

# **RailWestMidlands**

## **National Rail Users' Conference Carrs Lane Centre, Birmingham Saturday 3<sup>rd</sup> November 2012**

Incorporating the inaugural National Rail User Group Awards organised by Railfuture

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



Some views of central Birmingham, work being performed at New Street station, and the computer generated images of the completed station. All images courtesy of National Rail.

## Conference Speak Biographies



**NICOLA MOSS, Head of Franchise Management, London Midland.** No doubt she will be face criticisms of the hundreds of London Midland trains currently being cancelled because of a shortage of drivers, following poaching by other operators. London Midland has controversially been allowed by government to close several ticket offices and reduce the hours of others.



**RICHARD GIBSON, Head of Communications, Arriva Cross Country.** He started in the ticket office at Reading station in the 1980s; later became BR's Parliamentary and Press Officer; a political consultant to many TOCS, adviser to ATOC, BTP and SRA. He was previously Head of Communications at Wessex Trains, and Virgin Trains.



**RICHARD HARPER, Head of Network Development, Chiltern Railways** with responsibility for timetable development and train planning. Two weeks ago approval was given to Chiltern's Evergreen 3 scheme to run direct London-Oxford trains; he was a member of the team that specified the scheme. In 2011 Chiltern launched its new much improved, and successful, mainline train services.



**MICK MILLER, Senior Sponsor for Birmingham Gateway Project, Network's Rail.** 140,000 people can use Birmingham New Street each day, double the number when the station was last rebuilt in 1967. He has worked on the project for two years. It will transform New Street Station to create a stunning 21st century transport hub in the heart of the city and the West Midlands. His presentation provides a timely update on the projects' progress.



**TOBY RACKLIFF, Railway Development Manager, Centro (WMPTE).** He has been at Centro since 2003. As Rail Contracts Manager he had responsibility for overseeing the Central Trains franchise. He also had responsibility for setting rail fares, timetable production and customer satisfaction. He is currently co-ordinating the production of a Rail Vision for the West Midlands on behalf of the West Midlands Regional Rail Forum.



**Phil Bennion MEP, Liberal Democrat European Group.** Describing himself (on his web-site as "a champion for the West Midlands in Europe", he is also the Lib-Dem Transport Spokesman. He is knowledgeable about rail and has strong views on many rail matters He is also a Railfuture member. He will be the last speaker, giving his views on what he has head during the conference and other matters.

## Rail Users' Conference - Birmingham

*Railfuture* has been running the national Rail Users' Conference since the first in 1979. The last, on 3<sup>rd</sup> 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.



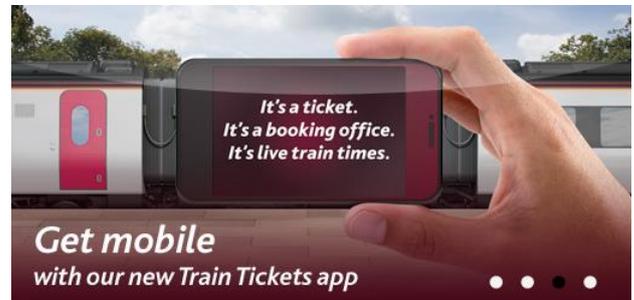
AXC had at least one of each of five class 170 types. It decided to strip out the insides of the four types to make them all look the same in order to create a consistent customer experience on its 170s.

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](http://www.railfuture.org.uk/books)) as a token of our thanks.

Report by William Whiting.

## Railfuture National Event Diary 2013-2015

*Railfuture* National AGM, **Durham**, Town Hall  
Saturday 11<sup>th</sup> May 2013 – 11:00

*Railfuture* Summer Conference, **Taunton**, Albemarle Centre  
Saturday 11<sup>th</sup> May 2013 – 11:00

*Railfuture* Autumn Conference, **Oxford**, Town Hall  
Saturday 2<sup>nd</sup> November 2013 – 11:00

*Railfuture* National AGM, **Sheffield**, Quaker Meeting House  
Saturday 10<sup>th</sup> May 2014 – 11:00

*Railfuture* Summer Conference, **Cambridge**, University Centre  
Saturday 21<sup>st</sup> June 2014 – 10:45

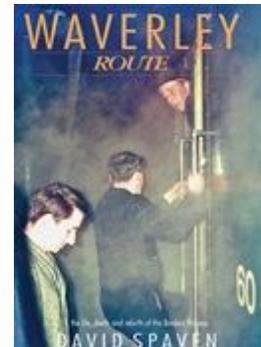
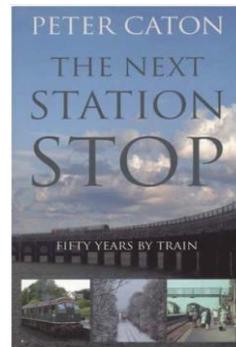
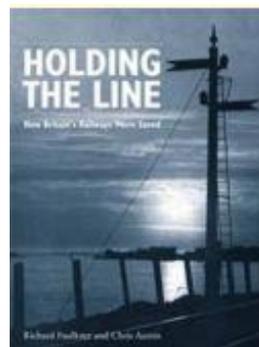
*Railfuture* Autumn Conference, **London**, Univ. Westminster  
Saturday 1<sup>st</sup> November 2014 – 11:00

*Railfuture* National AGM, **Blackpool**, Savoy Hotel  
Saturday 16<sup>th</sup> May 2015 – 10:45

Book *Railfuture* conferences online  
[www.railfuture.org.uk/conferences](http://www.railfuture.org.uk/conferences)

## Items available from *Railfuture* web-site

Various books supporting Railfuture campaigns are available from our web-site at [www.railfuture.org.uk/shop](http://www.railfuture.org.uk/shop). These include *Holding the Line - How Britain's Railways Were Saved* by Richard Faulkner (Lord Faulkner) and Chris Austin OBE (who is Head of Railfuture's Infrastructure and Networks Group and also Heritage Railway Liaison Officer). All books are offered at reduced prices, and Railfuture gets a small commission to help our campaigns.



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