

Lichfield Rail Promotion Group

Newsletter - April 2016

It is some while since we sent out a newsletter – somehow this got overlooked, so busy were we with other things. More members have been attending our monthly meetings and thus are well briefed, but it is important that those unable to attend are not forgotten. Our website www.lichfieldrailusers.org.uk should be up-to-date with notes of meetings etc, but a summary of where we are may still be of interest.

ORR station usage figures

The figures for 2015-6 show further increase in usage locally. Lichfield Trent Valley (excluding interchange) increased by 6% to 981,000, and the two Lichfield stations together (still excluding interchange) reached 1.66 million. Lichfield numbers can be compared with those at Tamworth and Nuneaton on the Trent Valley line, whose totals were 1.40 million and 1.58 million respectively. But it should be remembered that those towns have trains in four directions, not three, although only one station serves each place: Lichfield clearly attracts more rail users than the other Trent Valley places. Rugeley Trent Valley usage grew by 8% to 146,000, and Shenstone more modestly to 178,000. We may be seeing the end of large annual percentage increases, though steps to reduce ticketless travel and extra Virgin calls at Lichfield Trent Valley may keep numbers growing.

London Midland

Mark Goodall, route manager for Cross-City, was promoted and replaced by David Whitley who attended meetings of the group and on detailed issues with David and Ian, until he in turn moved on to the bid team prior to refranchising from late 2017. In the meantime London Midland were given a “direct award” of a short franchise pending the full process. We gain a train into Birmingham half an hour earlier at 901 from Trent Valley on Sundays and two later trains from London on weekdays (at 1946 and 2046), but not till December 2016. Punctuality on Cross-City has been much improved with longer turnrounds at Lichfield Trent Valley and more time allowed at Birmingham New St, and has also been good on the Trent Valley trains except for occasional cancellations for non-availability of traincrew.

The “new” Birmingham New St opened in September. While far better than before, certain features are unsatisfactory; particularly changing platforms at the “a” end when it can be necessary to pass through two sets of barriers. An opportunity was missed in not renaming the station “Grand Central” to match the title chosen for the new shopping area!

Virgin

We were delighted when Virgin Trains at last responded positively to our arguments for extra calls at weekends, and added in an extra call each way on weekdays which are also most welcome; these all start with the new timetable on May 15th. The Sunday extras are particularly important as London Midland trains start late in the day and still run via Northampton taking a long time to/from the capital. At the suggestion of Virgin while this was being considered, we helped to set up a Lichfield Rail Alliance involving local authorities etc which should give greater weight to future local pressure for better services.

Trent Valley station

The “new” car park adjacent to the main southbound platform was out of use for over a year; when the new Burton Old Road bridge over the WCML was opened in November it was found not to carry the power cable needed for lighting the car park, considered a safety requirement. So the temporary replacement on part of the former GKN site by Crossfield Road continued in use, but was closed again as soon as the other reopened, thus missing the opportunity for much-needed extra parking.

The provision of step-free access at Lichfield Trent Valley, approved by Department for Transport, was put in doubt again by the “Hendy” report for Network Rail; at the time of writing the outcome is not known.

Consultations

These have become a regular task for groups such as ours. While it is good that we and other local bodies are being asked, submitting considered views can take a lot of time. The most important recently has been that on the proposed West Midlands franchise; our response is (or will be) on our website. Following this will be the same process for Inter City West Coast.

Lichfield to Derby/Nottingham

Our case for a new service to Nottingham with a station at Alrewas for the National Memorial Arboretum started well but needs fresh impetus. It doesn't help that one of at least three TOCs might provide a service, that it is cross-border between East and West Midlands (though one hoped that the advent of Midlands Connect might have helped), and our County Council haven't produced their draft Railway Strategy which has been in gestation for at least three years. (Are they too busy whingeing about HS2?)

Open Access

Great North Western Railway Company, a subsidiary of Alliance Rail, eventually got permission for trains from Blackpool to Queens Park, just short of Euston; but there is little sign yet of action towards making this happen.

HS2

Is proceeding according to the government's plan, with parliamentary approval in the House of Commons completed last month and the hybrid Bill now moving to the Lords. With cross-party support construction is expected to start on schedule next year.

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