to Woodsmoor and Davenport. Travel to Buxton from these stations is relatively frequent but return journeys are very fragmented and makes the legibility of the timetable very poor for infrequent travellers, who might assume that if a journey from A-B is direct the journey from B-A would be the same and would not involve changing trains and lengthy and inconvenient changeovers.

This imbalance is particularly problematic for visitors from the Peak District to Stepping Hill Hospital and the educational establishments listed previously, who will have to interchange at Hazel Grove to access Woodsmoor Station, the nearest station providing pedestrian access to Stepping Hill. For example a journey to Stepping Hill; departing Buxton at 09:00, arrives at Hazel Grove at 09:37, departs Hazel Grove again at 10:10 arrives at Woodsmoor at 10:13. A 73 minute journey including a thirty three minute stop over to complete the last three minutes of the journey! The equivalent journey today would be; depart Buxton at either 08:26 or 09:27 and arrive at Woodsmoor directly at 09:05 or 10:03 respectively, approximately 40 minute journeys.

*Through services:* The current service offered by Northern offers a number of trains that travel through Piccadilly to Oxford Road, Deansgate and beyond, currently five services in the morning peak are through services. The 2018 proposals offer no such service. This proposal is unacceptable; many residents in the Woodsmoor and Davenport area are employed in the University and Media sectors located north of the city centre. The loss of a direct service will have major implications for many people; journey times will be much longer than they are currently and this will require additional child care arrangements to be made as parents will have to find care for children that can't be dropped off at school due to their earlier travel times. Removing a through service that has existed for many years and adding a through service to another line, that as the above heat map shows, demonstrates little demand for through journeys to the north of Manchester, gives the impression that Northern has completely lost sight of its customer base.

*Outbound services (from Manchester):* In general the 2018 service proposals are broadly similar to those that are currently experienced and that is welcome, as is a slight increase in early and late evening services.

*Weekend services:* Comments relating to Saturdays are very much in line with the weekday comments. The unevenness of in / out bound services is particularly problematic for leisure travellers returning from the Peak District, the same



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interchange and timetable fragmentation issues highlighted for Stepping Hill apply here as well.

*Customer impact:* There has been a high level of concern expressed by resident living close to Woodsmoor and Davenport. The concerns expressed range from greatly increased crowding on services and the risk of being left behind at the station due to overcrowding, through to increased journey times to the north of Manchester, to others who would find the cost of increased child care making working marginal and possibly not worth it and others who would have to consider relocating their home to an area better served by public transport. These concerns have been expressed in the response provided by the South East Manchester Community Rail Partnership response to Northern's proposals.

*Heaton Chapel Station:* Heaton Chapel station is one of the busiest two platform stations on Northern's network with a footfall over .75m / annum. Many of the peak times in the current services are heavily overcrowded and on occasions results in passengers being left on the platform. This station requires a substantial increase in passenger capacity, whether that is delivered by higher frequency of service or larger trains. Maintaining the status quo will not keep pace with growing demand.

We recognise the conflict between journey times from relatively distant stations into Manchester and the desire to service as many stations as possible and we feel that Northern have yet to get the balance right when dealing with stations as busy as Heaton Chapel. As the ORR figures illustrate this station along with Hazel Grove and Cheadle Hulme are outstandingly busy in comparison with other local Northern stations and some detailed consideration needs to be given as to how the service levels that these stations require can be achieved, it's clear that they all represent outstanding opportunities for Northern to increase their revenue.

The reasoning behind some of the scheduling decisions are unclear, but the fact that services from Chester are no longer calling at Heaton Chapel suggests that there might have been a decision by Northern to acquiesce to demands from Mid Cheshire Rail User Group to skip Heaton Chapel. If this is the case and the driving force is to speed up journey time, we would suggest that given the difference in footfall between Heaton Chapel and the majority of Mid Cheshire stations, the service decision needs revisiting.

*Cheadle Hulme Station:* The Council welcomes steps to bring services through Cheadle Hulme towards the TSR requirements. The increase in off peak journeys will be welcomed, though concerns remain over peak time travel. We also have concern over the quality of passenger waiting facilities, considering the very high



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volume of passengers the recently added open bus stop waiting spaces and the pre-existing rather dilapidated waiting rooms hardly seem adequate.

### **New Mills via Bredbury services:**

We welcome the general direction of the service provision, in particular the increase in off peak services; one of the main concerns over current service provision is that of train capacity. The provision of carriages on this route is somewhat inconsistent; this often results in acute overcrowding. The apparent merging of two early services is very likely to compound this issue as both services are currently heavily used; this service is also scheduled to make stops at Bredbury which will compound the overcrowding further. The problem of trains from Sheffield being routinely short formed is also raised as a persistent problem that requires addressing.

We are concerned that skip stopping of Strines Station looks set to continue, the saving on timetable timing really does not make skip stopping this station worthwhile or justifiable. We would also add that the Strines area has seen substantial housing development, additionally there is a major employer in the area a market research company (DJS Research) that employs a lot of young staff that travel in from the urban centre. The current service is not really adequate, which often results in people travelling beyond Strines on a skipping service and interchanging at New Mills to return to Strines from the opposite direction.

There is also concern in relation to the early and late services; early services are not sufficiently early enough to enable interchange with regional and national services at a sufficiently early time for convenient business travel. The general increase in evening services is welcomed, however the penultimate train out of Manchester is scheduled to be too early for many users to use and this is likely to result in passenger shift to the last service out of Manchester, a service that is already very overcrowded on Friday and Saturdays.

### **Rose Hill via Hyde Services:**

The Council welcomes the move to a service closer to a half hourly service and hopes that in the future, scheduling constraints can be overcome to provide a fully clock face half hourly service.

The Council is disappointed to note that little progress has been made on extending the operating day along this route and the continued failure to provide any sort of Sunday service. The lack of Sunday service inhibits both the potential growth of leisure travel and restricts the working opportunities of many. Similarly the lack of an



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evening service restricts access to the central night time economy; both in terms of working opportunities and leisure.

## **Stockport to Victoria via Reddish South:**

We note with disappointment that, in what appears to be a clean sheet approach to recasting the timetable, an opportunity wasn't taken to market test a service linking Stockport to Victoria Station via Reddish South.

There are several factors now in play that appear to make the case for such a service unarguable:

It appears that Northern's decision to terminate through services from the Buxton Line via Stockport to stations in the north of Manchester is irreversible.

The development of the city centre has shifted the centre of gravity of leisure and commercial activity further to the north of the centre.

The changing roles of Piccadilly and Victoria Stations as national hubs: north / south and east/ west respectively.

The need for a direct connection, linking Stockport and the south of Manchester to Victoria via a direct link would now, more than ever, appear to be obvious.

## **In Conclusion:**

Once again the Council wishes to thank Northern for giving it an opportunity to review and respond to its scheduling proposals. While there are a number of areas that show definite improvement, there are several areas of service that are of great concern. Of most immediate concern is the level of service planned for Woodsmoor, Davenport and Heaton Chapel. Accepting that the sub TSR offer was an error, we are nevertheless left with a proposed service level that is still well below what is required. All three stations are struggling for passenger capacity in peak journey times. Woodsmoor and Davenport currently run an above TSR service that is very overcrowded and Heaton Chapel's service is TSR compliant and likewise is barely adequate.

When one takes into account the predicted growth in passenger journeys and indeed; looking at the Northern Powerhouse economic plan, the essential required growth in local population and passenger journeys, Northern's current proposals lack the ambition required to deliver to that future requirement. We would urge Northern to urgently review its proposals.



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## Appendix A:

Cllr Paul Hadfield:

I object in the strongest terms to the proposed reduction in train times to Woodsmoor station which if implemented will have a profound impact on my Ward.

The service is used heavily each day by my constituents to get into work and a reduction in service by any level will seriously disadvantage my residents.

Many residents have moved to the area so they can easily commute to Manchester and the University complex at Salford and Manchester.

The proposal to stop the trains at Manchester Piccadilly, rather than continuing to Oxford road and Salford Central and beyond, will mean that if implemented journey times will be significantly extended by at least 30 to 40 minutes each day.

We have recently had two new major housing developments in the ward and again many people rely on the station and bought new homes because of the excellent transport links

We should be encouraging the use of public transport and I implore you to think again about the reduction in services and sensation of trains at Piccadilly.

Best wishes

Cllr Paul Hadfield MSc, MCIOB

Cllr John Wright

I have had many constituents contacting me about the proposed timetable changes at Davenport and Woodsmoor. They object on the following points

- a reduction of 40% to the current service
- there will be far too long between some trains
- overcrowded trains which will become more overcrowded
- there is little chance of getting a seat at the moment
- difficulty of getting into Manchester for work (many people moved to this area precisely because travel into Manchester was so convenient)
- all services terminate at Piccadilly whereas many people including students at the universities need to go to stations beyond Piccadilly



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- there is little alternative to the trains as bus travel takes so long to get into Manchester

It is not unusual to see queues out of the booking office and onto the pavement so many people wish to travel; both stations serve a large commuter area. Any reduction in service, which is barely adequate, will cause severe inconvenience to commuters who already find the service difficult to use in a civilised way during peak times.

Regards

Cllr John Wright