

Lichfield Rail Promotion Group

Newsletter March 2015

Meetings

We are now well established for our monthly meetings (second Monday of each month at 20.00) in the upstairs meeting room of the Kings Head on Bird Street. Recent attendances have been pleasingly good, at 10-15 members. This year's AGM, on 13th April, will be at the same place; Virgin Trains have been invited to attend.

ORR station usage figures

The figures for 2013-4 have been published several months earlier than previously. Including transfer passengers, Lichfield Trent Valley has topped a million for the first time, not far behind Tamworth and Nuneaton, and the two Lichfield stations together approached 1.7 million. Rugeley Trent Valley also saw significant growth although Shenstone slipped back a bit. Hopefully the revised timetable with greater reliability will see this decline reversed.

London Midland

David Dixon and Ian Jackson had a further, useful meeting on 5th February with Mark Goodall, again covering a wide range of issues. He told us that Cross-City performance was much improved thanks to new timetables for both "Leaf Fall" and since the December revision. (More than half of Sunday trains were now 6-car). This year the former may be brought forward to 19th October (but still last for 6 weeks) to coincide more closely with when the leaves start to fall. More peak-flow intermediate stops may be retained. When Birmingham New St rebuilding is completed in September passenger flows to/from platforms will be improved, and trains may be positioned when stopping there to match access points from the concourse above. We again pressed for the 2255 ex New St to be extended to Lichfield City. Poor ticket checking was again mentioned.

The Burton Old Road bridge over the WCML was demolished over Christmas, thus isolating the "new" car park adjacent to the main southbound platform, which may not be accessible again before Christmas 2015. A temporary replacement, with fewer spaces, has been provided on part of the former GKN site by Crossfield Road.

Network Rail's proposals for step-free access at Lichfield Trent Valley should be published in March, but are still subject to DfT approval. London Midland were looking at improving access to the northbound platform at Shenstone.

DfT

DD and IJ met in London on 23 January those responsible for the proposed direct award of a further two years franchise to London Midland. We asked for earlier Sunday trains both to London and on Cross-City, and for Sunday staffing of Lichfield Trent Valley to match Tamworth and Nuneaton with similar footfall; also for planning to begin for a proper waiting room with refreshment facility on the London platform, and for 600 car park spaces. For the next full franchise (from 2017), we asked for 20-minute evening and Sunday frequency on Cross-City, for completion of the new works, for driver operation of doors to reduce delays, and for self-contained rosters which should also cover Sundays!

Lichfield to Derby/Nottingham

Nothing further from the Birmingham and Solihull LEP, but IJ has made contact with the Staffordshire LEP. A useful meeting was held on 30 January with Peter Orgill of the NMA. We are proposing (so far through Railfuture) that the direct franchise award to Cross-Country include diversion of the Birmingham to Nottingham trains via Sutton Coldfield and Lichfield to give an hourly direct service from these towns to Derby and Nottingham. A petition originated in a letter to the Lichfield Mercury has attracted well over 400 signatures.

WCML

The proposal by Great North Western Railway Company, a subsidiary of Alliance Rail, for “open access” trains featuring Lichfield Trent Valley calls has been refused by the Office of Rail Regulation (ORR) despite earlier approval by Network Rail. We are not sure whether there is an appeals procedure, but in the meantime are persisting with seeking extra Virgin calls at weekends after their refusal received before Christmas to schedule any. We also continue to press London Midland for faster Sunday trains (at present all run via Northampton).

HS2

In October it was announced that the proposed Handsacre link to the WCML will still be built but will avoid crossing the Trent & Mersey Canal twice. The main route will go below the WCML and A38 instead of above as previously proposed.

Midland Connect

This is an initiative set up by the local authorities and LEP’s across the Midlands, to work with the Highways Agency and Network Rail to improve transport links between East and West Midlands and the rest of the UK. They have already conducted an economic assessment looking at the potential benefits of improved communications and aim to complete a detailed and costed proposal for investment by the end of 2015. We know that extension of the Cross City Line with a station at Alrewas has been included in the options being appraised. Engagement with businesses and the transport industry will be sought as the programme moves forward and we have been added to the list of consultees.

This is potentially very significant and at a recent meeting we attended looking at Network Rail’s East Midlands Route Study, we were assured that this work is being fed into the Network Rail planning process for CP6(2019-2024).

Pedestrian Crossings between Lichfield City and Lichfield Trent Valley

Network Rail are now working up a scheme to replace both of these crossings with a single Bridge. They have surveyed their use using temporary cameras and accept that this will need to include a ramp for step free use. This could be a very intrusive structure as the track is already about a metre above the surrounding land and houses are relatively close to the line. We have written to the District Council planners urging that an underpass be considered as an alternative but as ever cost will be a factor. Broad costs have been given as £450k for a stepped bridge, £900k for a bridge and ramp, and £1.8m for an underpass.

