

West Midlands Branch e-Newsletter July 2020

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EDITOR'S MESSAGE

We have held back on producing a newsletter during the current lockdown as almost every day there are changes in guidance or directives from the Government making anything we write out of date as soon as it is written.

The recent easing of restrictions provides us with an opportunity to consider the number of decisions announced by the DfT in lockdown, but also some ideas on the way forward in the coming months. Hoping you and yours are safe and well

Colin Major

YOUR COMMITTEE

Despite the AGM scheduled for 25th April being postponed until 2021 your committee have been very active with online Committee meetings and participation in several consultations and online events.

Amongst these are: -

- Supporting applications by Stoke-on-Trent City Council and the Honeybourne to Stratford -on-Avon re-opening campaign to the DfT "Reopening of lines and stations" Fund. Delighted to report that the DfT agreed to fund a business case for the reopening of Meir Station with a Park & Ride off the A50. Sadly, the two other two proposals to reopen Etruria Station, and restore the Stoke-to-Leek line were not successful. We await further announcements now the DfT deadline for more details of 30th June has passed.
- Train Operating Companies (TOCs)- we have been consulted WMT and GWR on their proposed increased of services from 6th July. GWR are operating around 84% of their normal timetable Up from 60% and there is a similar uplift by WMT. They are now consulting on the additional services for the September Timetables.

Your Secretary participated in online Conferences: -

- Two conferences, one lasting three days, on Decarbonisation and greening by the rail industry which already has a lower impact per passenger or freight than other modes and alternative means of powering trains. Electrification is the most beneficial with pilot installations in the South East on utilising solar panels alongside DC third rail tracks. The use of batteries and hydrogen for nonelectrified lines present challenges with the current systems of creating both modes of power.
- Interestingly in response to questions of bikes on trains and why can't we be like the Netherlands it was pointed out that there are almost twice as many bicycles as people in that country with commuters and others using one bike to the station which they park and on arrival at their destination have another often older bike parked there to finish their journey to work.

I will write an article for the next issue of the newsletter on the pros and cons of the current options

- West Midlands Railway Stakeholder Conference-
 - The first of the 26 new CAF 196 DMUs Unit 196001 has been delivered to Tysley where £40 million has been spent lengthening workshops and facilities for them. Units 196002-7 on test in Spain, units 196008-9 are on test at Newport, Wales. £4 million has been spent on updating the fuel road at Worcester Shrub Hill maintenance depot, which with Tysley will service these units, as they will initially be used on the New Street to Hereford service. As additional units are commissioned, they will be used on the Birmingham to Shrewsbury services.
 - Consultation with the residents around Bescot on revising the planning application for the new Electric trains' depot are going well.
 - Network Rail Route Director highlighted the detailed planning with TOCs to ensure that services are not impeded by the resignalling of New Street which will take 18 months. He also said their other priority was to ensure that despite the lockdown that rail services were ready for the 2022 Commonwealth Games. Four stations on the Shrewsbury line were having their platforms lengthened.

Your Chairman, Steve Wright, has also been active, albeit on national issues.

- The Board of Railfuture are trying to rekindle the discussion on fares and ticketing reform and Steve, as lead on this topic for RF's Passenger Group has prepared a paper on desirable changes to these systems. Once this has been discussed by the Board, we hope to be able to distribute these aspirations more widely, especially to our branch members.
- Secondly, he has been keeping in touch with Cross Country Trains about their efforts to provide a safe-from-COVID travelling environment. Now that restrictions are being eased we aim to correlate the efforts being made by all the TOCs operating in the West Midlands Region and distribute this widely – all as part of a campaign to encourage passengers back on to the trains and off the roads.

GETTING PASSENGERS BACK TO RAIL.



Have our railways suffered another collective nervous breakdown with such strong messages so openly discouraging sustainable travel - by train?

Since the DfT is funding all the franchises, has it lost all faith in its own services?

The messaging is negative and inconsistent, even contradictory, not conditional encouragement – in sharp contrast to all other modes. Passengers may feel unwelcome or unsafe and may be unable to travel. *The comparison with air travel is stark.*

There's now an urgent need to get the rail system working productively to support economic recovery. Cities in Britain depend on effective public transport to function and people need confidence that rail is safe. The Department for Transport issued new guidance to transport operators on 29 June 2020. However, it is left to operators to interpret the guidance, which will result in passengers being given inconsistent messages by different operators. Railfuture believes the government should give simple clear guidance to all potential passengers.

Railfuture has proposed a five-point plan to restore confidence in rail.

- 1. The full train service should be restored as soon as possible.** This will create capacity to minimise risks of overcrowding. *Service levels are increasing, but not everywhere, and not enough for everyone who needs to return to work. Some services are still being provided by buses.*
- 2. There has to be a consistent application of distance rules across all transport modes.** If it is safe to effectively ignore the 2metre rule on aeroplanes, why is this not acceptable on trains? *From 4th July the 2metre rule is replaced by 1 metre plus, but operators may interpret this inconsistently when determining the increase in available capacity.*
- 3. There should be an agreed national standard on hygiene levels,** for example sanitisation of surfaces, which should be made fully public. This would not only help protect users but would restore confidence in using the rail system. *Operators are following enhanced cleaning and sanitisation regimes, but no national standard has been made public.*

- 4. The rail industry should urgently look at best practice elsewhere and adopt this.** New York appears to be adopting a much more balanced position on social distancing for example, as is much of mainland Europe. *In much of Europe it is back to business as usual on the trains, with national marketing drives to encourage people to travel.*
- 5. The restrictions on “necessary journeys only” should be eased** as soon as train services are restored to normal levels. It’s inconsistent to allow the public to engage in leisure activity, but not allow rail to play a part in that. *Even as I write the guidance changed as of 16th July the RDG and TOCs homepage messages on GWR, WMT, Avanti West Coast and Cross Country trains changed to” Lets travel safely this Summer” with back up publicity material pointing to it is safe to travel on trains thus hoping to increase the passengers confidence in using trains.*

Why not bang the drum for a coordinated action plan to encourage the use of rail transport by contacting your MP and local Councillor.

COMMUNITY RAIL PARTNERSHIPS (CRP).

Despite not being able to visit communities or schools around stations Much activity is continuing. Worcestershire CRP supported by West Midlands Railway has reached out to their families with children aged between 11 and 18 to take part in the campaign by creating a video, song, rap, or storyboard which shares the anti-trespassing message.

Six national winners of the competition will receive a state-of-the-art GoPro camera, while anyone living in Worcestershire will also be entered into prize draws to win music vouchers courtesy of the CRP.

<https://wcrp.org.uk/backtrack-anti-trespass-competition/>

On Wednesday 8th July, the WCRP launched another Community participation project “Stitch Train Worcestershire” creating 18 tapestry train artworks for temporary display at each of Worcestershire’s 18 railway stations or nearby civic centre in the Autumn. Then, all the trains will be linked together to create two massive trains – each at 11.5m long – to be exhibited in the first instance at the Worcestershire Community Rail Partnership Anniversary event in November. Participants will be stitching either a piece of the carriage, set of doors, or the front or end piece of a train and can insert a small image of themselves in a window. The train designs and colours represent either the new 196 units being launched later in the year in Worcestershire by West Midlands Railway, or the latest Great Western Railway Intercity Express Trains which call at eight of the county’s stations. <https://wcrp.org.uk/stitchtrain/>

Heart of England CRP put together Welcome Back packs to thank their 131 volunteers in their 15 station adoption groups. Each pack contains hand sanitiser from the Warwickshire Gin Company, a reusable fabric face mask, a bottle of Warwick-based Iyoki Chapman Original drink, chocolate from Henley Chocolates and a pen donated by the Samaritans. Each station group also received a gift card for a garden centre local to their stations. <https://heartcommunityrail.org.uk>,

There are three CRPs within the West Midlands, with more to come. To get involved please contact the nearest to where you live:

Heart of England CRP <http://www.shakespeareline.com/community-rail.html>

North Staffs CRP <http://www.northstaffsrail.org.uk/>

Worcestershire CRP peter.chapman@worcestershirecommunityrail.org.uk / @WorcsCRP

RECENT RAIL DEVELOPMENTS

Amongst these are: -

- Planning applications submitted for HS2 stations at Curzon Street and the Birmingham Interchange
- Planning consent given for University station rebuild- the challenge is to complete in time for the Commonwealth games in 2022.
- Wolverhampton station new entrance and interchange with the Metro has opened.
- Kidderminster rebuild opened on 7th June.

WELCOME

We welcome the following new members: -

O Benson, Rugby

R Crockett, Sutton Coldfield.

R Hanks, Shobden.
O O'Neil, Erdington.
J Wallbridge, Wolverhampton

YOUR VIEWS MATTER

We would like to hear from **you** about any matters you believe your Officers and Committee should be working on. So please don't hesitate to get in touch with me on colin.major@railfuture.org.uk.

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

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