



## ***West Midlands Branch eNews***

### ***Issue 12 - October 2015***

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

- Railfuture's Rail User Express bulletin, October 2015 issue
- Railfuture Thames Valley branch newsletter dated October 2015
- London Midland rail franchise passenger research

*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.*

In this issue:-

- Local News
- National News
- Out-of-Area News – West Coast Rail 250 meeting

### **LOCAL NEWS**

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#### **Birmingham New Street phase 2**

As mentioned in the September 2015 eBulletin, the rebuilt concourse at Birmingham New Street station has fully opened, but Railfuture has now had time to take a thorough look at the station facilities. There is lots of space, as stated, but not that many seats in the 'A' end of the concourse and none at all in the public circulation area (i.e. outside the barriers). Whilst their absence has the advantage of not attracting no-travellers it is unfair to 'meeters and greeters' who may have to stand for an extended period or spend money at a café to get the chance to sit down.

New barriers are being installed adjacent to the escalators for platforms 6A and 7A. This will make it easier for passengers needing to transfer from platforms 6-12 to 1-5, even though it will still be necessary to pass through two sets of barriers to do this. Let's hope the barrier software is clever enough to understand this and not refuse re-entry to passengers.

Railfuture has started having a detailed look at the facilities and signage, etc. If you've been to New Street and have any comments (good or bad) please e-mail [steve.wright@railfuture.org.uk](mailto:steve.wright@railfuture.org.uk) and we'll include them in the review.

#### **West Midlands Combined Authority**

From April 2016 Centro and the West Midlands Integrated Transport Authority are to be subsumed into the new West Midlands Combined Authority. The WMCA will comprise strategic elements from the existing councils of Birmingham, Coventry, Dudley, Sandwell, Solihull, Walsall and Wolverhampton, covering transport, land use and strategic planning. It may also include parts of Staffordshire and Worcestershire.

"Combined Authorities do not take power away from local councillors or the individual communities they serve. On the contrary, the existing local authorities remain in place and collectively form the Combined Authority with their partners. They remain "sovereign" and the

principle of subsidiarity, whereby decisions are made at the spatial level closest to the people ‘on the ground’, applies. The regions that have already established Combined Authorities have already shown themselves to be in a better position to negotiate with government the devolution of power and resources from the national to the local level” according to a press release in July 2015.

### **West Midlands Rail**

A decision on the LMT direct award is anticipated late autumn 2015. This is not necessarily a done-deal. Approximate timings for the new franchise (post direct award) are:

- OJEU notice/stakeholder consultations 12/2015
- Invitation To Tender 07/2016
- Decision late autumn 2016
- New contract 10/2017.

Any bids must take into account certain considerations, especially Kenilworth services. The franchise will be run jointly by the Department for Transport (DfT) and West Midlands Rail; future WM franchisees will need to take integration with HS2 into account and plan towards splitting the next franchise.

Connectivity with Birmingham International (and possibly Walsall) is on Centro’s ‘agenda’ for the next franchise. The individual authorities within the area are working on business cases for any new or enhanced services.

Similar timings will apply to the WCML franchise. The DfT recognises that the franchises are linked and although there are two teams they will be working together to a certain extent.

### **West Midlands Schemes Progress**

1) Chase Line electrification – the Secretary of State for Transport has confirmed that works will be completed and services running by December 2017. It is anticipated that services will be provided by the 323 units currently operating on the Northern Franchise. This will free up the DMUs currently employed on the Chase line to be used elsewhere.

2) Bromsgrove Station – delays have been well publicised, and opening is anticipated April 2016. Extension of electrification of the Cross City line to Bromsgrove will necessitate closure in October 2016 whilst works carried out. Testing should start in November with new electric services to and from the new station in May 2017.

3) Park & Ride Schemes – Four Oaks has been delayed due to the contractor going into liquidation! Whitlocks End has no budget as yet. Preliminary plans are being developed for Tipton & Lea Hall.

4) A bid has been made to the DfT to upgrade the booking area at Solihull.

5) Stechford – plans being drawn up for step free access.

6) Knuckle Phase 1 – new stations at Coventry Arena and Bermuda Park were expected to open in August 2015 but now 2016 is looking more likely. London Midland has a page about its new stations at <http://www.londonmidland.com/your-journey/station-info/newstations/>. The service will be

provided by a single class 153 unit as now. Knuckle phase 2 includes a half hourly service and remodelling at Coventry and is expected in 2017.

7) An hourly shuttle is planned between Leamington Spa and Coventry calling at Kenilworth starting in December 2016. However, at present there is no idea where the unit would come from.

### **Wolverhampton - Walsall**

Any review of a potential direct passenger service needs to be done in conjunction with the Black Country light rail study. Centro's view is that a business case for a heavy rail service will be very difficult. They are however looking at various Black Country scenarios including a link to Aldridge.

### **Overcrowding**

#### *Services from Tamworth and Nuneaton*

Centro recognised that there is no incentive for Cross Country to accommodate 'local' passengers. The possibility of local (London Midland or successor) services to Tamworth or Nuneaton is not even in Centro's medium term plans, due to far too many infrastructure/costing problems and lack of a good business case. However when the new Cross Country franchise comes up for renewal in 2019 there will be a stipulation that 'local corridors' are accommodated.

#### *New St - Bromsgrove – Worcester & Hereford*

It is anticipated that the electrification extension of the Cross City line to Bromsgrove will help with overcrowding on this route. No other firm plans exist at present although DMUs released by the Chase Line electrification may help.

### **Branch Meetings**

The next meeting of your branch committee will be on 11th November 2015 at Moor Street Station at 6 pm. There is an open invitation to members to attend our meetings as observers but you need to contact the Secretary ([steve.wright@railfuture.org.uk](mailto:steve.wright@railfuture.org.uk)) in advance so that we can arrange to escort you through the barrier. Also if a lot of members decide to come we would need to arrange for a bigger room!

## **NATIONAL NEWS**

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### **DELAY REPAYMENTS**

Good news from Virgin Trains West Coast. Holders of advance purchase tickets (bought through Virgin Trains) who are delayed more than 30 minutes will now receive compensation automatically – by repayment into the credit or debit account used to buy the original ticket. Other travellers can still claim as now by completing a printed form or through the Virgin Trains web-site. At the moment only Virgin Trains are doing this but it is likely to be rolled out to other TOCs and may become a franchise commitment.

## OUT-OF-AREA NEWS (but of interest to West Midlands)

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### WEST COST RAIL 250 (Meeting 14th October 2015)

New Virgin Trains services to Blackpool are meeting loading expectations. Those to Shrewsbury are doing rather better than expected.

Virgin Trains are aiming to provide hi-speed Wi-Fi on their trains, but this requires investment in line-side equipment. Between Euston – Preston this is expected to cost £80 million.

For the May 2016 some timetable changes are being considered. There are no details yet but there are not expected to be a great number. However where they occur they are likely to have significant local effect.

It has been announced that HS2 construction at Euston will now leave 16 platforms free (out of 18), rather than the 13 predicted earlier.

The decision to remove railcard discounts on peak-hour ticket purchases, which was voluntarily introduced by Virgin Trains, was roundly condemned by stakeholders. It is likely to lead to greater overcrowding on the first off-peak trains and may reduce patronage overall.

The next Railfuture West Midlands eNews will be issue 13 in December 2015.

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