



West Midlands Branch eNews

Issue 5 - October 2014

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

- London Midlands Business - issue 7.pdf
- Rail User Express, 7 Sept 2014.pdf
- Rail User Express, 12 Oct 2014.pdf
- Watford Area Stakeholder update - 10.10.14.pdf
- Worcestershire Parkway Regional Interchange.doc
- XC Over-crowding Survey - June 2014.docx

West Midlands Rail

Centro and 14 constituent or neighbouring local authorities have joined forces to negotiate rail devolution with the Department for Transport. They want to run the whole process from franchising to strategic management of the operation of the local train services throughout the West Midlands Region, including timetabling and fare-setting. Discussions are progressing well, although the DfT is intent on managing the next round of franchising in 2017, albeit in conjunction with West Midland Rail (WMR) who would manage the franchise from day 1. However come 2024 it is planned that West Midland Rail will take over franchising as well.

As part of this, from 2017 the present London Midland franchise will be split into a West Midlands set of services (West Midlands Rail) and the rest (West Coast Connect - WCC).

The West Midlands Rail network will comprise the present Cross-City services (New Street and Snow Hill), Birmingham to Hereford, Shrewsbury, Stafford, Rugeley, International and Leamington, and Coventry to Leamington and Nuneaton. This comprises 50% of the trains serving Birmingham. WMR would operate 112 stations and run over 650 trains each day, about 30 million passenger journeys.

West Coast Connect will comprise the London – Northampton and Crewe services and Birmingham to Liverpool which is tentatively being suggested to be combined with the forthcoming West Coast franchise. Some of these overlap for WMR services (e.g. Birmingham – Northampton, Birmingham – Stafford) so these will be jointly specified by WCC, WMR and the DfT. There will also be co-ordination between WMR and other parallel operators, Chiltern and Arriva Train Wales.

At present the Birmingham to Tamworth and Nuneaton services are outside the scope of this plan but options are being kept in mind for these depending on future service developments.

Worcestershire Parkway Regional Interchange (by Colin Major)

The long-awaited dream, first proposed in 1978, of an interchange station outside the City of Worcester near Norton, some two miles from M5 Junction 7, where the Cotswold Line crosses the Birmingham to Bristol Cross Country line appears to be being realised as the Worcestershire County Council received approval of £7.5 million from the Government's Growth Fund towards the £17.1 million cost.

The Worcestershire County Council launched a consultation exercise on 1st October at the Worcester Hive showing plans for a step free passenger station building incorporating two platforms on either side of the Birmingham – Bristol line and one platform on the North Cotswold line. Associated infrastructure will include the development of a station car park for 500 car spaces including disabled and cycle parking provision and improvements to walking and cycling routes to the site. Vehicular access from the existing B4084 will be provided with a new roundabout junction. The design on display has been “future proofed” to provide for doubling of the Cotswold line and the long term prospect of electrification of both this route and the Birmingham to Bristol route. There is no proposal to close either of the current stations in the City of Worcester both of whom provide a vital service to the City and the train operators.

As well as the Government's funding commitment the Department for Transport has agreed talks, which are already advanced, with the train industry and cross-country services linking to destinations such as Bristol and Cardiff. The Department for Transport has also agreed to re-examine the "business case" for faster rail services to London.

In its supporting brochure Worcestershire County Council state the key rail priorities:

1. To deliver improvements to rail services and infrastructure in Worcestershire to meet Central and Local Government's expectation that the rail network should actively support economic growth;
2. To address Worcestershire's current poor accessibility to and from London arising from the limited frequency and lengthy journey time of North Cotswold Line services.
3. To transform access to the rail network for Worcestershire passengers currently restricted by minimal car parking capacity and limited opportunities for expansion at county stations;
4. To tackle Worcestershire's exclusion from the Cross Country network (Bristol-Birmingham- North West/North East). Despite the service passing through the very heart of the county, rail access is only viable by making connections at Birmingham New Street and Cheltenham Spa and this must be addressed. This severely restricts the County's economic relationships with other parts of the United Kingdom.

All four factors lead to increased car use for strategic journeys which would otherwise be made by rail, as well as significant use by Worcestershire residents of alternative journey options from Birmingham International and Warwick Parkway and consequent additional and avoidable use of congested sections of the local and strategic road networks.

The current situation impacts upon the County's economic competitiveness when contrasted with a neighbouring comparable county. For example Warwickshire has faster, more frequent and more accessible train services to London and direct access to regular Cross Country services to the Thames Valley, South Coast, North East and North West England.”

A full planning application is expected to be submitted to Worcestershire County Council during spring 2015 to seek approval for the new Parkway station and associated infrastructure. A decision will be expected from the Planning Committee over summer 2015. The £7.5 million for Worcestershire Parkway will arrive in mid-2016, by which time the council hopes to have secured planning permission and taken ownership of the land needed to build it. The rest of the £10 million needed to fully fund the £17.1 million station will then come from a long-term loan paid for from parking charges with a target of May 2017 for the opening of the station.

Councillor John Smith, Cabinet member for highways at Worcestershire County Council, has issued a statement saying:- "A report is going to the WCC cabinet meeting on 25th September seeking authority to commence a public information exercise on the Worcestershire Parkway scheme details. The public engagement, required as part of the planning process when preparing to submit an application, will inform people of the preferred option plan and the progress on the scheme. This part of the planning process is expected to start the next day and will mean people can see in more detail what could be involved."

Full details can be found on www.Worcestershire.gov.uk/parkway and the County Council welcome comments by 5pm on 30th November 2014.

Threat to a Wrexham-Birmingham Service (by Paul Lindsay)

The Shrewsbury - Chester Rail Users Association (SCRUA) has launched a campaign to protect a train service which it believes to be under threat. SCRUA understands that Arriva Trains Wales, is considering axing the 0747 Wrexham to Birmingham service from May 2015. Also facing the chop is understood to be the 0700 from Shrewsbury which arrives in Wrexham at 0739.

The 0747 from Wrexham calls at Ruabon, Chirk, and Gobowen and provides an important direct service for commuters and students from NE Wales to the West Midlands and Birmingham Airport. It is very busy train. Records show that there has always been a train to Birmingham at around the same time, even in Great Western days when it ran to Paddington!

What has been suggested is that the Holyhead to Cardiff 'Premier' express service, which currently runs non-stop between Wrexham and Shrewsbury, should stop additionally at Ruabon, Chirk and Gobowen. But it runs 15 minutes earlier (currently 07.32 from Wrexham) and passengers for the Birmingham line would face inconvenience and delay to their journeys by changing at Shrewsbury.

SCRUA chairman John Mattocks believes this will act as a deterrent to rail use - "this is bad news if you are one of the many commuters who use the service to get to work in Telford, Wolverhampton and Birmingham, as this would mean an earlier start, and necessitate a change at Shrewsbury, all factors which might make the rail option less attractive and force commuters onto the road"

Additional services, backed by Welsh Government, are being provided for the Cambrian and Heart of Wales Lines from next May, which SCRUA totally supports. However it is concerned that services are being strengthened elsewhere to the detriment of passengers between Chester and Shrewsbury. There should be no cut in services, especially as May 2015 sees the opening of the re-doubled track north of Wrexham, funded by the Welsh Government at a cost of over £40 million to help improve services on the line.

SCRUA is currently engaging with local politicians and rail users and is encouraging members of the public to sign an on line petition at <http://www.ipetitions.com/petition/save-the-0747-wrexham-to-birmingham-rail-service>.

HS2 - Inter-regional Services: the Birmingham Link (by Peter Rowland)

One of the benefits of HS2 will be to link up the regions of the UK. This must include those regions who are not on the line of route. This implies the use of 'Javelin' type services, operated by train

sets that can run on both high speed and classic lines. As a consequence there must be physical links between HS2 and the classic network.

One of these links needs to be somewhere to the east of the proposed Curzon St station in Birmingham. This will allow trains that have travelled over classic lines from south west England and south Wales access to HS2 for onward travel to north west and north east England and Scotland. Destinations to benefit include Bristol, Gloucester, Exeter, Swansea, Cardiff, Newport and on to Manchester, Sheffield and Leeds. Eventually also to Newcastle, Glasgow and Edinburgh.

Current official thinking is that that this link will not happen and that passengers taking these trips will be expected to detrain at New Street and make their way to Curzon Street. The intention to provide some form of mass transit system for these passengers, but this will still take time as well as raising issues such as through ticketing. Are these passengers expected to carry some loose change for their tram ride as well as having to struggle with cases, baby buggies etc? The time taken to make the transition is likely to mitigate against people using HS2. Given the expected time needed to navigate ticket and security checks the total time needed from the arrival of the classic train in New Street to the HS2 departure will be round about three quarters of an hour.

HS2 needs a national consensus to proceed. Ensuring that these interregional links are available from the first day of operation must only strengthen HS2's appeal from bodies such as the Welsh Government and major English regional cities not directly on the line.

Note: This will form part of our submission to Baroness Kramer via our member Phil Bennion. Indications of support for the ideas would be most welcome.

Meeting with Centro

Representatives from the West Midlands branch committee met with Centro people on 23rd September 2014 - one of our regular quarterly meetings. Topics covered included:

- Devolution and HS2 links (see above)
- Midlands Connect - the East and West Midlands LEPs working together to identify transport infrastructure hindrances to economic growth
- Cross City Line (South) - the lack of capacity on Sunday trains especially when the city centre shops close. London Midland are to strengthen one of their 3-car sets to 6. This will include the 1615 departure from New Street.
- Car Parks - Centro has introduced enforcement for parking misdemeanours, such as parking outside designated areas. We raised the issue of lack of parking space for non-commuters but there is no plan at present for this.
- Cross City Leaf Fall - the 10-minute frequency will be maintained but some services will be timetabled to skip stops to provide recovery time. See timetables for details.

Railfuture's Future

On 11th October Railfuture held a major workshop session in Birmingham on the subject of Railfuture - Where we are now, What we stand for, What do we do well and What could the future

look like. Your chairman and secretary participated in this with representatives are most Rf branches and national groups.

A series of actions were identified for our individual branch or collective attention, including identifying two campaigns in the next 5 years. One project that is on-going is the Birmingham Mobility Action Plan and we are considering organising a public forum. The aim of this is to raise the society's profile as much as to air the issues around the Plan.

A more detailed report on the workshop and progress with organising a forum will be published in the November 2014 newsletter.

Timetable Changes - London Midland – Cross City Line

Now that the double tracking is complete south of Barnt Green, from December an additional train per hour will be going through to Redditch, giving a 20 minute frequency throughout the day (Mon-Sat). Turn-round times at both Redditch and Lichfield is being increased to provide greater margin in case of delays, to avoid the non-stop runs to get back to schedule. In addition, The Shenstone stop is being transferred to the Lichfield Trent Valley trains.

Timetable Changes - Cross Country Trains

A couple of trains on the Leicester to Birmingham service are being strengthened to provide additional capacity in the morning peak – the 0724 from Leicester will be 4 cars and the 0737 from Nottingham via Leicester will be 3 cars. The latter will have an extra stop at Water Orton. Most of the xx41 services from Nottingham – Birmingham are re-timed to leave Derby at xx10 and run earlier to Birmingham. There will be an extra Sunday service between Leicester (dep 1024) and Birmingham (arr 1116) to reduce crowding on the 1119 from Leicester. On Sundays, the 0912 from Birmingham to Penzance will depart later at 0930, arrive Plymouth 1252 and then run as at present through Cornwall. The Sunday 1018 from Derby to Cardiff will start from Nottingham at 0952.

Cross Country Trains - Over-crowding Survey

A further Railfuture survey at New Street has been requested for November or early December to confirm June's findings. Volunteers to help would be most welcome. (Similar surveys are planned for other major centres served by XC Trains.)

The next Railfuture West Midlands eNews will be issue 6 in November 2014.

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

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