



West Midlands Branch eNews

Issue 17 - October 2016

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

- Railfuture's Rail User Express bulletin - August 2016, September 2016 and October 2016 issues
- Midlands Connect Monthly updates – August and October 2016
- Setting the Direction for Wales and the Borders Rail (franchise consultation results)

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.

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RAILFUTURE NATIONAL CONFERENCE IN BIRMINGHAM IN NOVEMBER 2016

Speaker line-up complete – bookings open

Bookings for the Saturday 12 November 2016 conference are open until two days before the event. The event includes welcome refreshments and a buffet lunch. It is open to everyone with members enjoying a discounted rate of £20 until 31 August and £25 after that with non-members paying £30. A discount is available for people who book the conference and join at the same time. Full details can be found on the Railfuture website at www.railfuture.org.uk/conferences/.

The theme is the role of railways in developing the local economy. Confirmed speakers include Toby Rackcliff from West Midlands Combined Authority (Transport), Lord Anthony Berkeley (Rail Freight Group), Stephen Joseph (Campaign for Better Transport), Alice Gillman (Vivarail), who will be talking about the ex-District Line trains that will run on the Coventry-Nuneaton line by the end of 2016 and Maria Machancoses, Programme Director, Midlands Connect. The conference will be Christian Wolmar (Transport Journalist, Author and Railfuture Honorary President).



The venue is at the Priority Rooms in Birmingham. It is easy to reach from rail stations - the front gates are about eight metres for the Bull Street tram stop as shown in the photo on the right.

The booking confirmation will include a programme, which has a map showing how to get to the venue.

West Midlands Trains – Invitations to Tender

The Department for Transport (DfT) has issued the Invitation to Tender (ITT) for the next West Midlands franchise (previously called London Midlands) to the two remaining pre-qualified bidders – Govia and Abellio (with minority partners East Japan Railway and Mitsui). The minimum requirements are similar to the present level of services but applicants are expected to offer substantial enhancements, particularly adding capacity at peak travel times and meeting demand for travel to and from special events – including Coventry Arena.

Railfuture West Midlands is pleased to note that the DfT is particularly interested in extending the length of the operating day; enhancing frequencies between Birmingham and Worcester and between Worcester and Gloucester; and operating services on Boxing Day. They also want shorter journey times, new or enhanced direct journeys and increasing rail's share of transport to and from Birmingham Airport.

Detailed service enhancements specified are:

- Once electrifications are completed, extend the present 3 tph Cross-City Longbridge trains to Bromsgrove and double the frequency between Walsall and Rugeley;
- Direct trains from Walsall to London, and back, in peak hours;
- Two stopping trains per hour between Birmingham and Shrewsbury;
- Divert the present London-Stoke-Crewe service to be direct between Stafford and Crewe to allow for longer peak-hour trains. To serve Stone, Kidsgrove, Alsager, etc. add a Birmingham-Stoke-Crewe service;
- Regular services to Kenilworth;
- Refurbish all pre-1995 rolling stock and consider reducing 2+3 seating configurations to 2+2 to enable more comfortable standing room. (No removal of toilets!)
- Free Wi-Fi on all trains (except the Stourbridge Shuttle);
- Increase use of smart ticketing. Also, multi-journey discounted tickets (like seasons but more flexible);
- Improve service quality at stations – no reduction of staffed stations;
- Wolverhampton station to be transferred from West Coast to West Midlands;
- From 2018, the frequency of evening services will be improved. From 2021, at latest, most lines should have Sunday services enhanced to the same level as now provided on Saturdays. This is dependent on negotiations with the rail unions over Sunday working and with goodwill might be concluded sooner than 2021.

Railfuture West Midlands is currently seeking meetings with the two preferred bidding consortia to promote our views for expanding rail services in the West Midlands, particularly improving frequencies and/or capacity on local trains and.

The DfT's documents can be downloaded from:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/west-midlands-franchise-competition-invitation-to-tender>

West Midlands and Chilterns Route Study

Network Rail published their Route Study in July 2016 with a series of ideas for developing the rail infrastructure in the West Midlands and for the Chiltern Line to cope with anticipated demand up to 2043. The detail documents for this can be found on Network Rail's website at <https://www.networkrail.co.uk/long-term-planning-process/West-Midlands-and-Chilterns-Route-Study/>.

This covered many aspects of the infrastructure but one of the key points was the building of the north and south chords at Bordesley to enable trains from the south west and north east to access Moor Street station, instead of New Street, to release capacity at the latter. They envisage trains for Leicester and for Worcester using Moor Street. We have no quarrel with the former (although it would make changes from some other parts of the West Midlands a bit less convenient) but we oppose the Worcester trains being diverted as this would seriously inconvenience all those who want to get to University station for the University itself or the QE Hospital.

Railfuture's official response to this can be found at <http://www.railfuture.org.uk/display1423>.

Cross Country Trains – Direct Award

Arriva has been successful in extending its Cross Country Trains (XC Trains) franchise under the Direct Award process. This includes some significant enhancements to present services:

- Extra 39,000 seats in peak times on the Edinburgh-Plymouth route (by Dec 2017);
- New stops at Morpeth on this route;
- Journey times between Birmingham and Manchester reduced by up to nine minutes on weekdays and 12 at weekends;
- Modernisation of the HST fleet including retention toilets and power-operated doors;
- Free Wi-Fi and 4G connections (by April 2018);
- Waiving the £10 fee to change Advance Purchase tickets (from Jan 2017)
- Funding for Community Rail Partnerships across the network

This is really not a great deal of change. The extra seats sounds welcome but it all depends how this is to be achieved. Other detail improvements are useful. But there is nothing for the Leicester, Stansted or Nottingham services. And there are no additional stops at new Bromsgrove, although Railfuture and many other organisations lobbied for this.

Railfuture West Midlands branch secretary held a meeting with XC Trains on Tuesday 18th October to clarify some of these changes. The extra seats are being achieved by using two spare Voyager end cars with an internal carriage from two present five-car Voyagers. Therefore two of the five-car Voyager trains will become three four-car sets. The extra set will be used in tandem with another four-car train in a flexible way, to provide the extra seats on some of the services that tend to be over-crowded. This may mean attaching and detaching the extra set at strategic points.

Coventry–Nuneaton

Vivarail's 'D' train project is due to start operating the Coventry-Nuneaton service before Christmas 2016, on a 12-month trial basis. The Class 230s will provide some 225 seats on each service, three times that provided by the present class 153.

Snow Hill Tramstop

Passengers will be aware that the new Snow Hill stop on the Midland Metro is nowhere near the mainline station. Well, it is actually alongside it but with no direct access. A lift is being installed between the tram stop and Water Street some five metres below it. This will make access a bit easier. But Railfuture would like to see the Livery Street entrance passage extended to the other side of the viaduct to give direct access. However, it seems there is a suggestion to rename the station 'St. Chads'! See article on Birmingham Post's website:

http://www.birminghampost.co.uk/news/regional-affairs/midland-metro-tram-stop-been-11924923?ptrn_rid=93408&icid=EM_BirminghamPost_Nletter_News_smallteaser_Text_Story3.



Photos above from June 2016 (by Jerry Alderson). At present tram announcements are advising passengers to alight at Bull Street to reach Snow Hill station (see also letter below).

WALES RAIL ISSUES AFFECTING WEST MIDLANDS

Wales Rail Consultations

Considerable concern has been expressed about the status of cross-border services once the Welsh Government take over responsibility for rail services throughout Wales. The following is also highly relevant to Herefordshire and Shropshire.

Rail Service Range and Frequency - There was a general consensus that the frequency of rail services provided as part of the next franchise as a whole should be improved, including the provision of Sunday services. It was also suggested that the current service offering, including cross border services, should be considered the minimum for the next franchise and that the focus should be to build upon these.

The passenger growth figures included within Network Rail's Welsh Route Study - and reflected in the consultation document - were conservative and care should be taken not to be overly reliant on these projections as previously there had been a significant difference between projected and actual growth figures.

Many respondents offered a range of specific suggestions to improve services in their area.

For Mid- and West Wales - frequency improvements are the highest priority. The majority of respondents felt that improvements to Sunday services are needed to reflect the growth in tourism in these areas. Additionally, user groups and local authorities suggested that there is a demonstrable demand for hourly Cambrian line services 7 days a week.

Other suggested improvements included more services from Aberystwyth to Shrewsbury and Birmingham, including connections to Birmingham International Airport.

Respondents from the West and East Midlands stated the importance of the Wales and Borders franchise in linking Welsh regions with Chester, Manchester, Crewe and Birmingham. A public transport user group emphasised the particular need for the franchise to maintain and build upon these connections. Many respondents recognised the popularity of services from England to Aberystwyth for tourism and suggested that adequate service frequency and capacity should be provided to serve the increase in passengers.

Concern was expressed around service provision on the Marches line, and some considered service connectivity at Shrewsbury to be poor.

Next Steps - Transport for Wales (TfW), a newly formed arms-length company of the Welsh Government, will be taking responsibility for procuring the next Wales and Borders franchise. It will be asked to ensure that the views expressed during this consultation are considered fully as it develops arrangements for the next franchise. TfW is developing a programme of engagements which will include a further three-month consultation on proposals for the next franchise.

More on England-Wales Cross-Border Services

From the 'Campaign for Rail' October newsletter an article entitled 'Through Trains to Wales Saved'. "The new franchise begins in October 2018, for between 10 and 15 years, and the Welsh Government now says it will be similar in scope to the current franchise, including 'some cross border services and some England-only services in the vicinity of the border'".

However, this is slightly contradictory to the West Midlands Franchise Consultation Response document, which intimates the new Welsh franchisee may be dropping Sunday services! Two sections are shown below:

"5.11 Following feedback from the public consultation, we are requiring the new operator to operate an extra off peak daytime service every hour Monday to Saturday between Birmingham and Shrewsbury from December 2018. This will provide two West Midlands Franchise services per hour on the route in addition to the current hourly service operated by Arriva Trains Wales. Between Shrewsbury and Wolverhampton, the new service has been specified to call at Wellington, Telford, Shifnal and Codsall as a minimum.

5.15 A regular hourly service will also be introduced between Birmingham – Shrewsbury on Sundays from December 2021, which will replace the existing less frequent service provided by Arriva Trains Wales on this route." (But we think they mean ... in addition to)

RAILFUTURE WEST MIDLANDS CAMPAIGNS UPDATE

Walsall-Wolverhampton direct rail service

Railfuture West Midlands branch organised a really useful meeting on 26th August 2016, involving Walsall's Councillor Lee Jeavons (Cabinet Member for Transport), Matthew (Walsall Transport Strategy Officer), Chris Skilton of Network Rail and ourselves, to determine scope for, and issues concerning, the re-introduction of this service on a regular basis.

Councillor Jeavons stressed that, in the current political climate, the main driver for transport enhancements is for economic regeneration. It isn't enough to argue for just better transport connections, reduction of traffic, or even climate change impact. Nevertheless Walsall are still heavily committed to re-introduction of this service and were in the process of selecting consultants to investigate the options and cost-implications of a regular W2W direct service, with new stations at Willenhall and possibly also at Portobello and Darlaston, to serve local housing and proposed industrial/commercial developments.

Network Rail's representative urged caution in expectations as they have estimated that there is only scope for one train per hour on this line, mainly due to platform constraints at Wolverhampton. We find this hard to believe and think extension of the present Walsall-Birmingham-Wolverhampton services to then go directly back to Walsall could be done with little conflict to other services at Wolverhampton or elsewhere.

We have asked to be able to have conversations with the consultants so that they get something of a passenger's perspective.

Railfuture liaising with Train Operating Companies and other Stakeholders

Railfuture West Midlands branch maintains contacts with all the Train Companies operating into and through the West Midlands. Summer 2016 has been a relatively quiet time – apart from responding to the next West Midlands franchise and Network Rail's West Midlands and Chilterns Route Study (!) – but Railfuture has meetings planned for autumn 2016 with Transport for West Midlands (formerly Centro), Virgin West Coast and Cross Country Trains.

Two meetings of interest recently were a meeting on 3rd October 2016 between West Midlands Rail and the Transport Delivery Committee (TDC) of the West Midlands Combined Authority, and later the same day a meeting about some implications about HS2.

The first of these meetings was arranged to brief members of the TDC on what West Midlands Rail were doing with relation to the next West Midlands franchise, following publication of the Invitation to Tender. Much of the presentation concerned the contents (optional as well as minimum) of the ITT, described above. However one important aspect is the affirmation that WMR will be taking over, from the DfT, the monitoring of the franchisee's performance and how that is expected to be undertaken. Railfuture were there primarily as observers, but asked a couple of questions.

The second meeting was organised by Trowers and Hamlins, a national law firm with offices in Colmore Row. It comprised a question and answer session with some very high powered people on the panel and in the audience. The panel comprised the CEO of the Chamber of Commerce, the CEO of Birmingham Airport, the Editor-in-Chief of the Post and Mail and the Lib-Dem candidate for Mayor of West Midlands. The invited audience included senior representatives of Alstom, Siemens, Network Rail, HS2 Ltd and the WMCA.

Much of the discussion revolved around the need to sell the concept of HS2 more positively to the areas affected by it, both in terms of its expected benefits (economic as well as transport) and the care being taken to minimise impact on residents and businesses near the route and on the environment. We may soon see virtual media depicting stations and trains in motion.

There was also considerable discussion about the future role of Birmingham Airport, being linked to the planned HS2 Birmingham Interchange. Not surprisingly, most contributors felt that a second runway at Elmdon would be cheaper and less controversial than a third at Heathrow and that having London only some 30 minutes away by HS2 made it as easy to get to. Moreover it could be up and running many years before Heathrow 3.

Railfuture's contribution was a suggestion that New Street, Moor Street and the future Curzon Street should be made into a single station complex with covered walkways (possibly underground) and moving pavements connecting them and with some shared facilities, including arrival and destination information at all three for all three.

Arriva Club 55

Railfuture is pleased that Arriva Club 55 is back and with prices frozen for 2016 (travel anywhere on Arriva Trains Wales network from £24 return) with no need to book in advance. Arriva Club 55 is available to buy from ATW's website, until 27 October 2016. www.arrivatrainswales.co.uk/55.

Railfuture's national Passenger Group meeting in Birmingham in September 2016

The Railfuture Passenger Group met in Birmingham on 24th September 2016 where a wide range of topics were discussed. There are some key areas where support and involvement of the group members and branches is required.

Franchise Consultations - generally the level of our responses continues to improve and there is good evidence of the involvement of Railfuture branches involved (occasionally other organisations, such as RUGs). DfT have not always helped with the scope of their consultations and have often drifted into infrastructure issues that are not part in the power of a franchise to deliver. One area that does need improvement is the creation of a checklist that will be appropriate to most franchise consultations. There is real evidence that DfT (and others) and franchise bidders are taking notice of well evidenced and argued comments.

Passenger Best Practice - there was little response to the idea of including operational awards, alongside the annual RUG awards. This could include individual members of railway staff and TOCs who deliver best practice or go beyond the 'day job'. The aim is to publicise best practice across the industry and make involve other passengers and TOCs. Publicity would be good for Railfuture and well as the industry.

TOC issues - our TOC Liaisons are establishing and improving the contacts with their TOCs (editor's note – for every Train Operating Company there is a Railfuture member with responsibility for liaison and for reporting to the Passenger Group).

Station Design - some issues with station awning cover at stations has been raised and the idea of developing some examples of best practice to be considered by the industry has been suggested. Passenger comments/observations are most welcome.

Resilience v Performance - It is becoming more of a problem maintaining a service at all without raising performance. It appears there have been a growing number of infrastructure issues, ranging from minor failures to major problems that close down lines for limited or extended periods. There are also issues of staff availability - from individual (so train can't move, level crossing can't be opened) to insufficient trained drivers, large levels of sickness (especially on Southern) and even strike action (see also letter from David Harby).

Rolling Stock - there is good news about the amount of rolling stock on order, although by the time the orders go in the opportunity to influence the design is very limited – Railfuture's Rolling Stock Strategy group do manage to get dialogue with some train suppliers (builders and ROSCOs).

LETTERS

From John Orchard, Northfield

Re: Split Ticketing

I have had to make a number of journeys to Bristol by train over the last couple of weeks. With a bit of prompting, the ticket office staff at Northfield have been splitting the tickets between New Street and Cheltenham and Cheltenham and Bristol so getting me the reduced price. I find a stroll down to the station a much easier method to make these bookings than fighting my way through the splitmyticket.com website. Well done Northfield ticket office!

From Phil Williams

Re: Snow Hill Tramstop

I would like to point out (and nobody ever mentions) that there is no connection between the Metro and Snow Hill Railway Station at Snow Hill. The tram stop may be less than 10 metres away from Platform 3 but a passenger has to walk well over 400 metres from the tram stop up and round, across the footbridge and down the stairs/escalator on to Platform 3. Walking to and from the Bull Street tram stop is shorter.

This is crazy and only in this country would we build a tram stop next to a railway station and not provide access. I expect the people of Manchester are laughing at us. Just look at their tram stop connection with Manchester Victoria!

From David Harby, Lincoln

Re: Resilience v Performance - Should resilience be the focus for our campaigning?

I strongly suspect that as the Treasury stranglehold on Network Rail spending, combined with the concentration of manpower resources to ensure the Great Western electrification does not descend into a bigger farce than it is now, starts to have an effect our main concern will be maintaining services at their current level rather than looking for improved performance. Every time I hear any report from Network Rail about future plans I hear of more and more CP5 planned work that has been put back to CP6.

Particularly worrying is where signalling replacement is now going to be like-for-like when we were expecting some enhancement as well. Not all due to spending cutbacks. It is the lack of skilled manpower that is also seeing work delayed and chopped altogether. The Midland Main Line (MML) looks like anything that must be done for before electrification will be scheduled for CP6 but other work tentatively planned for CP6 is now back to CP7 (or has even gone so far back it doesn't have a date). Not a good prospect for resilience when there are a lot of old signalling systems around which are getting more unreliable week by week.

BRANCH MEETINGS

The West Midlands branch committee meets each month, often on the second Wednesday in an office at Birmingham Moor Street station, courtesy of Chiltern Trains. Any member of the West Midlands Branch of Railfuture is welcome to attend but please let the branch secretary (steve.wright@railfuture.org.uk) know if you want to come to ensure there is enough space and to arrange to escort you into the building.

We would be interested in bringing our meetings out to other centres in the West Midlands if local members would be interested in joining us.

To wrap up with some positive news...Bromsgrove Station -will be closed totally for 12 days in late October 2016 to allow for the 25 kV wires to be extended from Barnt Green. Electrification has been a key campaign for Railfuture for decades so it is good to see progress.

Railfuture warmly welcomes 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.

The next Railfuture West Midlands eNews will be issue 18 in February 2017.

Other issues of *Railfuture* West Midlands eNews are available at
www.railfuture.org.uk/branches/?branch=West+Midlands

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