

West Midlands Branch E-newsletter September/October 2019

Note from your new Editor.

Your Committee are keen to keep you aware of the many almost daily developments on the railways in the West Midlands. The fastest way to ensure you are upto date is by more frequent e-newsletters which I am hoping to send out on a bi-monthly basis.

Colin Major

Open Meeting at Shrewsbury 12th October

Everyone is invited to the Gateway Arts Centre, Chester Street, Shrewsbury SY1 1NB at 13.15 for a Meeting entitled “**Shropshire Rail-The forgotten County?**”

A panel of Lee Robinson Development Director Transport for Wales; Peter Sargant Head of Rail Development West Midlands Rail Executive; John Allcock Chair Wexham Bidston Rail User Group and Daniel Kawczynski MP for Shrewsbury and Atcham will explore the passenger needs of the area and identify opportunities and hopefully agree on the ways to improve rail services to achieve these improvements.

After a brief presentation by each speaker they will form a Panel to answer your questions.

Our Chairman Steve Wright will chair the Question session and is delighted to receive your questions in advance by writing to steve.wright@railfuture.org.uk

Admission is Free plus free Tea, Coffee and Light refreshments.

You can just turn up on the day but to help us organise the catering it would be useful to know if you are coming. So, if possible, please register your intention to attend at:

[-https://www.eventbrite.com/e/shropshire-rail-a-forgotten-county-tickets-6800955411](https://www.eventbrite.com/e/shropshire-rail-a-forgotten-county-tickets-6800955411)

West Midland Trains May Timetable.

We were delighted that WMT have incorporated many of the improvements in services we had suggested at several meetings with them. Saturday services now based on off peak Mon-Friday timetable plus earlier and later services on Sundays recognising the increase in leisure opportunities on the weekends. As an example, on the Birmingham to Worcester line there are now an additional ten trains on Sundays. Overall the May timetable has been very successful, unlike some other TOCs, and early usage shows there are 150,000 extra passengers a week on West Midland Trains since 19th May.

We welcomed the provision of direct services from Rugeley Trent Valley through New Street to Euston via the Chase Line entailing coupling and uncoupling trains at New Street with those to Liverpool. LNWR worked hard to ensure that these were practised beforehand so that they are efficiently and quickly done. Unfortunately joining two trains together requires both services to run to the timetable and delays at Euston, having lost two platforms, and Liverpool Lime Street have led to delays at New Street requiring Chase Line services to terminate short at Hednesford. WMT have a task force monitoring the situation and have stated that if they cannot resolve this then they will consider reverting to a self-contained service in the May 2020 timetable. Network Rail will not accept any changes to timetables before then.

Capacity Issues- in 2016/17 the on train survey, carried out by Railfuture volunteers in every carriage, of services to and from Hereford to New Street showed that not only were rush hour services overcrowded to the extent that passengers could not board, but also shoulder off peak services were as bad. Both West Midlands Trains and their predecessors London Midland promised that when the Chase Line was electrified the class 170 DMUs used on this service would be used to increase capacity to Hereford. However, as part of the WMT Franchise commitment additional trains now run to Shrewsbury utilising the DMUs released by the Chase Line electrification. WMT are regularly advising passengers that the Hereford to New Street trains are so overcrowded they are unable to board at Droitwich Spa even in the off-peak. We have had several meetings with not only WMT but also with West Midland Rail Executive, who oversee the franchise, as we are unable to accept that there will be no improvement in capacity until the introduction of the new Class 196s in 2021.

The position will be exacerbated by the Class 153s not conforming to the “Passengers of Reduced Mobility” requirements in force from 1st January 2020 and with the new build trains not arriving until late 2020 there will be a dramatic loss of capacity if these 153s are taken out of service. We have supported WMT in an application to the DfT for derogation from the PRM requirements by the 153s being coupled to two PRM compliant 170s or 172s.

We are delighted that following a meeting with Richard Brooks, Customer Director WMR, we have received written notification that the currently overcrowded New Street to Hereford 15.50 and 16.20 departures will be increased from two carriages to three.

Customer and Communities Improvement Fund (CCIF)

Following successful CCIF initiatives by GWR in the last two years West Midlands Railway have announced their own Fund to improve urban areas and local neighbourhoods across the West Midlands Railway (WMR) network by inviting bids from the region's communities who have innovative schemes to bring to life.

WMR offer bidders who have a not-for-profit status, including individuals, social enterprises, CiCs, charities, local authorities and community groups, the chance to apply for a share of the over one million pounds available over the next six years

The process is relatively simple, being one form, which shows all questions on the weblink so please do read through and prepare your answers before making a start. **The deadline is Monday 7th October.**

Following a judging process, Customer Panel and DfT ratification, funding will be awarded to a range of projects which all which need to be delivered between April 2020 and March 2021.

Examples of schemes which may be considered include:

- educational, literary, creative, marketing and heritage schemes
- schemes providing information to communities around stations
- projects to bring disused station buildings back to life
- schemes promoting walking and cycling

The formal application for your submissions is on the WMR website at www.wmr.uk/ccif

Stations.

Camphill Line- After a long campaign £15 million funding has been released for the three new stations on the Camphill Line, currently a freight only line and diversionary passenger route to New Street. These will be at Moseley, Kings Heath and Hazelwell and we were instrumental with others to persuade Andy Street the West Midlands Mayor to incorporate these in his manifesto for his election in 2017 and it is claimed to be the first new stations to be built in a city outside London this millennium.

University Station – Another campaign by us working with West Midlands Rail Executive (WMRE) and Transport for West Midlands and the City of Birmingham to enlarge this station to meet the demands of the 3.3 million passengers p.a. currently using a building originally designed for 400,000 p.a.

Providing access to not only Birmingham University but also the Queen Elizabeth Hospital a national centre of medical excellence. Has now proved successful with funding announced by Andy Street on 31st July. The existing building will be retained with designs for a new building on the Birmingham end of the two platforms connected by a wide footbridge which will also provide direct access from the station across the canal to the University campus. The new station is expected to be completed and open by the end of 2021, in time for the 2022 Commonwealth Games when the University hosts the hockey and squash competitions.

Proposed station looking towards the existing station building with the bridge to the University in the foreground



HS2

We support the statement from Midlands Connect Director Maria Machoneses: -

“The massive benefits of HS2 to the Midlands are already being felt. Although a review must rightly scrutinise the project’s deliverability, benefits and costs, we must not lose sight of the fact that HS2 will transform our transport network for the next century. Scrapping it or de-scoping the project will be a disaster for the Midlands and the whole country. We re-emphasise in the strongest possible terms that cancellation would be a disaster for the Midlands and the whole country.

We’re pleased that West Midlands Mayor Andy Street is on the review panel to promote the interests of the region. But it’s vital that the East Midlands isn’t ignored in this process either. Therefore, Midlands Connect will be submitting compelling evidence to the review concerning the benefits of HS2 to the whole of the Midlands. Far beyond those places with dedicated HS2 stations, many Midlands towns and cities will benefit from the rail capacity that HS2 will release. Midlands Connect has also submitted a strong business case to the government and HS2 Ltd for direct conventional-compatible links to Nottingham and Leicester city centres, via the HS2 East Midlands Hub at Toton.

HS2 also underpins the case for improvements we’re proposing to the classic rail network, including our flagship Midlands Rail Hub scheme to transform east-west links across the Midlands.”

Midlands Rail Hub- Moor Street

Steve Wright our Chairman was present at the Midlands Connect official launch of the Midlands Hub Strategy – mentioned by Maria Machoneses. Midlands Hub aims to provide 24 new paths per hour in the Midlands region by providing new or improved infrastructure, especially in Birmingham to allow trains for Nottingham and Leicester (and Camp Hill locals) to access Moor Street station, freeing up paths in New Street. It will also facilitate local access to HS2 at Curzon Street and New Street as part of our One Station concept for central Birmingham.



Pictures details – Moor Street station platform 4/5, 26th June 2019.

Malcolm Holmes (Executive Director, West Midlands Rail Executive, and Director of Rail, Transport for West Midlands), Laura Shoaf (TfWM Managing Director), Andy Street (WM Mayor), Maria Machoncoses (Midlands Connect Director), Sir John Peace (Midlands Connect Chairman)

Almost every week we receive information on new developments, and we post these on: -
<https://www.facebook.com/RailfutureWestMidlands>

Thank you for reading this e-news and I would be delighted to hear from you so please contact me on **colin.major@railfuture.org.uk**.