



## West Midlands Branch Newsletter

January 2019

### **!!! DATES FOR YOUR DIARY**

**Public Meeting – Saturday, April 6<sup>th</sup> 2019 – 1300 to 16:00 (free admission)**

***The Gateway Centre, Chester Street, Shrewsbury SY1 1NB***

**Annual General Meeting – Saturday, April 27<sup>th</sup> 2019 – 1030 to 1300**

***Priory Rooms, Bull Street, Birmingham B4 6AF (near Snow Hill)***

**! Special Guest –Executive Director of West Midlands Rail Executive ! (to be confirmed)**

Always more than just a meeting, this year we are most fortunate that the Executive Director of West Midlands Railway Executive, Malcolm Holmes, has agreed to attend and discuss with us the region's strategic plans for the next 30 years.

This is also your chance to learn more of what we've been doing since April 2018 and, more importantly, what we plan to do in 2019, and for you to have your say on these or any other pressing issues.

The venue for the event is one we used before to good effect, the Priory Rooms in Bull Street, Birmingham, adjacent to the Bull Street tram stop and close to Snow Hill station. We will be providing coffee or tea prior to the meeting, from 10:30 am.

This is also the occasion when you get to choose your branch committee for the coming 12 months. All committee positions are elected each year, including Chairman, Vice Chairman, Secretary and Treasurer. You're most welcome to nominate someone for the committee, including yourself, or to raise a motion for formal discussion. Committee Nomination and Motion Proposal Forms are attached and must be returned fully completed and returned to our Returning Officer by March 16<sup>th</sup>. Address details are given on each form.

Details of nominations and any motions will be sent, by email or post, to reach you by April 13<sup>th</sup>. If there are more nominations than vacancies for a specific post or for ordinary membership of the committee, this will include postal voting forms. These should be returned to the Returning Officer by April 20<sup>th</sup>.

**So don't forget - April 27<sup>th</sup>. Why not put this date in your diary straightaway!  
Any of your friends interested in developing our railways are also most welcome.**

### **From the Chair**

It may be rather late but here's hoping you had a pleasant Christmas and New Year festivities. So, welcome to 2019 and all that it may bring, including some enhancements to the West Midlands timetables in May, hopefully significant changes to Cross Country Trains operations from their next

Direct Award, some improvements to fares and ticketing from the Rail Delivery Group's consultations and possibly some radical change to the structure and funding of the whole railway network from the Williams Review. Some or all of these are discussed in more detail below. And then there's the little matter of the UK leaving the European Union with unknown effects on the railways supply industry.

From a more parochial point of view we, your committee, have been very concerned about our inability to attract more than a few stalwarts to our annual meetings. We have decided therefore that we shall bring meetings to your neighbourhoods and the first of these will be in Shrewsbury on Saturday, April 6<sup>th</sup>. This will be open to all comers, not just Railfuture members. But if you don't live in or near Shrewsbury, or even if you do, we would still very much like to see you at our AGM in Birmingham on 27<sup>th</sup> April. Details of both events appear further on in this newsletter.

So whichever way you regard it, 2019 is likely to be a bumper, if not bumpy, year for the railway world and for those of us who want to see it prosper and expand.

We continue to second-guess what you the member actually want from Railfuture. Do you want us to be active campaigning on specific issues and if so which ones? Or are you happy just to be kept informed of what's happening in the local railway scene? If so, are we telling you enough, often enough? Please tell us, it can get quite lonely up here in our (artificial-)ivory tower.

Dr Stephen Wright – Chairman of West Midlands Branch

### **Media Officer Wanted**

We are still looking for someone good with words and happy to talk about Railfuture and its activities on the telephone. Main tasks would be; identifying opportunities for promoting Railfuture and our campaigns; preparing and sending press releases; telephoning media contacts; and, using social media for promotions.

This is not necessarily a committee post, so regular attendance at meeting would not be required. However you would need to liaise regularly with branch senior committee members and special work groups, and you would be expected to produce periodic reports to the committee on actions undertaken, responses and future plans. You would also find it useful to liaise with the national Media Officer.

We can supply media contacts but it would be up to you to create working relationships with press, radio and TV people, and others as suggested by the branch committee.

If you would like to undertake all or part of this role (it may be shared between 2 or 3 members) contact the Branch Secretary, Colin Major - [colin.major@railfuture.org.uk](mailto:colin.major@railfuture.org.uk). If you would like to have a chat about the role and how you might do it call Colin at 01905 355544.

### **Meeting with Network Rail**

On 19<sup>th</sup> November Committee members Phillip Bennion and Roger King met with Network Rail manager Graham Botham who is in charge of infrastructure planning for the North and Midlands. Mr Botham was accompanied by two colleagues who had detailed knowledge of specific projects; in

particular associated with The Midlands Hub. We had sent them an agenda of items we wished to discuss and I will deal with them in order.

1) Capacity on Cross Country, particularly between Birmingham and Derby.

This had become a concern due to the recent consultation in which a series of leading questions suggested that DfT want to run 3 of the 4 trains along this corridor non-stop between the two cities. A completely unrelated document from Midlands Connect indicated an aspiration for 6 trains per hour along the corridor. Our contention is that the line has insufficient capacity to deliver this frequency, thus leaving a risk that Burton and Tamworth would lose services. Mr Botham agreed with us entirely that current capacity was insufficient. He said that Cross Country would not want to stop serving the two stations as they are big revenue earners with well over 2m footfall between them. However they are looking at ways of delivering an extra hourly train and on the possibility of using the goods line through Castle Donnington. In this way the long distance SW to NE trains can have their intermediate stops removed without reducing services at Burton and Tamworth.

2) Wolverhampton to Walsall services and intermediate stations.

They see this as one of the mayoral projects and they are working out how to make it feasible. Their concern is where the trains go at either end. We suggested a possible run through to Aldridge. They were aware of the aspirations at Aldridge but had not yet looked at this. The Midlands Hub project could give up to 10 extra trains through New Street but they are keen that a Wolverhampton-Walsall service does not continue into the New Street area as they do not want it to take up these paths.

3) Camp Hill line.

Again they see this as a mayoral project that they have only just been asked to start trying to plan. If Worcester or Hereford services are diverted via Moseley, then University would lose services, which they see as an undesirable consequence. Ideally the services would be additional, but this depends on the Midlands Hub going ahead. We were told that this requires redundant platforms at Moor Street to be brought back into use and the cords to the south to allow trains to run both north/east and south/west. There is an issue of how many additional platforms can be released, with a maximum of three. All three would be required to deliver the 10 extra hourly paths through the city. The Camp Hill services could then take up 2 of those 10 paths. At the moment the West Midlands Rail Executive and Network Rail do not seem to have the same intentions. We were told by Network Rail that the paths will be into Moor Street when the Hub is completed (not until 2026 at the earliest) but the WMRE plan is for 2 trains an hour from Kings Norton to New Street, calling at Hazelwell, Kings Heath and Moseley and possibly Balsall Heath and all by 2021.

4) Airport Connectivity. With no investors now keen on the Whitacre Link with major airport expansion no longer on the cards, we explored other options for improving Airport connectivity, without any significant progress. I suggested that it might be possible to make better use of Coleshill parkway in this respect. They did indicate a view that airport expansion might return to the agenda once HS2 was up and running. In that case money might then be forthcoming.

5) One Station Concept. We asked what details they knew about the "One Station Concept" being talked about for Curzon Street connectivity. They could not see it going further than the Curzon Street/Moor Street interchanges. This is basically not their project, although, like us they have an interest. They are currently trying to find out more and what practical plans might be proposed. Again this would be enhanced by the full three extra platforms at Moor Street and they suggested that we might use our lobbying voice for this to happen.

## **Community Rail Stations**

West Midlands Railway is actively promoting the idea of Community Rail Groups to adopt their stations. This has worked well along some rural lines across the country by making stations more welcoming. Increased footfall has usually followed. WMR have created a new post of “Head of Stakeholder and Community” to progress this project and appointed Fay Easton. If you are interested in forming a group to adopt a station or just want to know more, contact Fay at [fay.easton@wmtrains.co.uk](mailto:fay.easton@wmtrains.co.uk)

## **Williams Review**

No doubt you’ll have heard that the Secretary of State for Transport, Chris Grayling, has instigated a wide-ranging review of the rail industry with particular emphases on its organisation and funding. He has stated that the present system of franchising is no longer fit for purpose (this may be because few companies are prepared to spend time and money bidding for these franchises any more). So a review panel has been set up under the chairmanship of Keith Williams, former chairman of British Airways. The Williams’ Review invites us to make submissions on how the structure of the industry can best support delivery of customer outcomes and stronger support for devolution is one possible approach.

We have now responded to the panel’s first consultation exercise and our detailed comments are attached (Williams Review - WM Comments.pdf). In essence we attempted to detail the variety of options that we saw as possible, some more so than others, on each of the terms of reference laid down by Chris Grayling

We are looking forward to hearing the Williams Panel’s first thoughts arising from this first round of consultations. These were promised for late January, so probably February. Our Chair Stephen Wright is coordinating the West Midlands response

The Review consultation has seven topics each requiring general evidence:

1. Commercial models for the provision of rail services that prioritise the interests of passengers and taxpayers.
2. Rail industry structures that promote clear accountability and effective joint-working for both passengers and the freight sector.
3. Systems that are financially sustainable and able to address long-term cost pressures.
4. A railway that is able to offer good value fares for passengers, while keeping costs down for taxpayers.
5. Improved industrial relations to reduce disruption and improved reliability for passengers.
6. A rail sector with the agility to respond to future challenges and opportunities.
7. Other.

Unlike many other consultations there is no list of specific detailed questions. This suggests that the Review Team are not attempting to condition responses (or don't know what to ask).

However, it is clear from the questions that the Review Team is looking for responses focused on the interests of passengers and freight customers against a background of addressing cost issues, reliability and accountability. The background is probably dominant in the government's mind. We have been careful to exclude nice to haves that do not address the efficiency issue for this reason.

We as a Branch have submitted our response to the Railfuture Board ([attached](#)) to be incorporated in their initial response. Once the Williams Rail Review team have responded to the initial consultation process, we aim to discuss some of the issues further.

Your feedback to the West Midlands Secretary Colin Major would be most welcome on [Colin.major@railfuture.org.uk](mailto:Colin.major@railfuture.org.uk).

The Railfuture Board response is available on [www.railfuture.org.uk/display1977](http://www.railfuture.org.uk/display1977)

### **West Midlands Trains**

With the interregnum put on almost all operating companies, the enhancements planned for December 2018 were postponed until May this year. Hopefully all of these will go ahead as originally planned, as follows

- 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.
- 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 Birmingham, and Northampton and Birmingham.

### **Railfuture at New Street Station**

If you passed through New Street Station on Thursday November 8<sup>th</sup> you would have seen some of your committee manning a stall advertising again the activities and aspirations of Railfuture West Midlands. The Station Manager, Patrick Power, once again offered us space for a display free-of-charge, for which we are most grateful.

We had agreed to adopt the slogan 'Tell us about your journey today'. As it happens, the event coincided with some serious delays to many local and some long-distance trains due to trespassers on the line. Consequently we were inundated in the morning with passengers wishing to 'vent their spleen' and collected nearly 50 completed questionnaires, many giving us their email addresses and permission to contact from time to time. We may not have generated many new members but we certainly succeeded in raising Railfuture's profile.

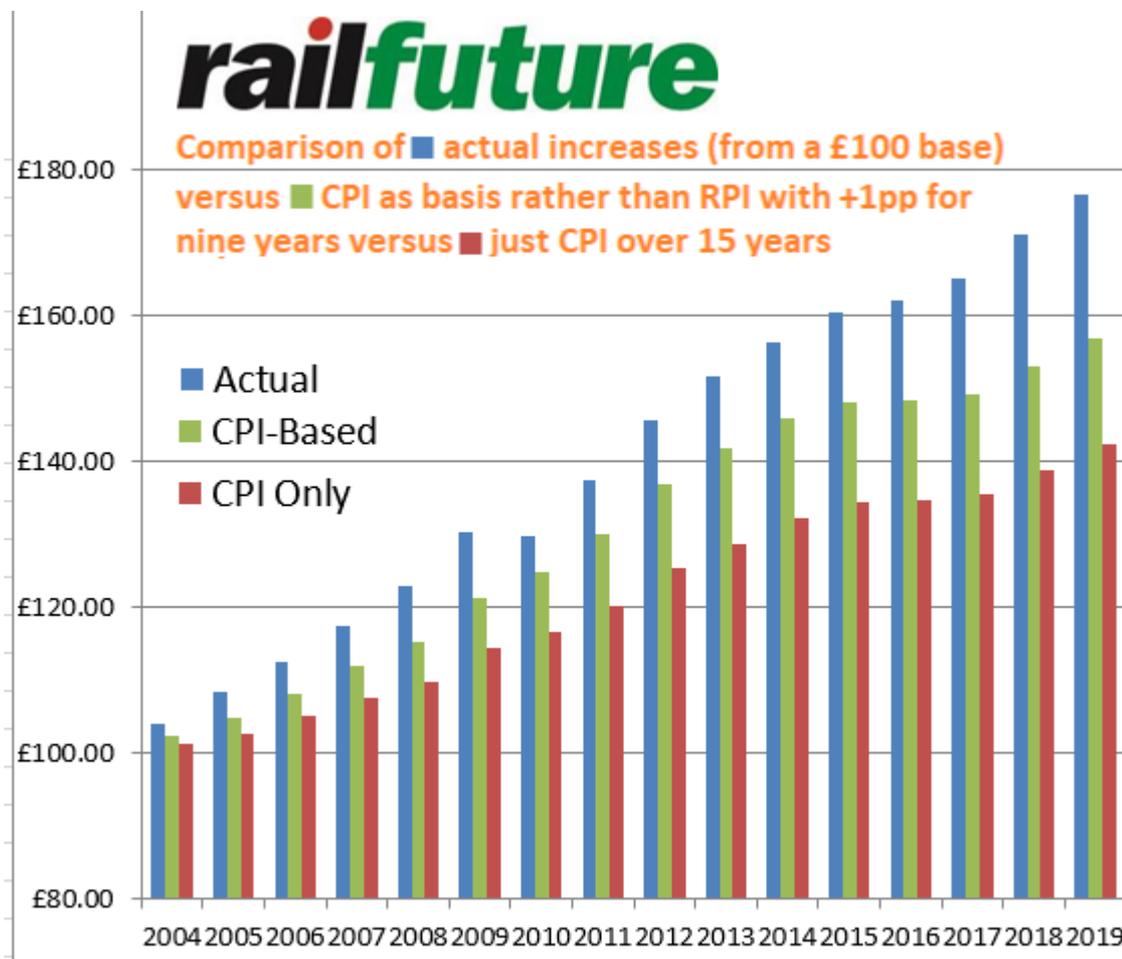
## Rail passengers rewarded with yet another kick in the wallet

Rail fares go up by an average of 3.1% on 2nd January, despite 2018 being one of the worst years ever for punctuality. "After a terrible year of timetable chaos, passengers are being rewarded with yet another kick in the wallet" said Bruce Williamson from the campaign group Railfuture. "Since 2004, rail fares have raced ahead of people's incomes whilst the cost of motoring has remained static, partly thanks to the government's continuing freeze on fuel duty. Petrol is now cheaper than it was in 2011, when the last fuel duty increase kicked in. In that time, rail fares have gone up 28%. Are they trying to drive us off the railways? Why are hard-working commuters being punished for the "crime" of trying to get the train to work? It really is war against the train passenger."

Rail fare increases are based on the Retail Price Index (RPI) rather than the government-preferred Consumer Price Index (CPI), which is usually lower.

"So why not use CPI? It's a very deliberate policy on the part of the government to make the most expensive walk-on fares in Europe even more expensive year on year. Rail passengers are paying the price for the government's inability to control industry costs. It's time that Chris Grayling got a grip: after all, if he's not the "fat controller", who is?"

The group has produced some figures comparing the effect of CPI v RPI on rail fares:





**FARE RISES IN BRITAIN OVER 15 YEARS  
EFFECT OF USING RPI INSTEAD OF CPI  
ON GOVERNMENT-SET REGULATED FARES**

The government has imposed RPI+1% fare rises between 2004 and 2013, and RPI since. These figures show the effect if the government had based rises on the standard CPI rather than the obsolete RPI. It was RPI-1% between 1999 and 2003, and was RPI before that.

|          | RPI  | CPI | Diff | Jan  | Govt   | Actual | £100.00 |        | If CPI | £100.00 |
|----------|------|-----|------|------|--------|--------|---------|--------|--------|---------|
| 2003 JUL | 3.1  | 1.3 | 1.8  | 2004 | RPI+1% | 4.1    | £104.10 | CPI+1% | 2.3    | £102.30 |
| 2004 JUL | 3.0  | 1.4 | 1.6  | 2005 | RPI+1% | 4.0    | £108.26 | CPI+1% | 2.4    | £104.76 |
| 2005 JUL | 2.9  | 2.3 | 0.6  | 2006 | RPI+1% | 3.9    | £112.48 | CPI+1% | 3.3    | £108.22 |
| 2006 JUL | 3.3  | 2.4 | 0.9  | 2007 | RPI+1% | 4.3    | £117.32 | CPI+1% | 3.4    | £111.90 |
| 2007 JUL | 3.8  | 1.9 | 1.9  | 2008 | RPI+1% | 4.8    | £122.95 | CPI+1% | 2.9    | £115.15 |
| 2008 JUL | 5.0  | 4.4 | 0.6  | 2009 | RPI+1% | 6.0    | £130.33 | CPI+1% | 5.4    | £121.37 |
| 2009 JUL | -1.4 | 1.8 | -3.2 | 2010 | RPI+1% | -0.4   | £129.81 | CPI+1% | 2.8    | £124.77 |
| 2010 JUL | 4.8  | 3.1 | 1.7  | 2011 | RPI+1% | 5.8    | £137.34 | CPI+1% | 4.1    | £129.89 |
| 2011 JUL | 5.0  | 4.4 | 0.6  | 2012 | RPI+1% | 6.0    | £145.58 | CPI+1% | 5.4    | £136.90 |
| 2012 JUL | 3.2  | 2.6 | 0.6  | 2013 | RPI+1% | 4.2    | £151.69 | CPI+1% | 3.6    | £141.83 |
| 2013 JUL | 3.1  | 2.8 | 0.3  | 2014 | RPI    | 3.1    | £156.39 | CPI    | 2.8    | £145.80 |
| 2014 JUL | 2.5  | 1.6 | 0.9  | 2015 | RPI    | 2.5    | £160.30 | CPI    | 1.6    | £148.13 |
| 2015 JUL | 1.0  | 0.1 | 0.9  | 2016 | RPI    | 1.0    | £161.90 | CPI    | 0.1    | £148.28 |
| 2016 JUL | 1.9  | 0.6 | 1.3  | 2017 | RPI    | 1.9    | £164.98 | CPI    | 0.6    | £149.17 |
| 2017 JUL | 3.6  | 2.6 | 1.0  | 2018 | RPI    | 3.6    | £170.92 | CPI    | 2.6    | £153.05 |
| 2018 JUL | 3.2  | 2.5 | 0.7  | 2019 | RPI    | 3.2    | £176.39 | CPI    | 2.5    | £156.88 |

From a £100 fare in 2003, using RPI as a basis rather than CPI has increased that fare by £19.51.

Note: figures apply to England (except Southeastern). In recent years Scotland and Wales may have differed.

**RAILFUTURE - CAMPAIGNING FOR BETTER SERVICES OVER A BIGGER RAILWAY**

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## PROVISION OF STATIONS ON THE CAMP HILL LINE

Report of meeting held at Kings Heath Community Centre on November 20th 2018

Presentation given by: GAVIN SMITH – SCHEME SPONSOR, WMRE

- MOSELEY: Entrance/exit at both ends of platform
- KINGS HEATH: Entrance/exit ONE end, Emergency exit at other end of platform
- HAZELWELL: Unsure of access provision
- Access to stations will be by LIFTS and STAIRS, there will be NO RAMPS
- ALL STATIONS TO HAVE TWO-CAR LENGTH CANOPIES
- ALL STATIONS TO HAVE PASSIVE PROVISION TO PROVIDE BUILDINGS (INCLUDING BOOKING OFFICES)
- ALL STATIONS WILL HAVE CYCLE PROVISION, BUT NOT ON PLATFORMS, AS THIS IS NOT ALLOWED
- ALL PLATFORMS WILL ALLOW SIX-CAR TRAINS

- SERVICES WILL BE PROVIDED BY NEW TRAINS, WHICH WILL BE HALF-HOURLY AT INITIALLY
- ALL PLATFORMS WILL HAVE SEATS
- FUNDING IS IN PLACE FOR ALL THREE STATIONS, BUT THERE IS NO FUNDING FOR THE PROPOSED BALSALL HEATH STATION AT PRESENT
- IT IS ANTICIPATED THAT THE STATIONS WILL BE OPEN IN DECEMBER 2021
- JOURNEY TIMES TO NEW STREET ARE ANTICIPATED TO BE 15 MINS FROM HAZELWELL, 12 MINS FROM KINGS HEATH and 9 MINS FROM MOSELEY.



**New Snow Hill Station entrance will give passengers direct link between trains and trams**



Passengers using Birmingham's Snow Hill Station are to get a new entrance so they can switch seamlessly between local rail and tram services. An image of how the new eastern entrance will look was released today (Tuesday December 18) by Transport for West Midlands (TfWM), part of the West Midlands Combined Authority (WMCA). TfWM also announced the appointment of leading independent infrastructure specialist Barhale to build the £1.5 million project.

The scheme involves opening up another of the arches under the Victorian viaduct that carries trains and the West Midland Metro trams into the city centre. At the moment passengers wanting to get from the West Midlands Metro stop at St Chads to trains in Snow Hill Station have to walk down a flight of external steps and then along A4440 Queensway before turning into Livery Street and accessing the station through its second entrance. Alternatively they have to walk past the Snow Hill Three, Two and One office developments and into the main Snow Hill entrance. The new third entrance will remove both of these external walks and instead give passengers a direct way into the station from the tram stop. Rail passengers wanting to catch a Metro service will also get direct access without having to leave the station.

Brenda Lawrence, West Midlands Railway's head of stations, said "The future of public transport is all about making it easier and simpler for passengers to move seamlessly between different modes of travel. "The third Snow Hill entrance, connecting the railway station with the Metro, is another important step towards that goal."

Cllr Roger Lawrence, WMCA portfolio holder for transport, said: "This new entrance to Snow Hill is one of several exciting projects in our long term rail development programme which aims to transform train travel in the West Midlands over the coming years. "Building the eastern entrance is a positive improvement that we can deliver in the short term, with the potential for more ambitious plans for the station being developed as part of the Snow Hill Growth Strategy."

The project will see Barhale construct the entrance beneath the existing brick arch viaduct which is enclosed by a reinforced concrete wall at the station's Livery Street end, where the second entrance was built more than a decade ago.

**Work on the new entrance is set to start in summer 2019, and it will link into the existing Livery Street entrance to the station.**

Cllr Ian Ward, leader of Birmingham City Council and WMCA portfolio holder for economic growth, said: "Improving the links between local rail and tram services will lead to a much better passenger experience, further cementing Snow Hill's importance to our ambitious growth plans for Birmingham and the wider West Midlands. "Better connectivity will make this an even more attractive place to work and invest, helping us create more jobs and opportunities for the people of the region."

Paul Edwards, contracts manager at Barhale, added: "The main challenge for construction will be to break through the reinforced concrete wall at the Livery Street end of the station to form the new access. "This is in the operational side of the station and so the works will take place outside of station opening hours with dust proof screens erected to keep out debris. This will allow 'business as usual' at Snow Hill station during the works."

New ticketing, security and travel information facilities will also be provided in the new entrance as well as wayfinding signage between the entrance and the St Chads Metro stop.

The new entrance is expected to be in operation in late 2019 with Metro and rail services unaffected during the construction period.

## **PASSENGER GROUP**

Postponing the Cross Country Trains (XC) franchising pending the outcome of the Rail Review could delay improvements to the franchise, which suffers from overcrowding due to too few trains. However, capacity could be increased without timetable changes through the introduction of new or

cascaded trains, so the Group's XC liaison officer will discuss possible ways forward, and also ask who the XC contact is at DfT.

### [£2.3 million overhaul of Lichfield Trent Valley station underway to make it accessible for everyone](#)

*West Midlands Trains - Dec 07, 2018 10:56 GMT*

Work is underway to install new lifts at Lichfield Trent Valley station to ensure it's accessible for everyone by Summer 2019.

Network Rail has started work on the £2.3 million 'Access for All' upgrade, which will transform the way people with all mobility needs use the railway.

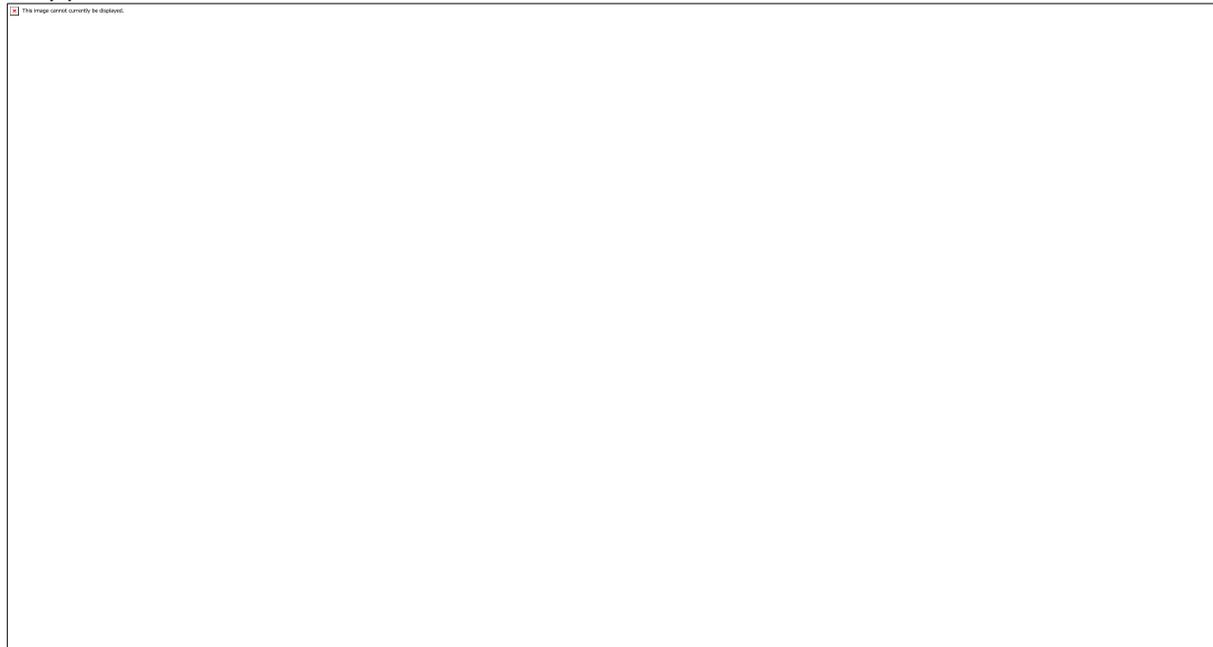
Passengers using the Cross City line and the West Coast Mainline services will soon benefit from the improvements, with the two new lifts providing step free access to all three platforms for the first time.

The investment has come directly from the Department for Transport's 'Access for All' programme, which was launched in 2006 to improve accessibility at railway stations nationwide. It forms part of Network Rail's five-year, multi-billion-pound Railway Upgrade Plan, which is the biggest investment in the railway since Victorian times.

The station, which is linked to London via the West Coast Mainline and Birmingham on the Cross City line, is one of the busiest commuter lines outside the south east of England.

#### **University Station**

It looks like the delayed work to rebuild University Station could be back on track. Station designs have been published and Committee member Colin Major has been along to the station to see if they pass muster.



**Above** proposal for the new station building at the New Street end of the station showing the bridge across the canal to Birmingham University campus

**Below** a view of the new station building from the Queen Elizabeth Hospital side of the platforms.



## Rail Ombudsman launched

The vast majority of complaints (99%) are dealt with by train companies without the need for people to turn to an appeals process, according to data published by the Office of Rail and Road (ORR).

Unfortunately, when passengers do complain far too often, they are left feeling dissatisfied with the outcome of a complaint against their train operator, but there was simply no way to appeal the operator's decision.

Until now that is, with [the launch of a new independent ombudsman](#) with the power to intervene when passengers' feel let down by rail companies. The [Rail Ombudsman](#) has been set up to offer a free, expert service to help sort out unresolved passenger complaints. Its decisions are binding on rail companies, which means that they must comply with them. It will also have the power to order train operators to pay compensation

Of course we all hope that most people will never have to use the Ombudsman and that train operators will do better at dealing with and resolving passenger complaints in future, but in case you find yourself let down by your rail company's complaints procedure, this means it will no longer be possible for a complaint to remain deadlocked between a rail company and a customer.

The service will be provided by the Dispute Resolution Ombudsman see <https://www.disputeresolutionombudsman.org>

It will be free to use and will cover all train services across Britain. Customers can go to the free-to-use Rail Ombudsman if they are unhappy with the final response from a rail company (sometimes called a 'deadlock letter') or if their complaint has not been resolved within 40 working days of the rail company receiving it.

- The Rail Ombudsman will receive all disputed customer complaints about events occurring either on or after 26 November 2018. It will either resolve them or put them in the hands of the body best-placed to deal with them.

- The Ombudsman will directly deal with disputes arising from complaints about the way that TOCs have provided their contracted service, which the customer has paid to receive on the day.

## RDG Ombudsman graphic.png



*Source: The Rail Ombudsman, November 2018*

Under the previous system, if you were unhappy with a complaint made to a rail operator you could go to consumer group Transport Focus. However, this group couldn't force train operators to act.

## China's great leap forward with high speed rail

China is introducing 553 new high speed rail services in 2018, a 9% increase on last year. By the end of the year, there will be an extra 1,500 miles of high speed line to add to China's 15,500 mile network.

The new lines will mean 12 cities, including Fuxin, Chaoyang, Chengde, Tongliao, Mudanjiang, Rizhao, Lianyungang, Yancheng, Yaan and Lijiang, can now benefit from high speed rail services.

The Chinese Ministry of Transport believes that high speed railways now serve more than half of its cities with populations of more than 1 million.

China now claims it has the world's most modern railway system and the most developed high-speed rail network.

New suburban Metro rail networks across the country are also packed with commuters but China's amazing economic success story has also led to private cars jamming the roads and airlines are also busy.



*TRIAL RUN: A high speed train at Hangzhou in December 2018 bound for Huangshan on the new 165 mile long line. Pictures XINHUA*

Rail development continues apace. Beijing has approved a 50 mile long high speed line to connect the busy port city of Ningbo to Zhoushan, on an archipelago off China's coast, with a 10 mile section of the line in a tunnel under the sea. In addition to the undersea tunnel, a road-rail bridge will be built to link parts of the archipelago. The American company Boeing is this month opening an aircraft factory in Zhoushan, which is in one of China's official national scenic areas.

In November, a new 180 mile long high speed railway line started operating between Harbin and Mudanjiang, in a region where the temperature can be as low as minus 40 degrees Celsius in winter. Construction of the railway line started in December 2014 as one of the key projects in China's high-speed rail network scheme.

**Editor's Note;** The Chinese government is using the high speed investment as a Keynesian boost of infrastructure spending as economic growth has fallen sharply. Many pundits believe that the drop in growth is due to Xi Jinping's policy of reversing some of the Deng reforms which liberated the economy three decades ago. Under Mr Xi the large nationalised behemoths of Chinese industry have gained favour over the private start-ups of recent years.