BIRMINGHAM - STOURBRIDGE
KIDDERMINSTER - WORCESTER
STOURBRIDGE LINE USER GROUP

PLATFORM

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The new era dawns. A Class 172 DMU in the new West Midlands Railway livery passes through Birmingham Moor Street station on Monday 11 December 2017

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The Stourbridge Line User Group, 46 Sandringham Road, Wordsley, Stourbridge, West Midlands, DY8 5HL

ONWARDS TOWARDS DUDLEY
by Roger Davis

Dudley 2023 ?

Since the last edition of *Platform* was published, SLUG's aspirations for a rail based passenger service along the entire route from Stourbridge Junction to Wednesbury has moved forward. The biggest news is that, on 20 November, the Government announced a £250 million investment grant to the West Midlands Combined Authority, the majority of which will be used to build the long awaited Midland Metro line from Wednesbury to Brierley Hill. This will enable work on constructing the line to start in 2019 with the line from Wednesbury to Dudley open in 2022 and to Brierley Hill in 2023.

Brierley Hill 2020 ?
With a new station of course !

In addition, SLUG has arranged meetings with both West Midlands Rail (WMR), the consortium of local authorities, and West Midlands Trains (WMT), the operator of the new franchise, and both have stated their commitment to reopen the line from Stourbridge Junction to Brierley Hill. WMR has told us that this is a committed scheme under the HS2 connectivity package while, at our meeting at WMT Headquarters in Birmingham, WMT stated that they are fully committed to providing this service as the funding for the new station has been agreed. WMT's proposal is for a half-hourly service (peak and off-peak) to operate to a new station at Moor Street which would be built with car parking facilities. It is intended that the line is further extended in 2023 to provide an interchange with the Midland Metro at Hart's Hill (Canal Street). In fact, at the annual WMR Conference, I managed to have a word with Jan Chaudhry-Van Der Velde, the newly appointed Managing Director of WMT, and he reiterated that WMT was fully committed to providing the seven new West Midlands stations they promised when awarded the franchise in August.

This includes the station at West Midlands Safari Park which WMT have told us is due to be built close to the Bewdley bypass on West Midlands Safari Park (WMSP) land with funding provided by WMSP. Trains would only operate as far as the Safari Park as Worcestershire County Council are concerned about traffic congestion if the service continued to Bewdley. An hourly service is proposed, with additional peak services, although the service would not operate when Severn Valley Railway were hosting a Gala event.

Both stations are earmarked for opening in December 2019, although this seems ambitious especially as Network Rail will be involved and their GRIP process seems to delay projects as the residents of Kidderminster will attest.

We will keep you informed of any progress in future editions of *Platform* and on our website.

NEWS IN BRIEF
edited by Rob Hebron

SoFA, so good. In a Statement of Funds Available (SoFA) issued on 12 October, Transport Secretary Chris Grayling announced £48bn spending on railways from 2019 to 2024. This figure includes the resources needed for more maintenance. The dates indicated are known as Control Period 6 (CP6) and Network Rail (NR) uses the CP procedure to allot funding to infrastructure improvements within this defined timescale. At face value, the funding is 10bn greater than the previous Control Period and may reflect the fear of going over budget. In reality, just £35bn will come from the DfT and the remainder from NR income i.e. payments from train operators and commercial ventures in and around NR property. £48bn is a great deal of money and has been welcomed by the Railway Industry Association which has pressed for more cash for renewals. The term "renewals" refers to the unglamorous aspect of railway maintenance such as replacing worn out track and upgrading signalling. The government will expect to see efficiencies from NR in return for the extra funding. Taking into account the cost of devolution and a possible increase in inflation, £48bn may not go very far. *(Source: - Rail Technology Magazine)*

Christmas Service Alterations. Normal scheduled train services service will not operate between Birmingham and Wolverhampton from 24 December until 2 January 2018 while improvement works take place to upgrade signals near Birmingham New Street. For the duration, fast trains will be diverted and rail replacement buses will run between Birmingham New Street and Wolverhampton, serving local stations. Consequently, connections to Stourbridge Line services at Smethwick Galton Bridge will be non-existent and passengers should allow more time for their journeys. London Midland claims that the benefit of the engineering work will be quicker journey times between Birmingham and Wolverhampton (as yet, unproved). Sadly, the works will not create extra paths to insert calls at Dudley Port, in preparation for the Metro interchange. *(Source: - London Midland website)*

Two Arriva Trains Wales DMUs meet at Shrewsbury

Bye Bye Blues. By the end of 2018, the familiar blue Arriva trains that call at Smethwick Galton Bridge could be no more than a memory. The Wales and Borders franchise should have been re-let and another operator should be carrying passengers to Holyhead via North Wales. Although Arriva Trains Wales initially bid for the franchise, it pulled out in October 2017 for commercial reasons. This leaves three other contenders - Abellio Rail Cymru, KeolisAmey and MTR Corporation. SLUG questions how any company could put in a bid when a massive chunk, the Cardiff Valleys, has yet to have fundamental decisions made about its *modus operandi*. Heavy rail, tram trains, and electrification are all options with differing costs. The uncertainty may well cause a year's delay in implementing a refranchising process, especially if the other bidders pull out. *(Source: - Rail Technology Magazine)*

ALL CHANGE ON THE DMU FRONT
by John Warren

On 16 October, West Midlands Trains confirmed an order for 413 new carriages to be delivered in 2020/2021. The largest part of the order is for Bombardier to supply Aventra electric multiple units - 36 3-car units for the Cross City line, 16 5-car units for Birmingham to London services and 29 5-car units for outer suburban services.

However, it is the order for 80 new carriages for diesel multiple units (DMUs) that is significant to the Stourbridge line. The order is for CAF (*Construcciones y Auxiliar de Ferrocarriles)* to supply 12 2-car and 14 4-car Civity units for delivery in 2020. CAF is based in Beasin in the Basque Country but it is thought that the new trains will be assembled at a new rolling stock plant near Newport in South Wales, due to open in 2018. While the new units will primarily be used on New Street to Shrewsbury and Hereford services, it is hoped that some will be used on Stourbridge Line services.

The arrival of the new units will see major changes in the make up of the DMU fleet with three older classes being withdrawn. These include the remaining Class 150 units which were the mainstay of Stourbridge line from the 1990s until their replacement by the Class 172 units in 2011. Two other types will be withdrawn. These are the single car Class 153 units, probably best known for their use on the Stourbridge Town branch until the Parry People Movers took over, and the Class 170 units dating from 1998-2000 which still see service on weekdays on a few Stourbridge line services as well as being the mainstay on Birmingham New Street to Hereford services. Currently, there are 137 DMU carriages as follows:-

Class 139 2

Class 150 6

Class 153 8

Class 170 52

Class 172 69

This means that 66 carriages will be withdrawn, to be replaced by the 80 new CAF carriages plus 22 carriages cascaded from other parts of the country. 16 Class 172 carriages, similar to the units in use on the Stourbridge line, will arrive from London Overground. These do not have connecting corridors between units nor toilets, although toilets will be fitted before entry into service. In addition, 6 converted ex-London Underground carriages will replace 3 existing carriages on the Bletchley to Bedford line. From 2020, there will be 173 carriages as follows:-

Class 139 2

Class 172 16

Class 172 69

New CAF 80

Class 230 6

Thus it means that the West Midlands will have an extra 33 DMU carriages available for use from 2020. Stourbridge Line User Group will be making representations to ensure that extra carriages are available for rush hour services and that 2-car trains are eradicated from weekend services.

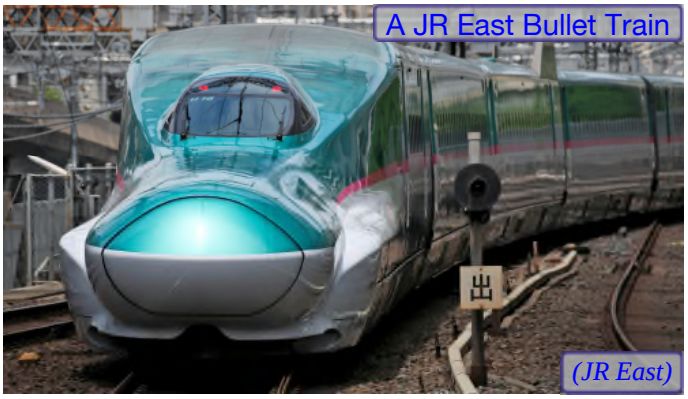
WHO RUNS OUR TRAINS NOW ?
by Roger Davis

As this edition of *Platform* went to press, operation of the franchise in the West Midlands area passed to West Midlands Trains. This is the third operator of Stourbridge line services since the railways were privatised in 1996. The first was Central Trains, owned by British bus and coach operator National Express. They were succeeded in 2008 by London Midland owned by Govia, an Anglo-French company. So who are the companies who own West Midlands Trains?

West Midlands Trains is a joint venture between three companies - Abellio, East Japan Railway Company and Mitsui & Co Ltd.

The majority partner is Abellio, which is the international passenger transport subsidiary of the Dutch national railway company, Nederlandse Spoorwegen. It was formed in 2002 as NedRailways to take advantage of the liberalisation of the European transport sector. A year later, it won a 25 year franchise to operate Merseyrail in a joint venture with Serco, and the same joint venture won the Northern Rail franchise, which it ran from 2004 to 2016. In 2009, NedRailways was rebranded to Abellio after the purchase of Abellio Deutschland. This acquisition also meant the expansion from an owning group with two UK rail franchises to a European public transport company. In the same year, first steps into the London bus market were made by buying London Bus from National Express. Since then, Abellio have won the ScotRail and Greater Anglia train franchises. In Germany, Abellio Deutschland serves communities in North Rhine Westfalia, Saxony, Lower Saxony, Saxony-Anhalt, Hesse and Thuringia.

An artist's impression a new Bombardier Aventra EMU for West Midlands Trains (Abellio)



A JR East Bullet Train (JR East)

East Japan Railway Company (JR East) (東本客道式社) was established on 1 April 1987, when Japanese National Railways was divided into seven Japan Railways Group companies as part of a package of railway reforms. Following the breakup, JR East ran the operations on former JNR lines in the Greater Tokyo Area, the Tohoku region, and surrounding areas. It provides urban, suburban and high speed operations for 17 million passengers on a daily basis.

Mitsui (三グー) is one of the largest corporate groups in the world with 139 offices in 66 countries as of March 2017. The major companies of the group include Mitsui & Co (general trading company), Sumitomo Mitsui Banking Corporation, Sapporo Breweries, Toray Industries, Mitsui Chemicals, Isetan Mitsukoshi Holdings, Sumitomo Mitsui Trust Holdings, Mitsui Engineering & Shipbuilding, Mitsui O.S.K. Lines and Mitsui Fudosan.

These are established and respected international companies. Just how well they operate a rail service in the West Midlands will be judged over the next 8 years.

LONDON MIDLAND - A PERSONAL APPRAISAL
by Rob Hebron

It would be fair to say that the demise of London Midland will be largely unlamented by the daily commuter. Comments on social media for the duration of LM's franchise have been largely negative. It is understandable that late and cancelled trains are blamed squarely on the train operator though sometimes, it is out of the control of that particular organisation. A passenger representative group such as SLUG has a duty to tackle the TOC about disruptions to service but it must also encourage improvement to journeys and seek network development. Looking at the bigger picture, London Midland has much to be commended for.

Many Stourbridge Line passengers will remember the very basic Class 150 units employed by LM's predecessor, Central Trains: Seating was asymmetrical and gangways were tight. The upholstery was akin to throw-over covers. Carriage floors were grimy. When London Midland took over the franchise, it introduced the Class 172 trains with comparatively luxurious interiors. The new DMU sets were capable of greater acceleration and deceleration, providing more flexibility within timetables. Selective door opening would enable short platforms to be accessed safely from specific carriages. London Midland rolled out a program of station improvements, including information screens on platforms.

The old and the new at Tyseley in 2011. A new Class 172 leaves the depot and passes an old Class 150 en route to Worcester

SLUG has enjoyed a productive relationship with LM Line Managers including Mark Lawton, Terry Oliver and Brenda Lawrence. The period when the Snow Hill Lines were under Terry's jurisdiction was the most memorable one: Terry executed the delivery of a regular Hartlebury service. This had been a long standing SLUG campaign which had never before been taken seriously. Terry also restructured the Stourbridge Town branch line timetable when SLUG pointed out connectional possibilities which were being missed. In fact, London Midland was responsible for introducing the Class 139 vehicle which has enabled a high frequency weekday and Sunday service to run on the branch line.

London Midland, in collaboration with partners has introduced new routes such as Stourbridge to Stratford-upon-Avon via Dorridge. The company has strengthened its revenue protection team and recruited staff under apprenticeship schemes. There is much to commend LM for providing. Unfortunately, there have been troughs as well as peaks in regard to performance figures. It is too soon to forget about faulty carriage doors. Issues such as short formed trains at weekends have not been completely resolved.

The old and the new at Stourbridge Town.
Above : Class 153 Below : Class 139

Nevertheless, during the last weeks of London Midland it was "business as usual" and SLUG has received various invitations to stakeholder presentations and workshops. Hopefully, some LM staff will be retained by the new franchisee, so as to provide continuity. However we judge London Midland's term of office, its record will more than stand up to that of Central Trains. For Abellio (West Midland Trains), LM might be a hard act to follow.

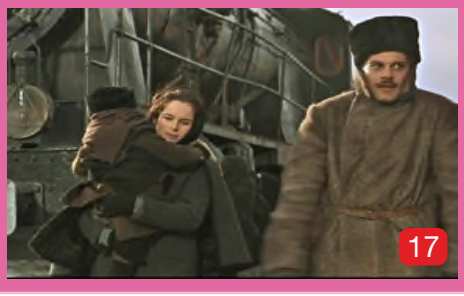
SLUG WEBSITE WINS NATIONAL AWARD

The Stourbridge Line User Group received a major accolade at the annual Railfuture User Groups Awards ceremony in November when the website received the Gold Award as the best Rail User Group website in the country.

SLUG Acting Chairman William Whiting (left) receives the award from Christian Wolmar

The award was decided by a panel of Railfuture vice-presidents - Paul Abell (former Editor of Today's Railways magazine), Ian Brown (former MD of London Rail), Roger Ford (Industry and Technology Editor of Modern Railways magazine), Chris Green (former Head of ScotRail, Network South East and InterCity in British Rail Days and former MD of Virgin Trains), Stewart Palmer (former MD of South West Trains), Lorna Slade (Editor of Rail Professional magazine), Stewart Stevenson MSP (former Minister of Transport for Scotland), plus Honorary President Christian Wolmar (a renowned writer and broadcaster on railway matters).

Obviously, we are absolutely taken aback by the award and the fact that it has been decided by acclaimed railway professionals. However, members should be reassured to know that our acronym will continue to be SLUG and not SMUG!

CHRISTMAS PHOTO QUIZ - NAME THE FILM

The following are stills taken from well-known films featuring railway locations. Larger images can be viewed on the SLUG website. Can you name the films?