

CONGLETON TOWN COUNCIL

COMMITTEE REPORTS AND UPDATES

COMMITTEE:	Council		
MEETING DATE AND TIME	3rd April 2025 7.00 pm	LOCATION	Congleton Town Hall
REPORT FROM	CLlr Suzy Firkin – Chair of Environment CLlr Robert Douglas – Chair of Finance and Policy CLlr Kay Wesley – Chair of Community		
AGENDA ITEM REPORT TITLE	6 Sunday Rail Services for Congleton		
Background	<p>Congleton has been without a Sunday train service for over a year. The lack of Sunday trains makes weekend trips from our local station of Congleton all but impossible.</p> <p>On Sundays, the service between Stoke and Manchester, with stops at Congleton, is limited to six rail replacement buses in each direction. These replacement services are significantly less efficient than the train service, frequently taking at least twice as long to complete the journey, often running behind schedule, and occasionally failing to operate. There have also been reports of replacement bus drivers dropping passengers off at stations for connections to trains that are not in service.</p> <p>The train operator, Northern Trains, is owned by the Department of Transport and has been operating on this line since 2020. The lack of a Sunday service for Congleton is partly a consequence of Northern Trains failing to reach an agreement with the RMT Union to include Sundays as part of the working week. However, this does not explain why other routes using the same rolling stock and available crew enjoy a better Sunday service than Congleton, despite the other lines carrying many fewer passengers than Congleton.</p> <p>As a result of working with Congleton’s local rail activist and industry expert, Richard Eadie, we now know that Congleton station has about 300,000 passengers per year and 25.5 passengers per train call. Apart from Knutsford, Congleton has significantly greater passenger usage and a much higher number of passengers per train call than all the other local Northern Train only stations. Stations with similar usage figures to Congleton all have at least an hourly Sunday service, with many having multiple trains per hour.</p> <p>We believe this unacceptable failure by Northern Trains to provide a Sunday train service has continued for far too long. Our MP Sarah Russell has also been highlighting local rail issues in Parliament, and a group of us have launched a petition to give local residents a voice since Northern Trains have not held a stakeholder meeting in the area for quite some time and do not appear to have any future ones planned. This petition, which must be a hard copy, will also be used as a parliamentary petition to raise the issue once more in the House of Commons. Running in parallel is an online petition on Change.org which will run in the background, allowing more residents to express their support. Supporters can sign both petitions.</p>		

	<p>The petition will request that the Department for Transport and the independent regulator, the Office of Rail and Road, require that a reasonably frequent Sunday train service be immediately provided for Congleton by :</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Provision of a more equitable share of the Northern train crew resource so that an adequate Sunday service (consisting of a minimum of 6 northbound and 6 southbound trains) is restored for Congleton. 2. Certain CrossCountry trains make an additional stop at Congleton throughout the day on Sundays causing the passengers on those trains little inconvenience while at the same time increasing passenger numbers on our train network. 3. To confirm and commit to a date when a sufficiently robust 7 day timetable will resume for Congleton. <p>We feel strongly that the Town Council should also add its weight to the calls for reinstatement of an adequate service and open a channel of communication with Northern Trains, which means we can be kept informed of the progress they make on this issue and hold them to account for the future.</p>
Financial Considerations	<p>The only internal cost is that of the officer's time to follow through on this request. The financial implications for Congleton residents of an inadequate train service have multiple implications, often forcing them to use more expensive modes of transport and incurring expensive parking charges if they use their own car to travel to, for example, Manchester. The lack of a robust 7-day timetable is also an economic disincentive to businesses and retail outlets to invest in our town.</p>
Environmental Considerations	<p>Using public transport is an effective way of minimising the environmental impact of travel (air pollution and carbon emissions) and as a Council we have committed to supporting sustainable travel and improving the public transport network.</p>
Equality Considerations	<p>Easy access to public transport is a key building block in ensuring that all sectors of the community can access employment, education, healthcare and social activities. The growing size of Congleton's population and the lack of matching local infrastructure makes this of growing importance in our area.</p>
Decision Requested	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. For the Chief Officer, on behalf of the Town Council, to contact senior executives at Northern Rail and request an urgent meeting to discuss the need to establish a suitably robust train service from Congleton Station on a Sunday. 2. For the Town Council to publicise this petition on its website, in social media and in Bear Necessities.