

## Merseyrail

The rich history of rail travel in and around Merseyside is one of the developments from the infamous Rainhill trials in 1829, towards private regional ownership, electrification and integration. The original network of stations and private rail companies sprang up during the early 19<sup>th</sup> Century including the main components of the modern Merseyrail network, the Lancashire Company, the Cheshire Company, the Mersey Railway, Liverpool Railway and the Wirral Railway.

The Liverpool Manchester Company was formed upon parliamentary approval to build the country's first intercity line in 1826. When the Liverpool to Manchester line was approaching completion in 1829, trials were arranged to find the most suitable locomotive to use on the railway. The Rainhill trials were held over a number of weeks and grandstands were erected to give spectators a view of the action. The trials involved running up and down the designated length of track to simulate the journey from Liverpool to Manchester, whilst being judged on a number of specifications. Robert Stephenson's Rocket was the eventual winner and took the contract to produce locomotives for the railway.

Lime Street railway station opened on 15 August 1836 and was the main Merseyside station of the London and North Western Railway. From Lime Street passengers could catch trains that travelled along the Liverpool and Manchester Railway. They could also catch London and North Western Railway Company trains to London Euston. Suburban services for Bootle to the north of the city and Sefton Park in the south also left from Lime Street station.



**Central Station in 1911**

Central station was opened by the Cheshire Lines Committee on 2 March 1874. Central station replaced the Cheshire Lines Committee's original station at Brunswick. From then on Brunswick handled goods trains only. Before Central station opened passengers travelled from Brunswick to the Cheshire Lines Committee's headquarters in James Street by horse drawn carriage. It took ten years to build the 1<sup>3</sup>/<sub>4</sub> mile (2.82 km) long extension

from Brunswick to Central station. This was because so much cutting and tunnelling needed to be done. A ban on the use of explosives in the city centre made progress even slower. In January 1892 the Mersey Railway opened its low level terminus (end of the line station) beneath Central station.

The year 1886 saw the completion of the cross-river railway tunnel and linked the Wirral peninsular to the rest of Merseyside's rail network.

The Liverpool Overhead Railway opened on 4<sup>th</sup> February 1893 and ran from Seaforth to Herculaneum Dock encompassing 14 stations. It was an electric railway and represented the first of its kind in the world. The main aim was to provide efficient transport for all workers in and around the dock area. Subsequent extensions lengthened the utility of the line, but could not prevent it from closure in 1956 as the rest of the lines within Merseyside were either nationalised or taken under some kind of municipal control. The only remaining feature of the Liverpool Overhead Railway that can still be seen is the tunnel entrance across from the Dock Road in Dingle.

Although there were rail links at various stations, the operation of the network only began to take the integrated form it operates under now with the onset of rail nationalisation in the 1950s. Under the control of British Railways, the franchise name of Merseyrail was introduced to brand the commuter network. The modern City Line remained as a separate undertaking of British Rail.



**Hamilton Square Underground Station 1956 taken by Dewi Williams**

Improvements and extensions were subsequently carried out with a view to extending rail provision across Merseyside. A notable development was the construction of the Liverpool city centre loop line that allowed trains coming from the Wirral to complete a circle and head back across the river. It also provided a link with the existing rails at Central station and Lime Street station. Since 1968, the Merseyside PTE played a more critical role in the development of Merseyrail as a joint operator and bridging the gap between expenditure costs and revenues.

When British Rail was privatised in 1995, the operation of the franchise was taken over by Merseyside Transport Ltd, operating under the franchise name of Merseyrail Electrics. In 1998, in light of financial difficulties the franchise was taken over by Arriva Trains Merseyside.

Under the supervision of the Strategic Rail Authority (SRA) (2001-2005), created to deliver the aims of the Strategic Plan for Britain's railways, there have been a number of developments of the Merseyrail network since 1997.

In a landmark move in 2003, Merseytravel took over responsibility for the Merseyrail electrics franchise from the SRA, and provides strategic direction and leadership of the franchise covering the Northern and Wirral Lines. In

conjunction with this, the concession to operate services on these lines was awarded to the consortium between Serco-NedRailways in 2003. The City Line was also affected by changes to franchise boundaries. A new wider franchise was created covering much of northern England, and was until 2005 managed by the SRA and the five northern PTEs, with the SRA responsibility absorbed by the Department for Transport in 2005. The concession for services of the northern franchise was awarded to Northern Rail in 2004, and covers services on the Merseyrail City Line.

Following the changes in 2003 there have been a number of projects initiated. This includes the £34million refurbishment of the entire fleet of Merseyrail train cars, and constant improvements to facilities at stations, such as new ticketing barriers, electronic display panels and a brand new interchange station on the site of the old Garston and Allerton stations – Liverpool South Parkway (2006), providing a transport hub for the whole South Liverpool area.

## **References**

Ferneyhough, F (1980) *Liverpool and Manchester Railway 1830-1980*, Robert Hale, London.

Thomas, R (1980) *The Liverpool and Manchester Railway*, Batsford, London.

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Thanks to Dewi Williams, Ottawa, Canada for use of the picture of Hamilton Square in 1956.