



West Midlands Branch eNews

Issue 13 - December 2015

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

- Railfuture's Rail User Express bulletin, November 2015 issue

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 and Campaigns Update
- Railfuture West Midlands Branch Matters
- National News
- Out-of-Area News – West Coast Rail 250 meeting

LOCAL NEWS AND CAMPAIGNS UPDATE

London Midland Trains Direct Award

The government has agreed a new deal for rail services in the West Midlands. This will include:

- Two extra evening services every weekday from London to the Trent Valley, providing an additional 2,300 seats from Euston each week;
- Earlier services to central Birmingham on Sunday mornings from surrounding towns including Rugby and Lichfield, with new Sunday services from Longbridge, Dorridge and Whitlocks End. This will provide more than 900 extra seats every week, and benefit shoppers, workers and local businesses;
- Free WiFi on long-distance services between London Euston, Northampton, Birmingham, Crewe, Stoke and Liverpool, with the aim that this will be free on all services when the next fully-competed franchise starts;
- New and upgraded ticket machines at selected stations, with new 'click and collect' and contactless payment options;
- Extra car parking spaces at Tamworth (and also at Watford and Hemel Hempstead) (Interesting as no LMT trains actually serve Tamworth! - ed)

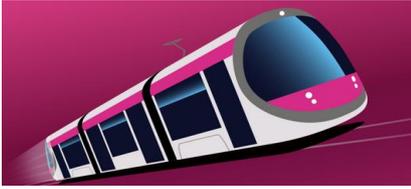
Under the contract, which will deliver improved connections, a better customer experience and set tough new targets, it is expected that passengers will benefit from £13 million worth of improvements.

London Midland will continue to run services between London, the West Midlands and the north-west of England until October 2017.

Birmingham New Street Station

It's official! The Queen said so (sort-of), when she formally opened the refurbished station on November 19th. She took time to meet many of the construction workers and also a selection of train services managers and staff. (Note: Chiltern Trains only got local resident David Cameron to open their new station at Oxford Parkway)

Midland Metro Schemes



It seems that the Chancellor of the Exchequer has looked favourably upon the West Midlands and granted us some millions to build **Midland Metro** extensions to Digbeth (and possibly onwards to the Airport) and to Brierley Hill. Not our top priorities but, hey, don't look a gift horse... Or is it a Trojan horse?

Meanwhile the first stage of the £128m Metro extension in Birmingham, to Bull Street, opened on 6th December 2015 as promised. It was the first time a tram had run in central Birmingham since 1953 (the former terminus at Snow Hill is not classed as "Central" Birmingham). The photo below, taken by Ian Brown, Railfuture's director of Policy, who is also involved in light rail, shows the new CAF trams leaving Bull Street for Wolverhampton. It was completely full!



Work will pause in the busy time up to Christmas and the New Year. A walk round the city centre shows that all the track and most (if not all) of the OLE is in place. Tram stops are still under construction or being kitted-out. The full length of the initial extension (as far as New Street Station) will open in 2016 (hopefully before Easter - ed). Latest info can be found on the Centro web-site www.centro.org.uk/transport/metro/ and also the Midland Metro Twitter feed [@MidlandMetro](https://twitter.com/MidlandMetro), although this is normally used for service announcements.

For more info see:

<http://www.railtechnologymagazine.com/Rail-News/trams-running-in-central-birmingham-for-the-first-time-in-60-years>

<http://www.railwaygazette.com/news/news/europe/single-view/view/trams-return-to-birmingham-city-centre.html>

West Midlands Rail (report from Colin Major)

The Worcestershire County Council Cabinet has agreed to join 13 other authorities to form 'West Midlands Rail Limited' to progress a franchise for West Midlands. Councillor Simon Geraghty, the deputy leader and cabinet member for economy, skills and infrastructure, said:

"This is a fantastic new development. The numbers speak for themselves, we've seen a doubling of rail patronage in the West Midlands in the last few years from 37 million to 74 million (2006 to 2013, passengers per year). "But that has put pressure on the network, capacity is becoming more of a problem, people do report that. Hopefully we're on the way towards a process of overseeing the franchise this is our chance to influence that."

Councillor Adrian Hardman called it an "important step forward for the West Midlands and Worcestershire and the move is being viewed positively within the Government and matches Bromsgrove MP and Business Secretary Sajid Javid's vision for the region to become what he calls the 'Midlands Engine'".

Rugby Parkway Station (spotted by Michael Tombs)

Rugby Advertiser carried an article on 15th October 2015 headlined "Second train station to be built as Rugby expands"

A new train station in Hillmorton to serve the expansion of Rugby has been given the green light by the county council.

Warwickshire councillors voted in favour of building the Rugby Parkway Station on the A428-Crick Road, on land between existing housing and the Daventry International Rail Freight Terminal (DIRFT). The new station will provide a service of two trains per hour (potentially three depending on various factors), allowing direct fast and semi-fast routes to Birmingham, Northampton, the West Midlands, London and the rest of Britain.

There will be a 260-space car park, northbound and southbound platforms with a connecting footbridge, a car and bus drop-off point, and a highway connection on to Crick Road. Jerry Roodhouse, Warwickshire county councillor for Eastlands and Hillmorton, and Rugby Borough councillor for Paddox, said: "Based on the expansion of Rugby and the experience elsewhere of such stations, I concluded that it would bring benefits as long as we can ensure that services increase and that we have bus links, cyclist links, etc, which are planned."

The scheme will cost nearly £11 million and work will begin in May 2018, with a completion date of December 2019.

The station will serve the old mast site, where 6,200 homes are being built over a 15-20 year period. This development could add 15,000 people to Rugby's population. Rugby Parkway Station will be located on the Northampton Loop of the West Coast Main Line and it is hoped it will be used by commuters to DIRFT and by mast site residents to get into Rugby town centre. It would take four minutes to get from Rugby Parkway to Rugby Station.

See: <http://www.rugbyadvertiser.co.uk/news/local-news/second-train-station-to-be-built-as-rugby-expands-1-7012226>

Stratford Matters (from Railnews, Nov 2015)

Stratford campaigners are distinctly displeased with Chiltern Trains for reducing their direct London services, from seven each way to three, to release rolling stock for the new Marylebone to Oxford Parkway service. The Stratford/Worcester/Oxford group (SWO) are campaigning for restoration of the Stratford to the North Cotswold Line at Honeybourne to provide for better local transport and mitigation of environmental effects of a planned, major, housing development in South Warwickshire, especially at Long Marston. They believe the case for the reinstatement has been strengthened by the current reductions to London. (It's worth noting that good connections at Leamington Spa provide another five fast services between Stratford and London - ed)

RAILFUTURE WEST MIDLANDS BRANCH MATTERS

Branch Meetings

The next meeting of your branch committee will be on Wednesday 13th January starting at 1800. Any local member of the West Midlands Branch is welcome to attend but you must give me notice (steve.wright@railfuture.org.uk) so that we can arrange to escort you through the barrier. Also we use a fairly small office at Moor Street Station, so it has to be first come, first welcomed.

New Group for Coventry

Railfuture member, Michael Tombs, is planning to set up a rail user group centred on Coventry station and is looking for support from other rail users in and around the City. He can be contacted via Steve Wright in the first instance.

We warmly welcome 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.

LETTERS

Railfuture West Midlands branch member Don Payne writes in response to the September eBulletin (number 13).

I'm fully in agreement with all three of the branch committee's priorities for developing existing services but I think that something needs to be done about the services to East Birmingham and Nuneaton, which are not specified by Centro and are only served by Cross-Country trains. All other routes out of the city have relatively closely-spaced stops and frequent trains. An hourly service to Coleshill Parkway and Nuneaton with an additional two-hourly train that serves Water Orton is pathetic. New stations are needed at places like Saltley, Bromford Bridge, Castle Vale etc. and should be served by frequent electric trains. Electrification to Nuneaton should be a priority because of its importance as a diversionary route of Rugby - Coventry is closed for any reason. It would also form part of a long-term need to electrify from Felixstowe to Birmingham.

(Of your priorities for) re-openings:–

Stourbridge Junction to Walsall. Heavy rail preferably, although the ability of light rail to take a loop

into Dudley and another into Merry Hill is attractive. Whatever mode is chosen it MUST go right through to Stourbridge Junction. Opening out the infrastructure to cope with Hi-cube containers would make sense as part of the long term need to bring freight from Avonmouth to Bescot and beyond. Long term, electrification should extend to Worcester and Norton Junction to link with Derby-Bristol electrification.

Camp Hill Line - Not before time. Electrify this from the outset and include Grand Junction to Bordesley so that the line can be used as a diversionary route if the Birmingham West Suburban Railway is obstructed. It would also link with the Nuneaton electrification.

On New Birmingham New Street - Yes, it's getting better but the passenger information is very poor. I habitually enter from Stephenson Street. There are NO departure indicators facing this entrance and I get to my, usually, B-end departure platforms without seeing any information until I get to the so-called "Red Lounge" and even then it is not very helpful.

As for the "lounge" joke, who thought that one up? These passageways are not even labelled and as for comfortable seating (sofas, armchairs?) it is sorely lacking. It is good to see that the automatic barriers work with my bus pass (Centro pass) but when are they going to do the same with the barriers at Moor Street and Snow Hill?

Nuckle Project. If Arriva Cross-Country doesn't want to stop at Kenilworth then maybe Chiltern Railways would like to open a service to Coventry and calling there. One in the eye for C-C! Alternatively London Midland could be offered the job. Get the line electrification-ready in preparation for the proposed Southampton-Birmingham electrification.

Worcester Parkway. Glad to see it has planning consent but why only one platform upstairs? Now is the time to re-double this stretch of track, probably to Pershore at least.

On delay repay - While the decision made by Virgin Trains and C2C is welcome it will prove very difficult for the scheme to be rolled out generally. Unless a passenger has booked their ticket on-line direct from the train company then they have no idea who is travelling when and on which train, so automatic compensation will prove extremely difficult. Many passengers, including myself, like to book tickets at the station and many pay cash.

Editor's note: with the wider use of smart-cards one of the benefits to passengers (in addition to not having to queue up at a ticket machine or ticket office to buy a ticket) will be the ability for delay repay in certain circumstances e.g. there the actual train can be identified, or if all trains within a particular time window were similarly affected. Of course, the ideal solution is if the technology can determine that the passenger was on a particular train either by tapping in and out on the train itself or using proximity detectors for the smartcard such as RFID.

NATIONAL NEWS

DfT UNVEILS DETAILS OF PASSPORT PQQ

The Department for Transport has invited operators to apply for its new 'Passport system' designed to streamline the competition process for franchises expiring during this Parliament. The DfT's Rail Executive hopes the new standardised qualification scheme will encourage applications from new entrants that have an interest in the rail passenger market.

It is based on similar pre-qualification and certification schemes in other parts of the market, aimed at cutting down on the time and money organisations spend providing technical information for multiple franchise competitions. Any national or international organisation, consortium or not-for-profit organisation can apply as long as it demonstrates necessary managerial, financial and material capabilities to run the specific rail services.

Passport applications will ensure interested organisations all demonstrate capability and technical ability, health and safety management and culture and satisfactory past performance before they are issued pre-qualification questionnaires – at which point they will be assessed financially. They will be marked on a pass/fail basis, after which they will either receive a Passport or be invited to re-apply later on.

The first franchises to benefit from Passports – which expire within four years – were South Western and West Midlands, whose bidders will be issued specifically-tailored qualification questions by the end of this year.

DfT PUSHES WEST COAST COMPETITION BACK SIX MONTHS

The next franchise available under the new scheme is Intercity West Coast, whose application date closes on 4 March 2016. That competition has been postponed by several months, according to the latest franchise schedule, with the ITT moved from June to November 2016, and the franchise start date pushed back from September 2017 to April 2018.

Other upcoming franchise competitions set to fall under the scope of the Passport system include East Midlands, South Eastern, Wales & Borders, Great Western, Cross Country and Chiltern.

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

West Coast Rail 250 (Meeting 14th October 2015)

New Virgin services to Blackpool are meeting loading expectations. Those to Shrewsbury are doing rather better than expected. VT are aiming to provide hi-speed Wi-Fi on their trains, but this requires investment in line-side equipment. Between Euston and 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.

You have probably already heard that HS2 construction at Euston will now leave 16 platforms free (out of 18), rather than the 13 predicted earlier. (More detail in the December 2015 issue of Modern Railways.)

The decision to remove railcard privileges on peak-hour ticket purchases was roundly condemned by stakeholders, but Virgin Trains appears unrepentant.

GO-OP Co-Operative

The Go-Op organisation, which has been around for several years but has not yet got off the ground, is aiming to be the first cooperatively-owned train operating company in the UK. Their flagship project, Mainline Rail, is for a Westbury to Birmingham Moor Street service (via Swindon and Oxford). They have developed a plan for a clock-face timetable using brand new rolling stock to deliver a highly professional level of service (their words). They appear to be a serious group since they are seeking “to meet the advance assurances specified by Network Rail and believe we have made good progress on all of these”. More info from www.go-op.coop.

Comment from member Colin Major who met them at the recent Railfuture conference in Bristol: Whilst not overlooking the viability or otherwise of their idea it is worth us noting that they anticipate demand for their self-described “Mainline Rail project” - the proposed route is Westbury, Trowbridge, Melksham, Chippenham, Swindon, Oxford, Banbury, Leamington Spa, Birmingham Moor Street. An interesting concept utilising and duplicating parts of existing GWR and Chiltern services who will no doubt oppose a free access operator especially on the crowded Didcot/Oxford and Oxford/Banbury two-track routes. I did ask them how much demand they anticipated as there are two GWR trains an hour to New Street from Westbury via Bristol change at Cheltenham Spa on to Cross Country and/or two GWR trains an hour from Westbury via Swindon on to Oxford plus next year Oxford to Banbury three trains an hour, but they had no quantifiable figure.

RAILWAY TECHNOLOGY

"The Future of our Railways: embracing digital railway technology" - by Colin Major

Back in October 2015 some of the Railfuture West Midlands members attended a lecture at Birmingham University given by Professor Clive Roberts (Professor of Railway Systems, and Director of the Birmingham Centre for Railway Research and Education). This concentrated on digital control of trains, but also included other digital aspects such as provision of up-to-date information to passengers. Below are some points from the presentation.

Professor Roberts outlined the work of the Birmingham Centre for Railway Research and Education (BCRRE) as a leader in railway science and education. With four professors in the department supported by 160 academics, researchers and professional support staff and a further 180 students it has a worldwide reputation and works with UK's Department of Transport, Network Rail, Deutsche Bahn, Singapore Land Transit Authority and Japan Central Railways.

His research helps railway companies gain a better understanding of their existing systems and the appropriateness of new approaches and technology. This work informs the specification of new train and railway system designs and currently as consultant to the Kuala Lumpur to Singapore High speed line, the Chinese State Railway and designing a line linking the United Arab Emirates.

They also have an expanding portfolio of consultancy and high-quality education programmes with:- Anhui Provincial Government/Hefei Metro(China), Zhejiang and Guangzhou Municipal Government/Guangzhou Metro (China); Beijing Municipal Government/Beijing Metro/Beijing Jiao tong University (China); Central Japan Railways/ University of Tokyo (Japan); Federal Railroad Authority Illinois (USA); LTA/SMRT/Nanyang Technologic (Singapore); SNCF/Ecole des Ponts ParisTech (France)

Research areas: - the BCRRE provides a system-wide view of railways, researching in all aspects of railway technology and operation and have built a world-class reputation in the following areas:

- Operations simulation
- Traffic management and train control
- Data Integration and cyber-security
- Power systems and energy use
- Condition monitoring and NDT
- Computational modelling
- Aerodynamics
- Climate change and weather impact
- Geotechnical engineering

Professor Roberts then outlined the benefit of a digital technology to enhance the current UK rail system by moving from 19th century train control to 21st century digital control which if, as the government desires, is in place by 2028 will increase the capacity of the current network by up to a third by handling the varying needs of specific trains whether they are intercity, inter-urban, commuter and freight which are currently hampered by rigid headways utilising fixed signals.

The data management group investigates fundamental questions about the use of electronic information in the transport domain, from the collection and structured storage of raw data, through efficient processing and algorithms, to the delivery of the appropriate information (information that supports their job and fits with their working practices) to staff in a timely manner. The group's current projects include work on large database design; open data; data exchange and modelling; cyber security; and asset management.

Current major projects: Network Rail Strategic Partnership in Data Integration and Management

A £1.6 million, five-year Strategic Partnership between the University of Birmingham and Network Rail where the group is:

- Advising on new ICT technologies & trends
- Developing concept-based data models for unambiguous data exchange between ICT systems within rail and the wider multimodal transport system
- Finding new ways of combining and exploiting existing data resources

i-R3D2: A novel track crack detection system, designed for use on in-service vehicles. The group is developing a standard XML interface that links the i-R3D2 cloud-based system to existing Network Rail databases via an OSA-CBM compliant model.

FuTRO Universal Data Challenge: Showing how shared, open access ontologies and linked data can help the UK rail industry realise its vision to facilitate access to information resources and enable easy integration/combined usage in forming responses to operational queries and then preparing the technology for use by the industry and delivering appropriate data models, documentation and reference implementations.

SCEPTICS: A project to investigate the threats posed to the industrial control systems used in transport networks by cyber-attacks and to devise assessment processes for system evaluation.

PCIPP: Creating an intelligent asset management for an enterprise-wide, enterprise-class system for remote condition monitoring. This multi-partner project aims to establish a common interface which correlates data from multiple assets and systems to create intelligence from each data source and to

reduce operator costs. The group will develop health assessment and prognostic algorithms to allow actionable information to be delivered to operational staff.

Capacity4Rail: A three-year, multifaceted project that will pave the way for the future railway by developing novel concepts for infrastructure, rail freight, asset monitoring and rail operations. Involved in many of the sub-projects, the group's most relevant work is on linked open data for the railways, and data exchange models linking the railways to other transport modes.

Signalling and Train Controls: The research work within signalling and train control includes both condition monitoring of signalling assets and the application of advanced algorithms for train movement control. This includes automatic route setting and dynamic rescheduling following disturbance.

Railways are often operating near their theoretical capacity, which is routinely true of metros and increasingly so of substantial parts of the UK mainline network, and are particularly vulnerable to disruption by human behaviour or engineering failures that lead to delays to or even cancellation of services. These problems exist in the UK and undoubtedly should be addressed by increasing network capacity and improving operating reliability. However, these are long-term goals, and require enormous investment. In the short term (and generally), it is clearly advantageous to respond to disruptive incidents in such a way as to minimise the resulting problems.

Current projects: a) Testing of audio frequency track circuits; b) PhD student: Collaborative rescheduling for a railway network; c) PhD student: Train regulation at complex junctions for optimum traction energy consumption.

Current and recent major projects:

FUTURENET: A 3.5-year multi-disciplinary project which developed quantitative methods for the evaluation of the UK transport network's resilience to extreme weather events and the effects of climate change.

REWARD: A project supported by Network Rail to demonstrate proof of concept in mappi

The next Railfuture West Midlands eNews will be issue 14 in January 2016.

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www.railfuture.org.uk/branches/?branch=West+Midlands

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