



West Midlands Branch eNews

Issue 16 – July 2016

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

- Railfuture's Rail User Express bulletin, April 2016, May 2016 and June 2016 issues
- Railfuture's Rail Disruption Report (final version)
- Railfuture briefing for branches from July 2016
- Lichfield Rail Promotion Group newsletter
- Severn Dee News for spring 2016
- Birmingham Post article 'Balfour Beatty snubbed in new Midland Metro partnership'

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 AGM 2016

Change of plan at West Midlands Branch AGM (23 April 2016)

Talk about bad luck – first Christian Wolmar had to cancel due to a long-standing commitment elsewhere that he'd forgotten to tell his office diarist about, then RAIL magazine editor Nigel Harris had to withdraw owing to health issues. It was most disappointing for all of us. We're extremely grateful to Railfuture director Jerry Alderson for stepping into the breach with a most interesting photo slide-show talk about various aspects of improving passenger experience from continental European practice. Jerry's slides can be viewed at www.railfuture.org.uk/display1254 or downloaded from www.railfuture.org.uk/DL1254.

Railfuture West Midlands Branch Committee for 2016/17

On the more mundane side, the Railfuture West Midlands branch committee for 2016/17 was elected and is made up of: Chairman - William Whiting, Vice-chairman – Albert Thomas, Secretary – Steve Wright, Treasurer - Ian Jackson. Ian suffered an illness last year but is recovering well and we are most grateful for him continuing as our Treasurer.

The rest of the committee is made up of Phil Bennion (Tamworth), Cllr Phil Davis (Birmingham Central), Peter Kennard (Solihull), Roger King (Birmingham South), Colin Morris (Worcester), Peter Rowland (Stratford-on-Avon) and Michael Tombs (Coventry). With William from Halesowen and Ian from Lichfield this gives us quite a good spread around our region, but note that we have no representatives from Shropshire or North West Staffordshire. Anyone interested in doing so and

willing to come to committee meetings on the second Wednesday each month please contact your Secretary.

At present we meet in an office at Birmingham Moor Street station, courtesy of Chiltern Trains, but this may vary occasionally and we would be interested in bringing our meetings out to other centres in the West Midlands if local non-committee members would be interested in joining us.

(Since the AGM, Phil Davis has been appointed Vice Chair of the Transport Delivery Committee at Transport for West Midlands as well as Lead Birmingham Member for TfWM. Consequently he has decided to resign from our committee to avoid any conflict of interest. He will stay as a member of Railfuture and will keep in touch with us. We give him our very best wishes in this new, most important position – ed)

Membership

Railfuture welcomes new members. These recently included people from Leamington Spa, Stratford on Avon and Wolverhampton. Branch membership includes ten Rail User Groups.

RAILFUTURE NATIONAL CONFERENCE IN BIRMINGHAM IN NOVEMBER 2016

Speaker line-up complete – bookings open

Bookings for the Saturday 12 November 2016 conference are open until two days before the event. The event includes welcome refreshments and a buffet lunch. It is open to everyone with members enjoying a discounted rate of £20 until 31 August and £25 after that with non-members paying £30. A discount is available for people who book the conference and join at the same time. Full details can be found on the Railfuture website at www.railfuture.org.uk/conferences/.

The theme is the role of railways in developing the local economy. Confirmed speakers include Toby Rackcliff from West Midlands Combined Authority (Transport), Lord Anthony Berkeley (Rail Freight Group), Stephen Joseph (Campaign for Better Transport) and Christian Wolmar (Transport Journalist, Author and Railfuture Honorary President).

The venue is at the Priority Rooms in Birmingham. It is easy to reach from rail stations - the front gates are about eight metres for the Bull Street tram stop as shown in the photo on the right.



LOCAL NEWS

Survey of Hereford to New Street Off-Peak Trains

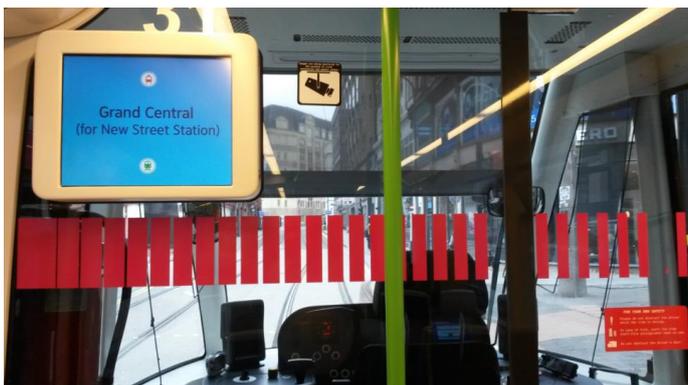
The £24m new relocated Bromsgrove station opened on 12 July 2016. There is a 350-space car park (with charging points for electric cars), secured cycle storage and a station building that has toilets, a ticket desk and retail facility. It was constructed via a joint partnership involving Worcestershire County Council and the West Midlands Combined Authority. It is operated by London Midland.

Midland Metro Extension to New Street is Open

At last the extension to Stephenson Street is open for business. It's quite a novel experience to 'glide' along Corporation Street, dodging the kamikaze shoppers, or rather them having to dodge the tram. It makes one feel that one is in some enlightened mainland European city. Railfuture is now looking forward to the extension to Five Ways.



Photos above and below by Jerry Alderson, Railfuture, taken on 11 June 2016



However, there are concerns about the height of the kerb outside New Street Station (as shown in the photo above), dangerously high at about 30cms. As a consequence, a temporary fence had to be put in place to prevent pedestrians from tripping over or down this kerb and they are forced to use a roundabout route to access New Street both via Burlington Arcade and by Stephenson Place.

This was brought to Railfuture's attention by member Don Payne who has since met representatives of Centro to review this problem and they will be considering the issue and reporting back to Railfuture West Midlands branch.

The plan for future tramlines is taking a more concrete form – see article from Birmingham Post at <http://www.birminghampost.co.uk/news/regional-affairs/balfour-beatty-snubbed-new-midland-11538361>.

Approval has been received for the extension of the existing tram to Centenary Square in 2019. It is then intended to extend to Five Ways and Edgbaston; Bull Street to HS2 and Eastside; and an extension in Wolverhampton to the train and bus stations.

Walsall-Wolverhampton service

Railfuture West Midlands branch is still pursuing re-introduction of direct Walsall-Wolverhampton passenger trains in spring 2016 the branch Chairman and Secretary visited the sites of three possible intermediate stations, together with Railfuture's contact officers in Walsall and Wolverhampton Councils. The site at Willenhall appears to offer the best opportunities, being near the town centre and with a considerable amount of housing nearby. The sites at Darlaston (James Bridge) and Portobello would provide good access to existing and new business areas for work-related journeys but has rather less scope for local residents.

Railfuture's next step is to engage key local politicians, Transport for West Midlands, Network Rail and London Midland Trains to try and generate some momentum. We shall also be pushing bidders for the new West Midlands Trains franchise to commit to this service. Ideally we'd like to see three or even four trains per hour introduced as soon as possible, even before any new stations are sanctioned. Our present aspiration is for a circular service; Walsall-Wolverhampton-Birmingham-Walsall and vice-versa.

Network Rail implements Railfuture's recommendations at New Street Station

In late October 2015 two members of the Railfuture West Midlands branch committee spent two and a half hours looking at the refurbished Birmingham New Street station from the viewpoint of the arriving and/or departing passenger. We recognised that work was still in progress especially at platform level so followed this up with a meeting in January 2016 spending a further three hours with senior Network Rail personnel and the Station Manager and physically taking them to the areas of our concern.

It was therefore with pleasure that we have learnt that several of our suggestions are being implemented.

Passenger information is vital to smooth movement of travellers so our concerns were that whilst there is a bank of information screens when coming through the main entrance from Smallbrook Queensway with lots of Departure screens and one screen showing Arrivals. If you were in the Atrium there are only Departure screens so anyone using the entrances from Stephenson Street, Hill Street, Station Street or Navigation Street cannot find where and when their friends/relatives are arriving. So we are delighted that an Arrivals board will be added to the Atrium array.

We were also concerned that the only passenger information screens on the North ramp are a few affixed just inside the door onto Stephenson Street, which are often obscured by passengers entering or leaving. In the short-term this has been addressed by one mobile unit inside the ramp and are delighted that Network Rail are investigating the plausibility of installing a small bank of screens well within the ramp space so that the increased number of passengers – as a result of the trams serving the station - using this service will be given better information on entering the station.

New Street handles the largest number of passengers in the country changing trains to continue their onward journeys. The provision of seating throughout was inadequate in number and quality so accepting our comments Network Rail are replacing those seats currently in the lounges with a much more appropriate lounge seating which will enhance the aesthetic concept of the lounges. The existing seating will be relocated to supplement the non-ticket areas of the station and some moved onto platform level providing more seating for those awaiting their trains. Appropriate colouring is being introduced into the so-called lounges. This will help to make clearer which is which.

The last phases of the rebuild is the refurbishment of the platforms which are day by day becoming lighter with new pale coloured cladding and to overcome our concerns that alighting passengers, especially those changing trains, need signs to guide them to their next platform or exit these are being installed as the cladding is being finished.

Railfuture West Midlands will continue to monitor the work being done to ensure that the needs of the passenger are met.

Report by Colin Major

MORE WEST MIDLANDS RAIL NEWS

London Midland briefing for West Midlands and North West Stakeholders May 2016

A Direct Award was made to London Midland (LM) starting in April 2016 and ending in October 2017 with London Midland committed to spending £15 million on enhancing services but with the shortness of the award there was no possibility of additional rolling stock.

Currently London Midland are achieving a positive customer satisfaction of 85% helped no doubt by high levels of reliability at 97.3% leading to the lowest level of cancellations by any Train Operating Company and by good punctuality (actual scheduled time not the usual five minutes leeway for local and 10 minutes for intercity services) of 90.4%. The Shrewsbury to Birmingham service achieved 94.9% in the first month of the Award period. Within the Award they are committed to spend the £15 million on:

- New targets to improve customer satisfaction
- Improved on-station and on-train information – staff are being given tablets, smartphones, smart mobile ticket machines
- New website
- Improved information on ‘self-help’ systems e.g. LM App, Journeycheck
- 7 million paperless journeys – currently running at 1.5 million
- New and upgraded ticket vending machines
- ‘Click and collect’ & contactless payment – initially a pilot of selling weekly season tickets which can be collected in under 15 minutes of ordering.
- Accessibility improvements – travel made simple for everyone.
- The provision of free Wi-Fi on trains.
- The refurbishment and re-tractioning of the Class 323 EMUs coupled with a trial of real time passenger information on one set as a pilot.

Answering a question from the Railfuture representatives on their proposals to improve University Station, which is no longer fit for purpose as overcrowding is a serious problem, following the expansion of the Queen Elizabeth Hospital and University of Birmingham considerably increasing the footfall. This station is the fourth busiest on the London Midlands network. The response was that in the short term there will be three additional staff on the station to control passenger movements and LM will look to installing ticket machines at the University and in the QE so passengers will have the opportunity to purchase tickets at these locations. It was originally thought that a Roman Burial Ground would prevent a rebuild of the station on a larger scale but there is now agreement with Birmingham City Council, the Local Enterprise Partnership and Network Rail to develop a scheme which will take account of any proposals in the long term for development of the whole area.

Whilst autumn 2015's "Leaf Fall" timetable had improved reliability of the services there were still instances of overcrowding when services were modified on route. London Midland agreed to revisit the timetable and see if it needs adjusting. It was pointed out that the timetable for the leaf fall is not drawn up to improve performance but to provide a more reliable service for passengers. LM has tried to convey in posters why it is necessary to have a leaf fall timetable to educate the passenger.

The aim is for there to be a 30-minute frequency on the Rugeley Trent Valley to Birmingham once electrification is complete. LM would also like to see an increased frequency on the Coventry-Nuneaton line but until infrastructure changes are made there are bound to be poor connections.

The slides from this meeting can be found on: <http://www.londonmidland.com/about-us/latest-news/#/documents/london-midland-s-nw-and-wm-stakeholder-briefing-spring-2016-56106>.

Report by Colin Major

Transport for West Midlands

The new West Midlands Combined Authority has now taken over responsibility for transport in our region and has posted its initial priorities. These include:

- Extensions to the tram network – to Edgbaston, to the Airport and Wednesbury to Brierley Hill
- Construction of north and south chords at Bordesley to provide for new local services via Kings Heath and via Castle Vale out of Moor Street Stations rather than New Street. (This would also offer the opportunity to re-route Leicester and Worcester trains to relieve New Street - ed)
- Redevelop Coventry station to include a new bay platform for Nuneaton services

Inter-City West Coast Franchise

Not only is there to be a re-franchising of local West Midlands service (2017) but also the West Coast franchise is up for renewal in April 2018. Stakeholder consultation is currently underway, due to end 2nd August. Anyone can make a personal submission on-line at www.smartsurvey.co.uk/s/icwc-franchise. The West Midlands branch committee will be putting forward our aspirations to the Railfuture lead for this consultation. These are likely to include:

- More stops at Trent Valley stations to give a regular fast service to and from London.
- More frequent through trains between Shrewsbury and London
- More stops at Milton Keynes on Birmingham-London services
- Replace the Voyagers used on the London-Wolverhampton-Scotland services with Pendolinos.

Forthcoming Service Disruptions

Bromsgrove Station - will be closed totally for 12 days in late October 2016 to allow for the 25 kV wires to be extended from Barnt Green.

Worcester - Essential infrastructure work by Network Rail in summer 2016 will disrupt services around Worcester and its rail links to Oxford, Birmingham and Hereford.

Following a series of signal failures in recent months the Victorian manual signal boxes in Worcester to Droitwich area are being refurbished with specially made parts unique to each box. As a result of this work, line closures took place on selected dates in June and early July 2016 and will also happen from Saturday 6th to Wednesday 10th August 2016. Details of travel information are available on: www.londonmidland.com/upgrades.

Unfortunately the August dates overlap with flood prevention work around Oxford to Didcot in the Hinksey area which is subject to frequently flooding after heavy rainfall lying as it lies alongside the Thames. This work starts on Saturday 30th July and runs to Sunday 14th August including weekdays and additional bridge repair work at Hanborough on the Cotswold Line will take place between Wednesday 3rd August and Sunday 7th. Buses will replace trains between Banbury, Oxford and Didcot Parkway.

Peak time services in both directions to and from Worcester - Paddington will be diverted via Cheltenham with commensurate longer journeys.

Details of these altered services running on GWR is available on: – www.GWR.com/Hinksey.

Banbury - A reminder that there will be a nine day closure on all lines through Banbury from Saturday 30th July until Sunday 7th August 2016 inclusive for upgrade work. Bus replacement services will operate between Leamington Spa, Bicester, Banbury and Oxford.

LETTERS

From Tony Woodward, Vice Chairman, Bromsgrove Rail User Group

Re: The Orange Paper Ticket Article - March Newsletter

The latest credit-card-sized ticket example has the hallmarks of "an attempted conversion by deception". The latest orange ticket format is absolutely ridiculous and in fact, insulting. How are we expected to read the small faint 'Out' or 'Return' printed at the top right-hand corner, or the equally incoherently printed, 'departure and destination' points?

I get the impression that it is intended, that customers who are not prepared to use a personal IT facility to secure their rail journey, will either be sent blind trying to read the newly formatted

orange ticket, or will be made to look ridiculous at the ticket barrier, when unwittingly trying to use the wrong ticket portion.

Who can be expected (even with their reading glasses in place) to read, or indeed, decipher this latest printed ticket example, particularly under the stress of being urged through the ticket barriers at busy times? Twice on arrival, I have unwittingly tried to access the ticket barrier at New Street, with either my return ticket or the similarly formatted transaction receipt.

Inevitably, there have been a number of reasons given as to why the ticket format has been altered, none of which come close to justifying the change however. What was wrong with the previous ticket format and print quality? Can anyone explain this quite unbelievable move to complete illegibility? We know that ultimately, most ticket purchases will be made via a personal IT device. However, until such times when everyone is able to undertake transactions electronically, an intelligibly presented rail ticket, should remain an available option.

Editor's note: Railfuture has attempted to design a revised layout for the tangerine ticket that achieves the aim of combining the seat reservation with the ticket, which was the reason for the re-design. See <http://www.railfuture.org.uk/demo/tickets/>.

From Colin Major, Worcester on Diesel Emissions at New Street Station

In response to idling engines at Birmingham New Street and my comments on train diesel engines being built to a different Euro standard from road vehicles - hence the absence of additives.

You may be pleased to hear that the first locomotive compliant with Euro IV /USA Tier 4 (trucks are now to Euro VI) emission is a shunter is on test for Crossrail using AdBlue additive in a 1-in-10 ratio to remove NOx emissions for use in tunnels. The penalty is half the bonnet space (some one third of the loco length) is taken up with the emissions cleaning equipment.

Therefore it seems it will be some time before builders or Train Operating Companies of DMUs can afford to double the under-floor space to accommodate this emissions cleaning equipment. So a push by us at Railfuture for selective engine shutdown may will be more attractive to Train Operating Companies as it will not only help them improve air quality but also help reduce overall fuel consumption, whilst units are standing idling at platforms, giving them an added financial bonus.

From Roger King, Northfield, Birmingham

I am a little surprised that this takes up so much space. A modern truck, Euro 6 compliant, has an Ad Blue tank fitted but this does not take up much space. I do not know the cubic capacity of a Voyager engine but I would have thought it would be not much more than 10 litres or so. However, this is academic given that a retro fit is not possible.

How much of a challenge would a private operator of New Street have in complying with Health and Safety requirements on air quality? This would be an interesting issue to explore with Network Rail! I think we need to understand what the policy is on the use of extractor fans. I imagine when in use they are expensive to run so that might constrain their use.

Editor's note: *extractor fans in use have been noted at New Street. And what a row they make! Quite drowning out platform announcements.)*

RAILFUTURE WEST MIDLANDS BRANCH MATTERS

Useful web-site links

Railfuture West Midlands AGM Slides (Passenger Experience - European practices)
www.railfuture.org.uk/display1254

Transport Focus, Passenger Voice – May 2016
<http://email.passengerfocus.org.uk/passengerfocus/lz.aspx?p1=051235S811509&CC=&p=0>

Transport Focus, Passenger Voice – June 2016
<http://email.passengerfocus.org.uk/passengerfocus/lz.aspx?p1=051235S321509&CC=&p=0>

Mid-Cheshire Rail Report – Summer 2016
www.mcrua.org.uk/uploads/MCRR95.pdf

The West Midlands branch committee meets each month. Any member of the West Midlands Branch of Railfuture is welcome to attend but please let the branch secretary (steve.wright@railfuture.org.uk) know if you want to come to ensure there is enough space and to arrange to escort you into the building.

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

The next Railfuture West Midlands eNews will be issue 17 in October 2016.

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

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