



## **West Midlands Branch eNews**

**Issue 20 – January 2018**

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

- Railfuture's Yorkshire Rail Campaigner – Issue 39 – December 2017
- Railfuture's Rail User Express – September, October, November and December 2017
- Report of Railfuture West Midlands meeting with HS2 Ltd on 5 January 2018
- Severn Dee News (Shrewsbury Chester Rail Association) – Issue 84 – Spring 2017

*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 BRANCH MATTERS**

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#### **Annual General Meeting – 21 April 2018 - Special Guest - MD of West Midlands Trains**

A brief resume:

- Jan Chaudry-van der Velde with us to discuss West Midlands Trains plans and progress.
- Report on branch activities in 2017 and plans for 2018.
- Election of officers - new Chairman needed
- Media Officer sought

Tea/coffee from 10:30, buffet lunch after the meeting.

#### **Branch Meetings**

Railfuture West Midlands committee meet most months on the second Wednesday of each month, usually in an office at Birmingham Moor Street station, courtesy of Chiltern Trains. Members are welcome to attend as observers.

## FAREWELL LONDON MIDLAND TRAINS. WELCOME WEST MIDLANDS TRAINS

From 10 December 2017 for the next nine years, the local trains in the West Midlands region will be operated by West Midlands Trains (WMT) under two distinct brands; West Midlands Railways - for local services in the region plus Birmingham to Hereford and Shrewsbury - and London Northwestern for the longer distance services to Liverpool, Crewe and London Euston via Northampton. London Northwestern will be the brand used for local service from Euston to Milton Keynes and associated branch lines. Details of service improvements planned by WMT are below.

As previously reported, the holding company West Midlands Trains is a consortium of Abellio, East Japan Railway Company and Matsui, with Abellio holding 70% of the shares. West Midlands Railway services will be accountable to both the Department for Transport and West Midlands Rail, a group of local authorities from the WM region.



New livery for West Midlands Railways



New livery for London Northwestern

That for WMR has been agreed with West Midlands Rail and should be the same irrespective of future franchise holder.

Few services changes are imminent, but we should see gradual introduction of new and more trains for both Cross City Services, and additional services to Shrewsbury, Rugeley and Bromsgrove (once electrification is complete) and between Coventry and Nuneaton and Kenilworth/Leamington. As part of their franchise commitment, WMT will also be investigating the case for re-introducing passenger services on a number of defunct or freight only lines (see later item).

After some serious difficulties with staffing causing cancelled trains London Midland managed to up its game considerably and improve its reliability to an (almost) acceptable standard. Railfuture West Midlands always had good relations with LMT managers. We are especially grateful for their co-operation with our surveys of Birmingham – Hereford services. It's to be hoped that WMT will be able to maintain and improve on service reliability and continue co-operation with stakeholders like Railfuture.

**Goodbye London Midland** – writes Colin Major, Branch Secretary of Railfuture West Midlands

It is with some sadness we said goodbye to London Midland Trains. In recent years they have worked very hard with us and other stakeholders to improve services in the West Midlands from what was indeed very poor in the first few years of the franchise.

The acquisition in 2011 of new diesel trains for the Snow Hill line and the Rugeley and Hereford services led to more comfortable and reliable trains. Reflected by rising to 97.6% reliability in 2017. I would like to place on record our thanks to all London Midland staff especially to the Directors and Heads of Route who have always been willing to listen to Railfuture's concerns and more importantly to take action where needed.

We were delighted when this positive and cooperative approach was recognised in the 2017 Rail Awards when London Midland won a Golden Whistle for train operator with the most improved reliability and a Silver Whistle for most improved punctuality. We look forward to having the same close relationship with West Midlands Trains.

### **West Midlands Trains new Franchise - Colin Major**

Three committee members attended a presentation by West Midlands Trains on their plans for the new Franchise. We met the Deputy Mobilisation and Transition Director and their Operations Lead.

#### **December 2018** - Major timetable recast with the main features:

- Improve the performance of Birmingham New Street, currently the highest cause of secondary delay to train services in the whole of the UK - reduce turn-around services by up to 50%, freeing platforms to allow any late-running trains to make up time. This would help all train operating companies, including Cross Country and West Coast services
- Reduced journey times Euston-Birmingham & Crewe
- New through services between London and Birmingham International to Walsall, Stafford, Stoke, Crewe and Liverpool and between Nuneaton, Coventry and Leamington Spa
- Additional services between Shrewsbury and Birmingham, and Wolverhampton and Crewe
- New Sunday services between Shrewsbury and Northampton and Birmingham. The Operations Lead told us that he has already put this to Network Rail to claim paths for these additional services in line with the DfT Franchise.

#### **December 2019**

- Services between Nuneaton and Coventry doubled, (Monday-Friday and Sundays) after completion of the new bay platform at Coventry and the single car will be replaced with 2 car modern Class 172 trains. On Saturdays they will run three trains per hour
- Up to seven new stations in the West Midlands, subject to successful feasibility studies:
  - Camp Hill Line – Moseley, Kings Heath & Hazelwell
  - Walsall-Wolverhampton route – Darlaston, Willenhall
  - Stourbridge to Brierley Hill linking up with the Metro
  - Kidderminster – West Midlands Safari Park.

#### **From May 2020**

New Sunday timetable to run as many services as Saturdays, doubling current number of services.

Using the Japan Rail East experience, who transport 17 million passengers on a daily basis across urban, suburban and high-speed operations with expectations from the Japanese public of clean on time trains, WMT will be upgrading all cleaning facilities and providing expertise to ensure right time running of services.

In answer to a question the Operations Lead stated their aim to increase the service from New Street to Hereford from one to two trains an hour from 2020 when new rolling stock will arrive.

## **RAILFUTURE MEETS RAIL USERS AT BIRMINGHAM NEW STREET STATION**

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Passengers passing through New Street Station on Thursday 9th November 2017 would have seen representatives of Railfuture West Midlands manning a stall advertising its activities and aspirations. Following one of Railfuture's reviews of the station, Patrick Power, the Station Manager, had offered us space for a display free-of-charge, for which we are most grateful.



The stall was active from 10:00 to 18:00 and the passing public showed significant interest - the Railfuture stand was hardly ever without at least one person asking questions and hopefully receiving useful answers. Although we only signed up three new members on the day, we did make several useful contacts, including one of the Stakeholder Managers for High Speed Two Ltd (see later item) and we intend to repeat this event on a regular basis.

For this event we designed some pull-up banners as depicted which are now available for future presentations and we would like to hold similar events at other stations, subject to permission. If you would like us to help you put on a display at your local station contact the Branch Secretary ([colin.major@railfuture.org.uk](mailto:colin.major@railfuture.org.uk)).

Later in November 2017 we assisted national officers with a stand at the Warley Model Railway Show at the NEC, using the same banners, about which they were most complimentary.

## **RAILFUTURE CAMPAIGNS AND RAIL CONSULTATIONS**

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### ***Walsall-Wolverhampton***

For the last two years the branch has been campaigning with local council officials to reinstate direct passenger services between Walsall and Wolverhampton. The local and national elections forced a hiatus in these proceedings. These have now recommenced and in October the campaign team were able to review progress with the project with a Walsall transport officer.

As noted above West Midlands Trains have committed to assess the case for running passenger services between Wolverhampton and Walsall and they have undertaken a feasibility study. This together with two other recent studies indicate that there is a much better business case than previously for a service between the two centres, especially with new stations at Willenhall and Darlaston (James Bridge).

So the Branch appears now to be pushing at a half-open door. Our main concern is that a viable service is provided, that is, at least two trains an hour, preferably more, between the two stations. We have agreed to assist Walsall Council officers at future consultation events in locations close to the route. So, in the near future the branch will be asking for volunteers to help with these.

Railfuture West Midlands can take some credit for re-activating this project, with meetings with Walsall and Wolverhampton council officers over the last two years. We will now be doing our best to sustain WMT's interest in this reinstatement.

### ***Cross Country Services from 2019***

October also saw some of the branch committee at one of the DfT's pre-consultation workshops, alongside other stakeholders, including transport professionals as well as volunteer organisations. The aim of these sessions is to identify key issues and possibly some solutions for the future of the Cross Country franchise.

First the DfT provided some useful background information, including some key statistics:

- a) 57% of the current passengers travel for leisure, 28% are business travellers, whilst only 15% are commuters;
- b) Ridership has grown from 32 million journeys in 2009, when the present franchise commenced, to 38 million in 2016;
- c) Only 10% of delays encountered by Cross Country Trains are attributable to the TOC.

Transport Focus also presented relevant findings from their most recent (Nov 2015) passenger satisfaction survey of Cross Country. This showed that ticket pricing and seat availability were the most important issues to passengers.

The DfT representatives then posed the workshop participants an interesting question – should the Cross Country franchise remain broadly as it is, or should it split up so as to provide a long distance quality express service serving just main centres, with a separate section to provide the inter urban and local services, possibly in alternative franchises.

The workshop participants were somewhat divided on that issue although there was a fair degree of agreement that local services between Birmingham and Leicester and on to Stansted should not be part of a future Cross Country franchise. They were unanimous about the present problems with Cross Country Trains – trains too short, therefore insufficient seats and poor seating configuration (not enough 4-seat bays, seats not aligned to windows); expensive basic fares, albeit good deals in advance; inadequate on-board refreshments, often closed hours before trains reach the final destinations; generally, a poor travel experience.

## ***Conference on the Future of Midlands Railways***

(arranged by Westminster Energy, Environment and Transport Forum)

Railfuture West Midlands attended this conference in December 2017. It was an interesting event with lots of speakers making presentations and some 50 attendees from a variety of organisations.

The opening speaker was Carolyn Dolan (Deputy Director, Regional Strategies: North and Midlands, DfT). She proclaimed, amongst many other things, that HS2 heralded a new opportunity for connectivity in public transport. That was the signal for us to raise the issue of connectivity between New Street and Curzon Street Stations. She responded that this matter was well known and admitted that there was still time to reflect. Afterwards Railfuture approached her and she said she could have said more but was wary of going on the record. This is slightly encouraging.

Most illuminating was a presentation by Huw Rhys Lewis, Managing Director of the Urban Growth Company, the body charged with developing the area adjacent to the Birmingham HS2 Interchange by the airport. Transport for West Midlands told Railfuture that the HS2 Hybrid Bill was set in stone and that to move Curzon Street a few metres sideways would not be possible. However, that is exactly what the UGC has done in concert with HS2 to enable the proposed development surrounding the Interchange to take place. Lorna Pimlott (Sponsorship and Policy Director for HS2) confirmed 22 changes have been made to the original Bill. So it can be changed if there is the will.

The original concept for the Interchange featured a station and a ginormous car park. In the new plan the surface car parks have been replaced with multi storey ones. Quite how many and how high these will be was not made clear, nor the likely cost of parking.

Also present at the Forum was Cllr. Roger Lawrence, Leader of Wolverhampton Council and Transport Lead on the Combined Authority. Outside the formal proceedings we asked him how passengers from Wolverhampton and Sandwell & Dudley would react when they discovered that access to HS2 would necessitate a walk or tram ride from New Street to Curzon Street. His reply: "We have a cunning plan. We will go to Stafford and interchange there". (!). This might work for HS2 phase 1, since some trains going to Liverpool and the North West will go via Stafford station and some may stop there. However, come phase 2, the HS2 route will by-pass Stafford. Will Wolverhampton passengers want to connect by getting from New Street to Curzon Street?

Railfuture also raised:

- Inadequate signposting concerning local bus services at New Street Station. Emily Walsh, Associate Director, Movement and Place (interesting job title), promised to look into this. We shall be monitoring this one closely
- Rail travel between Nottingham and Birmingham where a 50-mile journey takes over 90 minutes when a quicker route already exists
- Car parking at rail stations with few, if any, spaces free after rush hour
- Re-instating the Whitacre branch line to enable rail passengers from the East Midlands to access the Interchange, International and thus Birmingham Airport, before going on to New Street. Railfuture is concerned that the changes to the Hybrid Bill appear to obliterate this option. We shall be meeting Huw Rhys Lewis in the near future to try and ensure the proposed developments preserve this route.

## **High Speed Two Ltd**

On 5<sup>th</sup> January 2018, three representatives of Railfuture West Midlands, together with Railfuture's Infrastructure Group Chairman met representatives of High Speed Two Limited. This was the first such meeting and mainly intended to get to know each other and to give them an idea of our issues and concerns.

HS2 Ltd gave us an outline of their activities to date and planned for the rest of this year and next. The issues we raised mainly concerned connectivity with HS2, either for passengers – to Curzon Street, to Birmingham Interchange – or between HS2 and the existing network – in the Birmingham area and the future of Handsacre Junction after stage 2.

## **LOCAL NEWS**

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### ***Pilot Study of Stour Valley and Chase Line Stations***

Railfuture West Midlands has been asked to provide details of pilot studies being undertaken by the West Midlands Stations Alliance (WMSA). The WMSA, consisting of West Midlands Rail, Network Rail and train operating companies, is in the process of reviewing the 'Stour Valley' and 'Chase line' stations – specifically:

<b>Stour Valley stations</b>	<b>Chase line stations</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Smethwick Rolfe Street</li><li>• Smethwick Galton Bridge</li><li>• Sandwell &amp; Dudley</li><li>• Dudley Port</li><li>• Tipton</li><li>• Coseley</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Bloxwich</li><li>• Bloxwich North</li><li>• Landywood</li><li>• Cannock</li><li>• Hednesford</li><li>• Rugeley Town</li><li>• Rugeley Trent Valley</li></ul>

The Alliance has commissioned consultants Weston Williamson and Partners (WW&P) to undertake an assessment of the above stations. They are seeking the views of local residents, community groups and station users regarding station facilities, priorities for station improvements, and how the station could better serve the wider community.

Members of Railfuture are welcome to contribute their views, particularly if they use one or more of the above stations. The link to the online survey is below and the responses will only be retained for the purposes of the pilot study.

<https://www.surveymonkey.co.uk/r/WMRStationSurvey>

If you have any questions or wish to discuss this further, then you can contact Adam James, Planning Officer – Strategic Policy and Transportation, Sandwell Borough Council - [adam\\_james@sandwell.gov.uk](mailto:adam_james@sandwell.gov.uk) or telephone him on 0121 569 4219.

### ***Very Light Rail Plans for Coventry***

Plans for a very light rail service to provide better connections in Coventry moved a step closer as researchers from WMG, at the University of Warwick, unveiled early vehicle concept designs to representatives from Coventry City Council. This will use a state-of-the-art rail system which is claimed to be cheaper, quieter and more environmentally friendly than anything currently available.

The very light rail project seeks to significantly reduce costs, by developing a supply chain for the manufacture of lightweight rail vehicles and tracks – enabling local authorities to install new community rail services and reduce congestion more easily.



These small rail vehicles will have the capability to operate autonomously without a driver, which will reduce the operational costs and enable more frequent services for passengers. The vehicles will be battery operated using rapid charging solutions and therefore will not require overhead cables.

The project is funded by the Government's Local Growth Fund through the Coventry and Warwickshire Local Enterprise Partnership and West Midlands Combined Authority Devolution Deal (subject to the business case).

It is planned that the first demonstrator vehicle will be assembled by Spring 2019 and then tested at the soon to be built Hub to Home Transport Innovation Centre in Dudley.

WMG, and Warwick's School of Engineering, are also developing a novel track solution for the system, which will be lightweight, low cost and easily embedded into roads.

## ***Stratford-on-Avon Area Transport Strategy*** - Peter Rowland & Colin Major

A draft strategy was released in December, combining both Warwickshire County Council's and Stratford-on-Avon District Council's general principles for development of the network for the town, its immediate environs and key links.

This is not very forthcoming about rail and is mainly concerned with beefing up local services to Birmingham (especially via Solihull) and to Leamington for connection to London. No reference is made to a widespread local practice of driving to Warwick Parkway and making use of a much more frequent service from there. (Perhaps this is because Warwick Parkway is outside the district?)

The key rail-related items are:

- The District Council is commissioning a study into the feasibility of introducing a rail shuttle service between Honeybourne Station and the Garden Village new settlement and Long Marston Airfield.
- Rail service improvements that could benefit current and potential passengers include:
  - Additional peak time direct services between Stratford-upon-Avon and Solihull. This would be particularly beneficial in light of the planned expansion of Solihull town centre, part of the UK Central development.
  - Additional direct services to and from Warwick and Leamington Spa, and improved onward connectivity to Coventry and Birmingham Airport. Direct services to Warwick and Leamington Spa currently operate approximately every 1.5 to two hours during the day. There are, however, more frequent bus services between Stratford, Warwick and Leamington Spa that offer competitive journey times.
  - Improving station facilities and accessibility of rail services on the North Warwickshire Line.

Reference is made to Warwickshire Council's lack of enthusiasm to re-open Stratford – Honeybourne. There is an attempt to justify this view by referring to lack of capacity on the Cotswold main line, specifically the continued existence of single line sections.

### ***Kenilworth rail station update*** – 25th October 2017

Work is ongoing at the site of the forthcoming Kenilworth Rail Station. Images are available illustrating the completed brickwork on the lift and telecoms rooms, the roof-work on the main station building, platform works with tactile and copper slabs, and progress with the new bridge and stairs sections.

Click to view slideshow:

<https://kenilworthstation.wordpress.com/2017/10/25/kenilworth-rail-station-update-25th-october-2017/#gallery-594-1-slideshow>

### ***News from East Midlands - Derby upgrade***

Dates for a major £200million upgrade at Derby, that should improve journeys to and through the station, have been confirmed, with plans being put in place to keep Derby moving. Network Rail and partners CrossCountry and East Midlands Trains, announced that the track and signalling in the

area around Derby station area will be enhanced during 79-days of carefully planned engineering, starting on 22 July 2018.

While the station itself was modernised in 2013, the existing track layout has not been improved since it was installed nearly 50 years ago and is nearing the end of its operational life. The signalling has not been upgraded since it was installed in the 1960s. Regular maintenance has kept the station performing well for the past five decades, but as track and signalling work together to manage train movements efficiently, they are both being replaced and upgraded at the same time.

The historic layout of the railway has become inefficient as use of the railway has grown and now often results in lengthy waiting times outside the station, with the existing bottlenecks restricting the movements that trains can make and the platforms they can access. With passenger numbers having doubled in the past 20 years and demand expected to continue to grow, the Derby 2018 project is a once-in-a-generation opportunity to improve a vital part of the rail network which carries trains bound for as far afield as Aberdeen to the north and Plymouth to the south, as well as services right across the Midlands.

The 79-days of engineering will require removal of track and signalling so there will be significant changes to the timetable between 22 July 2018 and 7 October 2018. The full, detailed timetable will be published shortly but will see East Midlands Trains services to London, Crewe, Matlock and Nottingham affected at various points of the work. CrossCountry services will divert around Derby, with a bus replacement service from Derby to connecting stations.

CrossCountry's Managing Director, Andy Cooper, said:

These works will mean a long period of disruption for many CrossCountry customers, which is something we'd always try to avoid. However, the journey time improvement they deliver will get our customers to the north east quicker than ever before

We will do all we can to minimise the impact on customers travelling to and from Derby, and others with extended journey times caused by diversions around the station, including clear and frequent real time communication during the period of disruption and publishing revised timetables in good time. While there will inevitably be some inconvenience for many, for which we apologise, we are working with our industry partners to ensure this massive project will deliver real benefits for our passengers.

## **RAILFUTURE WANTS TO HEAR FROM YOU**

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Railfuture West Midlands secretary Colin Major writes...

You may have seen my truncated appearance on Midlands Today on Tuesday 2nd January 2018 talking about rail fare increases and asked yourself what else is Railfuture West Midlands doing for rail users?

Whilst this sort of high visibility campaigning brings Railfuture to a wider audience we have found that by being accepted by the Department for Transport, West Midlands Combined Authority,

Transport for West Midlands (TfWM), the Office of Mayor for West Midlands, the Station Manager at New Street and local authorities, as an informed and, on occasions, critical friend offering constructive advice, our views are always considered and often implemented.

This happened with the new West Midlands Trains franchise where we put a forceful case for the franchise to recognise the changes in work and leisure patterns required increased services on the weekends and earlier in the morning and later at night. That passenger numbers have grown by 50% since London Midland, there was an urgent need for longer trains with Wi-Fi and air-conditioning. All of these are now part of the new West Midlands Trains franchise.

Railfuture has also had input into the Worcestershire County Council Rail Investment Strategy and Local Transport Plan, were invited by the DfT to pre-consultation meetings about the future for Cross Country Trains, and are currently are being consulted by the DfT on the services for the replacement franchise for Great Western Railway.

We hold bi-monthly meetings with West Midlands Rail/TfWM, another with the New Street Station Manager and quarterly meetings with Virgin West Coast. One of our committee members is Cross Country Trains Liaison Officer for Railfuture's Passenger Group.

However, we are anxious to hear:

- What you as a rail user, and hopefully member, would like us to concentrate our efforts on?
- What events and where you would attend if we were to arrange them?
- Would it be useful to hold Committee meetings in your locality?

Please respond to Railfuture West Midlands Secretary, Colin Major [colin.major@railfuture.org.uk](mailto:colin.major@railfuture.org.uk)

**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](mailto:steve.wright@railfuture.org.uk).**

The next Railfuture West Midlands eNews will be issue 21 in March 2018.

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