



West Midlands Branch eNews

Issue 11 - September 2015

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

- Railfuture's Rail User Express bulletin, August 2015 and September 2015 issues
- Transport Focus: London Midland rail franchise passenger research
- Virgin Trans Stakeholder Newsletter Q3 2015
- Arriva Cross County Trains newsletter

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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Conferences in November 2015 and November 2016
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RAILFUTURE CONFERENCES

November 2015 - Bristol

Railfuture autumn conference and RUG awards ceremony takes place at the Mercure Bristol Holland House Hotel, Redcliff Hill, Bristol BS1 6SQ, on Saturday 7th November from 10:45 to 17:00. Guest speakers include Matthew Golton from First Great Western, James White of the West of England Local Enterprise Partnership, James Freeman of FirstBus (on the subject of bus/rail integration), Charlotte Leslie the MP for Bristol NW and John Parry of Parry People Movers. There will also be presentations focussing on specific rail campaigns.

The conference remains open for bookings, and the fee is £30 (includes lunch). For further information and a booking form, see: www.railfuture.org.uk/conferences for National Conference Autumn 2015.

November 2016 - Birmingham

As previously announced Railfuture West Midlands will be hosting the Autumn 2016 conference in Birmingham (12th November 2016). Toby Rackcliff of West Midlands Integrated Transport Authority has already agreed to be one of the guest speakers. Senior representatives from local commerce, government and railways are being sought.

LOCAL CAMPAIGNS

At the last Railfuture West Midlands committee meetings campaign priorities were decided. There are three priorities for developing existing services and three for re-openings.

Improvements to Existing Services

1. Improve Sunday Services on local trains by starting earlier. Early enough to enable passengers to use local trains to connect into earliest long-distance trains and also to access shops and other facilities open early in city and town centres.
2. Improve frequency of local train Sunday services throughout the day – generally by doubling the existing frequency.
3. Introduce very early morning services, seven days a week, to Birmingham International to enable airport staff to arrive in time for early shifts and for air passengers to arrive in time to check-in for early morning flights.

Service Reinstatement and Network Enhancements

1. Wolverhampton to Walsall:

The service, which ceased in 2008, would be significantly faster than the present bus service or even by car, especially at peak times. Initially this could be a non-stop shuttle service between the two centres, but Railfuture would like to see calls at intermediate stations, such as Willenhall, and possibly could be extended north of Walsall. The infrastructure (apart from new stations) already exists and the only additional requirement would be rolling stock and train crews.

2. Stourbridge Junction to Walsall:

With intermediate stations at key locations such as Brierley Hill, Dudley and Wednesbury and platforms at Dudley Port to allow connection into Birmingham/Wolverhampton trains and beyond. This would provide faster inter-urban connectivity than possible at present and allow direct access to the national rail network for communities without it. The passenger service could be either heavy rail trains or rapid transit units but the rail infrastructure must be capable of carrying heavy freight trains to provide an alternative freight route into and through the West Midlands from Wales and the South West. We would like to see this line electrified consistent with the rest of the West Midlands rail network.

3 Birmingham to Kings Norton, via the Camp Hill line:

With intermediate stations at Moseley, Kings Heath and other locations. This would relieve heavy traffic on the Moseley Road and provide new travel opportunities. To avoid over-loading New Street station this proposal would require a new Bordesley south west chord to connect the Camp Hill line to Moor Street and re-opening

Railfuture will be meeting representatives of the West Midlands Integrated Transport Authority and Centro in late 2015 to discuss these and other options. Then we will be discussing possible developments with London Midland Trains, particularly in the context of the franchise renewal/replacement for 2017.

LOCAL NEWS

Birmingham New Street phase 2

The rebuilt concourse at Birmingham New Street station is now fully open! And pretty impressive it is too. Masses of space, loads of seats and lots of places to eat/drink. More lifts and stairs. Just one little problem - if you arrive at the 'A' end of any of platforms 6-12 and want to go to 1-5 you have to go through two sets of ticket barriers, or use the 'B'-end escalators or lift. Not good if you have a tight connection!



The Railfuture West Midlands committee plans to give it a more detailed look-over on October 14th, just before our next meeting. In the meantime, we'd love to hear your views before the end of October and we'll print a selection of them next time.

Nuckle Project

Warwickshire County Council is hoping to open both Coventry Arena and Bermuda Park Stations on October 19th. More NR signalling issues have led to this further delay.

Incidentally, the original proposals suggested the Arena station would accommodate six-car trains, but somewhere along the line this has got watered down to three cars. Rather irrelevant at this stage as it looks as we are stuck with the single-car unit until the new franchise is awarded. Then there is the question as to whether Kenilworth will have any trains at all, as to date Cross Country Trains are not interested in calling there!

Whitlocks End Car Park Extension

This has had to be delayed due to green belt issues (details not yet known). Cotswold Line Promotion Group – “double whammy” of fare rises and time restrictions Cotswold Line rail users have been expressing their anger at First Great Western’s new “Fare Deal” which has resulted in increases of up to 90% in off-peak walk-on fares coupled with fresh restrictions on times of travel. For details see article in Rail User Express, 23rd August 2015, which can be found at <http://www.railfuture.org.uk/rail+user+express>.

Tyseley Open Day

Not exactly a railway development but of interest non-the-less, Tyseley Locomotive Works has its open days on October 24/25th. Visitors will include City Of Truro and King George V and various on-site activities. For details see www.tyseleylocoworks.co.uk/tlw/.

TRANSPORT FOCUS COMMENTS ON WEST MIDLANDS FRANCHISE

The current West Midlands franchise is due to end in April 2016. It is anticipated that the Department for Transport will negotiate a short-term contract (direct award) with current operator London Midland. This will allow it to continue running services until October 2017.

TF carried out research with London Midland passengers to find out what they think about their services and what they would like to see improved over the next couple of years. You can download their research conclusions at <http://www.transportfocus.org.uk/research/publications/london-midland-rail-franchise-passenger-research> – from TF’s Passenger Voice

WORCESTERSHIRE PARKWAY SECURES PLANNING CONSENT

Planning permission has been granted for a new Worcestershire Parkway station. Groundwork for the £22m project, which will link the Cotswold and Birmingham to Bristol rail lines, is scheduled to begin by the spring of 2016 with the station set to open in autumn 2017.

The new station will be built in the triangle of land formed by the intersection of the Worcester to London (North Cotswold) and Birmingham to Bristol railway lines and the B4084 near Norton, close to Junction 7 of the M5. It will have a single platform initially on the Worcester to London line and two platforms on the Birmingham to Bristol line, together with a new station building including a booking office, toilets and shop. A 500-space car park will be provided along with bus stops, a taxi rank and passenger drop-off area – Transport Briefing.

NATIONAL NEWS

NETWORK RAIL “SYSTEM OPERATION”

The Office of Rail and Road (ORR) has launched a consultation on system operation - how Network Rail operates the rail network and how decisions by Network Rail and others are made about the use of the system and its expansion over time. It covers a range of functions from long term planning, timetabling and allocation of route access, to day to day running activities such as signalling.

ORR is hosting a workshop on this topic from 10:00 to 15:00 at ORR's offices, 1 Kemble St, London WC2B 4AN jointly with Network Rail on Friday 2 October. This consultation closes on Friday 16 October 2015.

To read the full consultation paper and to get in touch with the team, go to <http://orr.gov.uk/consultations/policy-consultations/open-consultations/system-operation-consultation>.

DELAY REPAYMENTS

Until recently, you were only entitled to compensation and refunds in National Rail vouchers, which meant that you could only spend them when making a further journey. In July the rules changed - and you can now ask for monetary compensation if you were delayed. The key word though is “ask” - it is down to you to make it clear that you want money rather than vouchers when you make your claim (see attached Rail User Express, 2015-8, 23 Aug for more details).

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

(Contains extracts/précises from Rail User Express July 2015)

FIRE SALE OF RAILWAY ASSETS – Be warned ... and get ready to take action!

Network Rail has hired bankers at Rothschild to look into selling a commercial property portfolio that could be worth over £1bn. With rising costs and engineering issues meaning that £38.5bn of upgrades are being scaled back or delayed, exasperated officials and ministers at the Dept. for Transport and Treasury are keen on Network Rail refocusing on its core engineering work. They have been devising plans to let the private sector manage or take over aspects of its existing work, including telecommunications and the power supply to the network.

With Rothschild's appointment, bankers will look at a number of options for how, as an industry source put it, Network Rail can “maximise value” from its commercial property – probably in the form of a number of sales.

Network Rail is landlord to more than 7,000 small and medium-sized businesses. They range from scrap metal merchants to nightclubs, are largely found beneath railway arches, and collectively paid Network Rail £266m in rent last year. It is thought that railway land and properties no longer required for operational use might also be included in the potential sale. However, the portfolio does not include the stations, which the Government is also considering selling or outsourcing.

A valuation of this bag of properties and land is difficult, given that their locations, condition and suitability for sale vary widely. For example, a rail source said that regulators would probably block the sale of any disused land near lines that could one day be brought back into operational use. However, land and property that could be sold should bring in at least £1bn – originally from The Independent, 26 June 2015.

ROLLING STOCK PERSPECTIVE: MOVING BRITAIN AHEAD

The Department for Transport (DfT) has set out its perspective on rolling stock and their aspirations for the sector as a whole. You can view the document at:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/rolling-stock-perspective-moving-britain-ahead>.

With regard to passenger rolling stock, the aim is to:- make the DfT act as better client of rolling stock for passengers and taxpayers; drive improvements in terms of passenger quality; and offer improved information and transparency for stakeholders.

The publication is an important first step and will be the basis for dialogue between passengers, representative groups, industry and the Department in this policy area. The DfT intends to update the publication annually based on: feedback from stakeholders, the Government's latest policy position, and market and technological developments. If the Government's policy position evolves, the Department will be open and transparent about it. They will feed comments on the document into their annual update.

If you have views on the document and its annexes, please send them to the Department's rolling stock team at rollingstockperspective@railexecutive.gsi.gov.uk.

NEW GUIDE WILL DEMYSTIFY RAIL FRANCHISING FOR PASSENGERS

The Campaign for Better Transport and the Department for Transport (DfT) have put together an invaluable guide - the Passengers Guide to Franchising, which is a new, simple and effective guide to rail franchising answering some of the questions most frequently asked by passengers and which will help to explain how the franchising process works. You can download the guide from <http://www.bettertransport.org.uk/media/07-July-2015-passenger-guide-to-franchising>.

The next Railfuture West Midlands eNews will be issue 12 in October 2015.

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

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