

RailWestMidlands

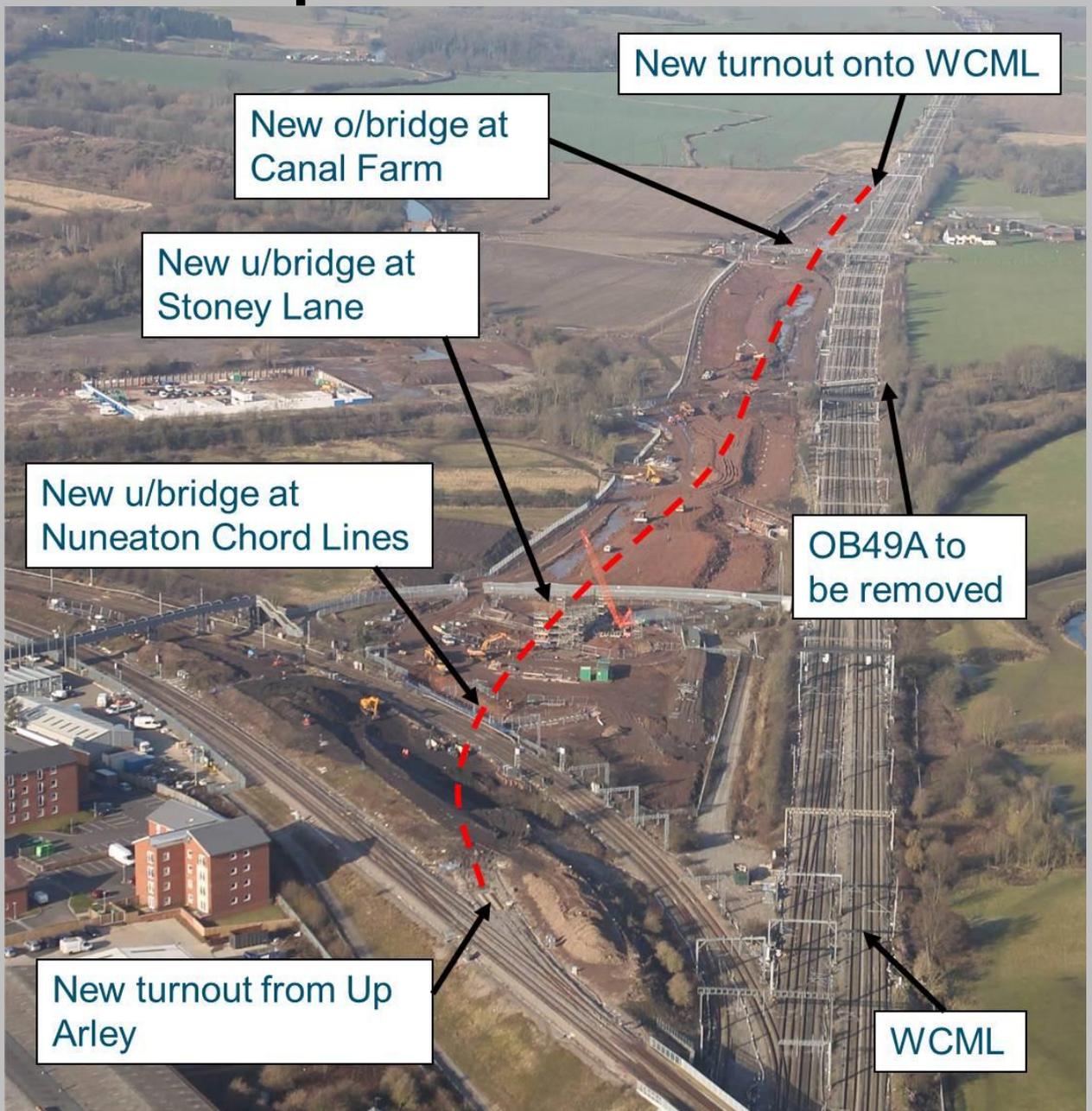
Issue 126

March 2013

£1 (free to members)

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

Most important rail freight project in Britain opens in the West Midlands



Picture and annotations courtesy of Network Rail

2012 was a good year for *Railfuture* Let's ensure 2013 will be even better



Jerry Alderson, *Railfuture* national vice chairman, writes: I find myself offering to format my third edition of Rail West Midlands and this time to edit it too. The branch is still looking for a permanent newsletter editor so it has been some time since the last issue. Hopefully this bumper edition makes up for it.

It's almost AGM time again and nominations are open to join the committee. Please consider doing so. You'll be joining an enthusiastic group. Three people were recently co-opted but there are spare places. Details at www.railfuture.org.uk/west+midlands_branch.

Wow, we were busy in 2012. We responded to more consultations and issued more press releases than ever before. We also had a lot of media attention, especially about the unnecessary and counter-productive above-inflation fare rises. We staged two excellent conferences, including the Birmingham one in November that the branch hosted (well done to all concerned). This newsletter includes a summary and a personal view from organiser William Whiting on organising events. The national web-site www.railfuture.org.uk was re-launched after a major technical upgrade, and you can now join, renew, donate, book conferences, take part in the monthly lottery and buy books online. We will be adding a lot more content in the next few months. Our Twitter account ([@Railfuture](https://twitter.com/Railfuture)) has many followers – please follow us too.

In 2012 our new national chairman, David Berman, persuaded five 'big hitters' to become vice presidents of Railfuture: Lord Adonis, Adrian Shooter, Chris Green, Roger Ford and Barry Doe. David and I will be hosting a reception in Westminster for them and our other VPs in March, when we hope to find ways that they can help *Railfuture*. Expect to see them contributing to the web-site and articles in *Railwatch*. We have just launched ***railaction***, an e-magazine that will be issued between editions of *Railwatch* – you can read it on the web-site, along with Rail User Express – our rail user group bulletin.

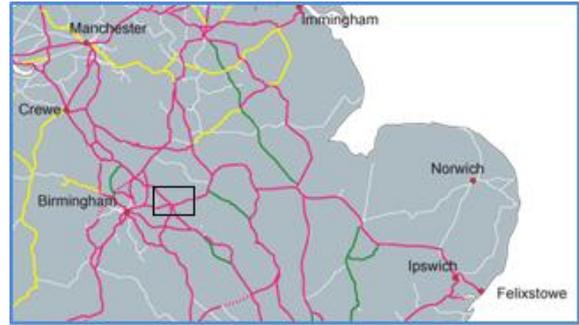
You can help in our success by attending the branch AGM in Birmingham on Saturday 27th April and our future branch meetings, keeping the committee informed of what is happening on the railway, and writing in support of the rail projects we are campaigning for. We always need new members – it has never been easier to join – so please encourage your friends to visit our web-site or write to **Railfuture Membership, 6 Carral Close, Brant Road, Lincoln, LN5 9BD**

As Financial Director I am eager that our members' money is spent wisely. Our current directors voted against all directors' expenses being automatically disclosed. However, David Berman and I have published a fully-itemised list of ours at www.railfuture.org.uk/expenses for you to view.

At national level we have six candidates for four places on the Board of Directors. It is excellent that three of them are new. Please use your vote!

jerry.alderson@railfuture.org.uk

The 0.9-mile-long Nuneaton North Chord that links the existing cross-country rail route from Felixstowe to Nuneaton with the west coast main line (a vital part of the Strategic Freight Network) was commissioned 21st October 2012 having taken about a year to complete. Of course, there was already a link, but it was on the level meaning that slow long freight trains crossed in front of the fast passenger trains causing delays. Cross-country freight trains will now travel through Nuneaton station, then onto the viaduct reinstated a few years ago (after removal in the 1980s) and down the new chord onto the WCML slow line. The Nuneaton North Chord extends from the north-west fringe of Nuneaton, approximately 600m to the north west of the existing railway station. It leaves the Birmingham to Leicester line near Two Bridges and runs parallel to the west coast main line (WCML) for approximately 0.9 miles before rejoining the WCML near Canal Farm (see front cover).



Nuneaton is shown in the boxed area.

The £28.3m scheme (described by John Smith, MD of freight operator GB Railfreight as "possibly the most important 1,400 yards of freight rail to open for several decades") has been co-financed by Network Rail, the Department for Transport and the European Union's TEN-T programme.

It was officially opened on 14th November by transport minister Rt Hon Simon Burns MP who said "The chord unlocks a real rail freight revolution with bigger containers now being taken straight from the Port of Felixstowe and transported by rail directly to the West Midlands and beyond." The entire route between the Port of Felixstowe and Nuneaton can now be used by freight trains carrying the more economical larger 9'6" ('high-cube') containers increasingly used by global shipping companies. The Felixstowe-Nuneaton freight route is expected to remove up to 750,000 lorries from roads each year by 2030.



The 21st October 13.45 ballast train from Harpenden (Herts) to Basford Hall (Crewe) used it first. UK Rail Tours will operate a charter over it on 25th May. The next enhancement for the region is grade separation at Norton Bridge.



GB Railfreight train on the chord – all photos and maps from Network Rail

Two-together discount card is scrapped

In the last issue William Whiting extolled the virtues of the then new £28 **Two Together Railcard** which was being piloted by ATOC just in the West Midlands (available to people with a Birmingham, Walsall, Wolverhampton, Dudley or Coventry postcode). One of the few innovations that the private-sector is supposed to be good at, it was useful for the majority that do not qualify for a senior railcard or young person's card, especially outside the south east, which still offers the Network Card. Whilst train travel is usually cheaper than car for one person, this is rarely the case for two adults in a car, so the card made train travel value for money. Unfortunately, ATOC has decided not to roll-out the card across the country and instead scrapped it in May. They did not say whether the take-up was low or if it led to lower revenue.



Railfuture believes the biggest threat to the railway now is its perceived poor value for money, following a decade of sustained RPI+1% fare increases, which has worked out at roughly CPI+1.5% each year.

We obtained considerable media attention (and some new members) over the Near Year period with contribution to television and radio programmes. In the press release, our media spokesman Bruce Williamson said: "Rail use is getting more expensive in real terms and goes against the Government's claim it wants to be the greenest government ever, if that were true they would be trying to get people on the trains instead of trying to discourage them by pricing them off. The Government has a policy of shifting the burden from the tax payer to the fare payer but we think they have gone too far with that."

Opposition to Station Destaffing

Along with above CPI fare increases, *Railfuture* is opposed to reductions in the service offered to passengers. We expect the rail industry to become more modern and efficient, finding innovative ways to offer an even better service ideally at lower cost (with savings passed back to passenger as lower fares). With few exceptions we are opposed to the de-staffing of stations (see our 2012 AGM resolution). It is accepted that passengers feel safer and are less stressed when there are staff available to ask advice and obtain assistance – whether stuck behind a glass window, on the platform or wandering around the station. There are many ways of deploying staff, and we expect the TOCs to be sensible about that. What matters to passengers is the *range*, the *quality*, and the *resilience* of the services provided.

Ticket vending machines are not a replacement for staff. TVMs achieve only some of the tasks performed by a person. They only sell a limited range of tickets (e.g. no Group-Save) and some only accept payments by card. Whilst TVMs replacing staff may reduce current costs in the medium term the rail industry will never be able to quantify the value of lost business.

Last September Norman Baker, Parliamentary Undersecretary of State, announced his decision on London Midland's application to change the opening hours of ticket offices at some of the stations that it manages. Closures requested at **Small Heath** (86,604 passengers in 2010/11) [top], **Jewellery Quarter** (310,000) [middle], **Bescot Stadium** (87,908) and **Adderley Park** (31,048) were refused. However, approval was given to close **Wythall** (48,250), **Witton** (169,758), **Lye** (105,000) and **Cheddington** (70,684) [bottom]. Several ticket offices have their hours extended, though only by a few minutes in most cases, and some are reduced. LM will be required to provide a total of 29 TVMs at stations that do not currently have them. Upgraded CCTV will be required at 11 locations. The DfT claims that it has ensured lifts will be kept in operation at unstaffed stations but has not explained how this will be done - remote CCTV and help points perhaps?



All photos from Wikipedia

London Midland Train Cancellations Continue

So, with value for money fares and staff at stations to sell us a ticket and direct us to the correct train let's get on board. Oh dear! If only we could.

London Midland suffered a shortage of drivers during much of 2012. Several were poached by Cross Country, which pays about £6,000 more. It takes 12 months to train a driver but they have only three-month contracts notice periods. *Railfuture* has sympathy for an operator faced with these difficulties, and we don't expect them to enter a bidding war with other TOCs, but it must get a grip. We were promised an end to train cancellations in December. The screenshot (see right) from the London Midland web-site on Saturday 16th February shows four trains cancelled or curtailed because of a lack of staff (whether driver or conductor is not clear).

It's not just a lack of drivers. The editor was delayed when no senior conductor could be found and had to wait nine weeks for a simple Delay Repay payment to arrive.

<p>15:33 Birmingham New Street to London Euston due 17:45 This train will be started from Northampton. This train will no longer call at Birmingham New Street, Marston Green, Birmingham International, Hampton-In-Arden, Tile Hill, Coventry, Rugby and Long Buckby. This is due to a member of train crew being unavailable.</p>
<p>13:13 London Euston to Birmingham New Street due 15:17 This train will be terminated at Northampton. This train will no longer call at Long Buckby, Rugby, Coventry, Tile Hill, Hampton-In-Arden, Birmingham International, Marston Green and Birmingham New Street. This is due to a member of train crew being unavailable.</p>
<p>14:34 London Euston to Tring due 15:17 This train will be cancelled. This is due to a member of train crew being unavailable.</p>
<p>15:26 Tring to London Euston due 16:08 This train will be cancelled. This is due to a member of train crew being unavailable.</p>

London Midland were challenged when its head of franchise management Nicola Moss (right) appeared before Birmingham City Council's transport scrutiny committee in December. She told the committee that only three per cent of services had been affected by a driver shortage, but that the cross city line had been particularly hard hit. The new December timetable has improved the service, she claimed, and any on-going delays are due to infrastructure problems, not driver shortages.

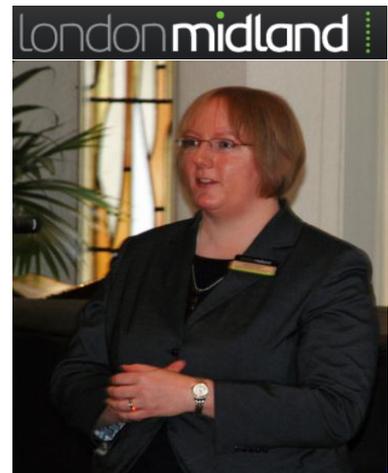


Photo: John Balmforth – taken at Railfuture conference, 5th Nov 2012.

Councillor Phil Davis (Lab, Billesley), who is also a member of the *Railfuture* West Midlands committee, said the company is over-reliant on rest-day work, so when volunteers failed to come forward it was left in the lurch claiming it "is nothing short of management failure." [Ed: Problems should have been predicted, such as too many staff taking leave deferred once the London Games had ended.] Committee chairwoman Coun Victoria Quinn (Lab, Sparkbrook) said she was disappointed that the company was not doing more to restore commuter confidence and rebuild trust. Transport Minister Norman Baker has also said London Midland has "fallen short both of everyone's expectations and their franchise obligations."

In compensation for the poor service over several months, London Midland season ticket holders (weekly, monthly, annual) have been promised five days of free travel passes and over the next two years there will be 500,000 additional cheap advance tickets on key network routes in London, Birmingham, Northampton, Crewe and Liverpool. Worth about £7m, this is not a voluntary gesture by the company but part of a negotiated settlement with the Department for Transport for a two-year franchise extension (until 19th September 2015) to the six years that commenced on 11th November 2007. The statement to the Stock Market in June 2007 said "The DfT has the right to terminate the franchise after six years if the operator is failing to meet agreed performance targets." This confirmation on 20th December implies that London Midland is meeting its targets – passengers might disagree! Clearly the DfT is less than happy since the two other franchises let at the same time as London Midland (EMT and CrossCountry) for the same length had their extensions agreed much earlier.

www.londonmidland.com/tickets-and-fares/refunds/additional-compensation-for-2012-season-ticket-holders

In its regular meetings with Centro management, *Railfuture* West Midlands representatives, obviously, complained about the unacceptable situation at London Midland (at one point it was short by more than 30 drivers). Other branch aspirations raised recently include the need for a Booking Office at Whitlock's End and return of Euston to Shrewsbury services (see next page).

Ending on a positive note, *Railfuture* hopes London Midland will continue its Great Escape offers. The most recent was between 9th and 24th February 2013, which offered all-day travel for just £15 (£5 for children). Railcard holders got an even better deal at just £9.90. First class was just £10 more.

Will Virgin revive Shropshire to London service?

The loss of the much-liked Wrexham, Shropshire and Marylebone Railway (WSMR) service in 2011 was widely regretted. This subject was covered in detail in the last issue, when the West Coast franchise was up for grabs. No need to repeat the sorry tale of what happened, but Virgin with its 23-month extension is investigating a service from the December 2013 timetable change taking just 2 hours 12 minutes between Shrewsbury and London Euston calling at Wellington, Telford Central, Stafford and Rugby. It could see an early morning and mid-afternoon departure from Shrewsbury with trains leaving London in late morning and early evening on Mondays to Saturdays and a single return service on Sundays.

West Midlands Branch AGM 2013

Notice is hereby given that the Annual General Meeting of the West Midlands branch of *Railfuture* will be held in the Margaret Rowland room at Carrs Lane Church Centre, Birmingham, B4 7SX (close to Moor Street station) at 11:00 on Saturday 27th April 2013.

ELECTIONS TO THE BRANCH COMMITTEE

The committee is vital to the running of the branch. We have a very friendly group of people who care about the railway in the West Midlands but would appreciate some new members who have something to contribute, particularly younger people, women and those from ethnic minorities. You do not need to be an expert on the railways, finance, or management. You do need enthusiasm, willingness to help, a friendly nature and hopefully have a sense of humour. Committee members give up at least two hours each month to attend meetings.

All details about the elections, whether there are more candidates than places will be posted on the West midlands page on the national web-site:

<http://www.railfuture.org.uk/West+Midlands+Branch>

Don't be fooled!

On 1st April there are bound to be a few made-up stories about the railway in the press. Like Christmas they start early. The first appeared in February!

Following the successful upgrading of all 30 Class 350 trains to 110mph running from the December 2012 timetable, London Midland are negotiating with vehicle owner Angel Trains and builder Siemens to retrofit tilting mechanisms and TASS (Tilt Authorisation and Speed Supervision) to take advantage of more high speed paths on the WCML fast lines, with 125mph services between London and Birmingham and Birmingham - Liverpool.

True story: From 2014, LM will introduce seven brand new trains, which will enable it to add eight new services into and out of London at peak times.

When will Moorland and City freight trains begin?



One subject excites *Railfuture* members more than anything else: rail reopenings. Amongst the private ventures they don't come much bigger than the Staffordshire mini-network being proposed by the Moorland and City Railway (see December 2011 issue – WM branch page on web-site).

Whilst the eight-mile line from Leekbrook Junction to Cauldon Lowe (MCR spelling) opened remarkably quickly, and the government offered £1.65m of funding, little has happened since – but not for the want of trying.

Whilst Churnet Valley Railway volunteers had cleared the mothballed line between Leekbrook junction and Endon (no train had run since 1994) and engineering trains had run, the project risked being blocked at Endon when a local resident and Green Party campaigner, Wendy Birks, lodged an application with Staffordshire County Council to register



Endon Station - Photo © Roger Kidd

<http://www.geograph.org.uk/photo/600553>

part of the railway line as village green. Eventually, in November 2012, the application was refused unanimously by the council's Countryside and Rights of Way Panel on a number of grounds including the fact that the railway was still open, trespass on the railway was illegal and only walking on a narrow strip of the route had taken place rather than community recreational use (e.g. to play football or have a picnic). Despite only three people coming forward to say they used the line, the entire legal process absurdly took more than a year and necessitated the hiring of lawyers. MCR and Network Rail, in particular, spent considerable time defending their rights and even had to provide evidence that they owned the land and had the legal right to run trains on it. This really is a 'wake-up call' for Network Rail, which must understand the need to maintain mothballed lines to a greater standard including the replacement of signs and fencing.

Hopefully MCR can now forge ahead. In May 2012 highly-regarded former chairman of Chiltern Railways, Adrian Shooter CBE (who is a *Railfuture* vice president) became MCR chairman. Hopefully, with his experience in leading the management buyout from BR in 1996, he can bring financial credibility to MCR, which has struggled to obtain the £8m to reopen line from Stoke-on-Trent to the quarries. It is believed that all of the track will need replacing to run freight trains – even the eight miles to Cauldon Lowe that is already open and sees occasional Churnet Valley Railway passenger trains.

A photographic view of the route from Leekbrook Junction to Stoke on-Trent can be watched at http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CepqGSrLu_A.

Railfuture meetings with Centro



www.centro.org.uk

Representatives of the Railfuture West Midlands branch committee meet with Centro four times a year for a free, open and wide ranging discussion to raise matters on behalf of our members.

Centro advises *Railfuture* of their concerns and proposals, and we in turn give our comments, raise concerns and promote our aspirations.

Centro told us it is keen to return to the situation that used to occur when it was a co-signatory to West Midlands franchise agreement. This was the case when Central Trains had the contract, but was discontinued by the Government prior to the awarding of the new contract to London Midland. There are some real advantages to returning to the old pattern; notably it would give more local democratic control of key rail services in our region.

At our July meeting we had a most useful discussion about proposals for services on the classic rail network after HS2 is operational. HS2 trains will free-up capacity on the West Coast Main Line and Centro have come forward with plans to promote new services to take this up. Amongst other proposals are (1) two Pendolino services *per* hour from New Street to Euston. One is extended northwards to Shrewsbury (implying the electrification from Oxley to Shrewsbury) and the other north to Scotland, terminating alternately at Glasgow and Edinburgh. (2) a new local electric train services running at 2 *tph* from Leamington via Coventry, International, New Street, Walsall to Aldridge. Electrification from Leamington to Coventry is now promised and from Walsall to a re-opened Aldridge station is a long held aspiration. These trains would serve a new station at Kenilworth.

Centro has been proposing that one of the existing 3 *tph* London Midland services from Moor Street to Dorridge be extended *via* Lapworth to Stratford, to give Stratford a better 2 *tph* service to Birmingham. As well as giving a better service, this will open up new journey opportunities such as Stratford to Solihull. There will have to be some minor alterations to the timing of the existing Chiltern services to Marylebone to free up capacity on the single line from Hatton to Bearley.

We had a useful discussion about Bordesley station. This little-used station (7,306 passengers in 2010/11) comes into its own when Birmingham City Football Club are playing at home when trains stop there. It appears that these services are poorly advertised and may be little used. Does anyone have any evidence of this? Please let us know.

It was welcome news to hear of CENTRO's spending plans for minor works at stations. Some new works agreed are firstly, an extra Customer Information Screen (CIS) at Tipton, secondly extra cycle racks at Snow Hill and thirdly some works at University to address congestion issues. We were asked to canvass our membership for ideas for future, similar projects. Have you got any ideas? Please let us know.

We are disappointed at delays over the new station at Bromsgrove, but the expectation remains that it should open, with the electrification of the Lickey incline, by 2015 (see News Snippets). The new dynamic loop at Alvechurch, to allow extra services to Redditch remains scheduled for Summer 2014.

We have had a number of issues following the recent re-casting of timetable formats. For example, LM used to produce a pocket timetable for the whole Snow Hill group of lines, so journeys such as Stourbridge to Solihull could be worked out; now there are two, one for each 'half' of the group. This is a retrograde step. We believe there may be other gaps. What do you think?

Report by Peter Rowland – peter.rowland@railfuture.org.uk.

West Coast Rail 250

Railfuture West Midlands is a member of West Coast Rail 205, which bills itself as the national campaign for improved services on the WCML. (See their web-site: www.westcoastrail250.co.uk). WM branch committee member **Peter Rowland** attended their AGM in Flint Town Hall on 11th October 2012.



Apart from the usual AGM business, there were presentations from Ben Davies, Stakeholder Liaison Manager North at Arriva Trains Wales (see www.arrivatrainswales.co.uk). Some points from the presentation included: (1) conflicts between political aspirations for better north-south services in Wales against passengers who are largely looking for better east-west services to/from England. (2) nearly 2/3rd of ATW business is in Cardiff + South Wales Valleys. (3) major challenges are level crossing misuse, cable theft and suicide. (4) major thrust on station improvement

The other presentation was from Robert Smith of the Rail Freight Group (see www.rfg.org.uk), which has 100 corporate members. There was a 10% increase in rail freight in 2011. Intermodal freight has grown every year in the last 10 years and is forecast to double by 2030. Work continues on the development of a freight 'land bridge' from the Channel Ports and tunnel to Holyhead for Ireland.

Walks from trains (1)

One of the joys of the Severn Valley Railway is that it opens up the valley of the river in areas not well served by roads. With a number of stations next to the River Severn itself, walks from one to another station are quite possible. One of Peter Rowland's favourites is from Northwood Halt to Arley.

Speak to the guard when you board and get the train to stop at Northwood Halt. Children, particularly, love the idea of getting a train to stop 'just for us'! Once the train has left you, cross the level crossing and walk down to

the road junction. Turn sharp right and continue along the lane to the Elan Valley aqueduct. The lane becomes a path between the river and the railway past Folly Point. Once the river bends away to the left, there are lots of ways onwards. You can keep on the river bank or you can wend your way past the reservoirs. Once the valley narrows again, join the river bank and very shortly you will walk under the SVR Victoria Bridge. From the river bank, the true size of this bridge is apparent and quite unlike the view obtained from the train. Keep going on into Arley village and turn left over the footbridge across the river. It is a short walk uphill past the pub to Arley station.



Midland Metro extension and new rolling stock

The last issue mentioned the government funding approval for the £128m 1.3km extension from Snow Hill Station along Upper Bull Street, Corporation Street and Stephenson Street to New Street Station with opening expected in 2015.



Work is now progressing at pace. Tram services between Birmingham and Wolverhampton will be suspended over the Easter school holidays (from 29th March to 15th April) to allow engineers to modify existing platforms for the £40 million 20-tram fleet of bigger CAF vehicles (contract signed April 2012), which will start operating in 2014 and eventually replace all 16 existing trams. The Easter period was chosen because many people take the school break off work which means fewer passengers will be affected. The extended maintenance depot at Wednesbury is still to be completed.

Railfuture West Midlands on television and radio

Railfuture is frequently contacted by the media across Britain. Former branch chairman John Balmforth gave an interview to BBC Radio WM on 18th September following approval for ticket office closures, and one in August on fares. He was also interviewed by ITV at Rail Users' Conference in November. As well as broadcasting the interview, the following appeared on their web-site: "On the day that dozens of London Midland train services have been cancelled or altered due to driver shortages, rail commentators have met in Birmingham to discuss the state of the region's railways. John Balmforth, West Midlands Branch Chairman of *Railfuture*, said: "If a driver can leave to work for another company... it's very attractive. That then leaves London Midland having to replace that driver and you can't just pluck somebody off the streets to do it." Branch secretary Peter Hughes, our main media contact, has also been interviewed by the BBC recently.

London Midland Stakeholder Conference

On 21st September 2012 London Midland held a stakeholder conference at Northampton Rugby Ground. William Whiting attended on behalf of *Railfuture* West Midlands. This provided an opportunity to talk informally with staff from the company both at the event itself and on the train to Northampton. There was agreement that over the past 10 years there has been a big improvement in the frequency of services across the region and the Snow Hill lines were mentioned. From Stourbridge Junction there is a 10-minute frequency of service during the day to Birmingham and there is now a train every 10 minutes from Stourbridge Junction to Stourbridge Town.



The conference had mixed messages and there was concern about the number of train cancellations and booking office closures. Patrick Verwer (left), Managing Director since January 2012, opened it by giving a summary of recent achievements of LM. He said that trials of the Desiro stock to run at 110mph on the West Coast route had been completed and a timetable would be in operation starting on 9th December 2012. There will be an additional 10 x 4-car 110mph class 350 Desiros for delivery in 2014. There are now 27 class



172 trains (left) on the Snow Hill routes replacing ageing stock which has improved the passenger environment considerably with air conditioning, wider seats and faster. There had been £1.5 million in station improvements including new vending machines, ticket gates, station renovation and more cycle racks. Finally, he said that the average age of rolling stock was only nine years compared with the national average of 17.9 years.

Commercial Director Richard Brooks (right) said that the 6-month passenger survey carried out impartially by Passenger Focus up to the March 2012 showed London Midland scoring a higher than national average. However this was before the severe cancellations in the autumn. Questions were asked from the floor and the general message was that it is vital passengers are informed of the length of delay so they have a chance to make alternative travel plans. Information must be updated frequently and where on-going connections are delayed information should be given about them as many LM passengers are continuing another journey. LM said that booking office staff and train crews had been given Blackberry phones to access the intranet. Concern was also raised about the validity of tickets on other operator's services when there was disruption to London Midland Services. Passengers were often confused.



The conference was advised that booking office closures had now been finalised by the Department for Transport (see article on pages 4/5). One delegate was concerned about the total closure of Wythall station as he said new housing would lead to an increase in passenger numbers. LM said they

would be installing 29 new ticket vending machines and where there is a lift at any station it would remain available to use until the end of the last service of the day, not when the booking office closes.

Attendees then divided into small groups to discuss the use of Facebook and Twitter on the company's website. A suggestion was made that pocket timetables be dispensed with as they become out-of-date quickly and do not take into account weekend engineering works, and the website allows customers to create their own (see screen-shot right)

Create your own timetable

Why not [create your own personalised timetable](#)? It's quick and easy to do and even includes short-notice alterations. Just select the stations you're travelling between and when you usually travel, and a timetable will be generated just for you.

This was firmly opposed in William Whiting's group on the basis that many people do not have access to the internet, particularly the elderly and pocket timetables are still widely used. However, for those that do have access they get an embarrassing error on the National Rail website (shown on the right). Oops!



The group felt that customers did want to be able to print e-tickets, which was not currently available on LM. The overall view of this workshop was that face-to-face contact and the use of IT should be complementary.

The attendees felt it was very productive and wanted LM to organise future conferences, although some would have preferred longer discussion groups rather than straight forward presentations. *Railfuture* hopes that other train companies will follow LM's lead and organise such conferences.

London Midland produced an excellent set of notes and feedback to all attendees (an extract is shown below). *Railfuture* members can read the 12-page PDF, is available at www.railfuture.org.uk/dl527 (2.27MB).

Delegates were asked; what have you got out of today?

- An opportunity to express concerns to London Midland
- Twitter and Communications presentation was useful
- We can feed back to others not here today
- A good introduction to the London Midland team and their areas of responsibility
- Interesting marketing and promotions information
- We've made suggestions for next year
- Good to meet up, networking and passing on ideas
- Our viewpoints have been heard by the managers present
- Presentations were useful
- Discussion about the problems of new technology
- Freedom to discuss any topic with TOC staff
- Hearing views and information from other
- Opportunity to give direct feedback to London Midland

What would you like next time?

- We need longer discussions/workshops
- The venue to be closer to the station please
- A more accessible venue
- Report back on the actions taken
- Do the conference more often (possibly split at New Street)
- The format works well – it may be better to group the tables on a more geographic basis
- Mix of regions – change tables at lunch

Rail Users' Conference - Birmingham

Railfuture has been running the national Rail Users' Conference since the first in 1979. The last, on 3rd November 2012 was hosted by the West Midlands branch. All attendees will be sent a conference report, which will cover the event in detail. However, for those who did not, here's a summary.

John Balmforth, then branch chairman, opened the conference, which was chaired by *Railfuture* president and transport journalist Christian Wolmar.

The morning session had presentations from TOCs that serve Birmingham.



The first was **Nicola Moss**, Head of Franchise Management at London Midland. The presentation, like all those from TOCs, was positive and focused on LM's successes and achievements since commencing the franchise in 2007.

Latest miles per casualty figures are 23,000 for the class 172 trains, which passengers like because of the air conditioning and good legroom. This is in contrast to the class 150s, which are less popular and have therefore been kept mainly for peak-time, with surplus ones being cascaded to Northern.

Project 110 is the name used by London Midland for the increase in speed from 100 mph to 110 mph on the mainline. The primary reason for this is to create an extra path between London and Milton Keynes (by running at a more compatible speed to the Virgin trains) rather than reduce journey times.

Asked to comment on the driver shortage, Nicola Moss explained that LM, like all TOCs, has a permanent plan to cope with loss of drivers through normal events such as retirement and moving to other operators. What has happened is “not to plan”. LM is looking at why they lost so many drivers in such a short space of time. Rectifying an unexpected situation is not immediate because notice periods are three months but training requires 12 months. During the shortage LM’s priority is providing information to passengers about cancellations in advance so that they can try to travel at a slightly different time. In early November LM had about 8-9 drivers reaching the end of their training and another 8-9 drivers at an earlier stage. She claimed that the immediate problem should be over in December 2012. There is a limit to the number of drivers that can be trained at any time because of the staff and facilities needed to train them.



Richard Gibson (left), Head of Communications at Arriva Cross Country Trains began by saying that they are five years into the franchise, which ends in 2016. A subsidiary of Deutsche Bahn, Arriva runs all of DB’s operations outside Germany. In Britain the group has five franchises and one open access operator (Grand Central).

The concept of cross country is not a new phenomenon as it dates back to the 19th century.

AXC is the geographically largest TOC in Britain, with the longest train service being Aberdeen to Penzance at 744 miles. High reliability is required for these gruelling services and the 1970s HST trains it uses were originally in very bad condition and had to be stripped down to bare metal.

The Voyager fleet is the backbone of the AXC service. They were introduced by Virgin XC in 2001. AXC removed the tilt mechanism as very little of the infrastructure that its trains run on can support tilt but the mechanism kept registering faults. They isolated the tilt readers and it trebled train reliability overnight. Its Voyagers are now the most reliable intercity trains in Britain.



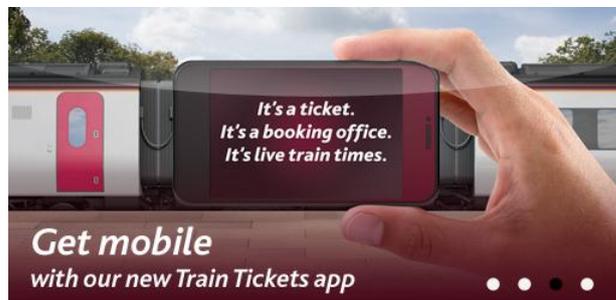
AXC had at least one of each of five class 170 types. It decided to strip out the insides of the four types to make them all look the same in order to create a consistent customer experience on its 170s.

AXC is almost alone in that its trains change their purpose during a single journey alternating between being a commuter and an intercity service as people board and alight during the journey. Most TOCs are also regional but AXC covers most of Britain, certainly more regions than any other TOCs, and it largely mirrors the motorway network. Around half of its passengers use its trains for just one leg of a journey. AXC has the most interchanges with

another TOC although it does not operate a single station. This means that it relies upon other TOCs to look after its passengers until they board its train.

AXC has taken steps to reduce emissions from its trains. It has also boosted the mobile signal on its trains. The removal of the shop when it took over the XC franchise was controversial but it allowed more seats to be provided.

Around 20% of tickets for its trains are now sold through electronic means (print at home or mobile ticketing). It is now possible to book reservations up to ten minutes before a train departs. Whilst some people ask why such a facility is needed, the reason is that if someone's train is running late and they miss a connection they can book a reservation on the XC train whilst on their delayed train. XC was one of the first TOCs to provide a mobile app (see advert for its Train Ticket app above).



Unlike most TOCs XC did most of its investment in the first two years of the franchise, spending around £50m in train refurbishment and enhancement. As there are no spare trains left in the rail industry it is encouraging people to travel in the off-peak.



The final speaker before lunch was Richard Harper, Network Development Manager at Chiltern Railways. He started by announcing that Chiltern is "TOC of the year" and declared rail as "a roaring success".

It took seven years to recover from the 1991 recession. Rail is a mature industry (200 years old) and is the only one that has grown in this recession, as most recent successful industries have been associated with new technology. [Editor: of course the railway has embraced new technology and arguably passenger numbers have grown because of web-sites and mobile phones.]

He explained that Chiltern Railways inherited a route that had a maximum speed of 75 mph despite the total route modernisation in the early 1990s.

Evergreen 2, which provided line speed upgrades and two new platforms at Marylebone, was unique at the time as a Design, Build, Finance and Transfer (DBFT) project. Evergreen 3 has been the same except that Network Rail has provided the funding through its regulatory asset base because the credit crunch made it much harder to obtain finance.



Chiltern sees its main competitor as the car rather than other TOCs despite sharing the London to Birmingham route with AXC and LM.

Water Eaton is one of Oxford's five park and ride sides, and the station to be built there (Evergreen 3 part 2) will be well used because Oxford is not very accessible by car. Chiltern expects to see the growth in rail travel continue.

Planning Policy Guidance Note 13 on Transport (PPG13) of 20 years ago required new development to be brown-field sites rather than green-field ones, and this, he believes, is a major reason why rail travel has increased. This is because brown-field sites, particularly old factories, tend to have railway lines close to them. A lot of new houses and jobs in the last decade have tended to be in cities, often in the service industry, and these locations are well serviced by rail. Road congestion has helped to increase rail usage.

The first speaker of the afternoon was Mick Miller of Network Rail who talked about the Birmingham Gateway project. He started with some impressive statistics. Birmingham New Street (BNS) has a train movement every 37 seconds. Most of the destinations on the rail network are only one change away from BNS.



The station is in the heart of the city, which was rare in Victorian times. Three quarters of the district around BNS has been redeveloped in recent times, but not the south side. The BNS reconstruction is intended to be a catalyst for redevelopment in that district as well.

The Pallisades shopping centre sits above the station. It was the first time that British Rail sold the 'air rights' to a station. The BNS redevelopment will see a hole created in the roof of the Pallisades creating an atrium in order to allow natural light into the station. The new station will be fully accessible with 19 lifts in total, and will have a new "iconic entrance to the city" that presents a much better first experience of Birmingham to visitors.

NR made a commitment that reconstruction of BNS would not see a single train cancelled or delayed. It only takes a single platform out of use at a time.

The project has seen collaboration between NR and the construction company, with it performing the management on some tasks and the contractor doing so on other tasks.

The station has two train crew depots (LM and XC) with XC also having catering facilities there. It also provides space for Virgin trains. All are being demolished and the TOCS had to be provided with replacements as the functions could not be moved to other stations.

BNS is defined as a sub-surface station and has to comply with all of the legislation introduced since the King's Cross fire.

The project will be completed in 2015, in the same year that the tram extension will pass the station.

Toby Rackliff, Rail Development Manager at Centro, talked about aspirations in the West Midlands. He said that the number of people coming into Birmingham by rail now exceeds the number by bus for the first time.

Mr Rackliff (right) revealed that Centro has been talking to the DfT about devolving responsibility for rail. It is the only Passenger Transport Executive that is not a co-signatory to the local passenger franchise. It is interested in taking over management of stations, not least because of its unhappiness at the TOC proposals to reduce station staff.



Centro suggests that the current franchise incentives are wrong. They are focused on profits, for returning to the Treasury, rather than focusing on passenger numbers. Increasing revenue can actually result in fewer passengers travelling.

He described HS2 as a game changer. It will provide opportunities for long distance improvements and extra services on existing lines where capacity is freed up. He also considered the importance of railfreight, saying that freight terminal capacity is an issue, and there is a need to electrify into terminals such as Hams Hall.

The last speaker of the day was Phil Bennion MEP, who is a Lib Dem. He spoke without using PowerPoint or notes and covered a series of topics but primarily the European Union and international matters. He pointed out that the EU budget is tight but they are looking to protect infrastructure projects. The EU wants to encourage cross-border services (concern if Centro had more power that services across Centro area would be affected). He explained the thinking behind the EU Rail package. It would create a single market area for rail, issue with cross subsidy between operator and infrastructure (DB and SNCF could undercut outside operators by cross-subsidy). He supported HS2 but had various concerns, such as over connections for HS2 at both London and Birmingham. He suggested a new station on cross city line at south end of Curzon St station, could also improve at Birmingham airport station.

The Rail Users' Conference also saw the presentation of the first-ever Rail User Group Awards, organised by *Railfuture*. This year was deliberately low-key with the awards publicised solely in *Railwatch* and *Rail User Express* and saw a limited number of entrants. Representatives from three of the winning RUGs are shown below receiving an award from Christian Wolmar.



Photos from the rail users' conference



Above: the morning speakers (Richard Gibson, Richard Harper, Nicola Moss) listening attentively to Christian Wolmar as he gives his introduction.



Christian is Tweeting to his followers on what the speakers are saying.



Photos by John Balmforth and Keith Dvall

Behind the scenes of the rail users' conference



Although the branch hosted the Birmingham Rail Users' Conference, much of the organisation was delegated to committee member William Whiting (pictured left). Over a period of ten months he found the venue, caterers and speakers, produced the programme, kept the branch committee and Railfuture board informed and liaised with everyone. Hopefully he had a good rest afterwards!

William gives some tips on organising a successful conference – in case anyone wants to volunteer!

The room at Carrs Lane Church Centre was on the ground floor which made it easy for any person with a disability to attend the conference and ensured *Railfuture* complied with the provisions of the Equality Act 2010. Despite the buffet lunch and the tea/coffee being served in the hall at the back it was sufficiently spacious not to interfere with the running of the conference programme. Fortunately attendees hardly noticed the buffet being laid out.

(Audience listens to Christian Wolmar)



A risk assessment was carried out in September. This is necessary to comply with the public liability insurance that Railfuture has for all of its events.

Finding suitable speakers is not an easy task says William. It is therefore important to identify at a very early stage the theme of the conference and the speakers who are able to speak to it. Approaches need to be made to potential speakers a year before the date of the conference. It was fortunate that the then chair of the branch knows a number of people in the rail industry and *Railfuture* was able to obtain speakers from three train operating companies serving Birmingham, a speaker from Centro and one from Network Rail who was able to give a good insight into the Birmingham New Street Gateway Project. Experience shows that attendance is higher if there are speakers from the rail industry, especially well-known people.

It is a good idea to talk to the speakers to find out what they are going to include in their presentation to ensure that it is relevant to the audience and will fit within their time slot allowing time for questions. They were also asked to provide a biography, which is given to attendees at the registration desk. The preparation paid off as the speakers kept to their allocated time. In general each speaker gave an interesting presentation, well received by attendees and each was presented with a gift (a copy of Railfuture's book *Britain's Growing Railway* – available from www.railfuture.org.uk/books) as a token of our thanks.

Report by William Whiting.

NEWS SNIPPETS

New £4m station proposed for Willenhall

In October Centro revealed proposals for a new £4 two-platform station in Willenhall (a total of approximately 40,000 people) on the Wolverhampton to Walsall line. A location in Bilston Street was found to be “practical” in a feasibility study. A 28-space car park would cost a further £550,000.

New £14.4m Bromsgrove interchange station planned

A new £14.4m railway interchange at Bromsgrove on a brownfield site about 400 metres south of the existing station Aston Fields, which it will replace. It will be jointly funded by Worcestershire County Council and Centro. The project has been on the cards for several years but in January 2013 a public consultation began (ends 17th March) with work likely to begin in spring 2014 for completion by summer 2015. It will have a station building, four platforms connected by a footbridge and lifts, as well as 350 car park spaces.

Network Rail Infrastructure Improvements Completed

Over the 2012 August bank holiday the West Midlands signalling centre at Saltley took over the role of some west midlands signal boxes, such as Stourbridge Junction, Blakedown, Kidderminster and Hartlebury. This is as a result of the Worcester to Birmingham Snow Hill line re-signalling project, which has seen new multiple-aspect signals provided.

Six stations on the Cannock Chase Line in the West Midlands benefited from £1.6m of improvements, such as the installation of help points, improved lighting and electronic information boards. They are Bloxwich, Bloxwich North, Cannock, Hednesford, Landywood and Rugeley Town.

Network Rail Strategic Business Plan for CP5 (2014-2019)

Railfuture and other organisations such as Centro have welcomed the planned £550m upgrade to the West Midlands rail network contained in Network Rail’s Strategic Business Plan (published 8th January - see the London North Western PDF on Network Rail’s web-site). The investment is needed to cope with increasing passenger numbers and expected additional freight traffic. It includes electrification of the Walsall to Rugeley line at a cost of £30m, but should bring economic benefits many times that. Centro and the region’s councillors had campaigned hard for it. NR will spend £65m electrifying the Cross City Line between Barnt Green and Bromsgrove with three instead of two trains per hour between Redditch, Bromsgrove and New Street. There were omissions, however, such as upgrading the Birmingham to Tamworth line.



Upgrade complete on Chiltern Railways’ Mark 3 carriages

All of Chiltern Railways' Mark 3 carriages (mostly from the WSMR service) now have power-operated swing plug doors. The sets were introduced in

roughly three month intervals since May 2012. The driver has the ability, if required, to operate the doors and selective door opening has also been installed. Automatic doors should reduce dwell times at stations and therefore offer a faster service. Other changes made at the same time means that the rolling stock meets all of the Persons of Restricted Mobility (TSI-PRM) regulations that become mandatory on 1st January 2020. The upgrade has cost around £300,000 per coach.

Network Rail to open national distribution centre in West Midlands

Network Rail intends to open a £25m 300,000 sq. ft. national distribution centre on the brownfield site of the former Peugeot car plant at Ryton in the West Midlands (closed 2006) as a hub for its National Delivery Service (NDS). It is at a convenient location for access to major rail lines and has direct access to the A45 and the motorway network. NR said it would also help reduce costs by centralising previously leased properties in Lichfield, Worcester and Ludgershall and cut road fleet mileage. The site is being acquired from Prologis and set to open in July 2013.

Third station for Worcester

Worcestershire County Council has proposed building a third station, which would be close to the M5 and known as Worcestershire Parkway. The council hopes it might open by summer 2016.

Severn Valley Railway share offer

The Severn Valley Railway, which has about 250,000 visitors a year and will reach its 50th year of preservation in 2015, launched a £3m share offer in October 2012 to fund various projects on the 16-mile Kidderminster to Bridgnorth line. It wishes to build a training academy at Kidderminster and expand its apprenticeship scheme for a new generation to learn traditional engineering skills. It wants to take on 15 people each year, who will work in the rail industry and also overcome the 'age bomb' that heritage railways are suffering from, as people with the necessary skills retire. It will also provide a source of labour to bring forward repair projects. The SVR will also invest in its Bridgnorth terminus station to return it to its Victorian glory.

The minimum is 100 shares (£100) with £25 multiples thereafter. Investors can reclaim tax under the Enterprise Investment Scheme if purchasing £500 or more. Benefits include free travel See www.svr.co.uk/shareoffer. In the first six weeks £860,000 of shares were sold and by mid-January it was almost £1.1m. This represented a third of the required amount in a third of the time allowed (it ends on 30th September 2013).

On 20th October Chiltern Railways ran a class 168 train from Bewdley (on the SVR) to Marylebone returning that evening. Last year was the 150th anniversary of the completion of the line, which was featured in a TV programme "How Britain Worked" on the More4 channel on 13th January 2013. The SVR was the first heritage railway in Britain to convey the Olympic torch, doing so from Bewdley to Kidderminster on 24th May 2012

Virgin is best of a bad bunch according to Which? survey

A recent Which? survey of all the major train operating companies found that Virgin Trains topped the satisfaction chart for the second year running, with just a 67% satisfaction rating. This survey of 7,500 regular train users produced much less favourable results than the 'official' survey by Passenger Focus that is funded by the government and uses a much larger sample size and a wider range of travellers.

Don't trip over the sign!

So there you are, casually walking along the platform, not paying attention, fail to notice a knee-level obstruction and trip over. With barrow crossings being closed, money being spent on fences at the end of platforms, not to mention a plethora of 'nanny-state' notices stating the obvious (hold onto the stair-rail), all for the sake of health-and-safety, how could anyone allow



this on Hednesford platform 1? It needed to be extended to take 4-car Class 170s trains. At the end of the old platform there was a speed restriction sign. Rather than move the sign to the end of the new platform the new platform has been built around it. Not only was it a trip hazard, but drivers would fail to be reminded of the speed restriction owing to passengers obscuring the sign.

Photo taken prior to the extension being used by passengers.
<http://wmbusphotos.com/Trains/other/HNFspeed.html>

Walks from trains (2)

The Hatton flight of locks on the Grand Union Canal west of Warwick is a great engineering sight and well worth a visit says **Peter Rowland**. The 21 locks range over a two-mile length of canal. Apart from the walk into central Warwick, this is downhill all the way.

Catch a train to Hatton. Walk up the short drive onto the bridge, which gives access to the towpath. Turn right and just follow the canal. Quite soon you will arrive at the top lock. The New Inn is on your left about one third of the way down the flight. After the last lock you will pass under the A46 Warwick by-pass and arrive at the canal junction where the Saltisford arm goes straight on and the main canal turns left. Either will take you towards Warwick centre, but I prefer to turn left to follow the main canal as far as the Cape lock. Turn right off the canal and follow Cape Road up into central Warwick, which has many pubs, cafes and restaurants. Warwick station is a short walk away, past the East Gate and down Smith Street to St.Johns. At the traffic lights turn left on to Coventry Road and left again onto Station Road.

Railfuture Diary 2013

Saturday 30th March 2013

Deadline for nomination to West Midlands branch committee 2013

Saturday 27th April 2013 - 11:00

West Midlands branch AGM, Carrs Lane Church Centre, Birmingham

Saturday 11th May 2013 - 11:00

Railfuture National AGM, Durham Town Hall

Saturday 26th June 2013 - 11:00

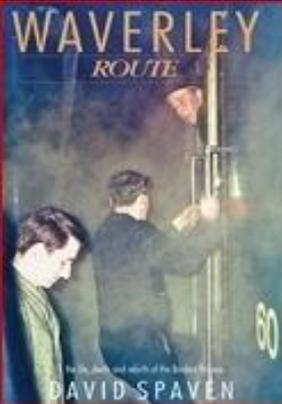
Railfuture Summer Conference, Albemarle Centre, Taunton

Saturday 2nd November 2013

Railfuture Autumn Conference, Oxford Town Hall

Book conferences at www.railfuture.org.uk/conferences

Books available from Railfuture web-site



Waverley Route
Life, death and rebirth of the Borders Railway

By David Spaven, Published August 2012. Paperback £14.99, Hardback £20.00 RRP

BUY ONLINE FROM RAILFUTURE - www.railfuture.org.uk/books

'excellent, well researched, highly recommended' TODAY'S RAILWAYS UK
'Extremely well-researched, and elegantly written' Keith Aitken, Daily Express

Other books available from the web-site include *Holding the Line - How Britain's Railways Were Saved* by Richard Faulkner (now Lord Faulkner) and Chris Austin OBE (who is secretary of *Railfuture's* Networks Group and also Heritage Railway Liaison Officer) at reduced price of £18.50 (RRP £19.99).

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