

**Manchester Recovery Task Force**  
**Response to Autumn 2021 Public Consultation**  
**from The Friends of Rose Hill Station**

This paper provides the response of The Friends of Rose Hill Station to the public consultation on the proposed December 2022 timetable. Our group has had sight of the response from the Goyt Valley Rail Users Association (GVRUA) with whom we work closely and we are in full agreement with that response. We will not repeat all the content of the GVRUA paper but will comment further on some parts and this response should be read in conjunction with the GVRUA paper (See Appendix).

The Friends group was similarly shocked and dismayed to see that the proposed timetable includes a reduction in the number of trains to Rose Hill Marple from 29 in the base 2019 timetable, to 20 in the December 2022 proposal. We had also been given to understand that the reduced service currently operating was a temporary measure caused by a shortage of fully trained staff. A return to the pre-COVID timetable seemed to be confirmed in the Consultation document produced in Spring 2021. (*"No changes are proposed in the structure of services in east Manchester, including local stopping trains to: ... Marple and Rose Hill"* P.34)

The proposed future timetable is a major step backwards for the Rose Hill service and the plan ignores entirely the strong growth shown on the route since the introduction of the regular half hourly service in 2010. Passenger usage more than doubled between 2009/10 and 2019/20. As the local Friends group, in existence before and throughout this period, we confirm a very marked change in the awareness and attitude to the train service in the community. An illustration of this is that, in our early days, an event held at the station elicited regular comments of the type "I didn't know this station still operated, it looked so derelict, I never use the train" to a situation in recent years when prospective passengers regularly arrive at the station on Sundays (when there is no service) taking it for granted that trains will run.

The details of the timetable proposed for December 2022 are incomprehensible to us. They appear to take no account whatsoever of passenger needs. The pattern of the service (which is also true of the current timetable) is an unsatisfactory mixture of hourly and half hourly services which is confusing for passengers and discourages use of the train

Local residents have told us that they no longer take the train into Manchester because they're not sure when there will be a train or that they cannot get a convenient train home again.

There are very specific problems attached to the absence in the timetable of peak services at **07.45** (to Manchester), **17.10** and **18.34** (from Manchester) and the **15.12** (to Manchester) which is the train used by the Marple Hall School students to get home. Each of these omissions undermines the use of the route as people make alternative arrangements when they cannot make their required outward or return journey. People have told us that they drive to Marple station (making worse the peak hour road congestion across Marple, the parking congestion at Marple station and the passenger

congestion on the peak trains through Marple) and this distorts the picture of the potential for fare generation on the Rose Hill line.

We are very concerned that there is a gap in knowledge within the Northern passenger analysis about the use of the train by the school and Marple Ridge Danyers college students, largely between Woodley, Romiley and Rose Hill. This may be due to a deficit in fare collection and we have observed that many tickets are purchased when Northern do intermittent ticket checks at Rose Hill station.

In the past, Northern has argued that reducing the service on the Rose Hill route does not matter because there are good alternatives at nearby stations. This is not correct. The distance between Rose Hill and Marple is 1.7 kilometres and the route contains a steep hill at Brabyns Brow. People choose Rose Hill because it is their nearest and most convenient station. For many older residents (Marple has a high proportion of older residents) the walk is not suitable; this is also the case for anyone with a pushchair or mobility difficulties. In addition, we have learned from interactions with younger people on the platform that, if they live at the Rose Hill end of Marple, they don't know where Marple station is (neither station is in the centre of Marple).

As described in the GVRUA submission, increasing rail use is important to meeting the Government's transport decarbonisation targets and Transport for Greater Manchester's target that 50% of journeys should be made by modes other than car by 2040. Reducing the train service to Rose Hill works against the achievement of these goals.

We strongly re-state that passenger usage on the line more than doubled, to an estimated 215,270 journeys p.a. (an increase from 97,780 in 2009/10) during the period when a half hourly service and a suitable peak hour service were in place up to 2019/20.

In fact, we have been informed by Northern that their estimate over 2 periods in Autumn 2019 (pre Covid) is that approximately 225,000 customers were carried on the route. This equates to nearly 1.5 million passengers annually - greater than our estimates and a very considerable number of journeys made.

We believe this represents robust evidence for future usage even in the light of changing patterns of travel.

Northern have said that future timetables may need to change to match altered travel patterns. It is already becoming apparent that offpeak and weekend traffic across the network has recovered more quickly than peak ridership. Pre-pandemic, Rose Hill did not have additional peak services and, in light of the current circumstances (changes in travel patterns), we urge that a regular half hourly service needs to be provided every day, to meet the travel requirements of both previous and new rail users.

We believe that the timetable proposal neglects the growth potential for this line in the evenings and on Sundays. We fail to understand why Rose Hill, alone among Northern's routes into Manchester centre, does not have a full timetable. We concur with the GVRUA comments and recommendation:

It is the only route into Central Manchester that does not have a late evening or Sunday service. All other local services have a last departure from the city centre after 23.00 on weekdays, compared to the proposed 21.21 last departure to Rose Hill. As a minimum, we consider that later trains should be provided at 22.21 and 23.21, with the longer term aim of a half hourly service between 06.00 and Midnight. Similarly, we consider that there is a strong case for providing a regular half hourly service on Sundays.

The absence of late evening and Sunday services reduces the value of the service to people who work in the retail and hospitality industries in Greater Manchester and people who wish to use these industries as customers.

The importance to the local (Greater Manchester) economy of the evening and Sunday leisure and work opportunities is well known. Marple residents wish to take part in the full range of options available and it is short sighted of Northern not to make plans to develop rail travel as the preferred option for doing so.

It is Northern's stated intention to identify and 'grow' leisure travel by train. As a local group, we emphasise the potential along our route. The Hyde loop follows the Peak Forest Canal from Guide Bridge, providing many attractive walking routes, station to station, which Northern could promote and local Friends groups (and, almost certainly, walking groups e.g. the Ramblers Association) would be enthusiastic to support.

The Middlewood Way starts at Rose Hill and is an important leisure facility. Rose Hill can be a hub for cycling and walking station to station routes for example: picking up trains at Middlewood and Macclesfield and, via Lyme Park (National Trust), Disley stations which offers great potential for capturing and growing leisure travel ridership. In addition, there are many valued rural and canal walks linking Marple Romiley and Rose Hill stations which the local Friends groups are promoting.

The Alan Newton Way is a valuable cycle route into Stockport (and can link, for example, to the route along the River Mersey to Parrs Wood) and is easily accessed from Rose Hill.

These are some examples of where passenger growth can be fostered and we believe that doing so via Rose Hill would also serve to reduce some of the pressure on the Hope Valley line.

We have taken note of Nick Donovan's (Managing Director) assertion at the recent Northern Community Rail Conference that local groups like ours "are our eyes and ears on local needs". We believe strongly that the December 2022 timetable proposals fail to meet local needs and miss a valuable opportunity to develop growth in rail travel on the Hyde Loop line to Rose Hill.

**The Friends of Rose Hill Station  
December 2021**

## **Appendix**

### **Manchester Recovery Task Force**

#### **Response to Autumn 2021 Public Consultation from Goyt Valley Rail Users' Association**

##### **1. Introduction**

This paper provides the Goyt Valley Rail Users' Association's (GVRUA's) response to the public consultation on the proposed December 2022 timetable. GVRUA was formed in 1993 to campaign for better train services on the lines from Manchester Piccadilly to New Mills Central and Rose Hill Marple via Bredbury and

Hyde. In this paper we comment only on issues relevant to the Goyt Valley routes and this should not be taken to imply support for, or opposition to, any of the other timetable proposals.

GVRUA recognizes that the primary purpose of the Task Force was to develop a robust solution to congestion on the Castlefield Corridor. However we consider it has provided an opportunity to look more broadly at services across the Greater Manchester conurbation and to rectify historical anomalies, which do not appear to have any market or social logic. We are concerned that if necessary changes are not made in 2022, the rail industry will become distracted by re-structuring and problems elsewhere on the network, resulting in the 2022 timetable becoming effectively set in stone for many years.

Following this Introduction we set out:

- The importance of restoring the full pre-COVID service to Rose Hill Marple, and extending the hours of operation to include late evenings and Sundays (Section 2);
- The need for additional Sunday and late evening services on the routes to Sheffield and New Mills (Sections 3 and 4); and
- A proposal for a modified timetable to New Mills and Rose Hill (Section 5). We consider this would be both more operationally efficient and more attractive to passengers, delivering a more frequent and regular service with no increase in the number of peak trains in service.

## **2. Rose Hill Proposals**

On page 34 of the Consultation document produced in Spring 2021, the proposals in relation to local services in South East Manchester are described as follows:

*“No changes are proposed in the structure of services in east Manchester, including local stopping trains to:*

- *Hadfield and Glossop*
- *New Mills Central and Chinley*
- *Marple and Rose Hill*

*In timetable Option C, Rose Hill Marple trains call at all stations every half hour, rather than missing out some calls as at present.”*

GVRUA was therefore shocked to discover that the proposed timetable includes a reduction in the number of trains to Rose Hill Marple from 29 in the base 2019 timetable, to 20 in the December 2022 proposal. This is clearly inconsistent with the above statement and we are dismayed that it has been incorporated at this late stage, with no prior warning. Until now, we had been given to understand that the reduced service currently operating was a temporary measure caused by a shortage of fully trained staff. The December 2019 timetable provided a half hourly service between Manchester Piccadilly and Rose Hill via Hyde until 20.00 on weekdays, with a final last train in each direction shortly after 21.00. As we argue below, these hours of service are too limited and restrict the growth potential of the route. However the planned timetable does nothing to remedy these limitations, is poorly designed and represents a major step backwards for the route. In essence it offers two trains half an hour apart followed by a one hour gap over most of the day. The proposal seems to be to make permanent the reduced timetable that was introduced during the COVID pandemic, albeit with some minor changes.

The overall proposal reduces the overall level of service to around the level which existed prior to December 2010. In practice, the proposed service is worse than existed then. Before 2010, there was an hourly service throughout the day with extra trains inbound to Manchester in the morning peak and outbound in the evening peak. As shown below, the current proposal has no extra peak trains and does not provide a regular hourly service. While trains are at standardized times past each hour, one third of the trains needed to provide a regular half hourly service are missing. This results in a three hour repeating

cycle where, taking Rose Hill as an example, a train departs at 43 minutes past the hour in the first hour, 12 minutes past in the second and at both 12 and 43 minutes past in the third. This creates a timetable that is hard to remember and will result in passengers having to wait an extra half hour if they arrive in time for one of the missing trains. There is evidence that passengers value a regular interval timetable and the loss of ridership from the proposals is likely to be more than proportional to the reduction in frequency. This is particularly important for leisure trips, which form a bigger share of journeys post-COVID.

Table 1 summarises the 2019 and proposed December 2022 peak departures.

**Table 1: Base and Proposed Peak Departures**

Base 2019 Timetable	Proposed December 2022 Timetable
<b>Morning Peak Inbound Departures from Rose Hill (07.00 – 09.29)</b>	
07.13	07.11
07.45	
08.20	08.12
08.45	08.43
09.13	
<b>PM Peak Outbound Departures from Manchester Piccadilly (16.00 – 18.59)</b>	
16.10	16.21
16.37	16.51
17.10	
17.38	17.51
18.11	18.21
18.34	

The table shows that there will be one hour gaps at the height of the peak in each direction. Prior to COVID, the 07.45 was the busiest train into Manchester in the morning peak and the removal of this train has resulted in a very large reduction in peak travel from Rose Hill (more than can be explained by changes in work patterns).

A further problem is that skip stopping at Fairfield and Hyde North is proposed to continue. Rather than alternate trains stopping at these stations, the proposal is that departures from Manchester at 21 minutes past the hour do not call at Fairfield, while those leaving at 51 minutes past omit Hyde North. This results in these stations not getting any trains every 3<sup>rd</sup> hour. A few peak trains do stop at both these stations. Consequences of the proposal include Fairfield only having one train from Manchester after 17.51 and Hyde North having no morning peak trains to Manchester between 07.27 and 08.57. If it is possible to eliminate skip stopping in the peak, it should be possible to do so at off peak times also.

The proposed timetable seems to be driven by operational efficiency, assuming only 2 train diagrams are allocated to the service, rather than taking any account of passenger needs. It appears to be based on the mistaken and outdated perception that the route is little used and has limited growth potential. In reality, it has shown strong growth since the half hourly service was introduced in 2010. In the following decade, ridership more than doubled at each of the three stations which saw their service level doubled and are only served by Rose Hill trains. Strong growth was also experienced at Fairfield and Hyde North, despite only having an hourly service for most of the day. ORR station usage statistics show that this was continuing in 2019/20, despite the impact of COVID 19 in the last 2 periods of the year. This is shown in Table 2. This growth has been achieved despite the route having no late evening or Sunday service.

**Table 2: Growth at Stations Served Only by Rose Hill Trains**

Station	Estimated Usage			Usage Growth Factor	
	2009/10	2018/19	2019/20	2009/10 to 2018/19	2018/19 to 2019/20
Fairfield	10,832	41,296	43,316	4.00	1.05
Hyde North	53,458	108,708	116,178	1.54	1.09
Hyde Central	34,614	48,836	53,358	2.17	1.07
Woodley	35,744	78,852	85,502	2.14	1.08
Rose Hill	97,780	210,904	215,270	2.20	1.02
<b>Total</b>	<b>232,428</b>	<b>488,596</b>	<b>513,624</b>	<b>2.21</b>	<b>1.05</b>

Data for Northern is only available, on the ORR website, from 2011/12. From then to 2019/20 growth at these stations was 75% compared to 18% for the operator as a whole, so it is clear that the Rose Hill route has experienced far higher than average growth.

In the past, Northern has argued that reducing the service on the Rose Hill route does not matter because there are good alternatives at nearby stations. This is not correct. In reality, the walking distances<sup>1</sup> to the nearest stations to those served exclusively by the Rose Hill via Hyde service are:

- Rose Hill to Marple – 1.7 kilometres;
- Woodley to Bredbury – 1.5 kilometres;
- Hyde Central to Newton for Hyde – 1.6 kilometres;
- Hyde North to Flowery Field – 0.8 kilometres;
- Fairfield to Gorton – 1.9 kilometres.

In addition there is a particularly steep hill between Marple and Rose Hill. The generally accepted maximum walking distance to a station is 800 metres. This provides the primary catchment area for a suburban station. Clearly all the above stations, except Hyde North, are further than this from their nearest alternative and there is little or no overlap between their primary catchment areas.

Looking beyond the rail ridership issues, there are important socio-demographic reasons why the Rose Hill route needs a good train service:

1. There is a high proportion of older residents in the catchment areas of Rose Hill and Woodley stations, who are likely to become more dependent on public transport as they age. In the absence of a good service they are more likely to experience greater social isolation and poorer health;
2. Conversely almost the entire catchment areas of the Hyde stations are in the most deprived 30% of communities in England, with much in the 10% most deprived. The proportion of people in full time work is low and the proportion who are unemployed is relatively high, while the level of educational attainment is also below average. The proportion of people who are economically inactive for reasons such as caring for others or long term sickness is very high, and double the regional average for the North West. This is precisely the type of community that the Government's levelling up agenda is designed to support. In order to counter the high levels of unemployment and economic inactivity, they need good access to the employment and education opportunities in Manchester City Centre. Recent evidence also shows that commuting levels have remained higher among lower income groups during the pandemic, than among those on higher incomes.

Increasing rail use is also important to meeting the Government's transport decarbonisation targets and Transport for Greater Manchester's target that 50% of journeys should be made by modes other than car by 2040. Reducing the train service to Rose Hill works against the achievement of these goals.

<sup>1</sup> From Google Maps

Accordingly, GVRUA strongly supports the restoration of the full pre-COVID service frequency on the Rose Hill route. However, this will not be sufficient, in itself, to allow the route to achieve its full potential. It is the only route into Central Manchester that does not have a late evening or Sunday service. All other local services have a last departure from the city centre after 23.00 on weekdays, compared to the proposed 21.21 last departure to Rose Hill. As a minimum, we consider that later trains should be provided at 22.21 and 23.21, with the longer term aim of a half hourly service between 06.00 and Midnight. Similarly, we consider that there is a strong case for providing a regular half hourly service on Sundays.

The absence of late evening and Sunday services reduces the value of the service to people who work in the retail and hospitality industries in Greater Manchester and people who wish to use these industries as customers. As noted above, access to these opportunities is especially important to residents of deprived communities in Hyde.

The restricted service hours will suppress ridership compared to a more comprehensive service directly, because journeys at times when there is no service cannot be made by train. They will also have an indirect impact because passengers whose return journey is not possible are likely to choose another route or mode for the outward leg of their journey, or not travel at all. Similarly people making the outward leg of their journey on a Sunday cannot travel by train from Rose Hill or Hyde Loop stations and therefore will not use the Rose Hill service for the return leg, even if this is made on a weekday.

### **3. Sheffield Services**

GVRUA welcomes the proposed improved in the regularity of the Manchester – Sheffield stopping services and the elimination of skip stopping between New Mills and Sheffield. This should improve the attractiveness of the service and encourage greater usage.

However we are dismayed that the shortened operating day on Sundays introduced during the pandemic is planned to be made permanent. The first arrival into Manchester will not be until 10.34, one hour later than in 2019, and the last departure at 20.45, one hour earlier than before. The first arrival in Manchester is too late for workers in the retail sector to commute by train, and the last departure is too early for people who work in the hospitality sector. It is currently not possible to have an evening out in Manchester on a Sunday and return by train. This limited service also greatly restricts opportunities for days out and weekends away by rail.

As rail travel recovers from the effects of COVID, leisure travel, including on Sundays, will be increasingly important. If Northern is to take full advantage of this an attractive, comprehensive Sunday service will be needed, starting earlier in the morning and finishing in the late evening. As a minimum first step, we believe that the full pre-COVID Sunday timetable should be reinstated immediately. This would offer a first arrival in Manchester at 09.33 and a last departure at 21.45.

As GVRUA has proposed previously, we would wish to see the first morning service from Manchester and the last evening service from Sheffield routed via New Mills Central rather than Stockport, calling at the main intermediate stations between there and Manchester Piccadilly.

We note that the last evening service via New Mills is proposed to leave Sheffield at 22.27 on Saturdays, compared to 22.47 on Mondays to Fridays. Given there is likely to be more late evening demand on Saturdays, this seems odd and undesirable. The last outbound service from Manchester is at 20.48 on Saturdays as against 21.48 on Mondays to Fridays. This greatly restricts opportunities for Hope Valley residents to spend time in Manchester in the evening, even 21.48 is unduly early.

### **4. New Mills Services**

GVRUA welcomes the retention of a regular half hourly service pattern between Manchester and New Mills Central on weekdays through a combination of trains terminating at New Mills and those continuing to Sheffield. This contrasts with the proposals for the Rose Hill service and seems to show that the Task Force does appreciate the benefits of a regular service pattern. We also welcome the restitution of additional

peak services on the route. However the gap between the 21.48 and 22.40 departures is undesirable as it coincides with the end of many events in Manchester City Centre. The addition of an extra service at 22.18 would allow the 22.40 service to be moved back to the standard pattern departure time of 22.48. Ideally the last departure would be moved back to 23.48 with an additional train at 23.18. This would address the regular crowding that occurred on the last two departures pre-COVID, which is likely to recur as Manchester's night time economy recovers.

We are also concerned that the previous Northern franchise commitment to introduce a half hourly Sunday service between Manchester and New Mills Central, replicating the weekday off peak timetable, will still not be met. A half hourly Sunday service was specified as part of the Northern franchise specification to meet the growing demand for rail travel on that day. The heavy loadings experienced on the current Sunday services shows there is strong market potential, which could be realised by providing this service.

## **5. An Alternative Service Pattern**

The Task Force's proposed service pattern appears to require at least 8 train diagrams:

- 3 to operate the hourly Manchester – Sheffield stopping service and also to provide some early services into Manchester from New Mills and Chinley;
- 2 to operate the off peak New Mills trains plus at least one extra diagram in the peaks; and
- 2 to operate the Rose Hill services.

As both the New Mills turnbacks and Rose Hill services have a journey time of just over 30 minutes, it should be possible to provide a half hourly service on both these routes using 5 units by interworking the two services. This would offer 3 trains/ hour in total to New Mills Central and two to Rose Hill with 5-6 minute turnrounds at each end of the two routes. Depending on detailed timetabling, this could be equally distributed between the termini or could provide a slightly longer turn round at one end. If the service is provided wholly by the new Class 195 units there may be opportunities to shorten journey times and thereby lengthen the turn round times.

Compared to the current proposals, the benefits of this option include:

- A regular half hourly service to Rose Hill;
- An additional service to New Mills in each off peak hour, with no reduction in the quantum of peak services;
- The opportunity to accelerate the Sheffield services by reducing the number of stops between New Mills and Manchester.

This would provide an improved service on all three routes, attract more passengers and better meet the needs of the communities served by them. It would not require any additional trains in service. There would be some additional staff, fuel, maintenance and track access costs, but these could well be less than the extra revenue generated.