



West Midlands Branch eNews

Issue 19 - September 2017

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

- Railfuture's Yorkshire Rail Campaigner – Issue 37 – June 2017
- CrossCountry In Focus issue 26 April-June 2017
- West Coast Rail 250 (WCR250) - June 2017 issue
- Severn Dee News (Shrewsbury Chester Rail Association) – Issue 84 – Spring 2017

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:

Railfuture West Midlands Branch Matters
New Street Station review
West Midlands franchise result
East Midlands franchise consultation
Wales franchise
Cotswold Line
Avonlink project
'D' trains
Fares increase
Letters

RAILFUTURE WEST MIDLANDS BRANCH MATTERS

Annual General Meeting – 22 April 2017

William Whiting and Albert Thomas were re-elected (unopposed) as Chairman and Vice Chairman. Michael Tombs was elected as Treasurer for Railfuture West Midlands.

As previously announced Steve Wright stood down as Secretary. Colin Major succeeds him. Other committee members elected were Peter Rowlands, Peter Kennard, Roger King, Phil Benyon and Steve Wright.

The committee holds regular meetings with Transport for West Midlands, Network Rail and Train Operating Companies (TOCs) as well as trying to ascertain and support local Rail User Group (RUG) needs. However, it is most important that we reflect the views as members of Railfuture and other rail users, so we would like to hear from you.

Please email your ideas, comments or suggestions to the West Midlands Branch Secretary Colin Major at colin.major@railfuture.org.uk.

Branch Meetings

Railfuture West Midlands committee meet most months on the second Wednesday of each month, usually in an office at Birmingham Moor Street station, courtesy of Chiltern Trains. Members are welcome to attend as observers.

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. Please email steve.wright@railfuture.org.uk if you would like us to consider coming to your neighbourhood, or to join us in Birmingham.

New members required!

Railfuture welcomes new members. We also encourage existing members to enlist friends, family and acquaintances. Even better, why not chat to fellow travellers at stations or on trains and explain how joining Railfuture can help to improve their railway services in the future.

Railfuture at Warley Model Railway Show at NEC – Saturday/Sunday 25-26 Nov 2017

Railfuture is a pro-rail campaigning organisation that puts passengers' interest first. Most people with an interest in railways are also rail travellers, and Railfuture finds that many enthusiasts are eager to see – and support – improvements to the passenger services.

Railfuture will, once again, be manning a stand at this year's Warley Model Railway Show at the NEC over the weekend of 25th and 26th November. Volunteers are needed to cover an hour here and there so that the main people manning the stand can take breaks. If you're willing to help out on either or both days please email Steve Wright.

RAILFUTURE WEST MIDLANDS GIVES WARM WELCOME TO NEW STREET STATION

Colin Major writes...

Since the reopening of Birmingham New Street station after its substantial rebuild, Railfuture West Midlands has provided feedback on a regular basis to Network Rail from the passenger's perspective. This has involved trying to think like a passenger unfamiliar with the station who is arriving on a train to either leave the station or connect into another service at the station. We then walked their probable route and, on the way, noted the signage and ease of access or otherwise.

We also examined the routes passengers would take when entering the station from the city.

Our survey carried out in May 2017 was discussed in mid-June at a two-hour meeting with the Station Manager who listened to us in a warm and friendly manner.

It was pleasing to find that our previous suggestion to encourage the use of the "B" end of platforms and the 'red lounge' for those needing to change trains (to avoid having to exit through the yellow barriers only to then re-enter through the blue barriers) had been implemented by the use of portable display boards on the "A" end platforms suggesting those transferring to another

train use the “B” end. However, these are mainly positioned at the foot of the escalators and were easily obstructed by passengers. So, we suggested that head high arrows on the cladding pointing to the “B” end would be more visible and reinforce the on-train announcements made by train managers/conductors. It was noted that not all train conductors make this announcement.

Our Secretary was particularly pleased when the Station Manager showed him that they had implemented his suggestion of signs at head/eye level over the descending escalators onto two adjoining platforms, showing which way to turn at the foot of the escalators to find the passenger’s desired platform thus avoiding persons stopping at the foot of the escalators.

During our walk about with him we suggested that as passengers reached the top of the escalators from the “A” end of platforms 6 & 7 and platforms 10 & 11 they had no clear indication of where to go next and this could lead to congestion as passengers stopped to make up their minds. The station Manager agreed that he would explore using the back of the signs at the top of the escalators to indicate the direction of exits etc.

Railfuture congratulated the Station Manager on his efforts to improve his passengers experience by obtaining significant funding to improve the passenger information screens in August (including pictograms) and the installation of additional screens in the North West corner entry from Stephenson Street.

The Station Manager had commissioned research by Birmingham University to analyse and offer suggestions on measure to reduce particulate emissions at the station. We had expressed our concern on the working environment for the staff on the platforms. The research is being evaluated and Railfuture suggested this might be a topic for our next meeting. Network Rail and TOCs are working together to meet the implementation of a City Centre Clear Air Zone in 2019. We discussed asking TOCs to utilise selective shut down on their DMUs when the units have to dwell for significant minutes at the platforms.

The Station Manager stated he had found our input very constructive and, in addition to sending a Railfuture representative to the July Meeting of his Access Group, he suggested, and we agreed to, holding regular quarterly meeting so Railfuture could continue to provide the passengers viewpoint.

ABELLIO CONSORTIUM WINS WEST MIDLANDS RAIL FRANCHISE

From 10th December 2017 local trains in the West Midlands and former London Midland Trains out of Euston will be operated by a new operator – a consortium of Abellio, Mitsui and East Japan Railway Company – to be known as West Midlands Trains. (This is not be confused with West Midlands Rail which is a collaboration between local authorities in the West Midlands Region - including Worcestershire, Warwickshire and others - and which will be responsible jointly with the DfT for monitoring the performance of new franchise).

WMT will be providing 400 new rail vehicles during their nine-year contract, all to be in service by 2021. A hundred of these will be metro-style carriages for the cross-city line and a further 80 for the Snow Hill line.

Rail service changes include:

- More trains between Birmingham and Shrewsbury with two services per hour
- A regular two train per hour service between Birmingham and Rugeley via the Chase Line
- Three trains per hour of the Cross-City line extended to Bromsgrove
- A new direct hourly service between Birmingham and Stoke-on-Trent
- Double the frequency of local Sunday services by 2021

Other commitments include:

- Improving compensation for late arrivals so that passengers will be eligible for 25% refund for trains delayed by 15 minutes
- Free Wi-fi on all main line trains by Jan 2020.
- £60 million for station improvements, including new car parking spaces

One of the most significant features is that the London and West Coast main line focused services and local West Midlands ones will be run as separate businesses, with the long-term aim of these becoming separate franchises in the future.

Railfuture's aim now is to establish contacts with the new company as good as we have with London Midland Trains.

EAST MIDLANDS RAIL FRANCHISE

Railfuture West Midlands has submitted its aspirations for the next East Midlands franchise to the Railfuture consolidated submission response. These aspirations include transferring the Birmingham to Leicester and Nottingham local services from Cross Country Trains to the East Midlands, and improving the frequencies. It also includes a new regular service through Sutton Coldfield and Lichfield to Derby/Nottingham.

The existing franchise has been extended by "up to a year" from 4 March 2018. The pre-qualified bidders are: Stagecoach, Arriva and a First/Trenitalia consortium.

The new Sunday timetables from May 2017 have generated some heat. The wish for better long-distance Midland Mainline (MML) services has been achieved at the expense of connections into northbound services at Kettering for passengers from Corby. Nottingham-Grantham and

Nottingham-Lincoln gain earlier Sunday services. However, this timetable is only for the short term.

WALES RAIL FRANCHISE

The Wales franchise award process also is on-going. Railfuture West Midlands's main concern is to retain through trains between the West Midlands and Wales (via both Shrewsbury and Gloucester). We also want to see the Marches line improved such that there is a regular hourly service between Shrewsbury, Hereford and Newport serving all stations.

COTSWOLD LINE

Further work was undertaken in June and July 2017 at Worcester Foregate station to commission signalling and a turn-back at Henwick in preparation for the introduction of the new Hitachi IEP Class 800 trains. Buses replaced trains between Worcester Shrub Hill, Great Malvern and Hereford.

GWR gave the following update at a meeting in May 2017...

For 2018 the first batch of Hitachi IEP trains delivered are five-car EMU/DMU bi-modes with up-rated engines and these are now being tested and run in. The peak-time passenger numbers to and from Worcester require two of these five-car sets coupled together to meet demand. However, because each IEP carriage is three metres longer than HSTs, the short platforms at many of these stations mean that door opening with two coupled five-car units would not meet the Passengers of Reduced Mobility (PRM) accessibility standards. Until Network Rail extend the platforms by 2019, off-peak services will be a single five-car IEP unit with HSTs retained for peak services.

GWR are frustrated with the pausing of the Didcot to Oxford electrification as they had planned to run class 387 "Electrostars" to Oxford from Paddington but now passengers will have to change trains, leading to overcrowding the trains to and from Worcester. This and the uncertainty of the timetable for cascading of rolling stock from the line presents a challenge for GWR timetable planners who have to work at least six months in advance of publishing a timetable.

The current suppliers' prices for infrastructure were highlighted when discussing possible enhancements to Pershore Station where the recent quotes by contractors to supply and erect a bridge with associated ramps for wheel chairs and buggies to meet Network Rail standards was £3 million. This is similar cost to the bridge at Honeybourne when that station was rebuilt.

A Cotswold Task Force was set up in 2016 with Lord Faulkner of Worcester as Chairman. They planned to hold their first meeting early in June 2017, but this had to be delayed due to the general election. Their aims include: the provision of two trains an hour between Paddington and Worcester with one hourly fast service of two hours to Worcester Parkway with a few strategic stops and an hourly stopping service; redoubling the single-track parts of the Cotswold line especially Evesham to Worcester stretch; and extending services from Paddington to Kidderminster via Worcester to provide another direct service to London.

AVONLINK (STRATFORD – HONEYBOURNE)

Readers are probably aware that there is a campaign to re-instate the Stratford to Honeybourne rail line with the aim of providing hourly services between Stratford and Worcester and Stratford and Oxford (and possibly London).

Although Railfuture West Midlands is in favour of a rail-based development on this corridor, especially with the substantial development of Long Marston, we've been concerned as to how this could be achieved, in Stratford itself and its impact on the cycle/walkway on the old line past the race course.

On 24th June 2017 a group from the branch committee walked the proposed route from just south of Stratford station to the crossing of the River Avon (about two miles). Our concerns were not wholly allayed, with the main potential problem being the re-alignment of Severn Meadows Road (the A4390, part of Stratford southern by-pass) to accommodate a single track in a cutting. Also, the plan for the railway to share the embankment with the present cycle/walkway (reducing the latter's width) may also cause concern. It would mean cyclists and walkers being in very close proximity with a relatively high speed (60 mph) railway for several miles.

The result of a GRIP4 analysis is due in late 2017.

FIRST D-TRAINS HOPED FOR Q1 2018

In summer 2017 Vivarail announced that they have increased production capacity of their adaptations of former London Transport 'D' stock, so that they can be built and delivered ahead of the original forecast schedule. Three variations are to be available: DEMU; Battery (with a range of up to 50 miles); or diesel/battery hybrid. They can be supplied as either two- or three-car units and will be fully compliant with all standards and regulations up to and including PRM-TSI.

FARE INCREASES FOR 2018 (RAILFUTURE PRESS RELEASE)

The cost of travelling by train will be rising by 3.6% in January 2018. Railfuture's press release said:

Rail passengers will feel rightly miffed that rail fares are going up when so much rail investment has been cancelled" said Bruce Williamson from the campaign group Railfuture. "The real cost of living is only going up by 2.6%, so again the government is putting an ever-tighter squeeze on the poor old rail passenger, while fuel duty for motorists has remained frozen for years. There's a real double standard here: they want to phase out diesel cars for electric, but with railways the reverse is true, with electrification schemes cancelled in favour of diesel traction. We recognise that rail industry costs have risen, but if some of that fare rise money were put into making rail industry more efficient then it could absorb the 1% difference and passengers would benefit.

The government uses the July inflation figures to calculate annual rail fare rises. The CPI figure is 2.6% but the higher RPI figure (3.6%) is used for rail fares. "This has to end. The government claims CPI is its preferred figure, so it needs to show it also prefers the passengers' interests and start using CPI for tickets too.

LETTERS

West Midlands Franchise

Reading the press release regarding London Midland and the new award I feel a little sad that they have lost the franchise. They have had problems, but they have tried. I hope though that most of their staff will transfer to the new operator, an operator that committed to new trains which, a source told me, swung it for them.

Roger King, Northfield

Comparative Ticket Prices

In my role as a member of Railfuture's Passenger Group, I did an interesting piece of research into the different ticket prices charged for the same journeys depending on whether one bought a through ticket or split the journey. This highlighted some astounding variations. For instance, for a round trip from Birmingham to York the following options were available (splitting at Derby and Sheffield):

- Anytime Period Return – through ticket £134.20; split ticket £98.50
- Off-Peak Period Return – through ticket £63.90; split ticket £63.60
- Anytime Day Return – through ticket £134.20; split ticket £64.90
- Off-Peak Day Return – through ticket £63.90; split ticket £46.70

I didn't look at Advance Purchases as these vary so much from day-to-day according to availability.

I was particularly surprised by the Anytime Period Return variation as I always assumed that these were based approximately on mileages. Clearly not! The fare differential from Birmingham to Newcastle (and return) was even greater - £208.30 as against £159.10, for a ticket split at Derby, Sheffield, York and Darlington.

But it was interesting that the Off-Peak Period Return fares was so little.

Steve Wright, Northfield

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 20 in January 2018.

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

We're on Facebook at <https://www.facebook.com/RailfutureWestMidlands/>

Railfuture – Promoting Britain's Railway for Passengers and Freight

www.railfuture.org.uk www.railfuturescotland.org.uk www.railfuturewales.org.uk www.railwatch.org.uk

follow us on Twitter: [@Railfuture](https://twitter.com/Railfuture) [@Railwatch](https://twitter.com/Railwatch) and [@RailfutureWMids](https://twitter.com/RailfutureWMids)

Join Online at www.railfuture.org.uk/join

*Railfuture Limited is a (not for profit) Company Limited by Guarantee.
Registered in England and Wales No. 05011634.
Registered Office: 24 Chedworth Place, Tattingstone, Suffolk IP9 2ND*