

RailWestMidlands

Issue 124

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Free to members

From the West Midlands branch of *Railfuture*
Britain's leading independent advocate of rail

From this



Railfuture's origins date back to the 1950s when railway line closures occurred regularly and scenes like the top picture were increasingly common.

For decades *Railfuture* has been promoting reopenings and new lines, and there has been considerable success as shown in our 2010 book *Britain's Growing Railway* (still on sale).

To this



These photos show the work recently done by Moorland and City Railway on its extension from Leekbrook Junction to Endon, which should reopen early in 2012, and hopefully a link to Stoke-on-Trent within a year.

In 2009 MCR secured more than 20 miles of mothballed railway track from Network Rail and in November 2010 (in partnership with the Churnet Valley Railway) passenger trains ran from Leekbrook Jct to Caudon Lowe.

Using this



Although MCR's roots are in the heritage movement, its intention is for freight trains to operate on its route, and this has just helped secure £1.65 million from the government.

Photos of Moorland and City Line reproduced by kind permission of Dave Gibson (copyright 2011) www.davegibsonphotography.co.uk

Read more on page 3.

Christmas comes early for rail campaigners but *Railfuture* still has plenty of work ahead



Railfuture national vice chairman, and acting West Midlands branch chairman writes:

Welcome to a slightly different looking West Midlands branch newsletter. We hope that you like it, especially the inclusion of colour, which several other *Railfuture* branches are now using in their newsletters.

This issue we have a variety of items, ranging from local and high-speed passenger services, new rolling stock, reopened lines, international travel and rail freight – all are subjects on which *Railfuture* campaigns both locally through its branches and nationally via its specialist committees.

The last few weeks have seemed like a dream come true for some rail campaigners with an almost-continuous series of positive news from the government ranging from a postponement of excessive above inflation fare increases in England (Welsh and Scottish passengers never faced them) to electrification, railway reopenings, line upgrades and new stations. Of course, we must look below the surface of these announcements to see whether the funding has really been committed, and challenge cost escalation in case the schemes are later abandoned.

In 2012 *Railfuture* will publish volume II of Britain's Growing Railway, which looks at potential schemes for the future. Each branch has been asked to contribute its thoughts. Volume I, the A-Z of Reopenings, looked at what has already been achieved. See www.railfuture.org.uk/books to purchase online.

We will also be holding two national events in the branch area – our AGM and the Rail Users' Conference. I hope that many branch members will join us at Worcester Guild Hall on Saturday 12th May for our branch AGM prior to the national event, as we would like to hear your views on what the branch should be doing. For example, should we have more meetings for our members to attend? I am delighted that our national anonymous survey of members has generated more than 600 responses in the few weeks since it was sent with *Railwatch*. If you have not yet done so please do return it, in the freepost envelope. *I wish everyone a prosperous and happy 2012.*

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It's nearly 64 years since Britain's private railways were merged into one, and almost as long since a series of new private railways were created following a continuous series of closures of that national network. Those are, of course, Britain's huge number of heritage railways – exceeding the rest of the world put together – run by enthusiasts for the benefit of themselves, tourists and families. Some are used by the freight companies, but that is incidental.

Staffordshire is about to have the first private rail network – a cross-shaped pair of lines joining at Leekbrook Junction (see map) totalling 30 miles – which are being opened as much for freight as passengers, and if the planned extensions to Leek and Alton Towers are achieved then it should get a significant number of people out of cars as well.



Diagram: Eleanor King

The Churnet Valley Railway had already opened between Leekbrook Junction and Kingsley and Frogghall – as *Railfuture* members saw in an outing after the 2006 summer conference – and runs occasional DMU services down to Oakamoor sidings. The Moorland and City Railway has obtained running rights over that line and opened Leekbrook Junction to Caudon Lowe. It's cleared and repaired the track to Endon (see photo left), almost half way to Stoke-on-Trent.



Endon Calling
(c) Dave Gibson

MCR has funded its scheme entirely privately, with the Churnet Valley buying shares in it through a £450,000 share offer of its own, which has raised £323,000 so far. However, the reopening received a boost in November when the government supported MCR's Regional Growth Fund application with a £1.65 million award – one of only two successful rail schemes in the country (the other was the Todmorden curve); and David Cameron wants to open it!

The government isn't funding the railway reopening as such, but the jobs and other benefits that will be created in and around the area that the railway passes through. According to the press release these include the Moneystone leisure development in the Moorlands, the Cornhill site in Leek and a number of sites in Stoke-on-Trent.

Unfortunately the reopening is not welcomed by everyone. The mothballed railway was last used in 1992 – just within the 20-year-rule but this has not stopped a resident formally asking the county council to designate the railway line around Endon as a 'village green'. Prior to that local politicians had wanted to rip up the track and use the route as a cycle path.

Reopenings are not as straightforward as we would like. Jerry Alderson.

Your *Railfuture* branch committee

Since the last newsletter the branch committee has been joined by some enthusiastic new members, whilst existing members are eager to play a bigger part and we've said goodbye to a few long-standing and valuable people who have contributed a lot over the years. We thank them all.

New people are welcome to stand for election to the branch committee, which is elected each year by the membership. Please contact branch secretary Peter Hughes – peter.hughes@railfuture.org.uk for information. Below are profiles of some of the ten current committee members, all of whom can be contacted by e-mail using first.last@railfuture.org.uk.



Peter Hughes, Secretary

- Peter joined the committee in 1997 and a Railfuture member since the 1980s. He now manages branch membership, finance and the media
- Peter's household makes full use of three rail-cards - family, young person's and senior. He says "We are allergic to traffic jams but enjoy motoring and try to choose the mode to suit the occasion."



Les Fawcett, Newsletter Editor

- Les has been a member for 10 years and on the committee for most of that time. He is now taking a bigger role in running the branch. Les is a member of Railfuture's Network Development Committee and has contributed to the HS2 reponsee. Worked in permanent way design until 1963, then in engineering & architecture until retirement in 2009.



William Whiting

- He has been on the committee for over a year and will be organising the national Rail Users' Conference on behalf of the branch. He has attended nearly every *Railfuture* national conference since he joined in 2002. He works for Sandwell MBC in legal services. He has a passion for the railways as that is the way he travelled to boarding school in York.



John Balmforth

- A committee member for a year, John served 10 years on the former statutory Rail Passenger Committee for the Midlands, part of the time as Deputy Chair. Subsequently he chaired TravelWatch West Midlands and he is the author of four transport books published by Ian Allan with a new one 'Virgin Trains from HST to Pendolino' due out in April 2012.

Other committee members are Peter Rowland, minutes secretary; Albert Thomas, *Railfuture* life member and returning former member of WM committee; Peter Kennard; former chair of Stratford Line Promotion Group; Mike Ponsonby, representing Bromsgrove RUG, Robin Fennell, former committee member, returning temporarily; Jerry Alderson, acting chair.

HS2 – *Railfuture* supports the principle but questions the government’s proposals

There is a variety of vastly different opinions regarding HS2 within every organisation in Britain except, perhaps, for those created solely to support or oppose the government’s proposal. *Railfuture* is no exception, ranging from “get it built quickly” to “there are more important rail projects to spend the money on”. One thing was certain – *Railfuture* could not be silent on HS2.

Some members may be surprised that *Railfuture*, while wholeheartedly supporting the principle of building new tracks northwards from London, does not support the full HS2 plan put forward by the government. You can see *Railfuture*’s response to the government’s consultation on the national website www.railfuture.org.uk.

Railfuture is not alone in pointing out a number of serious flaws in the official plan. The recent report by the influential parliamentary Transport Select Committee supports the findings of *Railfuture*’s study. Other national bodies also question the plan.

Timing: HS2 Ltd say their plan would come into use in 2026 while saying that WCML will be full by 2020. That is too late. HS2 must come into use incrementally, i.e. we build the first section (to Milton Keynes?) and bring it into use well before 2026 while continuing to build northwards (to Rugby to connect with WCML?).

Connectivity: the plan is to run from London to West Midlands with no intermediate connection. This means that many communities would be bypassed. We propose that HS2 is fully integrated into the rail network to give many more interconnections and greater flexibility (including Wolverhampton, Walsall, Stoke, Coventry, Rugby). Justine Greening, the new transport secretary, has recently commented on the very poor services between various midlands and northern cities.

North-south divide: HS2 Ltd propose separate services from London to a few provincial cities. There would be few connections between those cities. Nothing could be more calculated to exacerbate the north-south divide.

CO₂ emissions: HS2 Ltd admit that HS2 would have little effect on CO₂. Britain is legally committed to reducing our CO₂ emissions by 80%. If the biggest rail development since the Victorian railway building era - the biggest transport plan since the motorways were built - cannot make a substantial contribution to reducing CO₂, what can? We have the answer.

Parkway stations: parkways tend to suck skills out of the places they are supposed to serve, to the advantage of larger cities. HS2 Ltd say that 70% of the benefits of HS2 would go to London.

There is an argument that it is better to drive to a parkway than to drive all the way to the final destination. This may be true for journeys within WM, but in the case of the proposed parkway station in the Meriden gap, that station would generate a large number of car journeys on congested roads just to get to the station, because it has poor public transport links. This folly is unnecessary when there is International station in the perfect position and with space for expansion if needed. A rail-rail interchange would fit nicely near Water Orton, immediately west of Sutton Park junction. WM parkway was conceived by the Highways Agency to suit their rules for motorway access.

Speed: No railway service in the world runs at 400km/h, the design speed for HS2. China has built some track for 400km/h operation but does not run it at that speed because of the energy cost. Energy use increases exponentially with speed, approximately as the square of velocity. This erodes the green credentials of rail. Larger countries build HS lines to run at about 300km/h. There is no need for us to build for 400km/h in our crowded little island with all the penalties of energy consumption, noise and inability to fit the landscape.

Some question whether *Railfuture* is sensible to question the government's plan as they fear the entire project could be abandoned. However, there is a precedent for trying to improve a proposal: HS1 in Kent (the channel tunnel rail link) was not built to the plan put forward by the rail industry. Instead, 85% of the route is beside motorways, older railways, or in tunnel. The protestors against the original plan say they are happy with the outcome. We have not learned the lesson!

Farewell to the class 150 trains

Many of us may have had enough of class 150 trains on the Snow hill lines but nostalgia was alive and well on 12 November. With commendable initiative and at short notice, London Midland provided a 5-car train to tour the lines (and more) formerly served by this class, raising funds for The Railway Children charity at the same time.

Covering Stratford, Leamington, Walsall, Bromsgrove and stations to Worcester via Kidderminster (twice) the tour also encompassed a trip up the Severn valley to Bridgnorth and back. Finishing long after night-fall one has to admire the stamina of those who stayed the whole course.

A few 150's will still be in use for a while but having experienced the excellent new class 172, I think I might wait 10 minutes if a 150 comes along. That may sound terribly ungrateful after years of sterling service from the old war-horse.

Peter Hughes

Why my children have not wanted a car

West Midlands committee member **William Whiting** writes: I have a daughter aged 19 at Birmingham University and a son at a sixth-form college. Surprisingly they have expressed no desire to pass a driving test or own a car. Why might this be so?

We have always travelled by train where possible from an age when we did not need baby equipment or a buggy to load in the boot of a car. Their grandparents lived in York so with a half hourly train service from Birmingham it could not be easier.

When we went on holiday we took the car as we often stayed in a remote location but we would often drive to a station close at hand. I give a few examples. We stayed on a farm near Honiton in Devon and took the train to Exeter and Totnes. We also enjoyed a holiday near Berwick-upon-Tweed and had a day out in Edinburgh by driving to Berwick and catching a train. We used the family railcard and that proved cheaper than driving to a town incurring the expense of parking.

When the time came to arrange visits to University Open Days I have taken both my son and daughter by train. We visited Cardiff, Edge Hill (near Ormskirk/Liverpool, Leeds York and Bath Universities. In the case of Bath the entire journey was undertaken by bus and train. Most Universities have a good bus service from the station.

Finally in the Summer we holidayed in the Lake District near Keswick. The holiday was walking based and the organisers provided transport to and from the walks. The entire journey was by public transport.

I hope I have demonstrated if young people are brought up to experience using public transport then there is less desire to drive a car. Universities are increasingly discouraging car use and many do not allow students to use a car at halls of residence. We need to move to encourage young people to travel by train. Perhaps the railcard could give a greater discount. I would welcome feedback on this issue.

Les Fawcett comments: *"My son also avoided buying a car until he went to work in Los Angeles, where it is difficult to travel without one – and difficult to travel with one, due to congestion on the 'freeways'."*

Advert: London-Barcelona rail trip 2012

The trip is organised by RDS Group Travel, which is independent of *Railfuture*, is from Monday 21st May until Sunday 27th May and is timed, as far as possible, to enable people from most parts of England to get to London in time for the Eurostar and return in time for most people to get home that evening. Full details and booking forms will be sent out in early January and members can email Trevor Garrod (trevor.garrod@railfuture.org.uk) or send an SAE to 15 Clapham Rd South, Lowestoft, NR32 1RQ.

Railfreight's bright future

While the Chancellor took the limelight on 29th November with his autumn economic statement, including the welcome news that the line from Oxford to Milton Keynes will be brought into passenger use, transport secretary Justine Greening made a statement that was less publicised about the government's plan for new Strategic Rail Freight Interchanges (SRFI).

She said "The UK logistics industry makes a significant contribution to the national economy, generating around £110 billion annually and employing more than 2 million people. The rail network transports over 100 million tonnes of goods per year. Rail freight delivers over a quarter of the containerised food, clothes and white goods, and delivers nearly all of the coal for the country's electricity generation. It has expanded by 60% over the last decade, and is expected to grow by a further 30% up to 2019.



Freight on the WCML

The Government believe that an expanded network of SRFIs, complemented by other freight interchanges and terminals, is needed to support longer-term development of efficient rail freight distribution logistics. While SRFIs operate to serve regional and cross-regional catchment areas, they are also key components in national and international networks. These networks are of strategic importance in facilitating links between UK regions and the European Union.

The Government are therefore taking measures to unblock the development of strategic rail freight interchanges and unlock the necessary private sector investment in such facilities. In parallel, the Department has asked Network Rail to provide industry support to the development of a network of SRFIs, working collaboratively with the wider logistics industry to: speed up the delivery of SRFI sites to meet business demand; assist with funding mechanisms (potentially including Network Rail funding); and establish appropriate delivery vehicles for rail infrastructure elements of such proposals."

Does this mean that Centro's long-term wish will be realised for Stourbridge-Walsall to be reopened for freight? And will this enable passenger services to be added?

Chiltern chief's HS2 talk in Leamington Spa



On 27th October Adrian Shooter, retiring chief of Chiltern Railways, addressed a packed meeting in Leamington Spa arranged by the by Friends of Leamington Station. He spoke mainly about HS2. Broadly in favour of a new high speed line, he refused to be drawn by questions about the detail of the government's plan, according to Les Fawcett who attended on behalf of *Railfuture*.

He said a lot about Japan and showed photos of Shinkansen services, talking up Maglev as the next generation of HS rail there. He has been there a number of times so tends to talk up Japanese rail experience and practice. The differences between European conditions and Japan, which makes Japan less useful than continental parallels, weren't really mentioned.

In answer to a question, he admitted that density of seating on trains was increasing. He was invited as the pioneer of Mk3s on the Chiltern line, and previously the 100 mph Class 168s which are spacious by modern UK train standards, to campaign for a reversal of the trend and a return to the more roomy seating layouts of BR InterCity days. He suggested that as traffic increases on rail, more dense seating is inevitable.

Good news for Coventry – Nuneaton line

On 14th December the government announced that the Coventry-Nuneaton Rail Upgrade (formerly known as NUCKLE) would receive a £9.8m DfT contribution towards a total cost of £18.8m. The scheme will see new stations at Bermuda Park (Nuneaton) and Ricoh Arena (home to Coventry City Football Club). There will be platform lengthening at Bedworth and creation of a bay platform at Coventry. There will also be an enhanced rail service. Amongst the other schemes announced at the same time, there is also a package of transport improvements in and around Worcester, including enhancements to Foregate Street and Malvern Link stations.



Ricoh Arena (photo Wikipedia)

NEWS SNIPPETS

LIGHT RAIL

- The £133m extension of the MIDLAND METRO tram system to reach Birmingham new Street is likely to be delayed until 2015 rather than late 2014 because of issues re-routing buses, particularly on Corporation Street where there are as many as 140 buses per hour.

STATIONS

- BIRMINGHAM NEW STREET. Last Christmas the weather prevented the extension of the Navigation St. footbridge to serve platform 12. This year the possession should allow the "bridge not far enough" to be extended eventually to a new entrance in Hill St.
- COSFORD station is closed until March for re-building. It has all the appearance of being built in a hurry just before WW2 to serve the adjacent aerodrome.

TRAIN SERVICES

- London Midland are bidding to run trains at 110mph on WCML, missing out Northampton to save 30 mins to Euston.
- Centro has announced plans to reinstate passenger services on the Sutton Park freight line - see Railway Herald (www.railwayherald.org) issue 289.
- Chiltern's Railways has been offering unlimited travel at weekends on its services for £10 . Unfortunately the promotion only lasted until 30th December.
- The experimental "Two Together" rail card which is being trialled in the West Midlands (only those in post code areas B, CV, DY, WS and WV) is still available. See www.twotogether-railcard.co.uk for details. The railcard is designed for people who are too old for a young person's railcard, too young for a senior railcard and do not travel with children. Allowing two adults to travel together it costs £28 and lasts for one year.
- Through tickets are now available on CrossCountry trains to stations on the Dean Forest Railway - see
 - www.crosscountrytrains.co.uk/Special_offers/Treats_and_discounts/

TELEVISION PROGRAMMES

- The third series of Michael Portillo's series "Great British Railway Journeys" starts on BBC Two on 2nd January 2012.

Berkswell station has been renovated this year. The disused stationmaster's house and the wooden booking office/waiting room were demolished. Apparently there was no toilet so when the staff needed one they had to take a train to the next station!

The new booking office is built in a proprietary system of concrete blocks made to look like bricks, hung on a metal frame.



New modular station building

The building is tall with a flat roof and very wide overhangs. It uses the same system as the excellent Corby station but the outcome is very different. The planning authority questioned the design, especially the flat roof. Network Rail said they had been criticised by a coroner after someone was electrocuted after climbing up a pitched roof and touching the wires. If anyone wants to reach the wires they can do so much more easily from the adjacent footbridge.

A separate glass and aluminium heated waiting room is provided, and a shelter and bike stand. No doubt it will all do the job, but need it have been so utilitarian? Compare with the friendly modern Canley (1995) and Tile Hill stations nearby: brick, slate, glass and the individuality for which Victorian stations are loved.

There is a good case for rapid construction using dry prefabricated components in the railway environment, but the design of future stations should be done by people more sympathetic with the image of the railway on its customers and its neighbours. Network Rail, please note.

Railfuture 2012 events in West Midlands

Railfuture's West Midlands branch has the honour of hosting next year's national AGM in Worcester on Saturday 12th May at 11:15. Our WM AGM will be held from 10:00-11:00 on the same day at the same venue so we can all get together and enjoy the speaker at the national event.

The branch is also hosting *Railfuture's* national Rail Users' Conference, which will be in Birmingham on Saturday 3rd November 2012.

This year's adventure by Eurostar and other high-speed trains saw an assorted bunch of 19 *Railfuture* members and friends gather at St. Pancras from all parts of the country. The trip went some way to dispel the belief that foreign trains are always better than ours. On the ICE from Brussels to Frankfurt, beer supplies ran out and we think we understood the German steward to blame the English for drinking all the beer - when they only had about 3 bottles to start with !! Add to that a few blocked toilets and we really felt at home.

Five days in and around Munich were packed with activity including lunch with Deutsche-Bahn and a visit to their control centre followed by a free trip to Augsburg. On other days groups or individuals took the train to Salzburg and the rack-railway up Zugspitz - Germany's highest mountain. That involved some bus replacement for engineering works. Unforgivably, the bus could not take all the passengers and three of our party missed their connection. Would we tolerate that in the UK?



Cab ride in the new class 440 'Fugger Express'



Munich tram at the Karlsplatz emu stop

Some sections of German high-speed lines are still under construction but it is already possible to return in one day via Cologne and Brussels, enabling the Scottish contingent to catch the sleeper and the rest of us to get all the way home.

We also met for a meal with members of Pro-bahn - our German equivalent. Quite what they find to campaign about was not obvious to us as we drooled over the seamless changes between trams, U-bahn, S-bahn and regional trains - with a day-ticket for five costing 28 euro covering the whole of Bavaria by all those modes plus bus!! Needless to say we took full advantage



Augsburg tram 2

Report by Peter Hughes