SLUG News – 2018

31 December 2018

Christmas Quiz Answers

Here are the answers to the SLUG Christmas Quiz where you were asked to name some well-known TV series with railway locations.

21 October 2018

Kidderminster Station Reconstruction Open Day On 6 November

The October 2018 edition of “Branch Lines”, the Severn Valley Railway Supporters Newsletter, has announced that construction work on the new Kidderminster station building will start on Wednesday 14 November 2018.

Worcestershire County Council have since announced that they will be running an open day with their partners on Tuesday 6 November.

Project staff will be on hand at the station from 7.30 am to 6 pm to update the public on the plans and answer questions.

Kidderminster Station will undergo a dramatic redevelopment, including construction of a completely new, glass fronted station building. Inside the station there will be a new café, fully accessible toilets and an indoor seating and waiting area. Outside, the forecourt will be reshaped with a new drop-off and collection zone, relocated taxi rank and new traffic flow arrangements. The aim is to improve pedestrian safety and increase access and exit flow during the busiest times.

Highway works on Comberton Hill have already taken place and include improved bus shelters and a new pedestrian crossing. These works are set to further improve access to and from the station.

10 August 2018

Major Changes To Bus Services At Stourbridge Line Stations

On 2 September, nearly all National Express West Midlands bus services serving Stourbridge line stations will be changed, with new services introduced, existing services withdrawn and many services revised and/or renumbered. In addition, some changes will be made to tendered services to support the changes to NXWM commercial services.

The National Express services that serve Stourbridge line stations which are due for revision are as follows :-

9 will operate every 10 minutes rather than every 8 to 9 minutes as at present.
24 will be rerouted between Cradley Heath and Blackheath to serve that part of the withdrawn 129 route
120 will be renumbered to service 12.
120A will be withdrawn between Oldbury and Blackheath and rerouted from Oldbury to Dudley via the old 121 route. It will be renumbered to service 12A
126 will operate every 15 minutes between Dudley and Birmingham only
127 will be revised to operate between Blackheath and Birmingham only, and no longer serves the stops directly outside Rowley Regis station. It has been renumbered to service 13A.
128 will be renumbered to service 13. It will operate every 20 minutes rather than every 30 minutes
129 will be revised to operate between Blackheath and Birmingham only. It has been renumbered to service 13B.
140 will be replaced by new, limited stop, service X8 operating every 20 minutes from Wolverhampton to Birmingham via the old 126 route from Wolverhampton to Dudley and the old 140 route from Dudley to Birmingham.
241 will be renumbered to service 14 and rerouted via Whiteheath.
244 will be renumbered to service 19.
246 will be renumbered to service 6.
256 will be renumbered to service 16.
257 will be renumbered to service 17.
276 will be renumbered to service 7. The journeys on service 276 operated by Diamond will be withdrawn.
318 will be operated by Kev's Cars and Coaches rather than by Diamond.
X7 is a new, limited stop, service X7 will serve the station every 20 minutes on Mondays to Saturdays until about 1900 hrs. It will operate from Wolverhampton to Dudley via the old 126 route, then via Birmingham New Road, Oldbury, Galton Bridge, Heath Street and Dudley Road to Birmingham.
X10 will be rerouted via Brierley Hill Town Centre between Merry Hill and Pensnett Trading Estate and will be extended to Gornal Wood. The timetable will be revised.
X96 will be renumbered to service 8.

The following Diamond services in Kidderminster will be revised:- 1, 2, 3, 4, 4A, 9C, 9S, 10 and 303

First Worcestershire services in the Worcester area will see cuts, particularly in the early morning and evening. Services to towns and villages outside Worcester will be savagely cut by First.

3 August 2018

Consultation on the Cross Country Franchise Now Open

The Department for Transport are currently consulting stakeholders and passengers on the specification of the next Cross Country franchise, due to start in October 2019.

SLUG will be responding to the parts of the consultation that deals with services in this area and our response will be available on this website once it has been submitted.

However, SLUG thinks that it is important that regular Cross Country passengers have their say on how the franchise is improved over the next few years. Therefore, we are asking any members who regularly travel on Cross Country trains to consider responding to the consultation as an individual passenger. You never know – your proposals may be taken seriously.

2 August 2018

Chiltern Railways Service Changes Due To Closure of Euston Station

London Euston station will be closed on three successive weekends later this month to enable engineering work to take place. The dates of the closure are **18-19 August, 25-27 August and 1-2 September.**

For Stourbridge line passengers, this means some good news and some bad news.

First, the good news. On the three Sundays in question, through trains from Kidderminster to London Marylebone will not be affected with through trains departing from Kidderminster at 0940 and 1113 and returning from London Marylebone at 1810 and 1940. In addition, on Monday 27 August (the later summer bank holiday), a revised timetable will see four through journeys in each direction - from Kidderminster at 0629, 0712, 0809 and 0912 with return journeys from London Marylebone at 1710, 1810, 2010 and 2110.

Now, the bad news. On the three Saturdays in question, the Chiltern website states that "In accordance with the partial closure of the Euston to Birmingham route due to engineering works, Chiltern Railways services between Marylebone and Birmingham will convey additional carriages. No Chiltern Railways services will serve Birmingham Snow Hill and stations to/from Kidderminster; Marylebone/Birmingham services will serve Birmingham Moor Street ONLY."

The timetable for these three Saturdays shows that the stock that resides overnight in Chiltern's Stourbridge depot and which normally runs in service from Kidderminster in the morning and back to Kidderminster in the evening will instead run as empty coaching stock to and from Birmingham Moor Street. It means that 4 of the first 10 trains of the day from Kidderminster will be cancelled, meaning inconvenience to passengers and overcrowding on the remaining West Midlands Railway services.

This is not the first time that this has happened - Chiltern did exactly the same thing over the Spring Bank Holiday. What made it worse was that there were a lot of passengers along the Stourbridge line who turned up on a Bank Holiday to catch one of these trains only to find that it wasn't running. There was no announcement in the local press, nor notices at Stourbridge line stations. It appears that everybody uses the Internet! However, to add to the confusion, the National Rail Enquiries website on 2 August stated that no Chiltern trains would run between Snow Hill and Moor Street but showed the four Chiltern services from Kidderminster as actually running. You couldn't make it up. The National Rail Enquiries page may be viewed by clicking the link below.

SLUG will be bringing this matter up with Chiltern for their comments. SLUG will also raise the matter with the West Midlands Railway Executive to find out what they can do. Euston closures are going to be a common occurrence over the next few years as the station is remodelled for HS2. It is not right that Stourbridge line passengers should be the losers because of engineering work over 100 miles away.

6 May 2018

Stourbridge Town Branch Closures to Replace Road Bridge

Parkfield Road, just to the south of Stourbridge Town station, closed from 8 January until 6 May to enable the bridge that crosses the Stourbridge Town branch to be replaced. It is thought that the current bridge dates from the opening of the Town branch in 1879.

The majority of the work to remove and replace the bridge took place over the weekends of Saturday 24 February to Monday 26 February, and Saturday 3 March to Monday 5 March, with the main bridge replacement works undertaken continuously over those weekends.

The following are photographs taken while work was taking place. A small selection of photographs is posted under the "Gallery" tab on the website.

22 April 2018

Chaos as Charter Train Blocks Old Hill Bank

The Stourbridge line suffered a day of cancellations and delays after a charter service from Newport to Scarborough broke down on Old Hill Bank on 21 April. The train had picked up passengers at Stourbridge Junction at 07:51 but was struggling when it passed Cradley Heath station at 07:59 before grinding to a halt between Cradley Heath and Old Hill. What made the situation worse was that it took 3½ hours for a rescue engine to arrive and move the stricken train. As a result, no trains ran from Stourbridge Junction to Birmingham from 07:35 until 11:57, a gap of 4 hours and 22 minutes. In the opposite direction, only 3 trains operated south of Stourbridge Junction to Kidderminster and Worcester between 08:00 and 12:00.

This was on a warm, sunny Saturday when many people probably intended to spend the day in Birmingham or Worcester, or have a day trip to Stratford-upon-Avon (top left) or the Severn Valley Railway (top right). In addition, West Bromwich Albion kicked off against Liverpool at 12:30, with fans from the Stourbridge direction unable to get to the ground by train as only three trains from that direction (2 from Langley Green and 1 from Rowley Regis) stopped at The Hawthorns. Things were only slightly better from Birmingham with 7 services stopping at the station during the morning. In fact, football fans were at Stourbridge Bus Station as early as 09:00 and were completely lost with no idea on how they would get to the ground by bus.

Much of the blame must be placed on whoever was responsible for moving the broken down train. SLUG understands that the replacement locomotive came from Lawley Street in Birmingham, so for it to take 3½ hours is unacceptable, and somebody's head should be on the chopping block for that. Questions have also been asked by passengers as to whether West Midlands Railway and Network Rail could have done more to reduce the misery and inconvenience that they suffered. However, words of praise must go to the Pre Metro Operations staff who man the Stourbridge Town car. They correctly told would be passengers at Stourbridge Town that no trains were moving from Stourbridge Junction and that their rail tickets were acceptable on local bus services.

SLUG has collated the data of cancelled and altered train services and will be presenting this data to West Midlands Railway (as the train operator) and West Midlands Rail (as the joint owner of the franchise) and asking them to liaise with Network Rail and provide answers that will ensure that any future blockage does not affect Stourbridge line passengers as significantly as the one did on 21 April.

31 January 2018

December 2018 Timetable Enhancements Postponed Until May 2019

After Secretary for State for Transport, Chris Grayling, had instructed incoming Network Rail Chief Executive Andrew Haines to review the plans for the December 2018 timetable change, the Rail Delivery Group have announced that eight rail operators are to defer timetable changes that they planned to implement in December 2018. The companies involved are CrossCountry, Govia Thameslink Railway, Great Western Railway, London Overground, Northern, South Western Railway, TransPennine Express and West Midlands Trains.

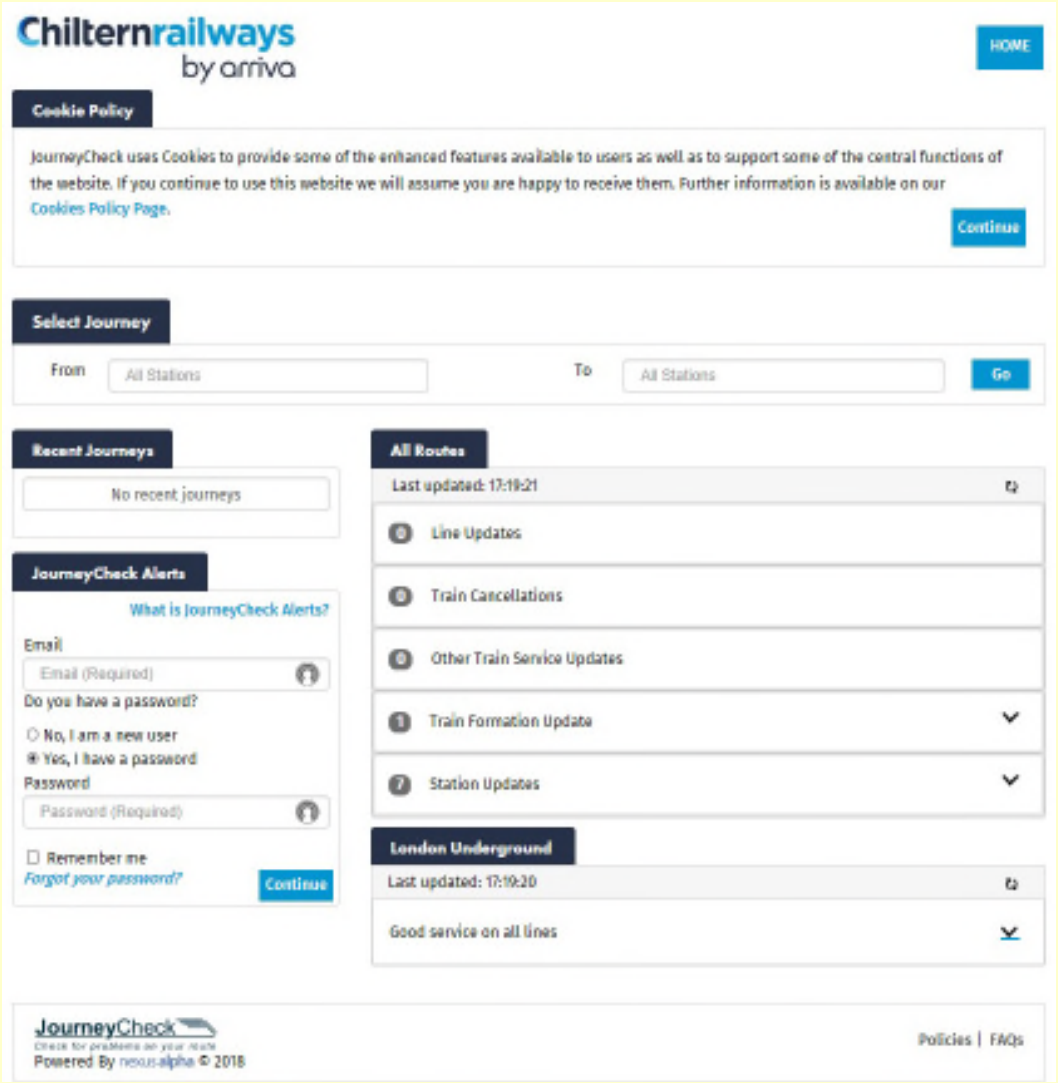
This means that the following enhancements planned by West Midlands Trains will be postponed :-

- Faster journey times between the West Midlands and London Euston
- New cross-Birmingham linkages creating better connectivity to London and Birmingham International from Liverpool, Stoke, Crewe and Rugeley via Walsall
- Faster journey times between Crewe and London Euston
- Significant uplift in capacity, particularly 8 car trains from New St to London Euston
- Additional services between Crewe, Stoke and Birmingham New Street
- Electric services on the Chase Line
- Better evening services on most routes
- Uplift in Shrewsbury Line frequency on weekdays, Saturdays and Sundays
- Later services on Coventry, Cross City North and Wolverhampton lines
- Through services Nuneaton-Coventry-Leamington Spa

On the Stourbridge line, this means that the planned improvement of evening services has been postponed. The current pattern of services of two trains per hour to Stourbridge Junction with one of these trains continuing to Worcester or Great Malvern via Kidderminster was due to be radically improved to three trains per hour to Kidderminster with one of these continuing to Worcester/Great Malvern. Hopefully, this postponement will only be for 5 months although, given the incompetence of the current Secretary for State, you never know what will happen.

31 January 2018

Chiltern's Journey Alerts



For users of Chiltern Railways, whether regularly or occasionally, there's a service you may not know about - it's personal and free!

JourneyCheck Alerts tell you if the train you plan to use, or meet, is likely to be disrupted. For example, if there's a cow on the line and trains have been halted, the JourneyCheck system sends you a message to warn you. JourneyCheck will also update you when a line of route incident is resolved.

Alert messages are usually sent by email, or as well as if you wish, you can opt for text messages to be sent. Unlike emails, texts are limited to four.

To set up personalised alerts, go to the new Chiltern Railways website (www.chilternrailways.co.uk).

On the Home page, just under "Are you travelling today?", click "Check for travel alerts".

This will take you to the Journeycheck page – you can register for alerts in the "JourneyCheck Alerts" section (bottom left on a full web page). You just need to fill in your email and password and then follow the instructions.

Please note that alerts will only be provided for services operated by Chiltern Railways. Messages are sent following the manual involvement of the Chiltern Control Team, so single incidents of minor late running are unlikely to be reported.

11 January 2018

First Stourbridge Line Unit Has Received Prototype West Midlands Railway Livery

The first of the Class 172 Diesel Multiple Units used on the Stourbridge to receive a prototype version of the West Midlands Railway livery was unveiled to the public on Monday 11 December 2017.

A selection of photographs from that event, which took place at the appropriately named Snow Hill station, are shown below.

10 January 2018

Funding For Dudley VLR Project Gets Green Light

On 20 September 2017, funding for the Dudley Very Light Rail (VLR) project, which will create more than 200 jobs at the site of the former Dudley railway station, was given the go-ahead.

The Black Country Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP) unanimously approved a £18.5 million grant towards the £25 million scheme to build the centre, which will design and construct lightweight rail coaches and rail track.

Work was due to start in January 2018 with the test track due for completion by March 2019. However, with the start date already passed with no sign of any work starting, it would appear that the completion date has no chance of being met. We will keep you up to date with news of progress.

7 January 2018

A Force To Be Reckoned With

The following is a press release issued by Stourbridge Line User Group.

A local rail campaign group is reflecting on its success in 2017. The Stourbridge Line User Group (SLUG) is celebrating the fruition of long standing ambitions for the railway which it represents. The Group has established a good working relationship with the new franchise holder, West Midland Trains (who operate under the brand name West Midlands Railway) and the policy maker, West Midlands Rail.

SLUG Chairman, William Whiting was quoted as saying:-

“There have been dramatic developments such as West Midlands Railway and West Midlands Rail making a commitment to a passenger rail link from Stourbridge to Brierley Hill. Also, Chiltern Railways have introduced weekend services to and from London Marylebone. However, as a campaign group, we must not be complacent when so much more is needed by the new generation of passengers.”

He added:-

“We must put pressure on West Midlands Rail and West Midlands Railway to see the draft December 2018 timetable as soon as possible to ensure Sunday trains at Hartlebury are included. Hartlebury, another SLUG success story, has had an annual footfall growth averaging 17.8% over the last five years, which is probably the highest of any West Midlands station.”

“We must also prompt the train operator to commit the new GOBLIN 172 train units to the Stourbridge Line to strengthen popular services.”

“Furthermore, Stourbridge Line stations are badly in need of a makeover and we must push for West Midlands Railways’ commitment to repaint and deep clean every one of its stations to be ordered by need, pointing out the tiredness of some of ours such as Galton Bridge - and attention to the canopy ends at Stourbridge Junction.”

He concluded:-

“SLUG has recently received a national award for “Best Website” from the Rail Development Society, now known as Railfuture. This demonstrates that we are effective in getting our messages across: We highlight the problems with the rail network and sort them out with the authorities. The past year has seen a steady increase in new members. It is no coincidence that successful campaigns have influenced recruitment and with growing membership numbers, the Stourbridge Line User Group will be a force to be reckoned with in 2018.”

1 January 2018

Kidderminster Station Progress

When Worcestershire County Council announced on 3 February 2015 that the government had agreed to provide the final £1.8 million needed to get the “long-awaited” redevelopment of Kidderminster Railway Station under way, it stated that it anticipated that construction work would start by summer 2016 with completion about 18 months after that (i.e. Spring 2018).

After that, very little was announced and SLUG pressed Worcestershire County Council for details on how the project is progressing. SLUG received a reply in April 2017.

The project will replace the existing inadequate railway interchange. This will be achieved by :

- Replacing the station building with a new, bigger, higher quality building containing improved facilities for all passengers (including those with disabilities) and operators
- Providing a new station forecourt layout to improve access for cars (parking and kiss and ride), cyclists, pedestrians and taxis
- Upgrading bus stops on Comberton Hill to provide an improved bus-rail interchange, although it would appear that buses unfortunately will not serve the station forecourt
- Installing a signalised crossing at the junction of the A448 Comberton Hill and Lea Street
- Providing improved pedestrian access
- Providing gateway access to Severn Valley Railway station

By April 2017, Network Rail had completed the design works for the station building, and CH2M had undertaken design works for the station forecourt and highways elements. Option Selection Reports were placed with Network Rail for final acceptance.

On Wednesday 12 July 2017, rail passengers were able to see what the new multi-million pound Kidderminster railway station will look like when artist impressions of the scheme were put on display at an information session on the forecourt at Kidderminster station.

The station is set to undergo a dramatic £4.3 million redevelopment - including a new glass-fronted station twice the size of the existing building. Facilities will include a new cafe or shop, toilets and indoor seating and waiting areas. Clearly marked waiting and taxi areas will be created in front of the station to make it safer for pedestrians. The scheme also proposes significant improvements to nearby bus facilities and a new pedestrian crossing close to the station on Comberton Hill.

Work on site is currently scheduled to start in August 2018 with completion expected in summer 2019.

The people of Kidderminster have waited a long time for a station that is fit for use by the £1.6 million passengers who use it every year. SLUG hopes that no further delays will occur to push the completion of this project back into the next decade.

Four artist's impressions of the new station are shown below.

Further information is available on the Worcestershire County Council website at
http://www.worcestershire.gov.uk/kidderminsterstation