



## ***West Midlands Branch eNews***

### ***Issue 14 - January 2016***

Readers who received eNews by e-mail also received the following attachments

- Railfuture's Rail User Express bulletin, December 2015 and January 2016 issues

*We welcome contributions from branch members, other Railfuture members, or the public, with any interesting news or pictures. So if you've learnt about something the West Midlands rail scene, or if you've been on an interesting/unusual journey, let us know and we'll include whatever we can.*

In this issue:-

- Local News
- Campaigns Update
- Railfuture West Midlands Branch Matters
- User Group News

### **LOCAL NEWS**

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#### **London Midland Trains Direct Award**

On 3 December 2015 the Department for Transport announced a direct award agreement which will see incumbent Govia continue to operate the West Midlands passenger franchise under the London Midland brand from the expiry of its current deal in April 2016 until October 2017. Issue 13 (December 2015) contained some highlights of the direct award. It is now possible to give greater detail of the agreement between London Midland and the DfT.

A subsidy of £130m will be paid over the period of the next contract, which includes:

- new targets for passenger satisfaction, punctuality and cleanliness
- recruitment of extra drivers, conductors and on-board staff
- free Wi-Fi on long-distance services between London, Birmingham, Crewe and Liverpool, and a commitment that free Wi-Fi will be rolled out on all services when the next competitively-tendered franchise starts
- new and upgraded ticket machines at selected stations, with 'click and collect' capability and contactless payment
- extra car parking spaces at Watford, Hemel Hempstead and Tamworth
- installation of CCTV on Birmingham Cross-City services
- issuing station staff with tablet computers to improve passenger information
- working with the Smart Cities Partnership to introduce smart ticketing on trains, building on Centro's existing Swift smartcard scheme
- two extra weekday evening services from London to the Trent Valley
- earlier Sunday services to Birmingham from surrounding towns including Rugby and Lichfield
- new Sunday services from Longbridge, Dorridge and Whitlocks End
- an extra daily return service between Watford Junction and St Albans Abbey.

London Midland managing director Patrick Verwer said "This new franchise will enable us to continue delivering improvements for our customers and, as before, we remain committed to

listening to our passengers and working with our stakeholders, communities and local elected representatives to make further improvements in the months ahead."

In addition to the franchise commitments, DfT said it was "pushing ahead" with electrification of the Chase line from Walsall to Rugeley Trent Valley and the extension of electric services to a new station at Bromsgrove. New stations are to open at Coventry Arena, Bermuda Park and Kenilworth. (see below - Ed)

Full details can be found at <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/new-contract-to-make-journeys-better-for-west-midlands-rail-passengers>

## **Nuckle**

At long last Coventry Arena & Bermuda Park stations have opened to paying passengers on Monday 18<sup>th</sup> January 2016. Read an article called [White NUCKLE Ride](#) on the Railfuture web-site.

Michael Tombs visited Arena station early that morning to be met by CWR reporter and later joined by Sarah Faulkner of Midlands Today. Also at that session were Francis Thomas of London Midland Trains and Coventry Councillor McNicholas. Did anyone see the programme at 6.30pm on BBC1 that night? No doubt the thoughts of Francis Thomas and Councillor McNicholas warranted more air time than Michael's. The BBC did seem to want to portray the negative side of the story, i.e. what has gone wrong & what is still wrong.

According to Michael, ignoring the main rolling stock/service issues, "the Help Points were not operational, nor were the auto ticket machines working. Only day one I appreciate, but how many years in the planning, project only 50% complete & still not fully functional."

There appears to be a new nickname for the line.....The Bermuda (Park) Triangle!!

Railfuture conducted a test of leading railway web-sites and found that the new stations only appeared on half of the 14 sites that it tried. For more details, read an article called [Sent to Coventry](#) on the Railfuture web-site, which has links to a Railfuture press release on the subject and recordings of two local radio interviews by Railfuture.

## **Plan to remove seats and toilets from Midland trains**

Trains across Birmingham and the West Midlands could have seats and toilets removed to reduce overcrowding.

The Department for Transport says changes to carriages are needed to cope with a dramatic increase in passenger numbers which has made commuting a misery. Providing fewer seats and toilets would allow train carriages to have wider aisles and more space to stand, according to the Department for Transport. It's included the proposal in a consultation about the future of the West Midlands rail franchise.

The consultation document warns: "(Over-crowding) is especially the case on some commuter services into London and Birmingham where large numbers of customers are standing in confined areas and on occasion some passengers are being left behind." And it says rail companies bidding

for the franchise "will be asked to look at options for adapting the current train fleet on some shorter distance services to increase capacity where it cannot be provided in other ways. Ideas that may be explored include providing fewer seats but more standing space and wider aisles to help people board and alight busy services more easily, or removing/reducing some on board facilities like first class seating or toilets."

### **Contractors shortlisted for HS2 enabling works**

On 10 December 2015 project delivery company HS2 Ltd announced the contractors shortlisted to carry out enabling works on Phase 1 of High Speed 2. An invitation to tender is expected early in 2016, with contracts worth €900m to be awarded later that year.

"Today's shortlist marks an important milestone as we move towards the start of construction in 2017 and a real boost for the UK construction industry. Over the course of the next few years, the winning bidders will go on to employ thousands of people on site and in the supply chain, preparing the ground for the start of major civil engineering", said HS2 Ltd Chief Executive Simon Kirby.

Including utility diversion, site clearance and ground remediation, work is divided into three packages: Lot 1 (south), Lot 2 (central) and Lot 3 (north).

### **West Midlands Franchise (from 2017)**

The consultation process for the replacement franchise started just before Christmas. The West Midlands branch will be a major contributor to Railfuture's official response. It's worth having a look at the DfT's franchise consultation document. This can be found at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/west-midlands-rail-franchise>

Personal submissions can be made to the DfT but, please, not in Railfuture's name as that must come from the official submission. In the meantime, there are to be a series of public consultation meetings. In the West Midlands Region these will be:

- February 3 - Coventry station (15.30-18.00)
- February 9 - Birmingham Snow Hill (11.00-13.30) and New Street (15.30-18.00)
- February 18 - Stafford (15.30-18.00)
- February 24 - Worcester Foregate (15.30-18.00)
- March 1 - Walsall (15.30-18.00)

The Railfuture West Midlands branch committee will be talking to Centro at the beginning of February 2016 about both the details of the LMT Direct Award and our aspirations for the replacement franchise. In addition, committee members will be attending as many of the consultation stakeholder meetings as possible.

### **Bromsgrove Station**

The progress on the relocated Bromsgrove station is somewhat delayed because of land decontamination issues, nevertheless the new station is definitely taking shape as show by the following photograph:



## **CAMPAIGNS UPDATE**

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### **Walsall - Wolverhampton**

The Railfuture West Midlands branch committee has now held meetings with both relevant local authority officers - Walsall, then Wolverhampton. Both are very keen on reinstating regular, frequent passenger services between these two conurbations. In fact Walsall sees this as one of their foremost priorities, with intermediate stations at Willenhall and Darlaston. They would also like six trains per hour to and from Birmingham, more frequent trains to Bloxwich and a direct service to London.

Wolverhampton's top priority is a tram service to the business development I54, but acknowledge the high importance for frequent services to Walsall.

Between us we've worked out a plan of action, of which our next task is to contact the local MPs and Councillors and seek their support. You could help us here. If you live in any of the Walsall or Wolverhampton constituencies writing or even visiting your own MP and/or Councillor to express your support for this project will add more credibility to the campaign. If you do, let us know and what response you get.

In the near future, Railfuture West Midlands will also be exploring the business case with Centro and infrastructure implications with Network Rail.

## **RAILFUTURE WEST MIDLANDS BRANCH MATTERS**

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### **New Member**

Welcome to Roger King, from Northfield, Birmingham. Roger is a former MP for Northfield so should be an immense asset to the Railfuture West Midlands branch.

## Branch Meetings

The next meeting of your branch committee will be on Wednesday 10th February starting at 1800. For this month we shall be in the Dale Lounge of Carrs Lane (Church) Conference Centre.

Any local member of the West Midlands Branch is welcome to attend but please give me notice ([steve.wright@railfuture.org.uk](mailto:steve.wright@railfuture.org.uk)) so that we can expect you.

### HSUK Seminar – *by William Whiting*

Railfuture West Midlands chairman William Whiting attended a seminar promoted by the Birmingham Fabian Society on High-Speed Rail. Their Chairman is concerned that the current proposals for HS2 do not stack up. Hence they invited HSUK to talk to 30 people present about the alternative to HS2. The presentation was given mainly by Colin Eliff of HSUK.

Firstly he said HS2 is shown to be a poor investment, because:

- No CO2 reduction
- Only two tracks between London-West Midlands
- Chiltern Environmental Issues
- Incomplete inter regional links
- Poor Benefit Cost Ratio
- HS1 link deferred
- It does not form part of a network
- Only 68 Journeys improved, 281 not improved and 171 Journeys made worse.
- It has been designed as a stand-alone route.

HSUK propose that the route follow the M1 corridor to minimise impact and move route away from Chilterns, with:

- Four tracking between Rugby and Birmingham
- New link from Soho Junction to Tame Bridge Parkway
- HS2 goes to Birmingham New Street
- Four tracking from Birmingham to Derby
- Reopening of Woodhead Tunnel between Sheffield and Manchester
- Many journeys improved, 40 not improved but none made worse

Christian Wolmar was to have spoken at the seminar but instead appeared on Skype and his main points were:

- HS2 Limited specified the route because of the expansion of Heathrow. This was a bad start as it does not fulfil stated objectives by taking planes out of the sky. It will not replace short haul flights nor connect with Europe
- HS2 will not be environmentally sustainable. Trains at 400 km per hour will increase emissions
- Terminus stations and Parkway Stations are a bad idea. We need through stations
- Rolling stock would only be usable on HS2 and compatible with the Classic Network
- He suspects that the line has been deliberately designed to be privatised and contracted out
- Massive deteriorating service from cities such as Wolverhampton and Coventry.

(Note: These are the views of HSUK and Christian Wolmar and do not represent Railfuture's position.)

**We warmly welcome contributions to these newsletters – any local news we missed, your opinions, photos or articles about interesting trips. Send your content to your branch secretary [steve.wright@railfuture.org.uk](mailto:steve.wright@railfuture.org.uk).**

## **LETTERS**

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### **Reinstatement of Stratford upon Avon to Long Marston Railway Line - *Fraser Pithie***

I have perused your website and I am most disappointed that there appears no reference, let alone support for the reinstatement of a 6-mile section of railway line between Stratford upon Avon and Long Marston linking to the Cotswold Line at Honeybourne. From examination of your priorities for railway there is also no reference.

Does no one in Railfuture realise how important the reinstatement is and the benefits it will bring to the South Midlands? Clearly, at the moment they do not. Later this month a number of us will be seeking to get the local authorities for Stratford District and Warwickshire County engaged at a Planning Inquiry where there is a significant opportunity for part private funding for a GRIP 4 study and indeed towards the cost of the line's reinstatement. In the last month both Gloucestershire and Worcestershire County Council's have confirmed that they want the line reopened and last week Evesham Town Council joined such calls.

I acknowledge that Railfuture has to consider a wide area and treat it equitably. I further acknowledged that the organisation has supported the reinstatement in the past. However, I am perplexed as to why Stratford-Honeybourne seems to have vanished without trace from your web based material and resources and thus discussions and considerations.

I would advise that we have a website at [www.suawoox.com](http://www.suawoox.com). We are also on Twitter and have a Facebook page, details of both are at the website together with a 15 minute presentation on the home page.

(Note from Ed: Nationally Railfuture paid Stratford on Avon District Council £2,000 from its Fighting Fund in April 2012 to produce the Stratford-Honeybourne Rail Study costing £70,000. Railfuture was also represented on the steering group. This is mentioned on the Railfuture web-site at <http://www.railfuture.org.uk/Fighting+Fund+Awards>. The West Midlands branch does support this re-opening and have noted this now on our branch page of the Railfuture website. However, resources prevent it being at present one of our active priorities. In any case the local campaigning groups appears to be doing a very good job already.)

### **Station Name Pronunciation**

There's been quite a flurry of emails about correct pronunciation of stations.

It all started with an email from Allison Cosgrove in Scotland: "Some things take more time than you think. Since the Borders Railway opened on 6<sup>th</sup> September 2015, there have been requests that Stow station is described on the GPS system to rhyme with "wow" rather than with "toe". A simple

request you might think, but four months later this has still not happened. The original recording assumed that Stow in Scotland was the same pronunciation as Stow on the Wold in England. We were told that it would be extremely complicated to change the pre-recorded system. Why it was incorrectly recorded without checking has not been divulged!?

"In England, we have pronunciation problems too. Todmorden is often TOD MOOOR DEN. There's also the issue of what will visitors understand? Locals pronounce Sowerby Bridge in West Yorkshire as Sore Bee Bridge, but the more literal pronunciation of Sow-er-bee Bridge is better understood by visitors. Train crews aren't consistent in their pronunciation and I can't remember what the GPS system uses. The joys of the English language!" - *Nina Smith, Yorkshire Branch*

"Local pronunciation can indeed be a nightmare for the automated systems...but they can eventually be changed....eyebrows were raised until recently on Cambridge station by the automated voice announcing Man-ee-uh for Main-ee .....aka Manea....."she" now does it beautifully. (ea/ey is a suffix meaning island in the fens) The West Midlands conductors on XC services still get Ely wrong...Ee-lie is common." - *Peter Wakefield, East Anglia Branch*

## **USER GROUP NEWS**

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### **DfT UNVEILS DETAILS OF PASSPORT PQQ**

#### **Coventry Rail Action Group**

This new Group is now up and running, the inspiration of branch committee member Michael Tombs. It now has its own email address - [info@covrag.org.uk](mailto:info@covrag.org.uk). If you would like to get in touch and find out what's going on, contact Michael via email or by calling him on his mobile: 07761 937788.

#### **Cotswold Line Promotion Group** (from Rail User Express)

The CLPG is pleased to see improvements to the train service from London in the afternoons being introduced in the December timetable change. However, they've pointed out that the pattern of services from Worcester in the afternoon is unbalanced and they've put forward ideas to resolve this and other anomalies. The Chairman says the group's proposals for interim timetable improvements are all the more important due to uncertainties over the electrification programme.

Improvements to stations were discussed at a recent meeting with senior managers from Great Western Railway. The CLPG says that continuous growth in line usage is putting significant strains on car parking, ticket offices and even access roads at some stations. The group has also been in touch with London Midland about similar problems on the Hereford-Worcester-Birmingham route.

The CLPG's President, Lord Faulkner of Worcester reports that, from his meetings at ministerial level, there's a lot going on to develop the case for further redoubling on the Cotswold Line with a view to perhaps running two trains an hour in the not-too-distant future. GWR's managing director, Mark Hopwood, has called for a manifesto for the line, setting out priorities for future development. The CLPG's Chairman highlighted the need to explore all possible sources of funding, and cited the example of a housing developer at Long Marsden pledging £17m towards the cost of

reopening the link between Stratford-u-Avon and the Cotswold Line at Honeybourne. He also said that infrastructure constraints at Worcester were leading to problems with capacity and reliability.

Worcester Parkway station, planned for opening in 2017, continues to provoke controversy, not the least because of its high cost (£17.5m and rising). With its large car park, it's bound to abstract passengers from neighbouring stations. It has the potential to offer better connections, but only if fast trains stop there (adding to journey times).

The Group welcomes the rebranding of First Great Western to GWR, and the timetable improvements from December, including an additional mid-afternoon service. However this would be even more attractive if Cheap Day Returns were restored and/or the restrictions on the Super Off-peak ticket relaxed to include the 0826 from Worcester to London, returning at 1521. Indeed, the whole ticketing structure needs to be drastically simplified - there are currently over 100 different fares from Worcester to London!

From May 2017, the introduction of Class 800 trains will allow an hourly service from Paddington. However, this will put even greater pressure on many Cotswold Line car parks. Doubling of the North Cotswold route has been referred to the National Infrastructure Committee, whilst an aspiration to reopen the line to Stratford-on-Avon has been given a boost with the offer of substantial funding from a housing developer, subject of course to the grant of planning permission.

However, the Group has concerns regarding the new Worcestershire Parkway station, both in regard to a paucity of connections, and the threat that it would pose to existing, smaller stations. The Group supports the development of a Cotswold Line manifesto to resolve the conflicting interests.

#### **Nuneaton, Bedworth and Hinckley Rail User Group** (from Rail User Express)

NB&HRUG has been continually frustrated over the last six months by the poor leadership on the Nuneaton to Coventry rail upgrade (NUCKLE) project. Coventry City Council and Warwickshire. It appears that bureaucratic problems such as lack of compliance to planning permission has prevented them opening. There is (still) an ongoing debacle over trains not being able to stop for events at the Ricoh Arena due to lack of rolling stock, despite NUCKLE phase 1 being 10 years in the making. Not surprisingly, phase 2, which includes a new bay platform at Coventry station, seems to be ever further in the distance.

The group is pleased to hear that London Midland are adding two more evening services from London to the Trent Valley as a result of their direct award until 2017, which will also include free Wi-Fi. The group have heard rumours that Virgin may be adding off-peak stops at stations in the Trent Valley from May 2016, but they remain sceptical. However, they're hopeful that Alliance Rail will get firm rights to operate services into Euston from 2017, which will include off-peak stops at Nuneaton. "Suddenly everyone is seeing the potential in the Trent Valley after a huge increase in usage over the last decade. More services are urgently needed to cope with demand from all the stations along the Trent Valley."

The next Railfuture West Midlands eNews will be issue 15 in March 2016.



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