

The Case for Reopening Tarporley Railway Station (Revised May 2020)



Beeston Castle and Tarporley Station in the 1960's

A presentational paper outlining the case for reopening Tarporley railway station, the benefits and the foreseeable problems that need to be resolved.

Note: To avoid any misunderstanding, although referred to in this document as “Tarporley” station, whereas the historic name was of this station was “Beeston Castle & Tarporley” station.

Background

Tarporley station was opened in 1840 as part of the Grand Junction Railway's line from Crewe to Chester, other stations on this line were also opened at this time at Worleston, Calveley, Tattenhall Road and Waverton. Eventually this line became part of the London & North Western Railway system, in 1923 the L&NWR was grouped into the London Midland & Scottish Railway and nationalised in 1948 as part of British Railways (London Midland Region).

In 1963, the Beeching Report on the reshaping of the railways included a recommendation that Tarporley station be closed, which it was duly closed on the 18th April 1966. Note that the other stations on this line were progressively closed between 1959 and 1966, Tarporley being the last and most controversially to close.

For those interested in the history of the station please follow this link:

http://www.disused-stations.org.uk/b/beeston_castle_and_tarporley/index7.shtml

An important factor in the closure of Tarporley and other stations on this line was the unsympathetic policy of the then British Railways London Midland Region to the idea of unmanned stations and halts. Other regions (typically Eastern Region) were more open to the idea unmanned stations and the train guard/conductor collecting fares on the train (called PayTrains), thus reducing the operating costs of such stations and increasing the likelihood of them remaining open.

If such a policy had been adopted for Tarporley the station may have never closed. After closure the attractive station buildings and elegant canopy were demolished, just leaving the platforms intact.

Current Situation

The Crewe to Chester railway is still open, providing an important link from London to Chester, North Wales and Holyhead for the Irish ferries.

Significantly there is still a local half hourly train service between Crewe and Chester, passing the site of Tarporley station, this service is currently operated by Transport for Wales/Trafnidiaeth Cymru and Avanti West Coast.

Since closure of the station, villages and rural areas within the Tarporley area have seen an unprecedented increase in housing and people travelling long distances to work coupled with large number of HGV vehicles using the A51/A500 as a route from the M6 to the Holyhead ferries, resulting in greater pressure on the local trunk road network than was envisaged in the 1960's.

People wishing to travel by train from the general Tarporley area (e.g. Bunbury, Alraham, Calveley, Tattenhall, Kelsall, Tarvin, etc) to London, Birmingham or North Wales, have to drive or travel by bus to either Crewe or Chester stations along the often heavily congested A51/A500 trunk roads. To make matters worse when approaching either Crewe or Chester the local roads are often very slow moving, forcing travellers to leave home earlier to guarantee catching a train at the end of the first stage of their journey. A typical journey time from Tarporley to Crewe railway station car park can take up to 45 minutes even when using the new link road from the A500 to Weston Road, excluding any out of the ordinary delays. Tarporley to Chester can take an equally long time.

Worked Examples of Travelling Times

As an example, take an early morning rush hour journey from Tarporley to London Euston, the journey could be broken down into three stages:

1. Travel by car from Tarporley to Crewe station car park	45 mins
2. Park car and walk to Crewe station and onto platform (assuming rail tickets have been previously purchased) giving allowance to ensure the train is caught	15 mins
3. Travel from Crewe to Euston	96 mins
Total	<u>156 mins</u>

Thus although the greater part of the journey is completed in good time the first 16 miles to Crewe is slow and unpredictable. All this has to be repeated on any return journey.

If Tarporley Station was Open

The above journey times would consist of:

1. Travel by car from Tarporley village to Tarporley station, park car and walk to station platform	10 mins
2. Travel by train from Tarporley to Crewe	12 mins
3. Walk from platforms 8 to 5 giving allowance to ensure the train is caught	10 mins
4. Travel from Crewe to Euston	96 mins
Total	<u>126 mins</u>

A total saving of about 30 minutes, to which could be added the reduced stress to the driver and less congestion on the A51/A500.

Obviously the return journey would present a similar time saving, thus an hour could be saved on a return journey to London

Operational Considerations

Currently there are two operators on the Crewe to Chester line, Transport for Wales/Trafnidiaeth Cymru operate class 158 or 158 units which are due to be replaced by the Vivarail 230 units (refurbished London Underground trains with diesel engines), and Avanti West Coast operate 221 Super Voyagers although these are now planned to be replaced by Hitachi AT 300 Bi-Mode units – which can operate either on electrified lines or non electrified lines using on board diesel engines.

A long-term aim by Network Rail was to electrify the line (potentially linked to the HS2 project), although the plans to introduce the Bi-Mode units may well render this option uneconomic for the foreseeable future. Either way this will result in faster trains with better acceleration being operated by Avanti West Coast, thus making an additional stop at Tarporley easier from an operational point of view.

The current timetable allows for a 23 minutes journey time between Crewe and Chester in either direction with a 7 minute “turnaround” time to enable the train crew to prepare for the return journey; adding an additional stop at Tarporley will increase the journey time by about 2 minutes. The 2 minute increase in time was established by comparing journey times using similar trains where stops are intermittently made at other stations along the North Wales coast line. A journey time of 25 minutes will still allow 5 minutes for the train to be made ready for the return journey after reaching either Chester or Crewe, but importantly still maintaining the half hour frequency of the service.

Given evidence from any future potential traffic surveys, it will probably be the case that Tarporley station would not require the current full half hourly service, and that perhaps an hourly service would suffice, i.e. only every other train on this service would call at Tarporley in each direction, which would give the train operators greater flexibility to the service particularly at times of stress. Any service frequency of less than an hourly frequency during the day may not be desirable at Tarporley to ensure local users can rely on a regular service, thus increasing passenger numbers. This would need to be determined by usage profiling and traffic surveys.

The additional time that would be needed to allow for the stop at Tarporley would not affect the current operations of other train services on the line.

Provision of Passenger Facilities

A new station would require the complete rebuilding of the existing platforms, access to the platforms which could possibly make use of the old subway access if in a suitable condition to be brought up to modern standards (including disabled access either by the use of lifts or ramps), shelters for waiting passengers on each platform, automated ticketing facilities, security cameras, modern secure parking facilities for approx. 100 cars.

Local Bus Services

The current 84 Crewe to Chester bus service serves a different customer base to that of a reopened Tarporley station, because it stops at a greater number of places (e.g. Tarvin, Duddon, Caveley, Alpraham, Wardle, etc) it acts as a feeder to Nantwich and intra village traffic which the Tarporley station patently wouldn't. Therefore there should be no threat to the 84 bus service from this proposal by way of reduced passenger numbers. Additionally it isn't proposed to reopen any other station on this line, as the operational problems that would cause and the diminishing returns for greater expenditure on more stations would probably preclude this.

However, local feeder bus services to Tarporley station could be considered, from nearby villages such as Tarporley, Beeston, Alpraham, Caveley, etc, either operating in for peak periods of the day or more frequently as traffic dictates.

Benefits to the Local Communities

Apart from the direct benefit of a restored and frequent train service, a number of other factors would improve the quality of life for local people:

Reduced traffic and pollution on local main roads

Substantially improved journey times to Crewe and Chester

Improved mobility for local people not able or wanting to make longer car journeys

Less dependence on the A51/A500 to travel to major local towns

Whenever the major rebuild of the A51 between Calveley and Wardle takes place, necessitated by the progressive collapse of the road into the adjacent Shropshire Union Canal, the availability of Tarporley station would reduce the impact on A51 users by providing a viable alternative.

The Cost of a New Station

The cost of a new station and all the associated works is not known at this stage, however an approximation, based on the forecast cost of other new stations, of £5-7 million would not be out of the ordinary.

A major unknown element of that cost is the ability to make use of the old subway (which is believed to be extant) to access the Crewe bound platform from the A49 under the railway, if this was adaptable to current standards then major savings could be made.

Land purchase may be required to accommodate a car park, obviously in a rural area care will need to be taken to avoid using agricultural land unnecessarily, minimising any damage to the local environment and protecting a number of key local businesses in the vicinity of Tarporley station. Note the recent permanent

closure of Beeston Market creates various possibilities in the provision of parking, without impacting negatively on the local area.

Funding the New Station

Although the sums involved when compared to the costs of major projects such as HS2 are small, funding will need to be sourced from somewhere.

The government has a “New Station Fund 3” scheme which closes in June 2020, which would put this proposal outside its scope, but given this is the third such scheme since 2013, it must be highly likely that a future fund will be created in a matter of years, to which the Tarporley scheme should be up and ready for.

Note that any application for the fund must, according to Network Rail’s website: <https://cdn.networkrail.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/New-Stations-Fund-3-Guidance-Note-for-Applicants.pdf>

“(m) Proposals must include written confirmation of support that the proposed station and train timetable can be supported by Network Rail as the timetable planner.”

Therefore involvement of Network Rail is key to the success of this project.

Some funding would need to come from the two local authorities (Cheshire East and Cheshire West & Chester Borough Councils) and regional sources.

Network Rail and the train operators again may be able to fund elements of the work.

The train operator would be expected to fund the running costs of the new station through ticket sales income (DTp rules), and this would have to be demonstrated in the business case.

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