



West Midlands Branch eNews

Issue 22 - October 2018

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

- Railfuture's Rail User Express – August, September and October 2018
- Cross Country's In Focus magazine – Issue 30 – April 2018

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 WEST MIDLANDS BRANCH MATTERS

Annual General Meeting – 21 April 2018 - Special Guest - MD of West Midlands Trains

At the Railfuture West Midlands 2018 annual members' meeting on Saturday 21 April (at the National College of High-Speed Rail in Birmingham, pictured right), **Steve Wright** was elected branch chairman. He had been Secretary of the branch (until 2017) and also editor of these eBulletins. Email: steve.wright@railfuture.org.uk



Colin Major remains Secretary. Other posts (unchanged) are:

- Deputy Chairman – Albert Thomas (Birmingham)
- Treasurer – Michael Tombs (Coventry)
- Committee Members – Peter Rowlands (Stratford), Peter Kennard (Warwickshire), Phil Bennion (Staffs).

We were most fortunate to have Jan Chaudhry-van der Velde, Managing Director of West Midlands Trains, as our guest speaker. He held our attention with valuable information about their plans for both West Midlands Railway and London North Western. Much of this was already in the public domain but included several updates on service plans and rolling stock. Attendees enjoyed the tour of the venue's facilities after the meeting, especially sampling the HS train simulator

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.

Recruiting New Members

Railfuture wants to recruit new members, especially regular rail users. As a first step we shall be holding another public display at Birmingham New Street Station on 8 November 2018 between 10:00 and 18:00. We'd be very pleased to see you there – we'll be close to the right-hand escalator (Stephenson Street side) to Grand Central shops and cafes.

We are also looking at ways to retain the interest of members and hope to hold public meetings at strategic locations around the West Midlands. The current wide-ranging review of the rail industry (see next item) provides a golden opportunity to open up debate to the general public as well as within Railfuture's membership. If you think your neighbourhood would be interested in this or any other topic, do contact the Railfuture West Midlands Secretary – colin.major@railfuture.org.uk.

We are also looking for “money can't buy” events similar to our tour of the College for High Speed Rail following our 2018 AGM. This could include a visit to Saltley Operations Centre or Bombardier's Central Rivers depot. No decisions have been made as yet and we'd really like to know what you would be interested in doing. If you have any thoughts on this – especially if you have any contact there – do please let our Secretary know. Bear in mind that we are Railfuture so, although some of us may enjoy steam trains, we'll favour ideas that reflect current or future rail activity. Suggestions need not be limited to the West Midlands region but need to be achievable within a day trip.

We Want to Hear from You

Railfuture wants to hear from members and other rail users on three topics

- What You as a member would like us to concentrate our efforts on?
- What events and where you would attend if we were to arrange them?
- Would it be useful to hold Committee meetings in your locality?

Please send your ideas to the Branch Secretary, Colin Major at colin.major@railfuture.org.uk

Finding out about Railfuture West Midlands

And a reminder that we have a page on the Railfuture website and a Facebook page

<https://www.railfuture.org.uk/West+Midlands+Branch>

<https://www.facebook.com/Railfuture-West-Midlands-1691400741181640/>

Contributions to these are welcome, send to Michael Tombs – michael.tombs@railfuture.org.uk

NATIONAL RAIL REVIEW

Readers will be aware that, following the failure of the East Coast franchise and May 2018's timetable fiascos, our esteemed Secretary of State for Transport has announced a wide-ranging review of the way the rail industry is structured and managed. Apparently even he doesn't think the present franchising approach is fit-for-purpose.

Naturally, Railfuture has much to contribute to this process and discussions are already taking place amongst our directors at national level. However, we believe that ordinary members have much to offer as well, so we'd very much welcome your thoughts on the shortcomings of the present system and how they might be remedied or removed.

There are several key questions like the relationship between the UK Government, the DfT and the industry; how to fund the operations and enhancements; to franchise or to have management agreements; the structure of the franchises (if any) – should they be bigger or smaller or regionally-orientated. You can probably think of many more issues of this sort and your opinions matter a great deal to us. Send your views to the Railfuture West Midlands chairman, Steve Wright at steve.wright@railfuture.org.uk.

The Secretary of State, Chris Grayling, has published Terms of Reference for this review - see <https://www.gov.uk/government/groups/rail-review#terms-of-reference>. Briefly, these are concerned mainly with the models for providing rail services and for industry structures (including joint working between passenger and freight sectors). It also asks for 'motherhood and apple-pie' issues – financially sustainable, good value fares, improved industrial relations. The link also details membership of the review panel.

LOCAL NEWS

Camp Hill Stations Re-opening

In the news during autumn 2018 was an announcement that stations will be built and local trains re-introduced on the Camp Hill line in Birmingham. The stations are to be at Moseley, Kings Heath and Hazelwell and possibly also at Balsall Heath. Train services at these stations will offer a reliable 15-minute journey time to Birmingham city centre. However initially there will be only two trains per hour and none of these will stop south of Hazelwell before Bromsgrove. This means that the opportunity will be missed for establishing valuable local connections between Kings Norton, Northfield and Longbridge and the Camp Hill stations. Only Kings Norton has a good bus service and only to Kings Heath. All other journeys between these two corridors involve changing buses. A link to Longbridge could be particularly useful to access Bournville College and the new Longbridge Village shopping area.

And only two trains per hour? Useful, especially if you want to access the wider national network for work or education or to make long-distance journeys, but hardly likely to have much effect on road congestion through Moseley or Kings Heath. With four trains per hour or even better six, as on the Cross-City Line, some significant impact could be affected, especially if there are connecting buses to widen the catchment areas beyond the immediate walkable neighbourhood. Due to constraints at New Street Station, only two trains per hour can be fitted into the timetable. However, it almost certain that the Bordesley chords, between the Camp Hill line and the Chiltern

Line will go ahead and so enable the Camp Hill trains to use Moor Street station, which should then enable at least four local trains per hour.

The first stage of this – new stations and 2 trains per hour – will start to be designed and built in 2019 and finished in time for the 2022 Commonwealth Games.

Because of the initial decision to consider the business case for re-opening these stations, a new local campaign group ‘Friends of Kings Heath Station’ has been set up. At its first meeting it acknowledged that they should pursue more than just the narrow remit that their title indicates and would keep in mind the needs of Moseley, Hazelwell and Balsall Heath. Their inaugural meeting was very well attended, with over 50 interested persons present. A Railfuture representative will attend their future meetings and we will be supporting them in any way possible.

Have a look at <https://www.itv.com/news/central/2018-09-26/three-new-train-stations-to-open-in-birmingham-camp-hill-line-moseley-kings-heath-hazelwell-commonwealth-games/> and / or <https://www.birminghammail.co.uk/news/midlands-news/how-moseley-kings-heath-train-14883587>

2022 Commonwealth Games

As well as the Camp Hill line service, other major improvements for the 2022 Games include a completely new concourse for University station, costing £40 million, and significant improvements at Perry Barr, including a new rail/bus interchange, £20.5 million.

The new University concourse will be at the opposite end of the station from the present one and will provide seamless movement from the platforms to the Queen Elizabeth / Women’s Hospitals and to the University campus, via a link bridge over the canal. This bridge will also be usable by non-rail users. One of the controlling factors has been the need to avoid damaging the remains of the Roman Fort at Metchley, which as a Scheduled Ancient Monument and a thorough archaeological investigation had to be completed before full design could be undertaken.

Three routes of the long-proposed Sprint bus network are also to be implemented - Walsall Town Centre to Birmingham City Centre; Birmingham City Centre to Birmingham Airport and Solihull; and Sutton Coldfield to Birmingham via Langley.

West Midlands’ rail users to benefit from partnership deals

West Midlands’ rail passengers will be able to access over 100 benefits, including easier ticket purchasing, being allowed to pay a fare when already on board a train, the Swift card on Chiltern rail, and many other improvements, after a partnership agreement between Chiltern Railways, West Midlands Rail (WMR) and Transport for the West Midlands was signed at Moor Street station in Birmingham.

The agreement aims to maximise and improve customer benefits across 117 areas that include more ticket vending machines, a possible loyalty card scheme, improved station design and facilities, and better connections for travellers.

Previous collaborations of this kind between Chiltern Railways and the former public transport body Centro delivered a new car park at Solihull station and faster journey times between Birmingham and London, with much improved information sharing between the partners.

The agreement is to be assessed against network reliability, more people using rail, happier travellers, better and safer stations, and better trains. It will run until the end of Chiltern's franchise in December 2021.

Very Light Rail in Coventry

An award-winning transport specialist has won a contract to work with WMG to design and construct an innovative very light rail vehicle which will be part of a new transport solution for Coventry. Transport Design International, based near Stratford-upon-Avon, has won a tender to create a state-of-the-art, lightweight, battery-operated, rail-guided vehicle which will ultimately be capable of operating without a driver.

The project, funded by the Government's Local Growth Fund through the Coventry and Warwickshire Local Enterprise Partnership (CWLEP) and the West Midlands Combined Authority Devolution Deal, is being managed by researchers from WMG at the University of Warwick in collaboration between Coventry City Council and Transport for West Midlands. A total of £12.2 million has been secured from the West Midlands Combined Authority (WMCA) Devolution Deal funding to undertake the research and development required to prove the VLR concept.

The VLR system will be compatible with Midland Metro and the Council will work collaboratively with TfWM to ensure operating systems, branding and information are consistent across the West Midlands. The prototype vehicle will be capable of carrying 20 seated passengers and a maximum of 70 including standees. It will be tested at the Very Light Rail National Innovation Centre in Dudley before a permanent tracked route is installed across Coventry and a fleet of vehicles manufactured.

West Midlands Rail is dead. Long live West Midlands Rail Executive

In an effort to reduce confusion between with West Midlands Trains and West Midlands Railway, West Midlands Rail – the consortium of local authorities who plan and monitor railway provision throughout the West Midlands Region – decided to change its name to West Midlands Rail Executive, to reflect the fact that they don't actually operate any railways. So glad they sorted that one out.

Birmingham International Revamp

Plans for a £286m revamp of Birmingham International Station were revealed in May 2018 after The Urban Growth Company (UGC) secured £9.2m, via devolution funding from the West Midlands Combined Authority, for a redesign project in preparation for the arrival of HS2.

These funds will allow the UGC to employ consultants to progress the technical design of the station and to appoint design and build contractors to start the delivery of the project.

The plans would see the existing station be transformed into a multi-modal transport exchange, bringing together existing rail, future high-speed rail, air, trams, buses, rapid transit, private vehicles, taxis, bicycles by 2025. The UGC predicts that up to 77,500 jobs, 4,000 new homes and £4.1bn GVA could be generated each year from the plans.



New rail research centre plan for Birmingham

The University of Birmingham is to create a 'world-leading' centre of excellence for railway research. The new building will accommodate up to 100 staff, 100 PhD students and 700 undergraduates. A University statement said: "The School of Engineering building will benefit from a £92 million research fund which was secured in 2017 between the rail supply industry and a consortium of eight universities, aimed at establishing a world-leading centre of excellence for railway research. A new flagship building is proposed to facilitate the growth of the engineering sector and deliver a world leading centre of excellence for research on digital systems, focusing on matters such as railway control and simulation, and data integration and cyber security."

Top railway engineer Bridget Eickhoff has been conferred as Honorary Professor at the Birmingham Centre for Railway Research and Education. Based at rail industry body RSSB as their Principal Infrastructure Engineer, Bridget is renowned as one of rail's leading authorities on the wheel-rail interface, with an impressive career spanning over 40 years, starting at BR Research.

The Director of the Birmingham Centre for Railway Research and Education is Professor Clive Roberts, who made a fascinating presentation to our national conference last November on the subject of the digital railway.

RAIL CAMPAIGNS AND CONSULTATIONS

West Midland Trains consult Railfuture on the design of their new DMUs

Following a suggestion to West Midland Trains (WMT) by Railfuture West Midlands Secretary Colin Major that other TOCs had found value in consulting passengers on the layout of their new rolling stock, he along with representatives of three West Midlands RUGs was invited to their Tyseley Depot in June 2018 to meet the DMU Class 196 lead engineer.

They spent three hours being taken through the design process and everyone was impressed on how West Midlands Trains had ensured that the basic CAF “Civity” platform was configured to meet WMT needs including widening doors for access, enhanced software to handle not only the carriage environmental ambiance but also to provide Wi-Fi and Real time Passenger information. The cabling and software has extendable capacity to meet additional requirements throughout the anticipated 35 year life of these DMUs. Enhancements could include real time track monitoring as suggested in the technical press and others.

There was an opportunity to test the adopted cantilevered seat design and it was refreshing to find that rather than go for the bog-standard FINA design, WMT had employed a design company to modify the chosen FISA seats with adjustments to the shape of the base cushions, head rests, with a better angle of tilt and lumbar support. They had also increased the distance between seats from standard CAF layout by 30mm which may seem small but when Colin (6'2") tried both spacings he found this increase provided a significantly more comfortable space for his long legs.

WMT have ordered 12 x two-car units and 14 x four-car units which as the current fleet of Class 170s is only three cars will require extending the Tyseley Depot to accommodate the longer four car units. A trip around the current depot impressed everyone with its cleanliness despite servicing and undertaking major overhauls of DMUs with their attendant oil and diesel emissions.

This visit emphasised WMT commitment to building a partnership with its rail user stakeholders and Railfuture's West Midlands Branch.

HS2 Connectivity

How do you plan to get between New Street and Curzon Street stations? Walk, of course. What if you are less able bodied and/or have heavy suitcases, or have a toddler and a baby in a pushchair? Well you could wait for a tram that's going the right way, along with five or six hundred other passengers every twenty minutes.

As you can tell Railfuture is not wholly convinced that the planners and developers have really thought this one through and we've spent quite some effort in persuading TfWM, WMCA, MPs and the Mayor that someone ought to do so. We even did a walk-about at the site to see how a connecting station near Proof House Junction might be possible. We could see it wouldn't be easy or cheap, so we weren't expecting a quick result, but some passive provision would have been nice.

Then Malcolm Holmes, COE of West Midlands Rail (Executive), let the cat out of the bag in Modern Railways a couple of months ago when we mentioned a ‘One Station Concept’ encompassing New Street, Moor Street and Curzon Street. Interest was aroused and this was our hot topic at our next liaison meeting with TfWM/WMRE. However, at that time response was limited to ‘we are considering all options’. A consultancy firm is being paid to consider this and estimate likely costs.

Wales and Borders

Farewell to Arriva Trains Wales on 14 October 2018 when Transport for Wales (TfW) take over. English user groups and local politicians are up in arms about the proposal to label all stations under the new management arrangements as 'A Transport for Wales station'. Their, and Railfuture's, concern is that TfW will be so obsessed with improving services in Wales itself, particularly around Cardiff, that the Wales-England routes will be overlooked and this is something we shall be monitoring carefully.

The Marches line has not been at the forefront of plans for the new organisation, although new rolling stock is planned for the 2020s. As yet there is no timetable, even in outline, for the Marches routes, although a new service between Cardiff and Liverpool, via Chester, is proposed, which should provide for two trains per hour all day between Cardiff and Shrewsbury. Nothing is known about the future stopping patterns. Our aspiration is for an hourly service calling at all stations between Shrewsbury and Hereford (Church Stretton, Craven Arms, Ludlow and Leominster) as these are all substantial communities with a need for better communications, both with the larger conurbations and between each other.

Market Drayton

Mueller the famous yogurt and desserts manufacturer is based in Market Drayton, adjacent to the long-closed railway line between Wellington and Crewe. One of their senior managers approached us to support their campaign to get that line re-instated, at least in one direction. Apparently, Mueller in Germany uses railways extensively to transport their products and they would like to do so in the UK as well. Our Shropshire representative is liaising with their UK representative to see how best we can support this worthwhile effort

Worcestershire Parkway Regional Interchange construction is rapidly gaining visible progress

As the photos below illustrate significant progress is being made in the construction of Worcestershire Parkway Regional Interchange just over a mile from M5 Junction 7. Providing services to Malvern from Oxford and to the Southwest via Cheltenham and its 500 car parking spaces more than doubles the total number of station parking spaces in the whole of Worcestershire.

During the five-day May Bank Holiday 2018 Blockade of the railway line to install the new bridge over the A4040 along with realigning and installing new sleepers and rail it included passive provision for a second platform. Piling of over 50% of the piles needed to create the platform 3 total length of the platform to be approx. 265m to accommodate a GWR 2 x 5 car Class 800 train.

The car park and bus stops' foundations have been laid and a roundabout on the on B4084 which links to the M5 is well under construction with a finish date of September this year.

The photo on the next page shows progress as at 1st June 2018 with the steelwork for the Station Building, Bridge and Lift towers and it is interesting to note that glazing has already been installed on the bridge over the Birmingham-Cheltenham line.



Completion of Worcestershire Parkway Regional Interchange is planned for the end of 2018 and services at the station managed by GWR are planned for early 2019 with discussions taking place between GWR and Cross Country to ensure interconnecting services in their timetables.

Ian Walters, Managing Director, SLC Rail, which is constructing Worcestershire Parkway (and other stations) is a speaker at Railfuture's national conference in Reading on 10 November 2018.

Below are two computer-generated images of the finished station building.





Fares & Ticketing / Cross Country Trains Franchise

Railfuture West Midlands chairman Steve Wright has also been heavily involved with two national projects, formulating responses to the Rail Delivery Group's consultation on Easier Fares (and ticketing) and the DfT's consultation on the next Cross Country franchise. The details of both these can be read on the Railfuture website page <https://www.railfuture.org.uk/Consultation+responses>.

Readers probably know that the Cross Country re-franchise has been postponed to await the result of the rail review. It is our view that many of the developments sought by Railfuture and other stakeholders, especially longer and more comfortable trains, could be instigated by the existing incumbent without waiting for a new franchise. This is something that Steve will be taking up with Railfuture's Passenger Group, Arrive Cross Country and hopefully the Department for Transport.

In May 2018, Cross Country made detail changes to its timetables. Most significant were more stops at Macclesfield, giving better connections to Bristol and the South West, and some changes to stopping patterns in the East Midlands for Nottingham to Birmingham/Cardiff trains. Unfortunately, the DfT initiated embargo on major changes in December 2017 has prevented XCT extending more Manchester-Bristol trains to Exeter or from speeding up trains through Derby following redesign of the track layout. They hope to do so before May 2019's timetable changes.

Railfuture warmly welcomes contributions to these newsletters – any local news we missed, your opinions, photos or articles about interesting trips. Send to michael.tombs@railfuture.org.uk.

The next Railfuture West Midlands eNews will be issue 23 in February 2019.

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