

**West Midlands Branch Newsletter November 2020**

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**EDITOR'S MESSAGE**

We have held back on producing a newsletter during the current lockdown as almost every day there are changes in guidance or directives from the Government making anything we write out of date as soon as it is written. I started writing this as there was an easing of restrictions only for the recent imposition of tighter restrictions.

However, your Officers and Committee have been busy liaising with the Train Operating Companies and WMRE and other decision makers. We also wish to hear your views and held our first online Members Meeting in October- see below.

It is my personal view that there needs to be a **Positive** message aimed at everyone, not just regular rail users, that rail is a **Safe, Enjoyable and Value for money method of travelling**. A campaign at National level visibly endorsed by the Cabinet is needed. An opportunity was missed when the Prime Minister visited Curzon Street, to announce the starting of construction work on HS2, that he wasn't shown using the train to get to and from Birmingham.

**A clear, positive, unambiguous, consistent, and trustworthy communication by policy makers and TOCs is essential to reinstate passenger usage and trust in Rail.**

As part of this campaign there should be, in urban areas, a multi modal "whole journey" ticketing easy to use and understand. The Fare Box income is now being in DfT's hands, there is a need for them and the Treasury to recognise that the previous aim of any fare changes being "Revenue neutral" will be impossible to achieve. However, by incentivising more usage at a lower price will, as Supermarkets know well, increase turnover and thus pay for the fixed costs of providing services.

Hoping you and yours are safe and well

**Colin Major**

**GETTING PASSENGERS BACK ON RAIL**

There was a National On-line Railfuture Conference on 3<sup>rd</sup> October with five speakers from across the Rail industry with an excellent presentation by Peter Sargant of West Midlands Rail Executive.

At the end of the Conference there was an online survey

- 73% said that the industry and government should do more to attract passengers back
- Opinion more divided on Face coverings 51% said they should be more vigorously policed, however 43% said it was about right currently.
- Similarly, when asked what one thing the industry and government should do to attract passengers back the two highest scores were 27% saying Promotional Fares and 23% to Quickly introduce Flexible Season tickets.

**WMT in the forefront of customer information.** Congratulations to WMT who, despite claims elsewhere, were the first TOC to provide an online traffic light system to advise travellers of loadings on a train they were planning to catch.

**Branch Open Meeting** - In October we held an online Meeting open to all Branch members where the attendees reported their experiences in using trains during the current restrictions and gave their suggestions for future campaigns. Branch member Owen O'Neill gave a stimulating presentation comparing his ideas for rail development in the next twenty years compared to those of the West Midlands Mayor's 2040 Vision for rail and tram.

**West Midlands Rail Executive** -We continue to have an excellent relationship with WMRE and in October had a 1 ½ hour meeting with the Executive Director, the Head of Rail Development, the Franchise Delivery Manager (has oversight of WMT TOC) and the Business Development Manager.

Topics discussed included the current situation, future timetabling, Restoring Your Railways bids, HS2 Integrated Rail Plan, Updates on new stations including Midlands Rail Hub and the infrastructure needed to deliver this. WMRE are reviewing their Rail Investment Strategy and we are consultees in the process.

## DECARBONISATION

You may have seen the news item on the first mainline running of a Hydrogen powered train called HydroFLEX, although residents of Evesham and Honeybourne were astonished to find that the media release from Porterbrook and then repeated by the BBC had moved their town and village to Warwickshire from Worcestershire. Simon de Montford and King Stephen are rising from their graves in protest.

Whilst there has been much publicity for Hydrogen power a detailed report commissioned by the German federal transport ministry has compared the economics of battery-electric multiple-units (BEMU) and hydrogen-electric multiple-units (HEMU) as alternatives to conventional DMUs.

It suggests BEMUs are likely to be €59 million cheaper to buy and operate on a whole life cost basis than alternative non-diesel trains powered using hydrogen fuel cells. The report was compiled by German electrical standards and research organisation Verband der Elektrotechnik Elektronik Informationstechnik (VDE).

The report suggests that not only is the initial cost of HEMU trains significantly more in the first place, **their energy costs and the cost of multiple replacement fuel cells during a 30-year working life means they are around 35% more expensive than BEMUs,**

**Hydrogen power-** the Birmingham Hydrogen Hub at Tyseley Energy Park, which is opposite the WMT's Tyseley TMD, the Park has a small 3MW electrolyser producing Hydrogen gas, powered by two "Energy from Waste" units, with sufficient spare H2 after supplying the City of Birmingham hydrogen powered buses to refuel two three car trains. This would enable trial running of hydrogen powered units if WMT wish and there are plans for a much larger electrolyser capable of providing sufficient power for 25+ trains supplied by a 250metre pipeline direct to the TMD.

## OTHER RAIL NEWS

**Wolverhampton Station** train, tram, and bus interchange - Having completed phase one and with phase two underway with completion in early 2021. The Interchange project has been shortlisted for Construction Project of the Year, Regeneration Project of the Year and for the Sustainability award at the Insider's West Midlands Property Awards 2020.

**Walsall to Wolverhampton** -Our long running campaign to restore passenger services on the electrified route in this part of the Black Country, which suffers from congested roads with significant bus and car journey times between the two cities, has been fulfilled by Planning consent being given for two new railway stations at Darlaston and Willenhall. An invitation to tender has now been issued for construction of the stations with a view to appointing a contractor by next spring. when they open in 2023 the stations will offer the people of Darlaston and Willenhall vastly improved connections to Wolverhampton, Walsall, and Birmingham New Street stations.

**Widening employment opportunities on the Railways-** West Midlands Combined Authority have started funding training on track maintenance for unemployed persons to start in November. They have partnered with the City & Guilds Foundation to create a scheme for 16 persons towards a City & Guilds Level 2 qualification in track maintenance, after which they will be guaranteed a job interview with a local employer and the prospect of building a career in a sector facing significant skills shortages.

**Coventry Station-** To our disappointment it was announced that in the rebuilding of the station bay platform which would provide improved services to Nuneaton and Leicester would be postponed. In response to our concerns the City's Director of Highways and Transportation said "We therefore decided that to ensure visitors coming to our city in 2021/2 do not arrive at a building site we would de-couple the bay platform from the rest of the project -with the delivery of the bay platform to take place after City of Culture. As far as the bay platform is concerned, we are working with DfT and NR to investigate lower cost ways of achieving it and to DfT to fund any shortfall in funding"

**Camphill Line-**The Planning Application for Moseley station has been approved by Birmingham City Council's planning committee so all three proposed stations on the Camp Hill line namely Moseley, Kings Heath and Hazelwell have planning permission.

## COMMUNITY RAIL PARTNERSHIPS (CRP).

Worcestershire CRP celebrates its first anniversary on 6<sup>th</sup> November with an online event. The link to view this event is <https://register.gotowebinar.com/register/7876675210686135568>

Their community project "Stitch Train Worcestershire" creating 18 tapestry train artworks for temporary display at each of Worcestershire's 18 railway stations or nearby civic centre in the Autumn has been completed.

Heart of England CRP which has been in existence much longer announced that they now have Station Adoption Groups for all of its stations.

There are three CRPs within the West Midlands, with more to come. To get involved please contact the nearest to where you live:

- Heart of England CRP <http://www.shakespeareline.com/community-rail.html>
- North Staffs CRP <http://www.northstaffsrail.org.uk/>
- Worcestershire CRP [peter.chapman@worcestershirecommunityrail.org.uk](mailto:peter.chapman@worcestershirecommunityrail.org.uk) / @WorcsCRP

#### **WELCOME**

We welcome the following new member: -  
Kieran Crowe, Stratford-on-Avon.

#### **YOUR VIEWS MATTER**

We would like to hear from **you** about any matters you believe your Officers and Committee should be working on. So please don't hesitate to get in touch with me on [colin.major@railfuture.org.uk](mailto:colin.major@railfuture.org.uk).

**Almost every week we receive information on new developments, and we post these on: -**  
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