



Results of the Middlewood Railway Station Survey

carried out by

Poynton Town Council

March – May 2012

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RESULTS OF THE MIDDLEWOOD STATION RAIL SURVEY

Introduction to the survey

Middlewood station is an unstaffed Northern Rail managed station on the Buxton to Blackpool North line lying just off the Middlewood Way. It literally sits in the middle of a wood and is accessible from both Poynton and High lane. From the Poynton side it is accessible on foot, either from the Middlewood Way or a walk of approximately five minutes via an access path off Middlewood Road. The station suffers from poor access owing to a lack of car parking facilities as well as lighting on the access paths .

The station was refurbished in 2010 and cycle racks were provided via a grant from the High Peak and Hope Valley Community Railway Partnership and Poynton Town Council.

Poynton is also served by Poynton station to the west of the village centre on the Manchester to Stoke-on-Trent line. This station is very accessible and has both a car park and good lighting. It is well patronised and is considered by Northern Rail to be Poynton's main station.

However, the two stations are almost three miles apart, a journey of approximately six minutes by car. Consequently, the two stations effectively serve two separate communities, Middlewood serving the Higher Poynton and Middlewood area and Poynton station, the rest of Poynton.



Middlewood Station Sign

Photo by Martin Smith

Survey results

900 copies of the survey questionnaire were delivered to households closest to the station (rather than Poynton station). From this, there were 114 respondents and a further 32 people completed the on-line version giving a total of 146 responses.

Map

Question 2 asked what age groups did people in their household fall in to, of which 9% were under 16, 48% were in the 16-59 age group and the remaining 43% were over the age of 60.

PEAK HOURS TRAVEL

In respect of peak-hours travel, 46% travel to Manchester, 32% to Stockport and the remaining 22% to other destinations.

Question 4 asked how did those people generally travel. 56% travel to those destinations by car, 13% use Middlewood station, 12% use Poynton station, 10% use Hazel Grove station and 11% use either the bus, cycle or walk. As expected, 90% of peak-hour travel was for the purpose of work, with the rest comprised of education, shopping and social purposes.

Encouraging more peak-hours use of Middlewood station

Question 7 asked for those people who do not currently use Middlewood station during peak times, what would encourage them to use that service. In priority, the improvements desired are :-

More frequent service	22%
Lighting along access path	20%
Improved access path	16%
Car parking facility	15%
Improved security	10%
Improved waiting facilities	8%
Improved cycle facilities	5%
New trains	4%

Question 8 was directed at those 22% of responses from people who currently travel out of Poynton at peak times and use either Poynton or Hazel Grove stations. They were asked what would encourage them to use Middlewood station as an alternative. The improvements required showed

the same priority – a more frequent service, followed by lighting, improved access path and then a car parking facility.

Train times during peak-hours travel

Currently, in the morning from Monday to Friday, trains stop at Middlewood for Manchester at 0653hrs, 0721hrs and 0755hrs with a journey time of 30 minutes. During the evening peak period, trains from Manchester Piccadilly, leave Manchester at 1651hrs with the next one leaving Manchester at 1752hrs.

Question 9 asked respondents whether anyone in their household would require an additional train out of Manchester to fill the gap between 1651hrs and 1752hrs. 43 respondents said they would want that additional train.

OFF PEAK HOURS TRAVEL

In respect of off peak hours travel, 61% travel to Manchester, 19% to Stockport and the remaining 20% to other destinations.

Question 11 asked how did those people generally travel. 39% of respondents travel to those destinations by car, 23% use Hazel Grove station, 17% use Middlewood station, 17% use Poynton station and 4% use either the bus, cycle or walk. As expected, 53% of off peak travel is for social purposes, 36% is for shopping with the rest comprised of work, education or for other purposes.

Encouraging more off peak hours use of Middlewood station

Question 14 asked for those people who do not currently use Middlewood station for off peak travel, what would encourage them to use that service. In priority, the improvements desired are :-

More frequent service	22%
Lighting along access path	20%
Car parking facility	16%
Improved access path	16%
Improved security	10%
Improved waiting facilities	9%
Improved cycle facilities	4%
New trains	3%

Question 15 was directed at those 40% of responses from people who currently travel out of Poynton at off peak times and use either Hazel Grove or Poynton stations. They were asked what would encourage them to use Middlewood station as an alternative. The improvements required

showed a similar priority – more frequent service, followed by lighting, a car parking facility, and then an improved access path.

Middlewood or Poynton station?

Section 3 of the questionnaire was specifically aimed at people who currently use Middlewood station for travel. They were asked if they lived closer to Poynton station and just under 12% confirmed that they did. This 12% of people were then asked whether they preferred to use Middlewood station because the fares are slightly lower, with it being located in Stockport (part of Greater Manchester). 27 responses (77%) indicated that they did prefer to use Middlewood station because of the lower fares.

GENERAL COMMENTS REGARDING MIDDLEWOOD STATION

Section 4 asked respondents for any comments or improvements they would like to suggest with regards to Middlewood station.

There were 86 individual responses which are listed at the end of the report.



Middlewood Station Bridge

Photo by Martin Smith

Key Findings of the Survey

The results clearly demonstrate that the vast majority of respondents said that a more frequent hourly service together with various access improvements to the station would encourage them to either start using the station or use it on a more regular basis.

Our survey only covered residents of Middlewood and Higher Poynton. It did not cover residents on the High Lane side nor did it consider the needs of tourists from the Stockport and Greater Manchester areas. Middlewood and Higher Poynton is situated in the foothills of the Peak District with direct access to Lyme Park, the Middlewood Way and the Macclesfield Canal, whereas Poynton itself has a wide network of paths. The Middlewood Way is a ten mile traffic free route between Marple and Macclesfield. It provides opportunities for cyclists (national route 55), walkers and horseriders allowing access to beautiful Cheshire countryside. Accordingly, improvements to the timetables for Saturdays and Sundays combined with promoting awareness would increase growth in usage numbers.

The current timetable between Buxton and Manchester in some respects reflects the patronage at the various stations on the line. An extract of the figures for 2010/11 reveal the following numbers for patronage :-

Buxton	308,856
New Mills Newtown	190,478
Disley	123,608
Middlewood	19,304

Accordingly, throughout the day, trains stop hourly at Buxton, New Mills and Disley but this becomes two hourly at Middlewood. This is to meet the demand for a journey time of under one hour between Buxton and Manchester. Currently, there is an hourly service at Middlewood on Sundays which is considerably better than the service from Poynton station which is virtually non-existent.

However, when the new timetable commences in December 2012, the Sunday service at Middlewood will become two-hourly whereas there will be more frequent stops at Poynton station.

Looking to the near future, there is an aspiration to introduce a half-hourly service on the Buxton line, possibly from 2013 or 2014. This could give an hourly service at Middlewood with little effect on the overall journey time between Buxton and Manchester. In the interim, as indicated by the response to Question 9 of the survey, there is a desire for the train which leaves Manchester at 1723 hrs to stop at Middlewood in order to encourage commuters.

Conclusion

The survey makes a strong case for a regular hourly service at Middlewood station combined with access improvements, especially lighting, better access paths and car parking facilities. This would ensure an increase in patronage at the station, thus taking pressure off the road network, and also encourage an increase in tourism, one of the benefits of which is to boost local economies.

“It was near this point that on 25th May 1885 a curve was opened linking the Macclesfield line with the Buxton line at Middlewood. Its use by passenger trains was never extensive, at best consisting of trains on 3 or 4 days a week, between Stoke and Buxton and even then usually only one train a day in each direction. Not surprisingly the “service” was an early victim, ceasing on 1st October 1914, being restored in 1922, only to be withdrawn again in 1927. The curve closed to all traffic in February 1955 and the bridges were demolished. The embankments can still be traced in the woodland both south and north of the current Middlewood Station.

Continuing on the main trail, a slight rise marks the site of the former Middlewood Upper station.

Middlewood (Upper or High Level) station was opened on 2nd June 1879 and closed in 1960. The station house is still extant on the left hand side of the line and the path that formed the station approach now joins the trail.

Ahead you can now see the large girder bridge that carries the Middlewood Way over the Buxton Line and here too is the usual array of information signs that one gets at any station. As you arrive at the top of the steps leading to the Manchester bound platform of Middlewood (Lower) station you pass imperceptibly from Cheshire into Greater Manchester. The only things that betray this change are the different signs and, in particular, those on the station that show you are now in GMPTE’s territory. A more unlikely PTE station would be hard to imagine as Middlewood has no vehicular access at all and, as the name suggests, it is literally in the middle of a wood. You need to time e your arrival here with care as there are some 2-hour gaps in the train service and, as will be all too obvious, no possibility of a taxi or a bus”.

(Extract from the Disley to Middlewood stations walk prepared by Martin Smith. This walk is one of a number of walks available for download from The High Peak and Hope Valley Community Railway Partnership website [hvhptp.org.uk]).

General Comments

- Safe car parking

- The times we do use the train are always peak time, carriages are always full to overflowing - why are extra ones not put on?

- Encouraging more cars to travel up Middlewood Road would be inappropriate as would providing car parking near Middlewood. There should simply be improved services both in Poynton and Middlewood – the solution is not increasing car usage.

- Invariably, we end up driving to Hazel Grove as the most useful trains do not stop at Middlewood, although a station stop only adds 2 minutes to the timetable. For instance, my wife works at Heaton Chapel but cannot get a commuter train that stops at either station! I travel into Manchester for a regular meeting and either have to catch a train at 10am and waste two hours because the 11am train does not stop at Middlewood, and the 12 noon train gets me in too late! Jackson's Brickworks car park is unsuitable because of anti-social behaviour problems in previous years resulting in the car park being gated and closed at 5 or 6 pm. There needs to be proper provision for parking and a bus turning space nearer to the station. At present one or two cars parked on Middlewood Road, on the brow of the hill, cause a hazard for passing traffic. If there are to be more cars parked on the road it would be dangerous. The train carriages are the worst and the oldest in Manchester. In the dark, Middlewood Way is unlit. One is never sure whether the path is going to be muddy or if there are great dollops of horse excrement!

- Personally I happily walk in the dark to Middlewood Station but I'm sure the lack of lighting and muddy path will discourage many people. I'd be much more likely to use Middlewood if there was an evening service leaving Manchester around 5.30 pm. I think many local people, including people living close to the station, don't know it's there. A general publicity campaign might help. The financial advantages, for instance through using the TfGM Countycard, are marked and should be highlighted. Probably pie in the sky, but open jaw returns allowing you to travel out from Middlewood and return to Poynton, or vice versa, would be a very useful flexibility in my view.

- Car parking would be the major factor and also more trains during rush hours. If I miss my train to Poynton in the evening it would be good to know I could catch another fairly quickly to Middlewood.

- I live on Middlewood Road - and my children use the station regularly commuting to college and university- the light is a problem only in the winter. My husband and I both only use it occasionally for social trips into town - I have friends who use it

socially with bikes, up into the Peak District. However, please note we have a massive car park at the bottom of Pool House Road – 5-8 mins walk at the most from the station- that I have never ever seen any where near full- we do not need any more car parking facilities in the area which is very beautiful and supports a lot of wildlife- what ever you do to improve the facilities it must not impact on the natural surroundings which make this area so special.

- I have looked at using this station because it would be quicker to drive to but I am put off by the lack of parking facilities and the potentially quiet, dark walk to the road in the winter.
- The train routes to and from Middlewood need greater publicity locally e.g. via the Poynton Post or in the Poynton mag.
- Improved all-weather access and frequency of trains are the major factors in our opinion.
- I've occasionally used Middlewood for years and would hate for its future to be in doubt, however the age old problem of trying to get back home from there in the winter hasn't gone away. More lighting needed.
- Access by car/taxi would be good.
- Better access to the station would make me use Middlewood more, as I live mid-way between both Middlewood and Poynton stations.
- Useful signpost on Station Bridge. Currently it says "Ladybrook Valley" in both directions- no good for anyone wanting to know which direction is High Lane and which is Middlewood Road/Higher Poynton and beyond. (Many people wandering and lost especially at night and weekends). Automatic ticket machine would be good - if the guard is not on the train or his ticket machine is faulty or the train is very busy, everyone has to queue at the other end for a ticket – takes forever. Up-to-date timetables with bigger writing. It would be appreciated if the train company did not pretend to run a service from Middlewood to Manchester when the train from Middlewood actually goes to Disley (change platforms and wait 40 mins) and then goes back to Manchester through Middlewood without stopping! An alternative service when trains not running – as Middlewood station is not alongside a road there is no link bus that stops nearby. There should be a pick-up at Middlewood Road during track upgrades and maintenance. Cars currently park on Middlewood Road near to footpath causing obstruction on road and pavement at a blind spot, which is hazardous to passing traffic. A car park area and taxi pickup point would be great. Footpath from road to station is too narrow for pushchairs, wheelchairs, passing pedestrians, cyclists – needs widening and resurfacing. Lot of dog poo on the narrow footpath from the road to the station - a wider path would make this easier to avoid!
- Let Stockport or GMT equivalent pay for the maintenance of a station in their area.

- More frequent trains and a reliable service is what is required. In the winter it is harder as there are no lights on the path. But Middlewood Way is a good access conduit if you are coming from the Adlington side of Poynton to go to Middlewood Station.
- Why can't the trains stop every hour as that would be a better service and also how about the train connecting up with the bus or the bus with the train.
- We would like Middlewood cut through to be closed so therefore would reduce traffic on Middlewood Road. It has been wonderful while it has been closed for repairs and it seems people do not need to use cut through to get to work as they have been managing since the repairs began.
- The questionnaire fails to assess occasional travel from Middlewood Station which is how I use it. This may be on any day of the week and hence I've ticked all 7 days!! It is appalling walking along the access paths in the dark! I would use the station more if it provided secure bike storage lockers.
- A secure cycle shelter would be useful as it is difficult to get bikes on trains during peak times. The trains themselves are clapped out and not inviting when compared to those on the Poynton line, but I realise there is not much the Council can do about that!
- Need some sort of car park facility Poynton side plus cost it correctly. Hazel Grove to Manchester Return=£5.90 a lot cheaper than £7.30 per day, Hazel Grove Station can be driven in 5 mins.
- Lighting and either a car park or car turnaround would increase usage. Also a bus turnaround should be considered as the 391 bus service is under threat. The bus could stop at a turnaround on Middlewood Road at the appropriate times.
- Sometimes it is difficult to get off the train at Middlewood because the conductor doesn't open the doors. This must be addressed to make Middlewood more viable.
- I have lived in the same house in Poynton Coppice Road and have never used Middlewood Station to date.
- The 391 currently terminates at Green Lane. Could the termination be made closer to Middlewood Station? Please.
- Never used or visited Middlewood Station but it is cheaper to travel from Hazel Grove Station and trains run later.
- Footpath lighting is the most important! – as far as Middlewood Road.

- Person 1 and 2 both currently work in Alderley Edge so do not use a train for work. We use the train at weekends for social activities and would use it more if train frequency, lighting and security was increased. The questionnaire didn't feel like it was aimed at people who want to use the train but less frequently than every day for work. We love taking the children on trips via Middlewood Station (especially to Buxton).
- When using the train in either direction we normally travel by car to Hazel Grove then get the train because of the reduced cost and more frequent trains and parking.
- If prices were more economical it would be easier and more likely to be used. You can go for marginally lower prices from Hazel Grove and there is more parking than either Poynton or Middlewood.
- The footpath desperately needs lighting and improved pathway would be highly beneficial. This is a very isolated station and needs dramatically improving regarding safety and access.
- I'm not sure how to access Middlewood Station by car – I don't think it is widely advertised. We just "stumbled" across it whilst walking along the Middlewood Way. Perhaps you could advertise it as an alternative by putting up notices at Hazel Grove Station. I know several people in this area who choose to travel to Hazel Grove Station because the fare is cheaper. Perhaps you could use that as a selling point along with the fact that it is probably easier to get a seat.
- Any improved rail service facilities really need to be co-ordinated with the 391 bus service to/from Higher Poynton to facilitate improved connections for Poynton village residents.
- Wonderful idea – please get Middlewood Station to a better standard/access for use.
- Please note above Person 1 and Person 2 currently travel out of Poynton before 6.53 am so therefore do not fit criteria for questionnaire. Person 1 gets 6.33 am train from Poynton Station travelling there by car/foot. If the first train out of Buxton i.e. 5.59 am stopped at Middlewood Station he would walk to Middlewood and get the train there – more convenient and much cheaper option, given the isolated aspect of Middlewood many people would not use it unless access path/lighting was much improved.
- We often go into Manchester on the train to have a meal and go to the theatre but find there is never a train leaving Middlewood going to Piccadilly at the right time on an evening. Best bit is we can get the last train back to Middlewood which is close to home and saves a taxi fare.

- The bus could turn around at the station. Plus a more frequent bus service to Higher Poynton.
- Provision of pay station on platform. More frequent bin emptying. Please do not ruin Middlewood Way by installing lighting.
- Increasing the frequency of services in the off peak times to at least 1 per hour would be a great incentive to use the station. The principle attraction of Hazel Grove is the frequency of trains yet we drive past Middlewood station to get there!
- As regards car parking there is a large car park at Jackson's Brickworks which is only 5 mins walk to the station which is hardly used during the day or weekends. Some improvements could be made to the steps from Poolhouse Road. Also I think more signs to say where the station is at access points. Why do they have an hourly service on Sundays and not during the week? It could be made as a request stop.
- That all trains stop at Middlewood Station.
- It is very isolated, especially for girls and women. It is very dark at night. The access is very long and lonely and can be very muddy.
- We walk along the Middlewood Way to the station and in parts it can be very muddy. We have to avoid it when it is dark. If trains were more frequent to Manchester and Stockport via Middlewood, we would use them rather than the bus or via Poynton.
- Everything is fine apart from the gaps – the one in the afternoon especially. There is no train to Middlewood from Buxton between 3.30 and 5.00.
- As a woman I would be concerned about personal security. I also work at Stepping Hill hospital and if the service was more regular I would consider the train as a means of transport. PS – I am certainly going to use the service from Middlewood to Buxton in the school holidays.
- Single ladies are nervous because of the isolation. Good lighting and CCTV cameras might reassure them.
- I would like to see better facilities for cyclists i.e. blue locker similar to Hazel Grove for secure storage. There are several at Stockport bus station which don't get used and just gather litter and leaves and each train to be able to stop here. Surely that alone would make car owners use the train more into urban environs.
- Fix Middlewood so it's not a death trap to pedestrians. Also on Mon-Sat those that run through it can easily stop. Make them do so.

- Good to have taxi link.

- As a woman – I definitely would use it more as access was lit and it was more secure.

- Lighting which activates automatically when it is dark is essential. All too often we have arrived at the station and there are no lights whatsoever – neither on the platform nor above the station to show the way to the Middlewood Way. Once the train has departed the darkness can be extreme and disorientating with the only light at the private Station house (not in view from the platform) and the little red lights on the electricity pylons in the distance. When challenged about this the railway authorities say “that they must have forgotten to be switched through”. This always happens when the clocks are changed in the autumn and so at only 4.30pm it is essential to carry a torch or else “feel ones way” from the platform, along the handrail to the Middlewood Way until the Station House light.

- Increased frequency is crucial. We use Hazel Grove although much further because of this.

- It would be a good idea to improve the lighting and footpaths to the station and also some better parking facilities.

- Better access more lighting/car parking.

- A more regular service that stopped at Middlewood would be good (e.g. hourly rather than two-hourly). Improved lighting would improve things and encourage greater use (especially women, I suspect). I’m glad improvements are being considered – excellent news!

- The path down to the station from Middlewood Road could be improved. It is uneven and becomes slippery in parts with water, leaves and ice. The pavement on Middlewood Road should be better maintained, more hedge-cutting and cutting back of nettles is required. Also the grass verge needs cutting back off the pavement in parts, thanks for asking!

- On two occasions trains have left Middlewood early. As it is a quiet station I believe the guards don’t keep to the timetable.

- For many years I have used Middlewood Station when travelling to or from Buxton/Stockport/Bolton but now I am unable to use public transport due to age and arthritis.

- After dark not suitable for women. More lighting would help.

- The Middlewood Road is the most dangerous road in Poynton. No footpath from Anson Road. From Coppice Road to Anson Road I have been clipped on the pavement by two 4x4 cars passing at high speed. Please never allow any cyclist or pedestrian to use this station as there will be deaths.

- Have occasionally used Middlewood to travel to Buxton, but Poynton Station is closer to our home.

- The timetable needs sorting out to provide a full 1 hour service during the off-peak period Mon-Sat. if the rail company can do this on Sunday why not do it for the working week. It is hard to understand why services pass through Middlewood without stopping for passengers. Until this low cost change is made any other change to facilities will be wasteful. Car parking and associated security would be a major undertaking. As the name suggests Middlewood is in the middle of a wood with restricted access. We would like to use the Buxton/Manchester line more fully but fear the timetable lets us down. Should consider connecting services for mainline to say Birmingham or London, signed.....J W Simpson 17.04.12

- Improvement to access path lighting.

- More lighting.

- Car park near the road. Make it obvious both from the road and town centre. Make it obviously safe to use both for passengers and vehicles parking.

- As a family we would use Middlewood more often if trains were more frequent. We are 5 min walk away from Middlewood yet to travel by train we drive to Hazel Grove most times.

- We cannot help feel this questionnaire is flawed. It is cheaper to use a car to travel to Hazel Grove and then use the train than either Middlewood or Poynton stations to Manchester.

- As per e-mail: Middlewood Way is fouled with horse droppings and dog dirt so essential it is illuminated. Car parking where the grass verge is would make it much easier even for "locals" who are mobility impaired.

- A later train from Manchester to Buxton say 1 am on Saturday to account for later stays in the city.

- We are planning to move to Higher Poynton – person I will definitely use the station as this coincides with a work move to Stockport town centre.

- I would not like to lose the convenience of Middlewood station even if there were no improvements.
- The car parking would need to be close to the station as any woman walking the 5 minutes it takes on the present path, I feel would be very uncomfortable, even with improved access and lighting.
- Given road access the bus should be extended to terminate at the station (391). Why wasn't the questionnaire asking about bus access/connections?
- I used to use Middlewood station for peak hours travel – the main issue that made me stop using it was the unreliability of the train service (late or cancelled trains).
- We are a family of five. The main reason we would opt to drive rather than travel by train for social/shopping is cost. We would consider travel from Middlewood for occasional family outings but we are unclear about access to the “car park” or would be car park from where we live (Coppice Road).
- Suggest a request stop on all trains at Middlewood rather than 2 hourly off-peak services.
- Middlewood station is a hidden gem that more people should know about. The only thing that is a fly in the ointment is that not every train stops here. If more trains/all trains stopped here would be brilliant and make life easier/more flexible.
- Only use it for going to Manchester or Stockport 2/3 times a year for socials. Cannot use it for work as I work near the airport and would have to change at M/C. The station and paths are pitch black at night so better lighting would be my vote. Although I always take a torch, just as I do when I walk down the Middlewood Way to the Boar's Head.
- Car parking needed – especially a turning round area because of “blind” summit below and volume of quickly moving traffic. Lighting poor - paths wet and muddy. The train journey into and out of Manchester is an excellent service, very reliable. The approach to the station however is a different story. The pathway leading from the road towards the Middlewood Way is treacherous during the winter months. Fields drains allow water to pour across the narrow pathway and this freezes over during the very cold spells. The absence of any lighting other than security lighting on the old Station Master's cottage (now privately owned) makes this walk during the winter months one that is definitely not for the faint hearted. Wellies and powerful torch are a must.
- Would benefit from better lighting at night. We use a torch to walk along the path. I won't use the service when dark on my own even if lights were floor level.

- My main issue with Middlewood was overcrowding on the rush hour trains. When I was pregnant I found it very uncomfortable to travel on that line vs. Poynton.
- Better information point/also better tannoy. More lighting. A more modern waiting enclosure, but relating to a country type station. The present one is cold and unfriendly.
- If there was car parking/better access path, more frequent trains, I would definitely use it.
- A “Friends of Middlewood station” should be set up to improve the state of the area which could be improved by planting more flowers to prove that people care about their local railway station.
- Don’t use train at present. Insufficiently flexible for nature of my work and things I require with me.
- Secure bicycle facility. More shelter for passengers waiting for trains.