

Rose Hill Train Line saved from complete closure

The Friends of Rose Hill, Marple and Romiley stations, together with the Goyt Valley Rail Users Association, campaigned loudly and strongly as soon as they heard about the plan made by Northern Railways to suspend all trains from Rose Hill via Hyde from September 14th; a plan conceived and delivered without reference to any of the community rail organisations.

Northern have always said this would be a temporary measure due to insufficient Covid free drivers linked to training needs for new trains and their commitment to eventually return to pre Covid timetables. However, the campaign group knew that any closure of the line would cause disruption and real difficulties for many as they endeavor to return to work, school, college and leisure activities. In addition, there was extreme concern that no trains for three months would drive passengers away from the route long term with people having to find travel alternatives including using cars. This would obviously worsen the already dreadful congestion in and out of Marple during rush hour.

Local MP, William Wragg, and local councillors, Lisa Smart, Angie Clark and Malcolm Allan were with the Friends groups along with residents in this fight right from the start. Social media was also extensively used to press the claims against line closure which resulted in taking the issue to the highest level, culminating in a debate in Parliament. In particular the Friends of station groups, with their local knowledge, drew Northern's attention to the large number of Marple Hall High School students who rely on the train, as it emerged that they were unaware of the numbers involved.

Stockport Council Transport Committee, Transport for Greater Manchester, the local Liberal-Democratic, Labour and Green parties and the MPs Andrew Gwynne, Jonathan Reynolds and Afzal Khan whose constituencies further along the line were affected, have all been very vocal in challenging Northern's plan and in helping them to find an alternative. Cross-party support and action has been invaluable in the campaign.

PARTIAL VICTORY!

It was agreed just a few days before the planned closure, that **three school trains a day**, Monday to Friday, running into Rose Hill Station arriving at 08.11 and 08.36 and corresponding return to Piccadilly via Bredbury, which commuters and others are able to use.

However, sadly, the only afternoon service, designed to meet the needs of school students, arrives at Rose Hill at 14.50, departing Rose Hill at 15.14, returning to Piccadilly via Hyde. There will be no trains to Rose Hill on Saturdays - and there are still none on Sundays.

A shuttle bus service, route Rose Hill - Marple - Romiley - Woodley (some) - Rose Hill is provided by Northern to ameliorate the situation for passengers with the addition of a ring and ride taxi service for those who need it.

However, **Northern have committed to restoring more of a service to Rose Hill and the Hyde loop from 26th October 2020, albeit a 90-minute service promised at that stage**

The campaign group continue to press Northern for early introduction of at least one evening peak service on the route which should be fuelled by the pressure from local people to convey to central Government and Northern the importance of the Rose Hill - Hyde loop service.

It will also be a considerable victory for the campaigning group to see trains running throughout the day well before the 14th December date initially set by Northern.

What next?

The full half-hourly service ought to return on December 14th at the latest. All the people who came together with the politicians, will be keeping a very close eye on developments, with a view to giving maximum publicity should there be any renegeing on this programme.

Everyone can assist by communicating their needs for the service via social media and email, including the GM mayor, Andy Burnham, who sits on the board of Transport for the North who have oversight of Northern's operations. Messages to the MPs who are involved strengthen their hand in meetings with the Government who have the ultimate responsibility as Northern is now run by the Operator of Last Resort through the Department of Transport.

The Rose Hill route via Hyde is the only rail service into central Manchester which lacks a Sunday service and the group believes that now is the time to press for this and for a full evening service (with trains late enough to come back from an evening in Manchester). Northern chose this line for withdrawal of service because it has fewer travellers than other routes. This is partly because it was based on old passenger data and it is a short route with fewer trains related to six day operation.

If this is making the route vulnerable to eventual closure, we can all push for the level of service our community needs, wants and deserves.

Rachel Singer, Chair Friends of Rose Hill Station