1. Friends of Eccles Station (FRECCLES) is a community organisation which aims to improve the environment and passenger services at Eccles Station and the immediate surrounding area, and to put the station back into the heart of the community. Eccles is a station in Greater Manchester on the historic Chat Moss line linking Manchester and Liverpool.

2. FRECCLES has long campaigned for a twice-hourly train service throughout the day at Eccles, which is clearly justified by the size of Eccles (population 40,000), station footfall (190,000 p.a.), and by the opportunity to make Eccles an interchange hub for the west of Greater Manchester.

3. The following analysis focuses on the Monday to Friday rail service at Eccles, although the Saturday and Sunday services are also of importance to FRECCLES.

4. At the start of the current Northern franchise in April 2016, Eccles had an hourly service with trains running between Manchester Victoria and Liverpool Lime Street, plus 3 additional services in the morning peak (one to Manchester, two to Liverpool) and 3 additional services in the evening peak (one to Liverpool, two to Manchester). This gave Eccles 22 trains per day in each direction.

5. The Northern Franchise Train Service Requirements (TSR2) specified that Eccles would get an hourly service plus 3 additional services in each direction in the morning and evening peak periods, making 25 trains per day in each direction. This modest improvement was specified to be introduced in December 2017.

6. In November 2016, Northern announced that they would not be implementing the specified timetable improvements in December 2017, due to the delay to the Great Western Railway electrification scheme. Instead Northern said that the changes would be introduced in May 2018.

7. In May 2017, Northern consulted with FRECCLES and other stakeholders on how they would meet the TSR2 specification in May 2018. There would be an hourly Crewe to Liverpool Lime Street service calling at Eccles, and an additional 3 services in both the morning and evening extended peak periods (7 to 10 am and 4 to 7 pm) in each direction. The additional calls would be provided by the planned new hourly Chester to Leeds service. During the consultation, one of the Chester to Leeds calls in the morning and one in the evening (in both directions) were replaced by calls of additional Manchester Victoria to Liverpool Lime Street trains. This would have given Eccles 25 trains per day in each direction.

8. In February 2018, Northern announced that delays to the Manchester to Preston electrification would further delay the changes then planned for May 2018. The actual timetable to be implemented on 20 May 2018 (https://be803fe5c416e39d38ae-aa21086260d3bd4e072d597fe09c2e80.ssl.cf3.rackcdn.com/images/timetables/2018-05/summer-2018-timetables/Northern-15-1017-32pp-v2.pdf) was not made available until early May. There would be no new Chester to Leeds service, and Eccles would only get an hourly service plus 1 additional train in each direction (one train in the morning to Manchester Victoria, one train in the evening from Manchester Victoria). Thus Eccles would only get 20 trains per day in each direction, 2 fewer than in April 2016, and 5 fewer than TSR2 originally specified for December 2017.
9. Most of the hourly calls at Eccles were on the Crewe to Liverpool service, but because two through services were omitted from the timetable (there was no 17.28 or 18.28 service from Liverpool Lime Street, or 17.16 or 18.28 service from Crewe), the corresponding calls at Eccles were to be provided by Manchester Victoria to Liverpool Lime Street services.

10. When the new timetable was implemented on 20 May 2018 there were numerous cancellations and delays to the Eccles services. In the following two weeks 95 Eccles services were cancelled (Monday to Friday, excluding strike days). On Sunday 27th May, 16 services were cancelled. In short, the train service was atrocious.

11. Northern replaced the standard May 2018 timetable by an emergency timetable on 2nd June, which coincided with the planned closure of Liverpool Lime Street for engineering upgrades. The emergency timetable provided an hourly service at Eccles in each direction, with no additional trains in the peak periods. No printed timetables or posters were provided at Eccles Station during this period. Cancellations and delays continued, but at a reduced rate.

12. Northern re-instated their standard May 2018 timetable on 30th July 2018. As stated above, Eccles now has only 20 trains per day in each direction, 5 fewer than specified in TSR2 for December 2017. FRECCLES is still waiting to hear when the TSR2 specification will be provided. The current service leaves passengers confused and stranded, as there is no obvious pattern to the destination or origin of services to/from Manchester. Commuters who use the 07.14 or 08.14 train to travel to Manchester Piccadilly in the morning find they have no return service from Manchester Piccadilly after the 17.23 train until the 20.22 train. For some reason the published timetables omit the calls at Deansgate between Eccles and Manchester Oxford Road, despite Northern having been repeatedly told about this error.

13. In summary, the May 2018 timetable was a disaster for Eccles passengers, even before it was implemented, and its implementation was appalling. An opportunity to provide a half-decent rail service at Eccles, and to start to provide a good interchange between rail and tram at Eccles, has been missed, and Eccles passengers are stuck with a worsened service until December 2018 and probably until May 2019.


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