BIRMINGHAM - STOURBRIDGE
KIDDERMINSTER - WORCESTER
STOURBRIDGE LINE
USER GROUP

PLATFORM

Issue 13 September 2018

After one false start, the new livery for the West Midlands Railway franchise has been finalised, as shown on unit 172 342 arriving at Cradley Heath on 4 August.

CONTENTS

2 A Corporate Image for TfWM

4 Devolution Revolution ?

6 News In Brief

8 Never on Sunday … Nor Bank Holidays

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

A CORPORATE IMAGE FOR TfWM
by Roger Davis

Anybody visiting London will soon discover that all forms of public transport, plus stations and stops, carry the famous London Transport roundel logo introduced in 1908.

Operated by Go-Ahead, this is unmistakably a London bus

While London Overground, London Underground and Docklands Light Railway are operated under the direct control of Transport for London, London buses are operated by a number of private companies such as Stagecoach, Go-Ahead, Abellio etc., but all carry the roundel and the red livery that is famous the world over.

Transport for West Midlands (TfWM) has decided to follow this example and introduce a corporate identity for all public transport in the West Midlands. A logo was designed consisting of four triangles and three diamonds arranged to form a hexagon, with the centre diamond a different colour for each mode of transport - orange for trains, blue for trams and red for buses.

West Midlands Railway West Midlands Metro West Midlands Bus

The partial devolution of control of the West Midlands Trains franchise from the Department for Transport to the West Midlands Rail Executive provided the impetus to do this. A new livery was required for the new West Midlands Railway franchise and, after a first attempt with a purple and silver livery applied to a single Class 172 unit used on Stourbridge line services, they went back to the drawing board to produce a gold and purple livery with a lattice of diamonds separating the two colours. This will be applied to all trains remaining after 2021 with a temporary gold, silver and black livery applied to trains due to leave the franchise before then.

The interim livery applied to trains due to leave the franchise

The permanent corporate livery to be applied to West Midlands Railway trains

In June, Transport for West Midlands took over operation of the Metro from National Express and a new two-tone blue corporate livery was introduced to replace the old pink and white Network West Midlands livery.

The new and the old West Midlands Metro livery at the Grand Central stop

The two tones of blue on a tram are shown with the diamond lattice between the two colours

Finally, a two-tone red livery was unveiled to the media on a National Express bus to replace the 20+ different bus company liveries currently in use in the West Midlands.

This Diamond bus has been repainted in the TfWM corporate livery for use on services 42 and 43

The bus then returned to the paint shop to be repainted into National Express colours! However, the aspirations of TfWM for a fully integrated bus network took their first steps in August when National Express and Diamond, who previously had operated competing services on routes 42 and 43 from West Bromwich, introduced an integrated timetable using buses carrying the "West Midlands Bus" logo, including some repainted into the two-tone red livery. This was followed in early September by the same two companies integrating their services from Walsall on routes 31 and 32.

In addition to the vehicles, the new corporate image is starting to be rolled out at stations, at tram stops, at bus stops and on timetables. It is intended that the new branding will also be applied to tickets currently branded as network by Network West Midlands. Once that has been done, the Network West Midlands brand will probably be consigned to history.

DEVOLUTION REVOLUTION ?
by John Warren

An annual day trip to an away Worcestershire County Championship cricket match saw me visit Southport with some friends in August. The journey was very simple – a London Northwestern Railway service from Wolverhampton to the superb Liverpool South Parkway station and a Merseyrail service thence to Birkdale (a 15 minute stroll from the ground).

The latter journey gave me the chance to see what improvements had been carried out by Merseyside PTE since they gained exclusive control of Merseyrail from the Department for Transport in 2003 and the areas in which the West Midlands Rail Executive could make improvements now that they have joint control of the West Midlands rail franchise alongside DfT, particularly when integrating public transport.

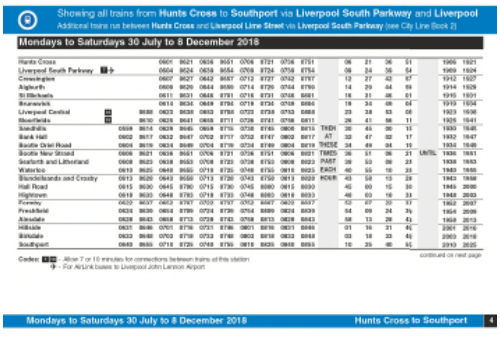
Class 507/508 units (above, at Southport) will be replaced from 2019 by new Class 777 units (below)

(Merseyrail)

The Merseyrail system uses third rail electrification throughout. It consists of two distinct lines – the Wirral line and the Northern line. Both lines are operated using 3-car Class 507 or 508 units which were built between 1978 and 1980 and which are made up into either 3-car or 6-car sets. They will be replaced by brand new 4-car Class 777 units, built by Stadler in Switzerland, between Summer 2019 and 2021.

My journey was on the Northern line service from Hunts Cross to Southport which has a total of 23 stations. My journey from Liverpool South Parkway to Birkdale took just under an hour and had 19 intermediate stations, including two in a tunnel which stretches under Liverpool City Centre. So, how did this journey compare with one from Birmingham to Worcester via the Stourbridge line?

The first thing I noticed was the standard of the timetable booklets. Each line has its own A5 timetable booklet with the Northern Line timetable comprising 28 pages. The result is far superior to the pocket timetables introduced by London Midland and perpetuated by West Midlands Railway which requires a degree in origami and a magnifying glass to read the unacceptably small font size, and where a single journey can be spread over four different leaflets.



Trains run every 15 minutes on Mondays to Saturdays but this level of service starts at 06:00 and continues until midnight, unlike the West Midlands service which will still see a reduced service during the evenings even after the planned improvements in May 2019. However, a reduced service operates on Sundays, something that will be addressed in the West Midlands in 2021 (Network Rail permitting!).

Also noticeable was the shortage of car parking spaces at Merseyrail stations. There is free parking at 14 of the 23 stations along the line but the total number of spaces is only 1,056 – and that includes 311 spaces at Liverpool South Parkway which was built for park and ride. When you consider that Stourbridge Junction has almost as many parking spaces as the entire Northern Line, it would seem that car parking at stations is not given as high a priority as it is in the West Midlands.

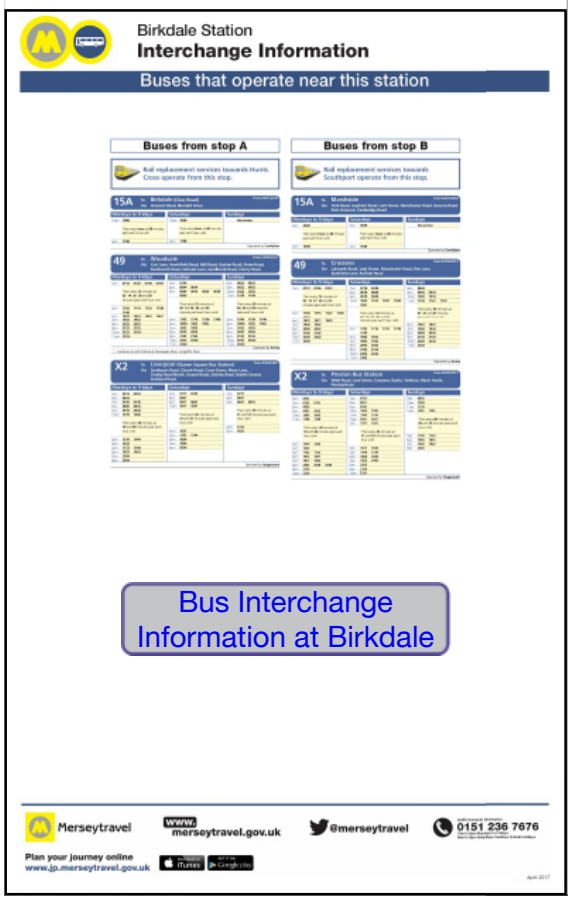
The secure bicycle storage unit holds 82 bikes at Freshfield which is "for the National Trust Red Squirrel Reserve"

(Merseyrail)

However, the same cannot be said for cycle storage as 18 of the 23 stations have free cycle racks with spaces for a total of 274 bikes. Additionally, 21 of the 23 stations have free undercover cycle storage for a total of 702 bikes which is secured, monitored by CCTV and accessed using a security fob. At many stations, these cycle storage units are located on one of the platforms. Finally, 11 of the stations offer cycles for hire under the "bike and go" scheme. An initial subscription fee of £10 is payable. Members of the scheme may then hire up to 2 bikes for up to 72 hours at a cost of £3.80 per bike per day. This is far superior to the facilities offered on the Stourbridge line, although a secure shelter is available opposite the booking office at Stourbridge Junction.

What was also noticeable was the size of waiting shelters on platforms. Large glazed shelters, with protection on all four sides, could be seen on many platforms and put to shame the inadequate bus shelters that Stourbridge line passengers have to put up with at many of our stations.

In addition, many of the station name boards prominently display the names of local attractions (e.g. Hillside for Royal Birkdale Golf Club), while posters at each station display timetables of all bus services serving that station.



Bus Interchange Information at Birkdale

A large waiting shelter on the platform at Waterloo

(Merseyrail)

However, the most impressive aspect of exclusive control by the PTE is the staffing levels at stations. Every station is fully staffed from 15 minutes before the first train until 15 minutes after the last train. This means that a full range of tickets is available at every station, something that cannot be achieved when a manned booking office is replaced by an ATM. For instance, the Merseyside Saveaway ticket is the equivalent of the TfWM Daytripper ticket and is widely advertised at stations with the advice that it can be obtained at any Northern Line or Wirral Line station – something that cannot be said about the Daytripper ticket when a Stourbridge line booking office is closed, as the ATM cannot sell one. SLUG is currently discussing this situation with West Midlands Railway.

In conclusion, the last 15 years has seen Merseyside make major advances in improving integrated public transport. SLUG hopes that devolution will bring similar improvements in the West Midlands over the next 15 years.

FOOTNOTE: there was one aspect of the journey where the Merseyrail matched many Stourbridge line journeys – I travelled from Liverpool South Parkway to Birkdale and back and was on a train for 108 minutes, but I never had my ticket checked!

NEWS IN BRIEF
edited by Rob Hebron

A Hint of Sprint. It has been announced that the program for the rapid transit bus system, known as "Sprint" has been brought forward. Tram-like buses on segregated highway and with priority measures at junctions will complement Metro in Birmingham City Centre.

The three routes, which will all start in Birmingham Moor Street bus mall, are:

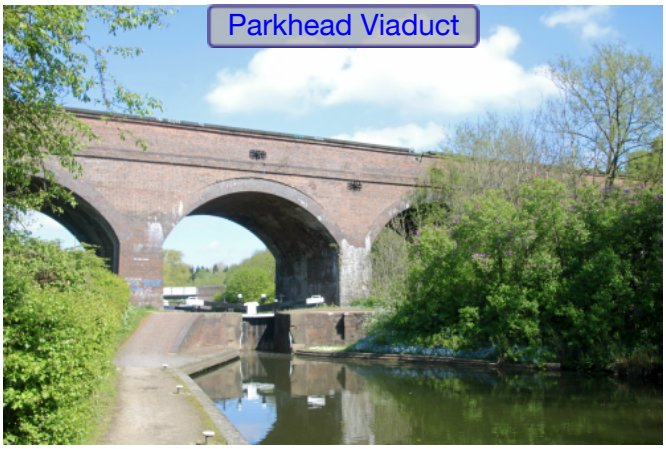
- Birmingham City Centre to Birmingham Airport and Solihull (A45)
- Birmingham City Centre through Sandwell to Walsall (A34)
- Birmingham City Centre to Sutton Coldfield via Pype Hayes and the new Langley housing development

Stourbridge Line Users already have a fast train link to Solihull but may gain time and convenience by transferring to Sprint rather than walking to Birmingham New Street for Sutton Coldfield. Although a public consultation has been arranged and project completion is planned to be before the Commonwealth Games, there is not even a hint of when actual groundworks will commence. *(Source: - Birmingham Post)*

Computer generated image of a Sprint vehicle

(WMCA)

Holding Up. Information passed to SLUG by member Dennis Whittaker is very encouraging, regarding the Dudley Line campaign. Contractors have completed inspection work of Parkhead Viaduct and the structure is repairable. Despite revealing a wooden core, the viaduct is capable of being restored to heavy rail standards. Given that the South Staffs Railway Line, north of Dudley is to be re-laid to heavy rail standards, it is critical that the viaduct can support heavy freight trains. Even though Network Rail and WMCA do not envisage a freight train service to Walsall before 2040, it facilitates an early introduction of passenger trains to Walsall if campaigners are forceful enough. *(Source: - D. Whittaker)*


Parkhead Viaduct

One Step Forward - Two Back. Work on the new Kidderminster station will commence in September. Meanwhile, preparations for bus access have been made. The first stage being the re-location of the shelter for Bromsgrove bound buses. Sadly, Diamond Bus has made changes to the Kidderminster bus network which disconnects Habberley and Comberton Estates from the station. Diamond quote "reliability" as the reason for changes to routes. Surprisingly, Worcestershire County Council has not stepped in to replace withdrawn sections of route. SLUG will be liaising with WCC and pressure group Transport Focus to try and address connectivity in Worcestershire.

All Hands On Deck. Recently produced minutes of a WMCA Transport Delivery meeting have revealed interesting ambitions. On page 75 of this lengthy document a list of desired feasibility studies appears. Amongst ten stations, Stourbridge Junction, Cradley Heath and Rowley Regis are identified as being suitable candidates for car park decking. A considerable time will elapse before a feasibility study is chosen and actioned. Let's hope our busy stations receive the upward space they need for growing numbers of passengers arriving by car. *(Source:- WMCA)*

Worcester Foregate Street Travel Centre

Preservation for Reservation. Worcester county councillor, Alan Amos has raised concerns that the travel centre at Worcester Foregate station may be lost because of redevelopment. The plans under consideration would see the installation of ticket barriers, merging the travel centre and booking hall and creating a new coffee shop. The travel centre has been open for forty years and provides travel advice, ticket cost guidance and reservations. The Cotswold Line Promotion Group strongly opposes the closure of the travel centre and can call on the support of SLUG. *(Source:- Worcester News)*

NEVER ON SUNDAY … NOR BANK HOLIDAYS
by Roger Davis

After reading the article on the lack of Sunday bus services in the last edition of *Platform*, a SLUG member contacted me to say that the situation was just as bad on Bank Holidays. His point was that attractions such as the West Midlands Safari Park and Clee Hill are inaccessible unless you have a car, and asked whether something could be done to provide such a bus service to connect with Stourbridge line stations.

The answer is that special weekend and public holiday services are provided elsewhere and, once again, Brighton & Hove is a good example of a bus company co-operating with local authorities to provide such services.

A B&H bus branded for service 79 picks up passengers in Brighton … on service 78!

Under the "Breeze Up To The Downs" banner, Brighton & Hove operate three services from the City Centre to the South Downs National Park - 77 to Devil's Dyke, 78 to Stanmer Park and 79 to Ditchling Beacon. Special return tickets are available that allow you to catch one service, walk along the Downs and then return to Brighton via one of the other services. The 77 is partly funded by Brighton & Hove City Council and the National Trust, while the 78 and 79 are fully funded by these two organisations. All three services run hourly on Saturdays, Sundays and Public Holidays only throughout the year, although the 77 sees a bus every 45 minutes seven days a week during the summer season.

In addition, the bus company runs a fully commercial service (13X) between Brighton, Beachy Head and Eastbourne throughout the year. During the winter, three round trips per day are operated on Sundays and Public Holidays only, with an hourly service provided between Good Friday and Easter Monday. From June to September, an hourly service is provided on Mondays to Saturdays with two buses per hour running on Sundays.

A B&H bus on Sunday service 13X passes Belle Tout lighthouse on the climb up to Beachy Head

This is excellent for tourists and locals alike and the bus services are well patronised. If successful weekend services to local attractions can be provided in East Sussex, then why can't they provided in Worcestershire? I wouldn't expect the County Council to subsidise a service to the Safari Park but, if the owners of the Safari Park are keen to build a railway station to get people to their attraction via public transport, why can't they subsidise a Sunday /Public Holiday bus service from Kidderminster station?