



Getting Business Back on Track

Wigan Transport Hub

Updated: December 2011



Wigan Town Centre

Located in the heart of the North West, right between the two conurbations of Manchester and Liverpool, Wigan is excellently placed to be a major transport hub. Train networks crossing between the two cities pass through the town as does the West Coast Main Line with its fast and frequent service to London.

Wigan's two principal stations, Wigan North Western and Wallgate, are located less than 100 metres apart within the town centre, are well used and are just a short walk away from top quality employment and leisure destinations including top flight football and rugby at the DW stadium. Wigan's businesses benefit from the town's location, but the stations also serve a wider hinterland stretching into West Lancashire, Warrington and Merseyside. The Borough has a population of 301,000 and within a 10 minute drive of the station are major international businesses such as Heinz.

This transport opportunity is let down by the poor level of facilities and environment of its principal gateway station, Wigan North Western. Recognised in Network Rail's own study of stations in 2009 as being poor, it is evident how tired and dated the station environment is. New investment has gone into a modern multi storey car park immediately adjacent to the station, however investment into the station itself has not been so forthcoming, although we recognise that some minor repair work is currently being undertaken as part of the National Station Improvement Programme.

The 2009 "Hall and Green" station review highlighted Wigan North Western as one of the key interchange stations that would benefit from investment and improved facilities. Standards have fallen below the expectations of a modern InterCity gateway station. We strongly support this assessment, as we have received negative feedback from businesses and developers about the current standard of the rail station and the importance of the image that the station should portray as a gateway for Wigan.

Wigan Forward Board, a collaborative of Wigan's high profile businesses tell us that they are not inspired to use North Western Station for business trips, and are prepared to travel further afield to access more amenable and aesthetic stations. There is therefore real potential for business growth, utilising Wigan's strategic location, through investment to deliver the desperately needed improvements to the station and the services it could offer.



Current Station and Service Provision

The existing design of Wigan North Western Station is the same used on many of the main stations between London and Scotland on the West Coast Main Line. This lack of character is combined with a frontage that isn't very prominent and lacks defining street presence as the entrance is set back from the highway, behind bus stops, a parking area, and a taxi rank.

Passengers often ask for directions between the two town centre rail stations, even though they are only 100 yards apart. The journey between the two is quite hazardous for pedestrians negotiating a lot of conflicting movements being made by cars, buses and taxis, both on the main street and within the station forecourts.

The interior appearance and experience of North Western station is very poor and does not portray the image of a high quality, strategic, and important service that it deserves. With paint hanging off the walls and ceilings, and unacceptable levels of general dirt and grime, the aesthetics of the station are not conducive to enjoyable train travel.

The basic provisions, including platforms, subway connection to the platforms, lighting, waiting areas and toilets are all in a desperate need of significant attention to improve their attractiveness.

The information and directions signs look particularly tired and grubby, groaning and creaking along the windswept platforms. Platform one has just been rebuilt, but this is the least used; all of the others have a significant step between them and waiting trains.

The lobby and ticket office are of least concern, but at the entrance to the facility, they create a first impression, which needs to be maintained. The café provision on platform 4 is under-utilised and this is due to its location and direction. However the general amenities could be further improved with newsagent kiosks and better signage.

The Customer Information System (CIS) within the station, only displays travel information for North Western station. There isn't any information about onward travel from other stations/stops in the vicinity. This is a missed opportunity to provide a connective transportation service with Wallgate Station and Wigan Bus Station.



Train Service Issues

Wigan Borough is a key strategic hub for the North West rail network, serving a large range of destinations, including Southport, Blackpool, Liverpool, Bolton and Manchester on local lines, and London, Scotland, Birmingham, Warrington and Preston on the West Coast Main Line. The rail network is vital for businesses in the borough, and we need to ensure that future plans exploit this important and strategic asset.

For businesses to function effectively and efficiently it is crucial that the right transport infrastructure is in place to improve the connectivity and accessibility of the borough. Our rail infrastructure can do more to help promote our competitiveness – by boosting productivity, reducing costs and expanding business and labour markets.

The central role played by rail connections cannot be overstated: supporting commuter journeys with an unrivalled capacity to enable **rapid** and **direct** journeys between central business districts, avoiding congested roads, and the difficulties of finding parking spaces. And the rail freight industry is playing an ever stronger role in ensuring goods and raw materials get to the right place at the right time.

We consider that the potential of Wigan North Western, as a gateway to West Coast Services for an extensive catchment, are is not being fully exploited as commuter flows use West Coast trains to access local employment and training destinations, such as Lancaster, Preston and Warrington.

Businesses tell us 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 considered key to making Wigan attractive for further investment. We strongly believe that this stopping pattern needs to be retained in the new specification, whether it originates in Scotland or Preston.

Any consideration of service pattern changes or the existing level of service should only be undertaken with full consultation.





Wigan Transport Hub

A study has been commissioned to investigate the benefits and impacts of bringing all modes of transport together, including rail, into a single 'Hub.' This study will provide a transport business case, including potential patronage growth and modal shift onto public transport; as such a high level of integration will significantly improve the travelling experience, for all transport users.

It is expected that more public confidence in using and interchanging with the various transport networks will lead to a more diverse and viable range of travel options. Less dependence on a single mode will create a more secure and attractive future for the Borough's economy and quality of life, as our proposals for a transport hub will further integrate walking, cycling, public transport and car parking, to encourage and promote more sustainable travel and provide development and regeneration opportunities.

Proposals include the removal of through traffic from Wallgate and dedicating the area to public transport, cycling and public realm to enhance the 'transportation hub' offer. This includes on highway CIS to both stations, direct connectivity with the bus services, and cycle provisions to encapture business, utility and leisure trips.

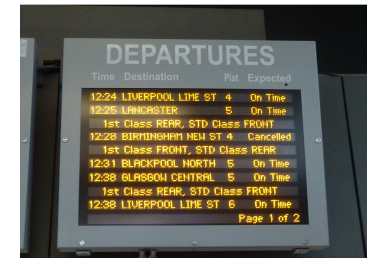
The Strategic Importance of Rail

It is essential that we work in partnership with the new franchisee to improve both Wigan North Western station and the services on the West Coast Main Line. Wigan North Western station is in dire need of investment. Its infrastructure is poor, its environment is unattractive and as business leaders we know it hinders use. It is an extremely poor gateway to Wigan, but it would not take much investment to make the difference and really make it an attractive entrance into Wigan.

We believe that this investment would bring significant business benefits for the operator through more passenger turnover. There is a new car park, but the immediate station environment is poor and unappealing. We believe that the operators will need to capitalise on the improvements to the station area and its main street Wallgate currently being made by Wigan Council and partners. This is helping improve the street scene and access, but without investment in the station itself, opportunities are lost.

A Single Transport Interchange for Wigan:

- Enhancement of the image of North Western Station frontage to improve its prominence on the highway;
- Linked improvements, physical and virtual, to the Wallgate station frontage and canopy;
- Sequential numbering of platforms between rail stations (to give impression of single interchange facility), combined with improved 'way-finding' between sites;
- Arrival / departure information for both rail stations (Wallgate and North Western) displayed on existing CIS;
- Relocated short stay parking/taxi rank area at North Western to provide space for an enlarged, pedestrianised forecourt area, with seating and small kiosks, possibly enclosed with a glazed canopy;
- Improvements to passenger facilities (meeting DDA standards) at both rail stations, including toilet provision, platform buildings, seating, and waiting rooms;
- Reduction of the gap between the trains and platforms;
- Improvement of the ambience of platforms, including information and direction signing;
- Enhanced bus stops on both sides of Wallgate, with improved information on interchange availability, including CIS on highway, for both bus and rail;
- Bus route changes to increase accessibility to transport hub & nearby key destinations, such as Robin Park and Wigan Infirmary;
- Improvement to lighting and the visual appearance of the subway connection at North Western station;
- Redirection of the pedestrian links to the interchange 'Hub' and multi-storey car park at North Western, away from the side exit, and towards the main entrance / forecourt area;
- A new "cycle hub" facility – including secure cycle parking with changing/shower facilities, cycle hire, information, retail, and a maintenance/repair service;
- Improvements to cycling route infrastructure, to support more cycling to the area; and,
- Improvements to the walking environment, especially at carriageway interfaces.



Regeneration, Business Potential and Development Opportunities

Wigan Town Centre is changing: the Council itself has moved into two new buildings, and we have an availability of strategic employment sites to suit the expansion of existing businesses and the attraction of new ones with further improvement to be achieved in our infrastructure. The hub will create an iconic gateway to the town centre will provide vital connectivity improvements to other development areas, including:

Knowledge Quarter

- the area around the current Wigan and Leigh College, including the conversion of the Council's Civic Building to a new University Technical College, and a new Wigan Youth Zone. This locality presents an opportunity to expand educational activity and offer with potential expansion space for the College and improved public realm.

Wigan Pier Quarter

- this internationally recognised destination area includes Eckersley and Trencherfield Mills together with the Leeds Liverpool Canal basin. Opportunities here include mixed use development, comprising new build and refurbishment, new homes, hotel, cultural and commercial opportunities focussed on the canal waterfront to provide a unique environment promoting the quality of Wigan heritage buildings.

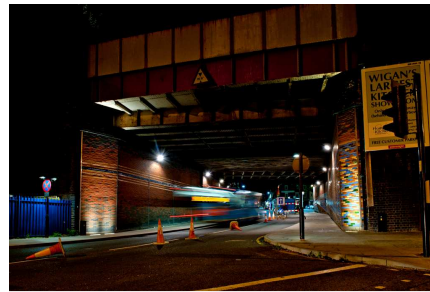
Wigan Transport Hub - the environment around and within the stations - is a critical link to these development areas, and needs to support the transformation of the quality of the town centre environment to help attract investment and more visitors. Through the creation of one integrated rail and bus station, the potential for business development is enhanced considerably through the retail / revenue associated with facilities required within the area connecting the stations' forecourts and streetscape. Through the provision of Customer Information System connecting the stations' platforms within one station, travellers will have connective journey information, so that during 'dwell time' they could take advantage of enhanced retail opportunities; effectively the street will become part of the station environment.

The Wigan Transport Hub is not only a key project outlined in the emerging **Transport Strategy** for the Borough, but will also be a key component of the **Wigan Central Area Action Plan** (part of our Local Development Framework), which will set out detailed planning policies for the area up to 2026 and will support the Council with planning applications decisions.

The Wigan Transport Hub is also a key project within the **Corporate Strategy** for the Council, with funding identified on the Council's Capital Programme. The project has financial, strategic and political commitment, which is enhanced further through the Council's **Economic Framework**. This document has a vision focusing on the strategic connectivity of the borough, and the quality of the borough's environment and its connectivity are catalysts for our economic prosperity and support the future growth and regeneration of the Borough as a place to live, work and do business.

Delivery Commitment

Wigan Council has almost completed the delivery of a programme of £1.3million improvements to the streetscape directly outside the two stations, including footway widening, reduction in traffic volumes, through the introduction of a new bus gate arrangement, improved public realm and innovative lighting scheme visually connecting the two stations.



The Wallgate Corridor includes Wigan North Western and Wigan Wallgate station frontages, and has been identified as an ‘area of opportunity’ where there are a number of derelict and vacant buildings that give a poor impression to visitors and can deter investment in the area. A £300k contribution from the Heritage Lottery Fund scheme will significantly help to improve the building frontages and support improvements in this area.

Wigan Council is also about to go out to tender to improve one of the Borough’s worst congestion hotspots, the Saddle Gyratory junction has secured funding of £7million for improvements, including a new link road to significantly improve vehicular access to/from Wigan town centre.

With Wigan Council’s commitment to the Wigan Transport Hub, we need to continue the momentum and drive for further developments in this area, and by working in partnership with the new rail franchisee, we will be able to ensure that the rail stations, both Wigan North Western and Wigan Wallgate will not be left behind.

Contacts:

Strategic Transportation Unit, Wigan Council

01942 489256

transportstrategy@wigan.gov.uk

Transport for Greater Manchester

0161 244 1174