

Carnforth Area Rail Development.

Carnforth Railway Action Group.

History.

The main line platforms at Carnforth were closed in 1970, leaving it as a branch line station on the line through to Barrow-in-Furness, a line which was opened in 1857. At that time, the main line platforms were not much used. The period was just post Beeching, when many lines were closed and others were under threat. The main line was to be electrified and it was considered that there was no place for Carnforth station as a main line station in the new scheme of things.

From having been an important junction with its own depot, Carnforth was running down. The town had basically developed from being just a village in the township of Warton to being a small industrial town which had until the 1930's and Ironworks and all the railway employment associated with its being an important junction. In 1880 the station had been much enlarged with the buildings on the up-side of the main line having been constructed and those on the island platform extended. The Midland line from Yorkshire had come in to the station, using the Furness Railway facilities. Much of the housing in Carnforth and nearby Millhead was built for the benefit of railway and ironworks employees. However, by the late 1960's and the early 1970's, the importance of the station was in decline, but the junction did, of course remain.

Gradually, the buildings largely fell out of use and into a state of disrepair until it became proposed to demolish them and build or convert into car parking much of the station site. This was in spite of local attempts to have the main line platforms re-opened. Many railway jobs went, starting in the 1960's. The marshalling yards closed in 1969.

Demand.

At that time, Carnforth itself was a fading industrial town, much employment being linked with the railway, but change was to come in the form of the tourism industry. The *Pine Lake* resort did not exist other than as a quarry for the extraction for sand and gravel and the same applied to the nearby *South Lakeland Leisure Village*. The main caravan site in the Carnforth vicinity was *Detron Gate Farm* (now *Bay View Caravan Park*) with another site close by the shore at Bolton-le-Sands. The large *Holgate's* site at Silverdale.

Today it is believed that there is more bed accommodation per night for tourists to the Carnforth area than there is for the seaside resort of Morecambe and possibly Morecambe and Lancaster combined. Not all of these people come by car, and with those who do, many enjoy a trip out by train.

Visitors to the area regularly use the Furness line trains and, to a lesser extent, those to Yorkshire. Some also go to Lancaster or Morecambe by train for the day. However, they cannot go to the South Lakes or the North Lakes by train for the day or longer.

People come to Carnforth both for a few nights and for the day. A considerable number come to see the now restored station with its Visitor Centre and Refreshment Room on the island platform and to see where the railway scenes in "Brief Encounter" were filmed. On the up-side of the main line they find shops and local information plus the Carnforth Connect office run by Lancashire County Council, which provides an excellent service for rail travel enquiries. These people come from all over the world. There have been visitors from Japan, Italy, France, Germany, Australia, Canada, the USA, South Africa, Mauritius, the Netherlands, Israel and no doubt many other countries as well, plus all parts of the United Kingdom.

Local people travel to work from Carnforth rather than to Carnforth, as in the past, and many use the train services. In addition, there are those travelling from Carnforth for purposes other than work. They may be going on holiday themselves or have business or leisure reasons to be away for the day or a few days.

As a result of the increased passenger usage, the TransPennine trains for Manchester airport and the local Northern Rail services can become very crowded. Passenger usage on some services is often well over 100% of seating capacity. Standing can be throughout the length of the train, passengers often getting a seat as Lancaster is approached in the case of the TransPennine services as a number change for main line trains there and the seats are retaken before the Lancaster passengers board.

Another frustration for people travelling to and from the north is to have to go south to Lancaster and then come north again. It can, and does, take an hour or more to go to Lancaster and then pass through Carnforth again on the way north. Similarly, travelling south from Scotland can involve stopping at Oxenholme on a Pendolino and seeing a TransPennine train waiting for a path. That local train could have stopped at Carnforth without causing delay to any following train and save passengers travelling time.

Business.

This brings us to the point that there is business awaiting for trains if the main line platforms at Carnforth are reopened for the use of "local" services. Not only would there be the advantage of not having to travel to and from Lancaster but there would be extra seating availability for passengers, which should help to reduce the overcrowding on some services.

As a minimum, the platforms could be restored to take the three car units, but consideration should also be given to whether some of those trains will be lengthened in the future and it may be more appropriate to have Carnforth main line capable of taking five car trains. It is, of course, appreciated that modern trains now have selective door opening and it would be perfectly feasible to have longer trains stop but passengers have to ensure that they were in a car which would stop at the platform, as happens on some services in Scotland.

Some are under the impression that Carnforth station is closed, owing to no main line trains being listed as calling there or a connection being shown in some timetables. Others, on arriving at the station, are surprised to find that the main line with all its traffic passes straight through the station, again with nothing stopping. Both of these misconceptions must lead to the loss of potential revenue.

The reopening of the main line platforms should also bring benefits to other areas. Just one example; the extremely popular *Lakeland Limited* stands only 100 yards from the railway station at Windermere, accessible in just a few minutes north along the main line should the platforms be reopened. There are many other possibilities for people to visit businesses, depending on the tastes and requirements of the individuals wishing to travel.

Feasibility.

It is now necessary to look at the basic feasibility of stopping main line trains at Carnforth once more. Various arguments and myths have been put about as to why that should not be the case.

One argument that had been put forward by a number of parties was that *Virgin Trains* would object to the restoration of the platforms as it would slow down their high speed trains. Virgin have stated in writing that they have no objections to the restoration of the platforms. They do, however, appreciate that there is no suggestion of stopping their Glasgow to London and Birmingham Pendolino trains at Carnforth.

Another argument put forward was that stopping trains was not possible owing to the curve of the line. It was pointed out to the body concerned that there is no curve on the main line as it passes through Carnforth Station. Neither had there ever been a curve. The statement was promptly withdrawn by the body concerned.

It has been said that having slower trains on the line will impact on the high speed trains. However, the slower trains run behind the high speed trains, so there would not be such a problem. Rather, the slower trains can be held up

by a late-running higher speed train.

It should be noted that track work had been carried out in the spring of 2008, involving the relaying of the main line through the station and the installation of new crossover points for taking trains from the up main line to the down main line and then on to the sidings. This work did not result in any major alteration to the track alignment or layout, which would no doubt have been commented upon by NetWork Rail if such had been appropriate.

It has also been suggested that there would be a problem with the line running near to full capacity. Clearly and demonstrably there is spare capacity for more trains. Indeed, slower trains (such as some freight trains) are able to wait in passing loops on either side of the main line tracks until the faster trains have cleared. Anecdotaly, during the time when much of this essay was being typed out, a new eleven car Pendolino in works livery ran slowly up and down the main line tracks, presumably carrying out tests ready for service. This pointed toward available track capacity in this region.

Although the faces of the main line platforms were removed and concrete slopes installed following their closure, the foundations remain in site and now support the remaining parts of the platforms, which are still in very regular use, particularly on the up-side where most people pass along the former platform to descend the subway and reach the island platforms for their trains and facilities.

Carnforth Railway Station now needs to be advanced from what was perhaps appropriate over forty years ago to a station catering for the needs of travellers in the twenty-first century.

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