



## **West Midlands Branch eNews**

### **Issue 15 – March 2016**

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

- Railfuture's Rail User Express bulletin, February 2016 and March 2016 issues
- Rail Technology 26 Feb 2016 - Airport Connections (HS2 needs to improve connections to airports – Transport Select Committee)
- Cross Country Trains Stakeholder News - In Focus 26
- Severn Dee News (Winter 2015)

*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**

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#### **Top Rail Pundits in West Midlands on St George's Day**

RAIL Magazine Editor Nigel Harris and Rail Writer/Broadcaster Christian Wolmar to speak in Birmingham as we welcome, not one but, TWO national experts on railways to the West Midlands Railfuture annual meeting in Birmingham on **23 April 2016**, at 2 pm in the Edgbaston Friends' Meeting House, St James Road, Birmingham B15 1JP (corner of St James and George Road, five minutes from Five Ways station)



**Nigel Harris** is Managing Editor & Events Director of RAIL, Britain's market-leading magazine. He has taken an interest in - and worked in and around - railways from an early age. He moved into railway journalism as Assistant Editor of Steam World in 1981. As Editor of RAIL since 1995, Nigel has commented on the privatisation of British Rail and its subsequent private sector operation. He is regular source of analysis and opinion on radio, television and national newspapers, including Sky News, News at Ten, the Times and Radio 4's You and Yours and Today programmes.



**Christian Wolmar** is an award winning writer and broadcaster specialising in transport and is the author of a series of books on railway history. He is a frequent speaker at conferences and railway events and is acknowledged as one of the UK's leading commentators on transport matters. He writes regularly for a wide variety of publications including newspapers such as The Times and The Guardian and numerous magazines, such as The Oldie and Public Finance. He has had a fortnightly column in RAIL since 1994. He has also been Railfuture's Honorary President since 2012.

Railfuture West Midlands Chairman William Whiting commented: "Since Curzon Street Station linked us to London in 1838 via the world's first large scale inter-city railway, our region has always played a big part in transport innovation.

"With Birmingham and the West Midlands at the centre of major rail investment plans - such as HS2 - and the recent £600m make-over of New Street Station now complete, Nigel and Christian will have lots to say about local as well as national rail. It will be great to have them here casting a critical eye over the future of rail here and in the wider UK."

The AGM business will be kept as short as possible to give Nigel, Christian and attendees plenty of time to engage in conversation about all things railways. Nigel and Christian promise a bit of argy-bargy between themselves about issues they disagree about but you will be able to join in with questions or observations of your own.

**Join us on Saturday, 23 April 2016 for an afternoon to remember.**

## **LOCAL NEWS**

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### **Survey of Hereford to New Street Off-Peak Trains**

Following concern from members and from the general public, Railfuture will be travelling on day-time off-peak trains on April 20th between New Street Station and Hereford to measure passenger loadings.

"We welcome the cooperation of London Midland trains in allowing us to carry out this survey which we hope will provide them and the County Council with quantifiable, independently verified facts, obtained by us travelling on all day time off-peak services to and from New Street Station rather than relying on hearsay evidence.

On the evidence so far and without prejudicing the survey results hopefully our findings will enable the next franchise to require provision of increased capacity on this service as our members report overcrowding throughout the day."

For further information please contact Colin Major, Railfuture's Survey Co-ordinator on 01905 355544 or e-mail [colin.major@tesco.net](mailto:colin.major@tesco.net).

### **Coventry Arena Temporary Solution (and then not!)**

After some very bad press about trains not stopping at the new station because of the inability of the rostered single-carriage 153 being totally inadequate to handle traffic on match days, London Midland Trains (LMT) have been able to re-roster an additional 153 for weekends although the second unit can't be guaranteed and they won't stop at Arena in the 60 minutes before a match starts or the 60 minutes after a match ends.

As an experiment, LMT and Wasps hired six-carriage trains and class 47 locos from Riviera Trains to provide 'stadium specials' for two matches at the new station. Railfuture has yet to hear any

evaluation of this trial. We are hoping the other match and event organisers, especially Coventry City, will be prepared to pay for these specials.

Unfortunately, latest news is that these specials will not be repeated. So back to square one, probably no service improvements until the new franchise in October 2017 at the earliest, and in the meantime the station will be closed before matches and other big events.

Railfuture also discovered that many rail web-sites, mobile apps and TVMs did not know of the existence of the two new stations. The fact-finding exercise by Railfuture found this to be the case with other stations opened in the previous few months and in the case of Abellio Greater Anglia the last new stations shown were those opened in December 2013. This is described in an article on the Railfuture web-site: <http://www.railfuture.org.uk/article1647-Sent-to-Coventry>.

### **Birmingham to introduce UK's first battery-operated trams**

The first battery-operated trams in the UK will be introduced in Birmingham to remove the need for overhead power lines. The battery-powered tram system, known as catenary-free running, will be used in architecturally sensitive areas, meaning the Metro line from New Street station to Centenary Square, due to open in 2019, can run through Victoria Square without having to attach overhead cables to the 182-year-old Town Hall.

The West Midlands Integrated Transport Authority (WMITA) has approved plans by Centro to retrofit its fleet of 21 Midland Metro Urbos 3 trams. Four new trams, which come with the batteries already fitted, have also been ordered to allow the fleet to keep running at the current level of service once the Centenary Square extension opens.

Cllr John McNicholas, chair of the WMITA delivery committee, said: "The application of battery technology on this scale in the West Midlands will be a historic first for the UK light rail industry and the modern era of British tramways." He added that WMITA had wanted the new fleet of trams to run without overhead wires when they were first ordered in 2012, but battery technology was not developed enough at the time.

Urbo 3 trams, manufactured in Spain by CAF, already run catenary-free in parts of the Spanish cities of Zaragoza, Seville and Cadiz, but with supercapacitors to provide on-board energy storage. These would be unsuitable for Birmingham trams because they have to go up a steep hill on Pinfold Street between New Street station and Victoria Square. CAF says newly available lithium ion batteries are robust enough to handle the gradients. The batteries, which are expected to require replacement at approximately seven-year intervals, will be fitted on the tram roof and will be recharged by the overhead lines along other parts of the route.

Catenary-free running is due to be introduced on four sections of the Midland Metro route, with predicted immediate savings of £650,000 and greater savings longer term because there will no longer be a need to make infrastructure changes to buildings and roads to accommodate overhead lines - for example, the Birmingham Eastside extension between Moor Street Queensway and Digbeth High Street stop, running under the proposed HS2 station at Curzon Street.

Two other catenary-free lines proposed are:- the Wolverhampton city centre extension between the bus station and the railway station tram stops; and on the Birmingham-Edgbaston extension from Centenary Square to the Brindley Place tram stop, and through the underpass at Five Ways.

See also - <http://www.railwaygazette.com/news/urban/single-view/view/midland-metro-trams-to-be-converted-for-catenary-free-operation.html>.

### **End of the orange paper train ticket closer** (Western Daily Press – Feb 4th 2016)

The end of the orange paper train ticket, dating back 40 years, could be a step closer as plans are unveiled to allow passengers to travel anywhere in Britain using their smartphones. Barcoded mobile tickets – known as m-Tickets – could be extended within three years to cover journeys involving several train firms. A pilot scheme covering more than 230 stations in the Midlands, northern England and Scotland has seen 40,000 m-Tickets bought.

The proposals will be discussed at the annual conference of the Rail Delivery Group (RDG), which represents train operators and Network Rail. The RDG is also exploring how to enable passengers who buy tickets online with a contactless credit or debit card to use the same card to go through the barriers at the station, so they do not need to print out tickets.

Jacqueline Starr of the RDG said: "We have a vision of fully digital, mobile-friendly train travel with smarter types of quick and easy electronic tickets which are convenient, personalised and can be used on different providers' services. "Many train operators already offer options like tickets on mobile phones and travel using smart or contactless cards. The rail industry is developing technology to make buying and using train tickets simpler." She added: "There is no one-size-fits-all solution and we'll continue to cater for everyone."

Railfuture recognises that it will take many years before the credit-card sized printed tickets are abolished as any replacement must offer the same ease of use for walk-on travel and be available to all travellers.

Railfuture wrote an article on this subject for Rail Professional magazine, which appeared in the March 2016 issue. See: <http://www.railpro.co.uk/railpro-magazine/march-2016/the-human-factor>.

### **Shrewsbury to Chester Rail Users Association (SCRUA)**

No significant changes are expected in the May 2016 timetable. However, temporary re-routing of the Cardiff to Manchester services saw a service enhancement of a (roughly) 30-minute frequency each way, which pointed out the potential for the route.

SCRUA will send a robust response to the Welsh Government regarding the shape of the new Wales and Borders franchise, which will come into effect in 2018 (as have Railfuture West Midlands – ed.). Although the Welsh Transport Secretary has ruled out terminating services at Shrewsbury, the DfT has suggested that the franchising of any services that terminate in England might not be devolved. Thus the Cardiff-Manchester service might be hived off, with the South Wales service terminating at Cardiff, leaving West Wales to the Welsh franchise. Also, Arriva Rail North might extend their Manchester - Chester service to Llandudno.

The SCRUA would like to see the line between Wrexham and Chester fully redoubled, a new Wrexham North Parkway interchange station, and Baschurch station reopened between Gobowen and Shrewsbury.

### **North Cotswolds (From Railfuture Thames Valley Newsletter)**

Railfuture were represented at a conference on 12 February 2016 to present the vision for the future of the North Cotswolds Line. The conference chairman was Lord Richard Faulkner, who opened by referencing suppressed demand, access to Heathrow, the need for easier access to employment and the importance of business support. Presentations were given by Mark Hopwood, MD of GWR and leading councillors from Oxfordshire and Worcestershire. The importance of rail developments was stressed to achieve economic growth but avoid beautiful countryside being covered in tarmac.

Comment was made that it was not only access to London which was important but also to Oxford and Worcester, which have two of the most rapidly growing economies outside London. A winding up address was given by David Cameron, expressing his full support for the vision and urging all parties to work together to develop the financial case.

Figures were presented showing the growth in passenger numbers all along the route and reference was again made to suppressed demand, demonstrated by the way car parks filled as soon as they were opened or extended. With the help of the Local Enterprise Partnerships, proposals have been put together as to the methods of achieving the overall aims of reduced journey times and increased frequencies. It concluded that re-doubling the full remainder of the route would not be value for money in view of the technical issues involved and the objectives can be achieved by re-doubling at the western end between Evesham and Pershore and at the eastern end between Wolvercote Junction and Hanborough. The latter station would be used as a "turn-back" for fast London-Oxford trains, enabling 3 trains per hour into Oxford.

The timing for delivery of these infrastructure improvements would be in Control Period 6 (2019-2024) at a cost of £275m.

(Comment from Railfuture West Midlands member, Colin Major - The basic proposition as far as West Midlands is concerned is the provision of two trains every hour between London and Worcester one fast taking two hours centre-to-centre and one stopping, plus doubling the line west of Evesham to the Norton Junction.)

### **Banbury Upgrade and Route Closure (From Railfuture Thames Valley Newsletter)**

There will be a nine day closure on all lines through Banbury from Saturday 30th July until Sunday 7th August 2016 inclusive.

During this period, bus replacement services will operate between Leamington Spa, Bicester, Banbury and Oxford. As part of its railway upgrade plan, Network Rail is investing £76 million on the rail infrastructure in and around Banbury. Both Banbury north and south signal boxes date back to the early 1900s and the mixture of semaphore and colour light signals will be replaced with modern

LED signals controlled from the West Midlands Signalling Centre in Birmingham. In addition, a revised, more reliable track layout will be brought into use through Banbury station together with a connection to the new train maintenance depot currently being constructed south of the station on the site of the former steam depot.

### **Virgin News (From Virgin Trains Stakeholder Newsletter Q1 2016)**

M-tickets - Virgin Trains now offer mobile 'phone Tickets across all ticket types and routes, on both the West Coast (VWCT) and East Coast Mainlines (VTEC). The app allows customers to both buy and use their tickets on their mobile telephones. Customers wanting to buy their tickets on the day can download the app via the free Virgin Trains station Wi-Fi, avoid queues, and select their ticket via a simpler interface than ticket machines (they claim - ed).

VWCT and VECT are both looking at ways to bring m-Tickets to even more customers and eventually move away from paper tickets completely, which they claim are easily lost or confused with tickets for other journeys. They say they will only remove all tangerine tickets once they are sure all customers are ready for the change.

From 23 Feb 2016 West Coast journeys could be booked via the mobile app. From early April 2016 the Virgin Trains app and the Virgin Trains (east coast) website will both sell m-Tickets for both franchises.

Anglo-Scottish services have been restored to full capacity after repairs to the Lamington viaduct in Scotland were completed ahead of schedule. The full cross-border timetable resumed on February 22 following work to reinforce a damaged pier of the bridge, near Carstairs, and raise the track to its normal level. The crossing sustained heavy damage during unprecedented levels of rainfall in December which washed away foundations, weakening the second pier.

#### **May 2016 timetable changes confirmed**

- Improved connectivity and journey opportunities at Tamworth and Lichfield on weekdays, by more services stopping there to/from the North West, including the 07.55 Manchester to Euston and 18.40 Euston to Manchester. There will also be more Saturday and Sunday calls at Lichfield.
- Improved connectivity and journey opportunities at Nuneaton by stopping the 08.35 Manchester to Euston there on weekdays.
- Improved connectivity and journey opportunities at Rugby by stopping the 12.10 Euston to Chester and 10.40 Glasgow to Euston there Mondays to Saturdays.
- More standard class capacity and faster journeys from Euston on weekday evenings, by accelerating the 19.00 Euston to Manchester and 19.07 Euston to Liverpool, and 18.46 Euston to Preston (Fridays only), and moving stops to services with more capacity.
- Improved performance, connectivity and journey opportunities on weekdays by stopping the 16.30 Euston to Glasgow service at Warrington, Wigan, Preston, Lancaster, Penrith and Carlisle, rather than just Preston.

### **CAMPAIGNS UPDATE**

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There is no significant news on Railfuture's campaigns to report since the last bulletin.

## RAILFUTURE WEST MIDLANDS BRANCH MATTERS

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### Branch Meetings

The next West Midlands branch committee meetings will be on Wednesday, 13 April and 11 May 2016 starting at 18:00. We expect to be back in our normal meeting place on platform 3 or Moor Street Station. Any member of the West Midlands Branch of Railfuture is welcome to attend but please let the branch secretary ([steve.wright@railfuture.org.uk](mailto:steve.wright@railfuture.org.uk)) know if you want to come to ensure there is enough space and to arrange to escort you through the Moor Street barriers.

**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).**

## LETTERS

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### From Donald Payne on our aspirations for West Midland Trains 2017 franchise

What about an earlier start on Sundays, particularly on Jewellery Line? Also a better balance of services at Sandwell & Dudley. All the non-Virgin services call in one half-hour slot and nothing in the next slot apart from the stopper. I would still like to push for a stopping service to Nuneaton and to Tamworth via Coleshill Parkway to be included. And what about more electrification?

*(Infrastructure improvements are not part of franchise negotiations, although service developments may require such. More electrification is a subject we plan to bring up with Network Rail as part of the West Midlands and Chilterns Route Study – ed)*

### From Richard J. Barker on Trent Valley Services

No-one other than me seems to be concerned about what was published in Rail magazine Issue 791 by Phillip Haig concerning the suggested routing of the LMT Crewe to London service via Stafford and Birmingham.

The traffic flow along the Trent Valley is good. For instance the 0622 LMT Service from Atherstone to Euston the train is more than half full leaving Atherstone. The 0633 Crewe bound train is very sparsely filled but would be about half full by the time it arrives at Stafford.

The Birmingham to Crewe LMT service is quicker from Stafford to Crewe than the train from Atherstone to Crewe via Stoke on Trent, however you can swap from the Stoke train which will connect with a Class 390 at Stoke taking you to Manchester Piccadilly via Stockport. The faster train to Crewe via Norton Bridge is quicker to Crewe. However to go to Manchester the 390 is routed via Sandbach, but some route via Stockport whilst others go via East Didsbury to Piccadilly.

Returning at approx. 1700 from Crewe either via Stoke or Norton Bridge the LMT services are generally very full. There is a 390 service from New Street to Crewe, as well as an LMT train on the same route. Having used both recently I would say that both are full after 1600. I also think that

there is a Cross Country service as well. According to the information that I hear all the services are well filled.

I would certainly back a half hourly service along the Trent Valley Route, however it depends whether the service is routed via Northampton or direct to Euston calling at Rugby, Milton Keynes and Watford junction to Euston. The Birmingham to Euston LMT service uses the Northampton route and will wait at Northampton to merge with one of the Trent Valley line LM services and or another service ex Birmingham, making a 12 car set.

If I could choose a means of improving both Trent Valley services and Birmingham Euston services I would ask for the type 350's were modified so that the mains power was bussed through the sets rather than requiring three pantograph working. According to one of the electrical engineers for LMT the slab front of the 350 pushes up a wall of air as the train moves along thus moving the OHL wires. With three separate pantographs there is three times the risk of a flashover bringing down the wires. If you look at a 390 which is highly streamlined, air is pushed around the train, but of course they always run with the rear with the front pantograph up it is restricted to 100mph running.

*(We support 2 trains per hour along the Trent Valley, perhaps one via Northampton the other via Weedon. We also would like to see the use of 8-car trains on this route, at least at peak times. However these could not call at Stone, Etruria or Kidsgrove since these stations are only suitable for 4 cars. So there may be scope for the longer Trent Valley services to go direct to Crewe and for the smaller stations to be served by a new Birmingham/Stoke/Crewe service – ed)*

## **From STORM - Support the Oldham Rochdale Manchester Lines**

An announcement heard recently on Birmingham New Street station: "Platform 6 for the 16.33 to Northampton calling at Marston Green and lots of other places." Their shift must have been coming to an end...

The next Railfuture West Midlands eNews will be issue 16 in July 2016.

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