



West Midlands Branch eNews

Issue 1 - May 2014

Introduction

This is the first of what, we hope, will be a monthly newsletter. Much of the material will be that reported by officers at committee meetings from a variety of consultations. However we welcome contributions from you, our members, of any interesting news or pictures. So if you've learnt about something local, or you've been on an interesting/unusual journey, let us know and we'll include whatever we can.

As well as the news items below, we have also attached items (rather a lot!) which we've received recently:-

- 1) West Coast renewals at Watford – Stakeholder Update
- 2) West Coast renewals at Watford – LM Leaflet
- 3) Birmingham Mobility Action Plan – Presentation at our AGM
- 4) HS2-HS1 Link - Strategic and Technical Case

Cross Country Diversions & Delays

Infrastructure improvements between Water Orton and Kingsbury forced the half hourly Cross Country trains to Sheffield and beyond to travel via Lichfield for a week in February. To accommodate them two cross-city services per hour were suspended. However to compensate one XC train per hour called at Lichfield City. For one glorious week Lichfield residents had the joy of a non-stop express service to and from Birmingham. Not only that but they could board at Lichfield and head north to Derby, Sheffield and other exotic northern destinations, over the Alrewas line.

The problems in the south west from the winter storms affected services to the south west until April 4th, when the Dawlish rebuild was completed. Until then passengers for stations beyond Exeter had to use a replacement bus service from Tiverton Parkway (it was from Bristol Parkway initially).

The flooding near Bridgwater meant that for a while there were only six trains per day to Exeter, instead of the normal 19. The line between Taunton and Bridgwater reopened on, March 10th, although there were (are?) still some delays in both directions until the damaged equipment and cabling was fully renewed.

Towards the other end of Cross Country's services, a landslip blocked the line at Unstone near Chesterfield. Initial estimates indicated that train services would be disrupted for four to six weeks. Work progressed better than expected and the line was reopened ahead of schedule. However work to fully stabilise the hillside will continue for several months and so trains will run at a reduced speed past the site.

Alrewas Line

Mention of the XC diversion through Lichfield makes it worth mentioning that the Lichfield Rail Promotion Group are actively campaigning to reopen this line for regular services. They favour one of the Birmingham – Nottingham trains being re-routed this way as it would only require one additional DMU – a Lichfield – Burton shuttle would require two for an hourly service.

They have also interested the National Memorial Arboretum in a new station there if this line were to be reopened. This could be located as little as 200 metres from the Arboretum entrance and their existing 'land trains' could be used to provide access for the less-able.

Chase Line Electrification

It's been a long time coming but preparation work seems to have started on this. No catenary posts as yet but three bridges are undergoing modification to allow for OHE - at Bloxwich (Broad Lane) and Hednesford (Station Road and Walkers Rise), all needing complete demolition. Cannock MP Aidan Burley is dead keen on this development and he and Network Rail expect the project to be completed and ready for electric services to start running in December 2017 - although someone still has to find some suitable rolling stock.

Birmingham Metro Extensions

The ground preparation work is mostly complete now and lines are being laid here and there. All seems to be on track for the planned opening mid-2015. There also seems to be agreement and funding to extend beyond New Street Station to Centenary Square. The route for this would follow the line used at present by Fletchers Walk and would be part of the redevelopment of the Forum/Library/Conservatoire area. Meanwhile Centro has been considering how to serve the projected HS2 station and have proposed a route between Snow Hill and Moor Street stations via Carrs lane or New Meeting Street. For now, thinking only takes it as far as Fazeley Street but it could form the basis of a tramway to the airport. Hopefully, they will also consider a triangular junction to enable trams from New St. to go to Moor Street and beyond. However this plan is totally dependent on HS2 actually being built.

Norton Bridge Flyover

A flyover to grade separate Stafford – Stoke trains from Stafford to/from Crewe has been approved by the Secretary of State for Transport. It appears that this will also include a re-alignment of the Stafford – Crewe slow lines and an uplift to the line speed. Railfuture's suggestion a year ago that he looked instead at building the Stafford bypass alignment proposed some time ago, as an early stage of HS2 wasn't favoured.

The next Railfuture West Midlands eNews will be issue 2 in July 2014.

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