STOURBRIDGE LINE USER GROUP
PUBLIC MEETING AND ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

The Stourbridge Line User Group Public Meeting and Annual General Meeting will take place at the Refreshment Room, Kidderminster Town (SVR) Railway Station on Tuesday 8 May 2018 starting at 7.30 p.m.

Kidderminster Town Station

The Public Meeting is open to members and non-members. There will be presentations from Train Operating Companies and local transport authorities. Members are reminded that their membership renewal is due and a membership form has been included with this mailing. If you are attending the meeting, you can bring your membership form with you and pay on the night.

A TALE OF TWO CANOPIES
by Roger Davis

(David A Flitcroft)

Stourbridge Junction is a decent station. One thing that lets it down is the extremely tatty condition of the canopies. Wouldn't it be nice if the awful worn out canopies of today were replaced by the elegant GWR examples seen in 1965? Come on West Midlands Railway, you've promised over £60 million for station improvements, let's have some action!

CHRISTMAS PHOTO QUIZ ANSWERS

The answers to the Christmas Photo Quiz were as follows :-

1 - The Ladykillers, 2 - Brief Encounter, 3 - In The Heat Of The Night, 4 - Strangers On A Train, 5 - From Russia With Love, 6 - Blazing Saddles, 7 - The Great Escape, 8 - The 39 Steps, 9 - North By Northwest, 10 - The Titfield Thunderbolt, 11 - The Railway Children, 12 - The Lady Vanishes, 13 - Murder On The Orient Express, 14 - Some Like It Hot, 15 - Von Ryan's Express, 16 - High Noon, 17 - Doctor Zhivago, 18 - Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets

STOURBRIDGE LINE USER GROUP

PLATFORM

Issue 11 March 2018

Worcester Foregate Street on 6 March with a new GWR Intercity Express Train on the 12:00 service to Paddington, and a West Midlands Railway Class 172 unit on the 11:51 service to Whitlocks End.

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PLATFORM is published by:
The Stourbridge Line User Group, 46 Sandringham Road, Wordsley, Stourbridge, West Midlands, DY8 5HL

HOT OFF THE PRESS
Compiled by Rob Hebron and Roger Davis

If 2017 was the year of major announcements, the start of 2018 has been a slow news period, with all proposed enhancements now at the planning stage.

Throughout this period, SLUG has been busy. It has attended a Worcestershire Rail User Groups Association meeting, the first West Midlands Railway stakeholder conference in Birmingham, and attended a meeting with the Head of Rail at Transport for West Midlands. This has allowed us to summarise the latest news on the improvements currently under development.

Metro to Brierley Hill. The announcement that Birmingham has been awarded the Commonwealth Games in 2022 has increased aspirations that the line from Wednesbury may open in 2022 rather than 2023, at least as far as Dudley.

The New Kidderminster Station Building. It looks as though spades will soon be breaking the ground at Kidderminster station. A planning application has been submitted to Wyre Forest District Council and consultation on the new station building ended on 7 March. Provided consent is given to the planning application, work is expected to commence in August. Detailed drawings are on-line and depict a modern glass fronted structure with much improved internal facilities such as seating, toilets and a café/shop. SLUG has persistently campaigned for a "proper" station at Kidderminster which was used by 1.6m passengers in 2017. The cost of redevelopment is £4.3m and is being funded by the Greater Birmingham and Solihull Local Enterprise Partnership in conjunction with its Worcestershire equivalent. SLUG officers hope to see the station and forecourt in operation by summer 2019. The fulfilment of this campaign is welcome but long overdue.

A computer generated image of the new Kidderminster station building and forecourt

West Midlands Railway. There is currently a lot of work going on in two areas. Firstly, the senior management team is currently being reorganised and this should be completed within the next 6-8 weeks. Among new posts to be introduced are Head of Stations, Head of On-Train Experience and Head of Stakeholder and Customer Involvement, while the Head of Route positions will disappear. This will possibly mean that SLUG will have different contacts in the new organisation.

The new exterior livery and the interior trim of the units is also being finalised and may differ from that applied to the unit unveiled on 10 December.

A lot of people would say that it is acceptable for Stourbridge Junction passengers to travel via Birmingham. However, the same could not be said about Kidderminster passengers, who face an unnecessary 19½ mile northeasterly journey before turning 180° for the rest of the trip to the South West. The travel times for Kidderminster passengers are as follows :

To arrive at Plymouth at the following times								
		1144	1247	1338	1443	1543	1645	1742
You would have to depart from Kidderminster at the following times								
via Worcester (Shrub Hill or Foregate Street) and Cheltenham Spa	208¾ miles	None	0804 F St	0804 F St	1018 F St	1018 F St	1218 Sh H	1218 Sh H
via Birmingham Moor Street and Birmingham New Street	242½ miles	0705	0809	0906	1010	1110	1210	1310
via Smethwick Galton Bridge and Birmingham New Street	241¾ miles	0705	0754	0906	1010	1110	1210	1310

If you depart from Plymouth at the following times								
		0925	1025	1125	1150	1225	1325	1425
You would arrive at Kidderminster at the following times								
via Cheltenham Spa and Worcester (Shrub Hill or Foregate Street)	208¾ miles	1510 Sh H	1510 Sh H	1701 Sh H	1701 Sh H	1701 Sh H	1855 Sh H	1855 Sh H
via Birmingham New Street and Birmingham Moor Street	242½ miles	1347	1447	1547	1620	1647	1752	1905
via Birmingham New Street and Smethwick Galton Bridge	241¾ miles	1347	1447	1547	1620	1647	1752	1905

As can be seen,there are two southbound services (highlighted in red) where you can actually leave Kidderminster later via Worcester. However, in both cases, the saving is only 8 minutes for a journey which is 33 miles shorter. Added to this, a potentially cheaper off-peak return ticket would probably necessitate a return journey via the same route, and the longer journey times that this would entail.

One of the two-hourly services that link Worcester and Cheltenham Spa crosses the River Severn

SLUG has always maintained that connections between the Stourbridge line and Cheltenham Spa (for connections to the South West) are inadequate. There is an hourly service from Westbury to Gloucester via Bristol, but this only extends to Worcester and Great Malvern every 2 hours. A public consultation on the next GWR franchise has just closed, and SLUG has responded and requested that all journeys should run through to Worcester with some extended as far as Stourbridge Junction. The SLUG response can be found under the Consultations tab on the SLUG website. In addition, we will be making representations to West Midlands Rail and West Midlands Railways for one Stourbridge line journey per hour that currently terminates at Worcester to be extended to Gloucester to provided better connections. The above tables show that the current situation is not acceptable.

MISSION IMPOSSIBLE
by John Warren

My mission, if I accepted it, was to find a quicker way to travel from Stourbridge Junction to Plymouth without the need to travel into Birmingham and then change direction to travel south-westerly. Instead, I would set out heading in the right direction and, by shaving nearly 20 miles off of my journey, I would successfully accomplish my mission.

The problem is that even Peter Graves would have failed miserably because connections between services at Worcester are poor, the service between Worcester and Cheltenham Spa is infrequent and connections at Cheltenham Spa are also poor. This is even more evident on the return journey when the word "poor" should be replaced by "appalling". The following tables demonstrate how long journeys take at present travelling via Worcester and Birmingham. For passengers unwilling to walk between the two Birmingham City Centre stations, times are also shown for passengers who prefer to change at Smethwick Galton Bridge.

To arrive at Plymouth at the following times								
		1144	1247	1338	1443	1543	1645	1742
You would have to depart from Stourbridge Junction at the following times								
via Worcester (Shrub Hill or Foregate Street) and Cheltenham Spa	215¾ miles	None	0752 F St	0752 F St	1009 F St	1009 F St	1209 Sh H	1209 Sh H
via Birmingham Moor Street and Birmingham New Street	235½ miles	0714	0823	0918	1018	1118	1218	1318
via Smethwick Galton Bridge and Birmingham New Street	234¾ miles	0714	0815	0918	1018	1118	1218	1318

If you depart from Plymouth at the following times								
		0925	1025	1125	1150	1225	1325	1425
You would arrive at Stourbridge Junction at the following times								
via Cheltenham Spa and Worcester (Shrub Hill or Foregate Street)	215¾ miles	1518 Sh H	1518 Sh H	1709 Sh H	1709 Sh H	1709 Sh H	1906 Sh H	1906 Sh H
via Birmingham New Street and Birmingham Moor Street	235½ miles	1338	1438	1538	1608	1638	1738	1852
via Birmingham New Street and Smethwick Galton Bridge	234¾ miles	1338	1438	1538	1608	1638	1738	1852

The 1325 service at Plymouth. Travelling 20 miles extra via Birmingham New Street gets you back to Stourbridge 1½ hours earlier than travelling via Worcester.

Looking at the above table, it can be seen that, on two southbound services, there is only a 9 minute difference between journey times via Worcester and Birmingham. However, the same cannot be said of northbound journeys where only the last arrival via Worcester is within 15 minutes of the arrival via Birmingham, the others differing by between 30 and 100 minutes.

New Stations. On 8 March, Minister of State Chris Grayling visited the West Midlands and gave Government support to proposals to reopen stations and lines in the West Midlands. Of course, the Birmingham based television channels gave prominence to the proposed reopening of Moseley, King's Heath and Hazelwell stations in South Birmingham, but Mr. Grayling also visited the proposed Metro extension and new station sites in the Black Country. Feasibility studies are currently taking place to obtain business cases to reopen the stations in three tranches – firstly, Moseley, King's Heath and Hazelwell, secondly Darlaston and Willenhall and finally Brierley Hill Town and Brierley Hill (Canal Street). The complication with the Brierley Hill extension is that infrastructure changes may be required in the Stourbridge Junction area to allow a half-hourly service to operate, which could incur additional costs.

However, the Metro Mayor, Andy Street, is very keen that the stations are built by the end of his tenancy in 2020, with the first tranche possibly opening as early as 2019.

The Safari Park extension is different in that the Safari Park will be paying for the station to be built. For that reason, no feasibility study is needed. Discussions are currently taking place with Severn Valley Railway and Worcestershire County Council on issues such as signalling the route and possibly extending the service to Bewdley. We will keep you informed of further developments on both proposed extensions.

Parkfield Road Bridge. Network Rail is undertaking work to replace the railway bridge on Parkfield Road, Stourbridge (between Burnt Oak Drive and Vauxhall Road). Work commenced on Monday 8 January and will continue until the end of May 2018. Parkfield Road, Burnt Oak Drive and Vauxhall Road are closed to facilitate this work.

Before ... in 2006

After ... on 6 March 2018

Overbridge number 4, spanning the Stourbridge Town branch line was constructed in 1877 and was nearing the end of its design life. The riveted steel plates were showing signs of corrosion and the mortar of the brickwork was decaying.

Diversions for traffic have been put in place – using Church Street, Junction Road, Stepping Stones, Birmingham Street and vice-versa. The work also affects sections of the public right of way. Diversions for pedestrians will be via other footways alongside adjoining streets. Access to the Stourbridge Town station is maintained as Network Rail has not closed the drive to Age Concern and St John's Church. Bus operators have been informed of the work and have made arrangements to ensure there is little impact to services.

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

Part of the diversion works resulted in a temporary (non-pedestrian bridge) being installed and this work was undertaken during a series of short Saturday night possessions commencing 13 January 2018. Where possible as much of the works is programmed for normal day time working.

Potential December 2018 Timetable. Major service enhancements could take place in December if Network Rail agree to proposals submitted by West Midlands Railway.

Evening services on Mondays to Saturdays would see three trains per hour between Birmingham and Kidderminster with one of these continuing to Worcester or Great Malvern. Two of these three services would stop at Langley Green, Old Hill and Lye.

Smethwick Galton Bridge would see an hourly Liverpool Lime Street to London Euston and an hourly Crewe to Euston via Stoke-on-Trent service in addition to the half hourly Wolverhampton to Walsall stopping service and the hourly Arriva Trains Wales service. These would provide two through trains per hour to Coventry, Rugby, Northampton, Milton Keynes and London, three through trains per hour to Birmingham International and five services per hour to Birmingham New Street.

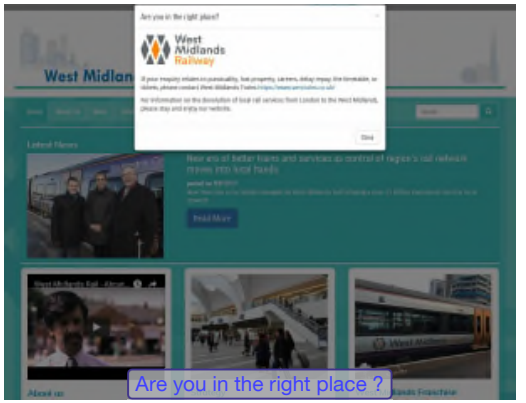
Eight 2-car Class 172 multiple units, cascaded from the Gospel Oak to Barking line in London, will be refurbished and fitted with toilets. They will enter service primarily to strengthen services on the Snow Hill lines, although one or two of these units will be deployed on services between Nuneaton, Coventry and Leamington Spa.

A GWR Intercity Express Train from Paddington arrives at Worcester Shrub Hill on 6 March 2018

Changing Trains at Worcester. GWR has said that it will introduce a clockface hourly service from London Paddington to Worcester from January 2019. Unfortunately, it is keeping its proposals close to its chest, which means that West Midlands Railway cannot make changes to its timetable to improve connection times at Worcester. SLUG, and other rail user groups in the area, will be pressing for GWR and West Midland Railway services to be synchronised to improve connection times. For the longer term, SLUG has responded to a Department for Transport public consultation on the next Great Western franchise from 2020, expressing the opinion that, at the very least, connections at Worcester towards both London and Bristol should be improved, while our preferred option would see Great Western services from both cities extended through to Stourbridge Junction. The article on pages 6 and 7 demonstrates how bad connection times are via Worcester at present.

BEMUSED, BEWILDERED AND BEFUDDLED
by Roger Davis

It seems that Transport Authorities and Companies in the West Midlands have always had similar names to confuse people. Over the years we've had Central Trains and Centro, followed by Network West Midlands and National Express West Midlands.



Are you in the right place ?

Now we have West Midlands Trains, West Midlands Railway and West Midlands Rail to cause so much confusion that the last of these has been forced to add a pop up window to their website to warn visitors that they are possibly on the wrong website.

To clear up the confusion, the three organisations can be described as follows :-

West Midlands Trains is the consortium of Abellio, Mitsui and East Japan Railway which has taken over the franchise from Govia, the owner of London Midland. West Midlands Trains has been split into the following two business units, which potentially allows the next franchise to be split with the West Midlands Business Unit fully devolved to local control.

- **London Northwestern Railway** operates all services other than those purely in the West Midlands (e.g. Euston to Birmingham and Crewe, Birmingham to Liverpool, Bletchley to Bedford etc.) and is fully controlled by Department for Transport.
- **West Midlands Railway** operates services within the West Midlands (e.g. Snow Hill lines, Walsall – Birmingham – Wolverhampton, Birmingham – Hereford, Cross City Line) and is controlled jointly by Department for Transport and West Midlands Rail.

West Midlands Rail is the consortium of 16 local authorities in the West Midlands that jointly manages, with DfT, all rail services operated by West Midlands Railway.

West Midlands Rail is distinct from **Transport for West Midlands (TfWM)** which manages all public transport in the West Midlands Metropolitan County (Birmingham, Dudley, Sandwell, Walsall, Wolverhampton, Solihull and Coventry). Perhaps, TfWM should rename itself West Midlands Transport to really confuse people!