

West Midlands Branch E-News February 2021

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SECRETARY'S MESSAGE

We had an excellent online January Meeting with Dave Penney Central Route Director Network Rail on 13th January with 22 Branch Members online.

We appreciate the way in which Dave was very open about the challenge he and his team have to meet to improving the current infrastructure and services and his willingness to frankly answer questions.

For those members unable to join that evening below are some notes of that event.

We are planning to hold another online Open Meeting for all members on the evening of **Wednesday 10th March**.

Details will be sent to you direct from us in late February.

Colin

Notes on our Meeting with Dave Penney.

Dave outlined the wide range of responsibilities and activities he and his team have.

These include: -

- Maintaining the Track and Signalling (T&S); Emergency repair of damage to T&S

- Renewal and installation of new infrastructure.

- Running New Street and Marylebone stations.

- Central Route will by April include the Chiltern main line between London Marylebone and the West Midlands, the Snow Hill line from Stratford-upon-Avon to Worcester, the Cross City line in Birmingham, and lines to Wolverhampton, Coventry, Walsall, and Banbury.

Resignalling: -The immediate task starting on 24th January was the final phase of resignalling New Street to be completed by late summer 2022 with switch of control to Saltley Signalling Centre in December 2022.

Platforms 1 to 3 used by trains towards the Coventry and London direction a much longer "A" end to stand the train in, without the need for permissive working.

To accommodate a six-car new Cross City EMUs and Hereford DMUs longer "B" end for platforms 8 to 11.

Platforms 11 and 12 will get mid-platform signals for both directions.

None of these changes will increase capacity above pre Covid levels but aimed for efficient train despatch with a new Train Despatch Equipment Unit (TDEU), which is being tried out on platform 4c. With all these systems in place the hope is that the exit speed in the station can be increased to 15mph. This could reduce platform reoccupation times by around 30 seconds and also ensure that longer trains still fit within existing Sectional Running Times (SRTs).

Platform out of Use' programme will enable work to progress through the station with minimal disruption.

New Street station: - Dave is undertaking a review of how they can improve passenger experience with a "Way Finder revue". Giving better signage for those entering or leaving the station and for those transferring from one service to another. Members proposed more seats and unlike current seating must which face the Information screens.

Colin Major pointed out that between 2015 and 2018 he and the Chairman had met the station manager on several occasions and provided suggestions for improvements from the passenger's experience. He would send Dave these proposals from RF WM.

Pinch Points: -Priorities are to enhance the Coventry-Birmingham corridor capacity, Coventry-Kenilworth- Banbury and remodelling Kings Norton as part of the Midlands Rail Hub.

The opening of Platform 4 at Snowhill is going ahead.

Whilst recognising the role of Worcester as a pinch point and terminus there are no immediate plans for remodelling the Worcester triangle.

Midlands Rail Hub: - The creation of the Bordesley Chords is an integral part of the creation of a six-platform station at Moor Street. Network Rail have taken over the planning of this from Midlands Connect and will be supporting the City Council if an appeal is made to the Secretary of State.

Spending on these enhancements is subject to the White Paper due to be published in February.

Other topics raised by members: -

Electrification- No firm news but Dave explained the criteria used to justify electrification including Pantograph swipes per hour. On this basis of intensive services on the Snowhill line this is seen as the priority for Birmingham.

PACE – Dave explained that this was an initiative to speed up the GRIP process which had become cumbersome. The five Regional teams will, for the first time, bring together project development, implementation and contractor and resource management in a locally focused way.

Freight – As Dave had overrun his time it was agreed that we would have another, perhaps a smaller meeting, with Dave or his senior team responsible to discuss this and other detailed ideas.

Other Items of News.

Modified Timetables:

In light of reduced travel both Avanti West Coast and LNWR have revised their services to Euston with Avanti only running one per hour rather than the pre Covid timetable of three per hour which has left a gap of 40 minutes between trains to Coventry from Birmingham as there is only one train from each TOC from Birmingham to Euston. Your Chairman has pursued the matter with Avanti who say that the Scotland -Birmingham -Euston service is the priority for the DfT on the WCML route. We are in talks with LNWR (WMT) to see if they can change their service to use another of their original timetable paths.

Getting Passengers Back to Rail:

On 27th Feb Transport Focus– published ‘**Travel during Covid-19: key lessons for 2021 and beyond**’ their survey results confirm that Rail has an uphill battle to convince lapsed users to return. Available on: - <https://d3cez36w5wymxj.cloudfront.net/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/26170211/Travel-during-Covid-19-key-lessons-for-2021-and-beyond.pdf>.

Their ideas re-enforce our own on the need for a Government lead campaign post Covid to persuade passengers that rail is an enjoyable and medically safe method to travel, that there should be flexible ticketing/seasons to reflect changed usage by commuters and that the cost of travel should be more competitive to the alternatives. Sadly, NHS England have recently run a campaign stating that rail is not a safe way to travel!

Stourbridge Town

The line from Stourbridge Town to Stourbridge Junction station, will close to passengers for a fortnight from Monday 8th February whilst the pair of small Class 139 trains used on the route will be internally repainted, deep-cleaned and have new passenger grab rails installed. Some seating will also be temporarily removed to aid social distancing on board. Network Rail will use the temporary closure to inspect the track, remove graffiti and clear vegetation along the line, including overhanging trees which could pose a risk to the safety of trains.

Worcestershire Community Rail Partnership.

Congratulations to Worcestershire CRP who in just over 12 months after their launch in 2019 were formally Accredited by the DfT.

Wellington station.

Community groups at Wellington station near Shrewsbury have been awarded £45,000 to install new signage, improve pedestrian links to the nearby bus station and added greenery. The station has been serving local residents for more than 170 years and is one of the first schemes to benefit from WMR's new Customer & Communities Improvement Fund (CCIF).

Warwickshire Transport Plan.

Warks County Council have issued a revised consultation document with comments to be submitted by March 18th. To respond the web link is <https://api.warwickshire.gov.uk/documents/WCCC-630-116>.

Modern Railways.

The February 2021 issue, now on sale, has on its cover a class 730 WMR EMU and the headline “West Midlands Prepares for Post-Covid Reset”. Inside is a featured 12page article of interviews with Malcolm Holmes and WMT MD Julian Edwards plus four pages on Coventry and VLR.

“Jumbo” Freight Trains.

Since March 2020 Network Rail has permitted freight trains to be temporarily lengthened to 775m on rail routes between Southampton and Leeds, Manchester, and Birmingham. They have also operated between the Daventry rail freight terminal in Northamptonshire and Grangemouth on the Firth of Forth. These will continue until May 2021 and Network Rail looking at its impact with the possibility of making these freight trains a “priority”.

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 us on westmidlands@railfuture.org.uk