

Welcome aboard!

## ...and Festive Greetings to you all

I'm afraid this *Update* is quite a long one, reflecting both that it is a bit later than I had intended, and that there is so much going on. Some of the items are therefore no longer exactly breaking news, but I have left them in for the sake of completeness. So, as Jeremy Paxman says at the beginning of every edition of *University Challenge*: 'OK, let's just get on with it'.

### Railfuture 'Mind the Gap' exercise

As some of you already know, we in the East Midlands Branch are contributing to a national Railfuture exercise looking at reductions in train services over the past two years as a result of the Covid pandemic. While temporary reductions may be reasonable in the circumstances, Railfuture is anxious that they do not become permanent. The national Railfuture Board has asked all Branches to identify their 'top 5' key routes that have seen such planned reductions in timetables and quality of service. The key criteria are passenger volume and impact on users, and we are talking about the published timetable, as opposed to day-to-day ad hoc failings. The purpose of this exercise is to have definite evidence from across the country of service deterioration during the pandemic, for a meeting the Rf Board is hoping to have with the Rail Minister early in 2022.

We shall be coordinating our response with Rf Lincolnshire Branch, as EMR Regional services have seen the worst of the Covid-related reductions, and many overlap the two Branch areas. The Branch Committee and a few others will have seen my separate email about this.

The specific concerns are:

- 1. Loss of frequency:** Number of trains per hour between A and B (*stations, e.g. Derby and Nottingham*) for both peak and off-peak, December 2019 and December 2021.
- 2. Loss of service duration:** Removal of first and last trains and loss of service duration in 30-minute bands.
- 3. Increase in average journey duration:** By how much have average journey times increased as a result of removal of fast services, or insertion of extra stops to cover withdrawal of stopping services?
- 4. Loss of through journey opportunities:** Number of through trains lost as a % of those in December 2019 for the key route. Increase in journey time as a result of now having to change trains.
- 5. Loss of on-train facilities:** Has there been any change in the provision of on-board catering, restrictions on cycle conveyance, etc?

Note: Not all questions may apply to all of the 5 selected routes, of course, so those can just be left blank or n/a.

Thank you to those who have already written to me about this. The deadline for responses to Rf is 7<sup>th</sup> January. If you have any comments – with evidence, please, in the form of comparison between the December 2019 timetable and December 2021 – please let me have them by December 31<sup>st</sup> to allow time for collation as well as coordination with Lincolnshire.

#### Direct Award to replace EMR franchise

The DfT issued a Prior Information Notice dated 18<sup>th</sup> October regarding the EMR franchise with Abellio East Midlands Ltd, the contract for which was ‘substantially varied’ by the Emergency Recovery Measures Agreement (ERMA) that came into force in September 2020 because of the Covid pandemic. In essence, this formally notifies Abellio East Midlands Ltd of the DfT’s intention to institute a Direct Award of between four and eight years’ duration, pending the new National Rail Contract to be set up under Great British Railways (GBR). The notice lists the services covered (including, pleasingly, Corby to Loughborough via Melton Mowbray), but summarises this by saying: ‘These services would be similar to those currently operated on the East Midlands Franchise’.



*Mentioned in dispatches: An EMR Meridian waits at Platform 1 at Melton Mowbray to form the 13:15 to London via Oakham and Corby on 24<sup>th</sup> June 2021. It had earlier arrived at Melton as the 10:45 from St Pancras via Corby and Oakham, before running empty to Syston and back. Whimsically, perhaps, this train did not run on Wednesdays in the old timetable. However, from 12<sup>th</sup> December it is due to run every weekday, but to different timings.*

*Photo: Steve Jones*

#### Restoring Your Railway (RYR) – bid results

The DfT has announced the outcomes of the Round 3 bids under RYR:

[https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/1028949/restoring-your-railway-successful-bids.csv/preview](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1028949/restoring-your-railway-successful-bids.csv/preview)

Nothing in Round 3 for the East Midlands! There are therefore three successful bids in total for our area:

- To reintroduce passenger services on the Leicester to Burton (Ivanhoe) line (Round 1)
- Reopened lines and new passenger services, Alfreton - Ashfield (Maid Marian Line) (Round 2)
- Reopened lines and new passenger services, Melton Mowbray - Nottingham (Round 2)

The description of the last of these is not wholly accurate as it involves the use of existing routes. Sadly, it does not mean the more direct line via the Edwalton test track!

We had several bids in our area, and it is especially unfortunate that neither the Peaks & Dales Line (MEMRAP: Matlock to Chinley and Buxton) nor the Welland Valley Rail Partnership (Kettering – Corby - Peterborough) were successful. Both would give valuable inter-regional links, but that fact may yet come to their aid as they fulfil wider aims than the more usual RYR ‘local branch line’ proposals.

Another scheme of interest to our Branch, though lying just outside it, is Lichfield – Burton. Though not successful under RYR, the West Midlands Rail Executive has aspirations for that line and is

prepared to fund the business case for its reopening. We also await further developments on the long-hoped-for branch-line extension of the Robin Hood Line to Ollerton, which may be the subject of a project under the Government's Levelling Up Fund. This was mentioned in a report to Transport to the East Midlands (TfEM) on 14<sup>th</sup> September 2021.

#### **Integrated Rail Plan**

Of course, the really big news has been the publication on 18<sup>th</sup> November of the Integrated Rail Plan (IRP), which is available here:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/integrated-rail-plan-for-the-north-and-the-midlands>

There is no point in my going into detail here; you will have read all about it by now. However, two particular aspects will be the focus of EM Branch attention over the coming months:

- The new high-speed line (HS2 East) between Birmingham and East Midlands Parkway, with trains continuing to Nottingham, Derby and Sheffield on an electrified Midland Main Line. We have long debated the relative merits of Toton and East Midlands Parkway as the regional station for HS2, so at least that question is largely settled.
- Full electrification of the Midland Main Line as far as Nottingham and Sheffield.

Of course, there is a lot of detail still to be determined, not least the timescales, and we and our colleagues in Railfuture's Lincolnshire and West Midlands Branches will be working together as the plans develop. For example, the upgrade to the ECML includes removal of the Newark flat crossing.

Railfuture's overall response is on the website: <https://www.railfuture.org.uk/display2860>

Some other comment:

- **Midlands Connect:** *"Our challenge to Government is simple, it should move as quickly as possible to get spades in the ground and bring benefits to local people sooner."* (Sir John Peace, Chair of Midlands Connect). He is right about that. The important thing now is to welcome the investments that have been pledged, support them as improvements to the present network, and hope the Government gets on with it asap and doesn't spend the next 20 years telling us that they are going to do it!
- **Transport for the East Midlands (TfEM):** [https://www.emcouncils.gov.uk/write/IRP\\_Draft\\_EM\\_Statment.pdf](https://www.emcouncils.gov.uk/write/IRP_Draft_EM_Statment.pdf)
- **Nottingham City Council:** <https://www.mynottinghamnews.co.uk/nottingham-city-council-response-to-publication-of-integrated-rail-plan/>

#### **Broxtowe Borough Council – Consultation on Toton and Chetwynd Strategic Masterplan**

As the title says, this is a consultation on a masterplan for the redevelopment of the Toton marshalling yards and the nearby Chetwynd Barracks site, near Nottingham. The Masterplan – which was written on the assumption of HS2 going ahead via Toton - can be viewed at <https://toton-and-chetwynd.virtual-engage.com/> (Click 'Continue' and have a look at the 'documents' on the 'desk' in the virtual exhibition room.) Transport is primarily covered on pages 50-57. However, it has been rather overtaken by the IRP! Nonetheless, there are major opportunities for regeneration of the area, and the idea of a station at Toton is not dead.

The consultation on the Masterplan closes on 14<sup>th</sup> January, and we in Rf EM should not miss the opportunity to respond, using the set questions in the online survey. Several of us in the Branch have discussed this, but if you have anything you would like taken into account in the Branch response, please let me have it by 31<sup>st</sup> December at the latest. I know that is tight, and you may have other distractions in the meantime...

#### **New Stanton Park**

This is the redevelopment of the old Stanton Ironworks site next to the Erewash Valley line and the M1 just north of Toton: <https://newstantonpark.com/>

The plan is for industrial and logistics developments, and includes two rail freight terminals, one each for logistics and bulk. I have been the Railfuture representative on a 'Community Liaison Group', convened by SP Broadway, the planning and PR consultants handling the project. This has included a couple of separate discussions with the rail freight consultant who is advising the developers. The freight potential is considerable. The demand for this sort of facility is also evidenced by the fact that only one warehouse unit now remains unoccupied at the new SEGRO terminal at East Midlands Gateway, not very far away. I am advised that as intermodal rail freight use at these terminals grows, the length of the onward road haul is diminishing and can be quite local. This is good news, with rail taking the boxes pretty close to where they need to be.

We as Railfuture have been formally invited by Erewash Borough Council to submit any observations we have on the proposals, with a deadline of the end of the year.

#### **MML Electrification to Market Harborough**

It is beginning to happen! Piling for the overhead supports between Kettering and Market Harborough started on 11<sup>th</sup> December during a weekend possession of the line. Let's hope that by the time the wires reach Harborough, arrangements will be in place to carry on towards Leicester and beyond.



*Gateway to an electric MML. Entrance to the SPL contractors' site compound on the old car park at Market Harborough station, 23<sup>rd</sup> October 2021.*

*Photos: Steve Jones*



*A road-rail yellow thing heads south from Market Harborough along the down line during a weekend possession on 11<sup>th</sup> December, the day electrification work officially started on the section from Kettering.*



*Pole position. The first overhead support bases have now been installed near Market Harborough, as seen in the foreground in this picture. The location is Braybrooke, just south of Market Harborough, where another site compound has been established. Just visible in the middle distance is a temporary access ramp onto the track for road-rail vehicles. The picture was taken on a murky 11<sup>th</sup> December, the day work officially started on the electrification from Kettering. Work was in progress that day at several locations, including the power substation just north of this location.*

*Photo: Steve Jones*

#### **Leicester Station plans**

The Government has awarded £17.6m from its Levelling Up Fund for a major revamp of the entrance to Leicester station. Though the frontage was smartened up a few years ago, the space is not used to best effect and the new proposals would be a major improvement. See here for more:

<https://news.railbusinessdaily.com/leicesters-railway-station-revamp-plans-get-major-cash-boost/>

#### **Union Connectivity Review**

You may recall that Rf submitted a response (<https://www.railfuture.org.uk/display2554>) to the Government's call for evidence for this review of transport between the four nations of the UK.

The final report has now been published:

[https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/1036027/union-connectivity-review-final-report.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1036027/union-connectivity-review-final-report.pdf)

The recommendations are on pages 10-11 of the report. Of greatest relevance to the railways in the East Midlands are (*with some thoughts in italics*):

- 1 Design and implement UKNET – a strategic transport network for the whole of the United Kingdom, and commit funding to improve the network, in particular, the parts that are not performing well; (*A very good idea, benefiting the whole country if done effectively. A schematic map of UKNET, based on transport corridors rather than specific roads or railways, is given on page 33 in the report. Further assessment of main corridors is given schematically on page 36.*)
- 2 Plan improvements to the network using multimodal corridors, which should be reviewed regularly and appraised on a wider economic basis in order to support government objectives such as levelling up and net zero; (*Again, potentially very beneficial. Concentrating on what each mode does best, rather than setting them against each other, has to be sensible, especially for freight. 'Trunk by rail; distribute by road'.*)

- 4 Reduce rail journey times and increase rail capacity between Scotland and London, the Midlands and North West England by upgrading the West Coast Main Line north of Crewe and reviewing options for alternative northerly connections between HS2 and the West Coast Main Line; (*Connectivity from the Midlands to Scotland. Possible opportunity for the Derby – Crewe line?*)
- 5 Seek to work with the Scottish Government to develop an assessment of the East Coast road and rail transport corridor from North East England to South East Scotland, including improvements on the East Coast Main Line and the A1; (*I like 'Seek to...'! OK, not our area directly, but this should surely cover the whole of the East Coast Main Line? Improvements to the ECML would be of benefit throughout, not just between NE England and SE Scotland.*)
- 9 Develop a package of railway improvements to increase connectivity and reduce journey times between Cardiff, Birmingham and beyond, which could include better rolling stock, timetable changes and enhanced infrastructure; (*Upgrade of the Nottingham – Derby – Birmingham – Cardiff CrossCountry corridor.*)
- 18 Improve connectivity to seaports across the United Kingdom by enhancing rail freight connections and maximise the potential of freeports by investing in improved connectivity to and from these economic hubs; (*As well as the container traffic to and from Felixstowe, we have a rail-connected freeport near East Midlands Airport.*)

#### **HS2 and other major infrastructure projects**

I am grateful to Graham Nalty for sharing this article in *New Civil Engineer* magazine with me:

<https://www.newcivilengineer.com/latest/what-hs2-could-have-learned-from-hs1s-30-years-of-success-14-10-2021/>

The author, Mark Bostock, is a former director with Arup. He contrasts the approach taken to HS1, which has proved highly successful and uncontroversial, with that taken by HS2, both in engineering and 'political' terms. It is quite thought-provoking.

Also from the *NCE* magazine is this: <https://www.newcivilengineer.com/latest/how-to-join-the-dots-between-integrated-rail-plan-and-union-connectivity-review-03-12-2021/?tkn=1>, which picks up Greengauge 21's proposal for using an upgraded Nottingham – Newark line to link HS2 to the ECML for services to the north-east. My thanks to Stephen Chaytow for sharing this with me.

HS2 Ltd and Network Rail have advised that '*Network Rail will be upgrading the track between Birmingham New Street, Water Orton and Coleshill from 19 to 27 February 2022. Engineers will upgrade the drainage and sewerage connections alongside the railway at Duddeston through a series of under-track crossings to prepare for HS2*'. XC's long-distance services will be diverted, and their regional services linking the East Midlands and East Anglia with Birmingham will start and finish at Coleshill Parkway. Replacement buses will operate between Coleshill Parkway, Water Orton and Birmingham New Street.

#### Network Rail

Network Rail have released this rather pleasing animated short video promotion of rail travel, encouraging us all to get back out there by train. <https://www.networkrail.co.uk/stories/rediscover-the-railway/>

Good for them; the railway needs to put itself about a bit as it rebuilds the business after Covid. However, having made some recovery during the summer and autumn, the railway has now been hit hard by Omicron. Let's hope this is only for a short time.

#### Easy Stations

Talking of getting out and about on the railway, our Easy Stations surveys are a good way of doing just that. I recently went to Oakham on the lunchtime train from Kettering over Harringworth Viaduct, always a treat. One of the questions on the survey form concerns refreshment facilities. Sadly, Oakham station does not have these, though the Grainstore Brewery and pub are in the old goods warehouse next door. But it does have this:



*Free-range eggs vending machine, Oakham station, 11<sup>th</sup> November 2021.*

*Ironically, EMR have not been allowed by the local authority to install a ticket vending machine at Oakham.*

*Photo: Steve Jones*

Just the thing if you are awaiting the 14:47 train to Kettering and are feeling a bit peckish.

How many other stations in our region have a free-range-egg vending machine? What is the most unusual feature or facility you have found in your own surveys of stations in the region?

Huge thanks to all those of you who have undertaken surveys of your own stations. We still have quite a few to do, however, and the continued Covid problems mean that we have given ourselves more

time to complete them. If you can help, please download the survey form from the EM Branch webpage (<https://www.railfuture.org.uk/dl2694>). Please send completed forms either to me [steve.jones@railfuture.org.uk](mailto:steve.jones@railfuture.org.uk) or to David Harby [david.harby@railfuture.org.uk](mailto:david.harby@railfuture.org.uk). You are welcome to check with me first whether your station has already been surveyed.

#### **Station usage statistics 2020-21**

The ORR have published their annual estimates of entrances and exits at each station on the national network: <https://dataportal.orr.gov.uk/statistics/usage/estimates-of-station-usage>

These are based on ticket sales from April 2020 to March 2021, giving a picture of how quiet the passenger railway was during the first year of the pandemic. For example, Nottingham saw a total of 1,416,536 journeys beginning or ending there, or 18% of 2019-20's total of 7,864,690. Elton & Orston had 12, or 17.6% of the previous year's 68!

The five busiest stations in the East Midlands are shown in this graphic, taken from the ORR's 'most used top-five stations in each region' video\*. Bear in mind that this is in the year ended last April. Things picked up somewhat after then, before taking a recent serious downturn.



\*<https://dataportal.orr.gov.uk/media/2030/most-used-top-5-stations-in-each-region-gb-map-2020-21.mp4>

#### **National Rail timetable – December 2021**

The national timetables are all on the Network Rail website, <https://www.networkrail.co.uk/running-the-railway/the-timetable/electronic-national-rail-timetable/>

They are set out in the familiar style of the old printed all-line timetables, so the MML is Table 052. Handy if you want to see the entire service on a particular route, rather than the usual journey planner search for individual trains around a specified time.

If you look at Table 052, you will see that my favourite working, the lunchtime trip north from Corby to Oakham and Melton Mowbray and back has been altered. The outward run will be an hour earlier than before, the return an hour later. This makes it more useful if you want to visit Oakham or Melton, rather than simply waiting for the train back - and perhaps buying a few eggs. It also now runs on Wednesdays!

#### **EMR Stakeholder Conference – Trent Bridge Nottingham, 9<sup>th</sup> November.**

Several members of the Branch attended this annual event, with many of us being there as representatives of other organisations too, such as local user groups. There was a good line-up of speakers and a series of useful workshop sessions looking at timetables and performance; the new Aurora bi-mode fleet for the MML; stations; and the present fleet.

Unfortunately, TfEM could not be represented on the day, but the presentation they would have given is available on their website at: <https://www.emcouncils.gov.uk/Transport-for-the-East-Midlands-TfEM> (scroll down to where it says 'TfEM Regional Rail Collaboration Information Presentation' and click the video link).



*The guard checks that all is in order before giving the 'right away' for an EMR Class 158 to depart from East Midlands Parkway with the slightly delayed 17:13 to Lincoln Central on 9<sup>th</sup> November. EMR Regional services were the subject of much discussion at the EMR Stakeholder Conference at Trent Bridge cricket ground that day.*

*Photo: Steve Jones*

#### **Catch Points**

An occasional item where curiosities arise or where people put me straight when particular points catch me out.

- **Signals**

We all recognise a semaphore signal when we see one, and likewise a colour light. But where is the boundary between the two? Is it, perhaps, towards the north end of Platform 1 at Kettering, where this bright green LED banner repeater is located? Is it a semaphore indicator, or colour light? I think we should be told.



I wasn't just there to photograph banner repeaters, of course. Luckily, the train in this picture is neither electric, nor on the fast line, so there was no violation of this sign just off the north end of Platform 3 on a sunny 16<sup>th</sup> October. Let's hope the sign can soon be removed...



*Wrong kind of sparks? LMS Jubilee no. 45596 'Bahamas' departs from Kettering towards York via Manton Junction and then via the Erewash Valley Line on Saturday 16<sup>th</sup> October. It had stopped at Kettering, both to take on water and pick up a good number of passengers.*

*Photos: Steve Jones*

The train was a special from Ealing Broadway to York. My thanks to Branch member David Fursdon for this short piece that appeared on *ITV Central News* on 16<sup>th</sup> October: [https://twitter.com/fursdon\\_david/status/1449432330381271040?s=03](https://twitter.com/fursdon_david/status/1449432330381271040?s=03).

- **Platform tickets**

I was at Oakham on 11<sup>th</sup> November (*yes, we know – and we know which train you used to get there – Ed*) when I saw a rather charming occurrence in the booking office. A young mum had arrived with a child of about four years old, to catch a train. She had booked her ticket electronically via her mobile phone and, this being the first time she had done so, she wasn't sure whether she had to use this to collect an actual ticket at the booking office. The child was too young to need a ticket. The thoroughly excellent booking clerk explained that, no, she didn't need to get a card ticket as the 'm-ticket' was valid in itself. This turned into a short conversation, largely for the child's benefit, about how you must always have a ticket when you travel on a train. Unbidden, the booking clerk then produced a platform ticket and gave it to the child, so he had his own 'ticket'. (Let's leave aside the fact that they are not valid in trains...) It was a lovely bit of customer care, and the child clearly felt that he was the most important person in the world and was holding the most valuable object in the world. As I was doing an Easy Stations survey at Oakham at the time, I had chatted with the booking clerk and, not realising that platform tickets were still

available at ‘open’ stations, I later bought one myself. From enquiries at a small sample of other local stations since, it appears that platform tickets are still available. Ironically, however, I have only found this to be the case at ‘open’ stations, with no barriers. At the stations with barriers where I have also asked, the booking clerks have said no, they don’t do platform tickets, and have advised me just ‘to have a word with the staff on the barriers; they’ll let you through’!



I have heard that there is a code you can put into a TVM to get a platform ticket at some stations, but I don’t know what it is. Does anyone know?

#### **Next EM Branch events**

Our next EM Branch Open Meeting is planned for Saturday afternoon, either 5<sup>th</sup> or 12<sup>th</sup> February, at which we hope to have a speaker from the DfT. We hope to meet at East Midlands Parkway, but that will depend on the Covid situation at the time. All members and prospective members welcome. More details, when confirmed, will be available on the Branch webpage <https://www.railfuture.org.uk/East-Midlands-Branch>, as are details of all future EM Branch events.

The Railfuture website Events page is also worth keeping an eye on: <https://www.railfuture.org.uk/events>

That’s it for now. May I close by thanking you all for your support for Railfuture and for the railways themselves during the past very difficult year.

**Very Best Wishes for Christmas  
and for a Healthy and Happy New Year**

Steve J.

**Steve Jones**

**Secretary – East Midlands Branch**

**Railfuture – Campaigning for better services over a bigger rail network**

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