



West Midlands Branch eNews

Issue 8 - April 2015

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

- Rail User Express, March 2015
- Railfuture West Midlands branch response to the East Midland Route Study

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 Annual General Meeting - 18th April 2015, 10:30

DON'T FORGET our branch Annual General Meeting this Saturday, April 18th 2015, starting at 10:30 am. It is being held in the Margaret Rowland Room at Carrs Lane Church Centre, Carrs Lane, Birmingham B4 7SX.

OTHER BRANCH MATTERS

RAILFUTURE SUMMER CONFERENCE NEWARK 20th JUNE - EARLY BIRD OFFER ENDS SOON

Have you booked your place at this year's Summer Conference? Act now and pay only £25 instead of the full price of £30 – see Railfuture website & click on events then conferences.

Held in the Georgian ballroom of The Town Hall, Newark is accessible from the West Midlands by EMT services via Leicester or Nottingham.

The overall theme of the conference is "Enhancing capacity in the East Midlands"

Speakers confirmed so far include:-

- David Horne - Virgin Trains East Coast
- Andy Castledine - Stagecoach Rail;
- Graham Botham - Network Rail Principal Strategic Planner LNE & EM
- Steve Barber - Broxtowe Borough Council talking about Nottingham Trams
- Roger Blaney - how the enhanced service from May on the Nottingham – Newark – Lincoln line was achieved;
- Great Central Railway representative - bridging the Midland Main line.
- Speakers from East Midlands Trains and Nottinghamshire County Council may also be added.

There will be a question and answer session after each presentation and the conference fee includes a welcome drink and buffet lunch.

Membership

Have you asked your friends to join Railfuture yet? If we all could get just one new member each then, across the whole country, we could get Railfuture's finances into a much healthier state. Even better if we can get some younger new members (under 60!).

General Election

In some parliamentary constituencies some candidates are campaigning on rail issues. Now's the time for you to contact your prospective candidates to seek/influence their views on railway development in your locality.

National Conferences 2016

We've been asked to host one of Railfuture's national conferences in 2016 and we've agreed to hold the one on 12th November 2016. No other details as yet but you will be given lots of advance notice.

LOCAL CAMPAIGNS

Centro

A small group of us met representatives of Centro, including Council Roger Horton, on 1 April 2015 and discussed a wide range of topics:

1 Proposed rail link from Dudley to Dudley Port

This scheme is still a long way off but Warwick Manufacturing Group based at Warwick University is intending to set up a research centre at the bottom of the Castle adjacent to the current redundant railway. Some funding from the LEP is available but request has been made to the European Union for £15-£20 million grant. It will be a light rail link but assurance has been given that it will not preclude heavy rail developments and in any case approval is needed from Network Rail who still own the trackbed.

2 Black Country Light Rail Transit Review

This is a separate project looking at possible links to New Cross Hospital in Wolverhampton and to Walsall Manor Hospital, as well as seeing if the Walsall-Wolverhampton service could be reinstated using either tram or heavy rail given capacity constraints at Wolverhampton. A review is expected to be completed by July. We have requested attendance at any future forums, one of which is to be held in May this year.

3 Ticket Office closures

We raised yet again our concern at ticket offices being closed on the southern section of the Cross City Line, particularly at Kings Norton, Northfield and Selly Oak. It was agreed that we should advise London Midland Trains direct by recording the date and time and any issues caused by the closure but send a copy of each incident to CENTRO.

If any member notices that a ticket office is closed at a time when it is expected to be open, please note the date and time and send to the Branch Secretary - steve.wright@railfuture.org.uk.

4 Rail Devolution

The DfT is still considering this matter but the Secretary of State has agreed a “memorandum of understanding”. It is hoped that the first phase of devolution will take place in 2017 when London Midland Trains’ franchise ends. It is intended when the franchise is let to the successful bidder there will be a West Midlands Business Unit and a West Coast Business Unit so the franchisee will still retain West Coast services until 2024.

5 Midlands Connect

Centro is working with partners on an economic impact assessment on improving transport links between the East and West Midlands given that rail journey times are very slow between Birmingham and Nottingham/ Leicester. However this process also includes highway options.

6 Freight on Chase line

Centro were under the impression that all the Chase line was being cleared for W10, not just south from Cannock. This is because Pentalver have only asked for access from the south, but there are obvious advantages in having the full line cleared for diversionary purposes.

7 Smethwick Galton Bridge Interchange

It is not very apparent to passengers this is an important interchange from Snow Hill lines to Birmingham New Street and north to Wolverhampton and Liverpool. We consider that it should be part of audio announcement on trains rather than relying on train manager announcements and Centro is to raise this with LMT and ask them to reinstate route diagrams on their trains showing interchange points.

8 Freight Policy

Centro would like to see more freight terminals on the west side of Birmingham but the Integrated Transport Authority is not the relevant planning authority in this area.

9 Cross City line trains

There are to be on-train audio announcements by 1 January 2020 to comply with disability legislation which must include the provision of disabled toilets.

Network Rail

A small group of us also met a representative of Network Rail recently (March 26th) for a presentation and discussion on the second phase of New Street Station redevelopment:

- Progress is now going as re-scheduled and the date for opening is confirmed as September 2015 but the actual date will be determined by the completion date of Grand Central.
- The atrium roof is now in place and most of the remaining work is on the shop areas, the east end waiting areas and the outside cladding.
- There will not be any more ticket offices but there will be more machines.

- We asked about future toilet facilities and were advised that there will be additional ones at the east end, but only inside the barriers (rail-side).
- In relation to the waiting areas, existing as well as the new ones, NR agreed to look at the location of departure screens as the present arrangements mean that passengers are not always facing them. NR would welcome our input regarding signage.
- Pre visits to the site are not planned this time as the site is too complicated to address safety issues for visitors other than official ones.
- It is intended to employ the use of "volunteers" once the station is completed to assist and direct passengers, both for the period immediately after opening but also long-term. Volunteers will receive training and necessary equipment. Any member interested in doing this should contact Network Rail direct.

CONSULTATIONS

Penalty Fares Appeals Process

The Department for Transport issued a paper recently consulting on issues relating to appeals to penalty fares for passengers with the wrong ticket or without one.

We have sent our views which mainly support the appeals processes proposed especially the need for the same system to be in place across the network, including TfL and for the DfT to undertake an annual audit of cases to ensure fairness and equality of treatment.

More importantly we urged the DfT to instigate a more flexible approach to the application of penalties. For instance, allow a passenger to 'top-up' their existing ticket, that is, where a ticket is invalid, the cost of the invalid ticket to be deducted from the cost of the new ticket.

East Midlands Route Study

Network Rail has published consultative plans for the East Midlands area looking forward to 2023 and 2043. Details are available at:

<http://www.networkrail.co.uk/long-term-planning-process/east-midlands-route-study/>

This contains many interesting ideas with implication for the West Midlands also, to which we have responded (see attachment). Our main concern is that improvements on the East Midlands do not cause adverse effects on Cross Country and West Midlands specific services.

Closing date for consultation is April 28th. So if you have any views get them to them direct as soon as possible.

Wales Route Study

Similarly, Network Rail has published plans for Wales. Details of this can be found at:

<http://www.networkrail.co.uk/long-term-planning-process/welsh-route-study/>

We are at present formulating a branch perspective on the proposals. Any views from individual members which we can incorporate would be most welcome.

West Midlands & Chilterns Route Study

This is one that Network rail are preparing at present. It is anticipated that it will be published for consultation in August this year. We'll keep you informed about this.

LETTERS

Diversionsary Route via Stratford?

The recent serious landslip at Harbury on the Leamington - Banbury line, which reopened this week having been closed since 31st. January, has highlighted the fact that there is no suitable alternative route and that buses have to be substituted. In addition to the Chiltern and Cross Country passenger services, the line carries heavy freight traffic, which has had to be diverted over circuitous routes that are already heavily congested. This is the second time recently that the Beeching folly of closing duplicate main lines has been highlighted, with the closure at Dawlish and now the Harbury landslip.

The obvious answer is to reopen the six mile Stratford-upon-Avon - Long Marston railway line, where it would join the freight line to the Cotswold line at Honeybourne. The route is protected, including the link to the Cotswold line facing towards Moreton-in-Marsh, for which passive provision was made for a junction, in the recent redoubling. The present junction faces towards Evesham. The whole of the Stratford-upon-Avon - Honeybourne - Cheltenham line was closed in 1976, and would have provided an alternative and diversionsary route from Birmingham to both Oxford and Cheltenham, the latter avoiding the 1 in 37 Lickey incline. The decision to close the line followed a serious derailment at Winchcombe and has been regretted ever since.

The Stratford - Honeybourne section was the subject of a £ 70,000 Grip 3 Business study by Arup, completed in 2012, and financed by Stratford-on-Avon District Council (as lead), Network Rail, Centro, two rail passenger operating companies, First Great Western and London Midland, three County Councils, Worcestershire, Oxfordshire and Gloucestershire, St. Modwen Properties (owner of the former M.O.D. site at Long Marston) and five rail promotion groups. Arup considered that the reinstatement was perfectly feasible, at a cost of £ 60 million for mainly single line, and would be viable with a cost benefit ratio of 2.03. Two hourly services were proposed, one from Stratford-upon-Avon to Moreton-in-Marsh and Oxford (possibly starting from Birmingham and extended to Reading (for Heathrow and Gatwick links) and London Paddington (for the Heathrow Express) and second from Leamington Spa to Stratford-upon-Avon, Honeybourne, Evesham and Worcester. A new two level station, Worcestershire Parkway, is to be constructed at the intersection of the Cotswold and Birmingham-Cheltenham lines, to be opened in 2017. This would be of considerable benefit to Stratford as passengers for Cheltenham, Bristol, the West of England and South Wales now have to travel 25 miles north to Birmingham to go south, with an inconvenient change of stations from Moor Street to New Street. Passengers for Worcester also have to travel via Birmingham. At Honeybourne connection will eventually be made with the Gloucestershire and Warwickshire Steam Railway, for which passive provision has been made for an additional platform.

Until 1962 Stratford had direct services to the West of England (the daily ' Cornishman') and to South Wales. A Leamington - Stratford - Gloucester replaced the main line services, which failed to

connect with the diverted 'Cornishman' at Gloucester, so only lasted until 1968, while local services to Evesham and Worcester, were withdrawn in 1969.

Stratford-upon-Avon, as one of the world's top tourist destinations, with some 5 1/2 million tourists visiting the area each year, apart from its Birmingham service, is poorly served by rail, which was highlighted in a letter from an American tourist, published in the Stratford Herald, in October 2013. The tourist Cory Rickner, from Oklahoma, described the frustration of using Stratford's rail services and criticised the fact that the network of railways in England had somehow omitted Stratford from its planning. Only 6% of visitors travel to Stratford by rail, as compared with an average of 13% to comparable destinations. Surely it should be realised that as an increasing number of tourists wish to visit Stratford, not to mention the large housing developments, this will only result in more and more traffic congestion in the town including the inevitable gridlock and air pollution. I cannot believe that Chiltern Railways are planning to drastically reduce the number of through rail services from Stratford to London Marylebone from September 2015, with virtually none at all at week ends, due to capacity problems with the introduction of the new Oxford - Bicester - Marylebone service. Passengers should not be expected to change at Leamington, which is just not acceptable, particularly tourists with heavy luggage and the disabled.

Until 2004, when Chiltern took over the London service, Stratford had a through service to Oxford, Reading and Paddington, which should be reinstated with the reopening of the Stratford - Honeybourne line, a route which is some 13 miles shorter than that via Leamington, as well as a local service to Worcester, as proposed by Arup. I would envisage a Park and Ride station being opened at Long Marston, serving not only the new development at Meon Vale (former M.O.D. site), with plans already approved for 1,180 homes, a further 550, for which planning application is pending and rail companies Motorail and Vivarail, but also a wide area south of Stratford and the river Avon. In addition a major housing development is proposed on the adjacent Long Marston Airfield, of up to 3,500 houses, with the developers offering a large contribution towards reopening the railway and a Grip 4 study.

Michael Brockington, Welford-on-Avon

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

Chiltern – EWR Update (from Thames Valley)

The Oxford – Bicester – London project remains within budget and it is still likely it will achieve the 6th September 2015 public opening date. Progress on the ground is good and momentum was maintained during January. With Oxford Parkway station building now water tight, construction of the lift shafts has begun. Islip station foundations have been poured while at Bicester Town the new station building steelwork is taking shape.

More details of the service are available:

- There will be no ticket offices at new stations but there will be brand new technology for purchasing tickets
- Oxford Parkway will have ticket gates but not Islip or Bicester Town
- Ticket easement will be in place enabling Islip tickets to be used to Oxford Parkway if a train is not stopping at Islip

- Oxford Parkway & Bicester Town platforms will accommodate a maximum length of 9-car trains with 8-cars at Islip although initial services will start with 3 - 4 cars.

On the original plans Oxford re-signalling Phase 1 needed to have been completed before Chiltern could extend services from Oxford Parkway to Oxford. Network Rail originally programmed this for commissioning in February 2016, but recently confirmed it will be delayed. However, negotiations are in hand to give Chiltern Trains access to Oxford station from March 2016 anyway despite the delay. A viable proposal has been proposed that would be a blend of new and old track layouts, changes to the timetable planning rules, and a lot of detailed train planning and performance mitigation work.

Chiltern would ideally like to start EWR phase 2 services to Milton Keynes from 2017, but NR want to do all the electrification work first, therefore delaying the reopening to 2019. In addition, a Transport and Works Act Order is needed to cover locations where the Claydon - Bletchley trackbed deviates from that authorised in the 19th century original Act of Parliament!

Cotswold Line (from Thames Valley)

It now seems likely the doubling of the whole line will be put forward for the next control period (CP6). It is clear that slab tracking Campden Tunnel for greater clearance should now be lobbied for following the Harbury landslide.

Worcester Parkway

Work is to commence in the spring, and the new station will have platforms on the NE-SW lines from day one. Local politicians have expressed support for limited stop services to Oxford.

Banbury Resignalling (from Thames Valley)

Work has now started on the 22-month Banbury re-signalling scheme at a cost of £40m by Siemens Rail Automation. A major benefit is to be a new through 'up' platform 4. A new maintenance depot will be built on the site of the former steam shed. There will be improved headways to Aynho Junction and re-control of Leamington Spa; other work includes faster turnouts to the north of the station, and a new crossover for the stone depot.

Watford Area Renewals Programme (as at 10 April 2015)

The sixth closure as part of Network Rail's £81m Watford Area Renewals Programme took place over the Easter Bank Holiday weekend. Engineers worked continuously over the four days to complete the replacement and installation of Orphanage Road Bridge to the south of Watford Junction station.

Work was also carried out to rewire the junction to the south of the station to help trains cross over in both directions, helping in times of disruption. Repairs were made to decaying masonry in the tunnel at the north of the station, which was blasted with concrete at high pressure. The railway was handed back at 0320 on Tuesday 7 April, 40 minutes ahead of schedule. There is a time-lapse video of all the work carried out over Easter on <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=D3FKxxiJ67w>

London Midland's rail-replacement bus operation over the weekend was a success, with low passenger numbers and no major issues to report on both the West Coast main line and the Abbey Line.

As the two closures in February were rescheduled, there is a further closure planned for later this year or early next year. Network Rail is yet to confirm the dates.

The next Railfuture West Midlands eNews will be issue 9 in May 2015.

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

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