

## 2 Background Information

### 2.1 Introduction

This Chapter of the Report provides a summary of the background situation in Wigan relating to transport and travel, the bus and railway stations and the general activity within the town Centre. It highlights some of the problems and issues that are present and links to the wider objectives that the proposed schemes will deliver towards in order to provide improvements to the quality of bus and rail services and facilities within the town centre.

### 2.2 Transport Objectives

The Wigan Council Corporate Strategy 2011-2016 seeks to provide an attractive, accessible and lively borough, with a prosperous economy as the location of choice for investment. Achieving this vision will provide people with improved life opportunities and independence, ensuring that people feel safe and supported within the community; helping people stay healthy.

In support of the Corporate Strategy, Wigan Council has developed the Community Strategy, Vision 2026. This document outlines an approach that will empower the community. It has a strong focus on engaging young people, in the knowledge that their positive development will help ensure a prosperous society for the future.

The successful delivery of the Corporate and Community Strategies will in turn promote the strategic objectives of the Third Greater Manchester Local Transport Plan (LTP3) which are set out below:

- To ensure that the transport network supports the Greater Manchester economy to improve the life chances of residents and the success of business
- To ensure that carbon emissions from transport are reduced in line with UK Government targets, to minimise the impact of climate change
- To ensure that the transport system facilitates active, healthy lifestyles, the number of casualties is reduced, and other adverse health impacts are minimised
- To ensure that the design and maintenance of the transport network and provision of services supports sustainable neighbourhoods and public spaces and provides equality of transport opportunities
- To maximise value for money in the provision and maintenance of transport infrastructure and services

The LTP3 objectives provide a strategic direction for transport across Greater Manchester. Wigan's Corporate and Community Strategies bring these objectives down to a local level by aligning them with the Council's own priorities. The Council has identified the following four key themes that seek to improve the quality of life for its residents:

- Economic prosperity
- Better life chances
- Great places for great people
- Radical efficiency

It is acknowledged that transport has a strong link with each of these themes through its ability to provide connected communities with opportunities to help achieve individual aspirations and well-being, this is evident from the *Wigan Borough on the Move 2011-2026: Transport Strategy Consultation Report*. An important issue for the Council to address is the

existing congestion problem within the Borough, which currently serves to constrain growth and threaten the well-being of residents.

Wigan Council has considered how its existing transport system could be enhanced in line with these themes in its *Getting Business Back on Track: Wigan Transport Hub* document that was produced in December 2011. The key findings of this review are summarised below:

- Wigan North Western railway station is an inter-city gateway station. However, the opportunity that exists for it to stimulate economic growth is currently compromised by a poor level of facilities and environment. Indeed, the Council have received negative feedback from businesses and developers about the current standard of the railway station and the importance of the image that the station should portray as a gateway for Wigan;
- Passengers often ask for directions between the two town centre railway stations (Wigan North Western and Wigan Wallgate), despite them being approximately just 100 metres apart. Alongside improving the physical integration of the two railway stations, there is also significant scope to improve the provision of rail service information;
- There is a desire to build upon the concept of improved integration so that it includes all modes of transport and not just rail. A single transport interchange for Wigan would enhance the perceived accessibility to sustainable travel options and provide real benefits to the local area; and
- Businesses have advised that they value the existing fast and direct service to London Euston, and in the context of the franchise, this limited stop express service is key in making Wigan attractive for further investment. There is a strong belief that this stopping pattern needs to be retained in the new specification, whether it originates in Scotland or Preston.

It is clear from the review that there are significant opportunities to enhance the transport provision of Wigan, specifically in terms of its integration and attractiveness to users. There is a need to improve the integration of services and the quality of facilities, and link to future opportunities in the town centre.

### 2.3 Wigan Town Centre Railway Stations

Wigan has two principal stations in the town centre, North Western and Wallgate, and they are located within 100m of each other on Wallgate (Figure 1.1). Presently, North Western station is managed by Virgin Trains and Wallgate station is managed by Northern Rail. Currently, services to the same destination do not operate out of each station, although this has happened in the past and will occur following the Manchester Hub timetables proposed for operation from 2014. Services to Manchester will operate from both stations, creating choice for passengers.

#### North Western Station

The station is located on the WCML (West Coast Main Line) with direct services to London, the South Coast and South West England, Birmingham, Crewe, Warrington, Preston, Carlisle and Glasgow. Local services to Liverpool via Huyton also operate at this station.

The typical service pattern per hour at North Western is shown in the table below:

Table 2.1: Rail Services at Wigan North Western Station

Operator	Main Service	Trains per Hour per Direction
Virgin Trains	Glasgow - London Euston	1
	Glasgow - Birmingham	1
Northern Rail	Wigan - Liverpool Lime Street	3
	Preston / Blackpool – Liverpool Lime Street	1

The frontage of Wigan North Western Station incorporates access for private cars, taxis and buses. The current arrangements result in potential conflicts between these vehicles and the more vulnerable pedestrians and cyclists. Photos 2.1 to 2.4 present some of the most significant aspects of the station frontage.

Photo 2.1: Bus Stops and Vehicle Access Area



Photo 2.2: Long Stay Car Park



Three bus stops are located outside the station all of which have basic shelters. Services that stop here serve areas in the west of Wigan, plus St Helen’s, Southport, Ormskirk and Warrington.

The long-stay car park, built in 2010, has 383 spaces that currently costs £8 per day during peak hours, with a lower rate at £4 per day off peak. Current demand at the car park appears below capacity, but there is likely to be growth in demand given current rail passenger trends. The facility is barrier controlled and offers users peace of mind through its security.

Photo 2.3: Taxi Rank and Short Stay Car Park



Photo 2.4: Wigan North Western Railway station Entrance



The taxi rank area is situated next to the station entrance allowing passengers to quickly interchange. Private vehicles making drop-offs and pedestrians exiting the station towards Wigan town centre create some potential for conflict of movements.

The station entrance frontage is rather dated and the current arrangement results in pedestrians regularly congregating at the entrance. The station has only one entrance and exit point.

Inside the station, there is a staffed ticket office, which is open throughout the week during regular hours. The ticket office area also incorporates self-service ticket machines and real-time arrival and departure boards. The main route from the ticket office to the platforms is enclosed via a subway and involves travelling up a flight of stairs. There are however lifts to the platforms, whilst the subway also provides a route to accessible toilets. There are six platforms that feature real-time passenger information, waiting rooms, a café and a customer information office. Photos 2.5 and 2.6 show some of the facilities within the station.

Photo 2.5: Entrance Area and Self-Service Ticket Machines



Photo 2.6: North Western Platforms



It is noticeable in this area that there is a lack of integration with Wigan Wallgate railway station, for instance a National Rail map on the wall shows how Wigan North Western links to buses and taxis, yet Wigan Wallgate is not marked on the map.

There is a range of facilities on the platforms, however they are basic and in need of updating. Work is currently ongoing at the station to modernise some of its facilities.

**Wallgate Station**

Wallgate station has services to Atherton, Bolton, Manchester (Victoria and Piccadilly), plus Southport and Kirkby. All services at the station are operated by Northern Rail. The typical service pattern is as below:

**Table 2.2: Rail Services at Wigan Wallgate Station**

Operator	Main Service	Trains per Hour Per Direction
Northern Rail	Manchester – Southport via Bolton	1
	Manchester – Southport via Atherton	1
	Manchester – Kirkby	1
	Manchester – Wigan	2

The frontage of Wigan Wallgate Station is clearly identifiable by its traditional canopy, which resides over a drop-off area for deliveries. Photos 2.7 to 2.9 present the station frontage, indicating how it interacts with the modally diverse Wallgate.

**Photo 2.7: Wigan Wallgate Railway Station Canopy**



**Photo 2.8: Interaction with Traffic on Wallgate**



The traditional canopy is distinctive and easily recognisable to rail users. It is, however, relatively old and consequently requires regular maintenance in order to preserve it. There is a signalised pedestrian crossing outside the station which is well used and has been recently upgraded.

Photo 2.9: Forecourt Area and Signing

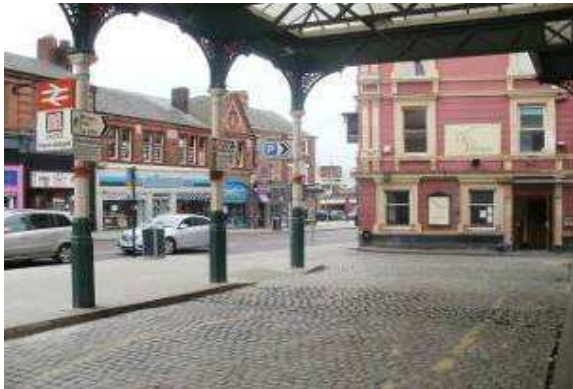


Photo 2.10: Cycle Lockers



Wallgate is a busy highway that accommodates a range of local bus services alongside private vehicles. The current volume of traffic on this route acts as a constraint to the concept of creating a single transport interchange. Parking is not permitted in the forecourt area, with a number of signs to state that this is the case erected upon the canopy structure. There is however, a relatively extensive private car park (operated in association with the rail station) located to the rear of the station, although this is somewhat concealed and difficult to access due to the narrow approach road (see parking sign in Photo 2.9).

Signs exist to show the direction for pedestrians to take to Wigan Pier and the DW Stadium, however it is not made clear what represents the best approach to reach Wigan North Western railway station.

The station is staffed during normal hours and has its own ticket office as well as self service facilities. There is also a newsagent and a lift to the platforms (for those who do not wish to use the main route, which involves steps). The station has three platforms that include a waiting room, real-time passenger information, accessible toilets and secure cycle lockers. Photos 2.10 to 2.12 show some of these facilities.

Secure cycle lockers are provided at the far end of the station platforms and this location may present cyclists with some challenges in terms of access during peak periods, when using the busy stairs or lifts.

Photo 2.11: Platform 1 and 2 Waiting Facilities



Photo 2.12: Platform Steps and North Western Sign



The platforms benefit from having fully enclosed waiting facilities alongside a range of additional seating and passenger information.

There are some small references made to how to reach Wigan North Western Station but there is certainly significant scope for improvement in terms of ensuring that the two railway stations operate together efficiently.

## 2.4 Wigan Bus Station

Local bus services have the ability to connect people from outside of Wigan town centre with the opportunities for onward travel that are provided by rail services from Wigan Wallgate and Wigan North Western railway stations. In this respect, it is important to ensure that bus services are promoting rail travel, across all areas, be it through routing, the location of stops, scheduling, specification of vehicle used and wider marketing.

The current operation of buses within the town centre focuses on Wigan Bus Station, which is located between Hallgate and Market Street. The site is within 500 metres of Wigan Wallgate Station, however the route is extended compared to what it could be due to the current access arrangements and pedestrian routes that are available. The bus station occupies a large plot of land and has 21 stands, alongside a host of other facilities that include a travel shop. Photos 2.13 to 2.16 provide an indication of the facilities that are currently available.

Photo 2.13: Vehicle Entrance from Hallgate



Photo 2.14: Bus Stands and Pedestrian Crossings



Photo 2.15: Enclosed Waiting Area and Travel Shop



Photo 2.16: Pedestrian Route to Market Street



Traffic restrictions are in place on Hallgate to ensure that buses are able to access the site freely.

The size of the site ensures that it can be served by a large number of buses, typically up to 100 per hour, whilst it also serves to minimise the amount of conflict between buses and pedestrians. It does however have some potentially negative aspects, such as increasing the distance that passengers are required to walk, increased costs of security and maintenance, whilst vulnerable passengers may feel isolated within certain areas of the facility.

The existing stands are of good quality in terms of offering protection to passengers from adverse weather conditions. There is, however, significant scope to modernise the facilities and provide wider travel information.

A pedestrian route from the bus station site to Market Street provides passengers with the opportunity to reach a number of key destinations, including the Galleries Shopping Centre, quickly. Furthermore, the quality of this link is of a high standard and it is made clear through an appropriate level of signage and a decorative entrance. This link adds value to the bus services that call at Wigan Bus Station.

## **2.5 Bus Services**

### **Bus Services**

The Wallgate area is well-served by buses travelling to and from the bus station (many of which pass over Wallgate via the King Street Junction) and on towards towns to the east, south and west of Wigan. The bus corridors into Wigan are represented in Figure 2.1. The number of buses and passengers per day using each of the corridors into the town centre is provided in Figures 2.2 and 2.3. These Figures demonstrate that there are about 25,000 bus passenger movements into and out of town on a typical weekday. The busiest corridor is Wallgate (Corridor 7), with 49% of passengers and 41% of bus movements.

The number of buses in each corridor directly serving the different areas of the town centre is included in Table 2.3, below. This demonstrates that all services use the bus station, but only 30% and 25% use Mesnes Street / Crompton Street (Cluster B) and Library Street / King Street East (Cluster C), respectively. The corridors from the north and east of the centre (1 - Standishgate, 2 - Central Park Way, 3 - Scholes, Parsons Walk, 10 - Bridgeman Terrace) have no service through to Wallgate (Cluster D) and the railway stations. Stop Clusters are highlighted in Figure 2.4.