

CHRISTMAS PHOTO QUIZ - NAME THE TELEVISION SERIES

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



PLATFORM

Issue 14

December 2018



CONTENTS

- 2 End of the Line at Brierley Hill ?
- 4 John Rutherford
- 5 Short Term Pain for Long Term Gain at Kidderminster
- 5 News In Brief
- 7 A Future Perspective
- 8 Christmas Photo Quiz

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

END OF THE LINE AT BRIERLEY HILL ?

By Roger Davis



SLUG has campaigned for many years for the return of rail-based services on the line from Stourbridge Junction towards Dudley, Dudley Port, Wednesbury and Walsall. It does not oppose the use of the line from Harts Hill to Wednesbury for a Metro service as this will serve centres that the heavy rail line bypasses – Brierley Hill Town Centre, Merry Hill and Dudley Town Centre. However, it has aspirations for a tram-train or

heavy rail service to complement the Metro line to provide a through Stourbridge to Walsall service and fully supports any project that will see a train service on the southern section of the line from Stourbridge Junction to Harts Hill to provide a connection with the Metro at the proposed Canal Street Metro stop, with that service in place by the time the Metro opens in 2023.

The first indication that the West Midlands Combined Authority were considering this link came in November 2016 when, at the Transport Delivery Committee meeting, Councillor Timothy Huxtable reported of the need to be ambitious and suggested that a Metro link (from Canal Street) to Stourbridge Junction could form part of the scheme. This was taken forward to the WMCA Board Meeting the following month when the HS2 Connectivity Package, which consisted of 25 projects to connect all parts of the West Midlands to HS2 at Curzon Street or Interchange stations, was revised to remove some schemes such as electrification to Shrewsbury and Aldridge as they were unrealistic in the timescale and replace them with projects that included “New Rail Stourbridge to Round Oak Line Canal St Station”. Of the 25 projects on the revised Connectivity Package, the Canal Street link was rated 8th in terms of Strategic Importance and 11th in terms of Economic Importance and was costed at £20m.

Things looked even rosier in August 2017, when West Midlands Railway were named as the new operator of the West Midlands rail franchise and, among their proposals, stated that “WMT will also be actively developing proposals for a number of new services within the WMR area, subject to feasibility studies being undertaken and support from WMCA/TfWM as required. The new services proposed were:-

- From Walsall to Wolverhampton serving new stations at Willenhall and Darlaston
- On the Camp Hill Line serving stations at Moseley, Kings Heath and Hazelwell
- To Brierley Hill as an extension of Birmingham - Stourbridge Junction services
- To West Midlands Safari Park as an extension of Birmingham - Kidderminster services which will operate along the Severn Valley Railway.

The proposed site of Brierley Hill Town station looking north from Moor Street



A FUTURE PERSPECTIVE

by John Warren

In October, the West Midlands Rail Executive produced their draft 30-year Rail Investment Strategy for rail service development up to 2047. The document makes the following recommendations for the Stourbridge line.

By 2025, train lengthening and improved evening and Sunday services are planned, although the document fails to promise earlier and later services. As discussed on pages 2 to 4, consideration will be given to new connectivity options for Brierley Hill and West Midlands Safari Park. Finally, there are plans to regenerate Snow Hill station at platform level and above, with platform 4 reinstated (before 2025 if funding is available to bring this work forward). It is also possible that one train per hour from the Stourbridge line that currently terminates at Dorridge will be extended to Leamington Spa during this period, although this will definitely happen by 2033.

From 2026 to 2033, an additional terminal platform will be built at Rowley Regis allowing an extra 2 trains per hour east of Rowley Regis. It will mean that the number of trains from the Stourbridge line to Stratford-upon-Avon will increase from 2 to 3 per hour, the additional train running semi-fast via Shirley and Henley-in-Arden. Sadly, no service enhancements are proposed at Hartlebury, Blakedown, Lye and Old Hill, while Hagley is shown as having 2 trains per hour instead of the current 3.

However, it is at the southern end of the line that the most significant change is proposed. The strategy calls for major infrastructure improvements in the Worcester area and along the North Cotswold line (Oxford to Worcester). As a result, 2 trains per hour are proposed from Paddington to Worcester with one continuing to Great Malvern/Hereford and one continuing to ... Kidderminster

and Stourbridge Junction. While this will provide one train per hour between the Stourbridge line and Worcestershire Parkway, where 3 CrossCountry services are planned to call on the low level line, SLUG believes that this is insufficient and that a through service between the Stourbridge line and Cheltenham Spa is also needed, either by extending a Snow Hill line service from Worcester to Gloucester or by extending a Westbury to Gloucester service to Worcester and Stourbridge Junction.

Proposals for our line in the period from 2034 to 2047 are, to say the least, sketchy. All that is said is that it expects local service frequency increases.

SLUG has responded to the consultation, and this response (along with the original strategy document) can be read on the SLUG website.

A GWR IET leaves Worcester Foregate Street on a Paddington service. Could we see one of these at Stourbridge Junction within the next 15 years?



A New Dudley Interchange. Plans to create a major new transport hub in Dudley have moved a step closer following a £10 million funding pledge. The Dudley interchange will link the town's bus station with the upcoming Midland Metro line, to be built between Brierley Hill and Wednesbury. (Source: - Express & Star)



Commonwealth Games Upgrades. The 2022 Commonwealth Games will result in major improvements at University and Perry Barr stations. Computer generated images of the proposed new University station shows it being moved slightly north of the existing station, with a much larger concourse at the northern end of the platforms and a new access bridge over the canal to connect the station to the University of Birmingham. (Source: - West Midlands Rail Executive)



Extra Snow Hill Line Units. The first Class 710/2s are now expected to enter traffic with London Underground in the second half of December, after a 9-month delay while Bombardier carried out software upgrades. They will replace 8 2-car Class 172/0 units which will transfer to West Midlands Railway to provide extra capacity on the Snow Hill lines.

All eight units expected to be in service from the May 2019 timetable change after being refurbished and fitted with toilets. (Source: - Rail Magazine)

A Successful Outcome for SLUG. After an email from a SLUG member informing us that Daytripper tickets were not available from station ticket machines, SLUG raised the issue with West Midlands Railway and the West Midlands Rail Executive. The member has now informed us that these tickets are now available at ticket machines.

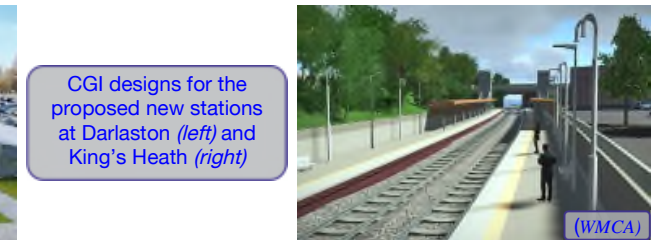
Grayling Strikes. On 20 September, Chris Grayling announced "a sweeping review to transform Britain's railways". Despite chronic overcrowding and poor performance in the current CrossCountry franchise, he stopped the competition to replace it during 2019. This has been widely criticised by observers, especially in Devon and Cornwall where Cross Country services are regularly withdrawn west of Exeter St David's due to the inability of Voyager trains to operate along the Dawlish sea wall at high tide. This has led to new demands from the South West Peninsula Task Force for the inland route via Okehampton and Tavistock to be rebuilt. (Source: - Rail Magazine)



Lost Property Charges Scrapped. A charge on rail users for retrieving lost property has been scrapped by West Midlands Railway and London Northwestern Railway. To simplify the process for both passengers and staff, they will be launching a new website in a bid to reunite travellers with lost items quicker. (Source: - Express & Star)

Even more eye catching was the claim that these Brierley Hill and Safari Park services could start in December 2019, something that most observers took with a pinch of salt given that Network Rail would be involved. Like many local observers, SLUG has questioned the viability of running a service every 30 minutes along the Severn Valley Railway line given that signalling on the heritage railway is operated by volunteers and any regular service would have to run alongside the railway's own timetable, which certainly isn't clockface. SLUG believes that a park and ride railhead serving Stourport and Bewdley would be better sited on the main line to Worcester in the Hartlebury area, possibly at the current station site and this will be discussed in a future edition of Platform.

Since then, work on the proposed new services at Willenhall, Darlaston, Moseley, King's Heath and Hazelwell has reached design stage with the stations proposed for opening in December 2021. However, news on the Brierley Hill extension has gone decidedly low-key, with the project described as being "on the back burner".



In October 2018, West Midlands Rail Executive produced its Rail Investment Strategy for the next 30 years and the proposals for the Stourbridge line are detailed on page 7. The only mention of the Brierley Hill extension states that in the years up to 2025 there will be "consideration of new connectivity options for Brierley Hill". The problem is that the extension of Stourbridge Junction terminators to Brierley Hill will require extensive infrastructure changes at Stourbridge Junction and the cost of this could be greater than originally estimated. In addition, a consultants' report that accompanied the strategy document contained the following put down - "The Stourbridge Corridor Branches have a very limited impact with only £0.12m generated per annum. In the case of the Brierley Hill service it relates to the relatively unattractive (in terms of journey times to Birmingham) service that would be provided resulting in very small catchment for the stations, with it remaining quicker in many cases for passengers to drive to Cradley Heath station to access the rail network."

SLUG has disputed this Birmingham-centric attitude on several points. Car parking at Cradley Heath and Stourbridge Junction is almost impossible after 8 am, so an additional car park at Brierley Hill Town would help to alleviate this problem. Brierley Hill is also extremely congested at many times of the day due to the proximity to the Merry Hill shopping centre and the inadequacy of the so-called bypass, so getting to Cradley Heath by car or bus is not a quick journey. In addition, Canal Street is the site of the proposed DY5 Enterprise Zone, so the line would bring a lot of employees to work in that area. It would also provide a route for passengers south of Stourbridge Junction to travel towards Brierley Hill, Dudley, Tipton and Wednesbury.

More worrying information arrived in November 2018 when the minutes of the previous meeting of the WMCA Transport Delivery Committee were published and part of the section regarding the Metro extension read “In relation to a proposed station at Canal Street, Councillor Huxtable enquired as to why there was no mention of this station in the WMCA report on Congestion Management. The Director of Development and Delivery (TfWM) advised that the station was not included in the WMCA report as work on Canal Street was still on-going; the feasibility study would be concluded in October.” For a train service to Canal Street to work, it must connect with the Metro. Therefore, if the Metro stop is not built, a connecting rail service loses its raison d’être.

It is pleasing that a local councillor is on the case and promoting both a Metro stop at Canal Street and a heavy rail connection to Stourbridge Junction. However, Councillor Timothy Huxtable is the Conservative councillor for Hall Green South in South East Birmingham and there is nothing in the minutes to suggest that Dudley councillors on the WMCA committee have added weight to Councillor Huxtable’s campaign. Dudley councillors need to realise that, for the proposed link to happen, they need to give it their full support at future meetings of the WMCA.



Round Oak freight terminal. Canal Street station would be just past the blue warehouse

At three separate meetings that SLUG officers attended with WMRE senior managers in October and November, we were told that WMRE are fully committed to providing this link, although it probably would not be by extending the Stourbridge Junction terminators to Brierley Hill. They are currently looking at ways that this could be achieved. SLUG is also looking at alternative solutions and will be putting our ideas forward to WMRE. Hopefully, Brierley Hill will soon be the end of the line rather than it being the end of the line for the Brierley Hill extension.

JOHN RUTHERFORD

It is with deep regret that we have to inform you that John Rutherford passed away on 18 October.

John was a SLUG member from 2003 until his death and served as a Committee member for many years. John was a resident of Hartlebury and a fine champion of its station. He was instrumental in the campaign for off-peak services to stop at Hartlebury and Monday 9 December 2013 was a proud day for John when he achieved his goal.

John was a true gentleman and SLUG has received tributes from senior managers at West Midlands Railway and Worcestershire County Council and from other campaigning groups such as Campaign for Rail and Bromsgrove Line User Group, which shows the esteem in which he was held.

John will be sorely missed and we extend our sincere condolences to John’s family.

SHORT TERM PAIN FOR LONG TERM GAIN AT KIDDERMINSTER

by Roger Davis



With on-site work due to start the following week, Worcestershire County Council held an open day on 6 November to explain to passengers what would be happening over the coming months. West Midlands Railway and SLUG were both represented for part of the day to provide answers to passenger questions.

The initial stage will see preparatory works with a temporary booking office and temporary toilets due to be completed early in 2019, before the existing building is demolished and replaced by the new, larger, glass fronted building. The access road to the station will be redesigned and the majority of the cobbles will be removed. The slope between Comberton Hill and the station will see the trees removed and the area landscaped to open up the view of the station.

The work is due for completion in autumn 2019. SLUG will keep you up to date on its website with developments as work progresses.

NEWS IN BRIEF

compiled by Rob Hebron

HS2 Station Progress. New images showing how the region’s two HS2 stations could look were released in October. The CGIs showcased plans for the new stations in Curzon Street (*below left*), in the city’s Eastside district, and Interchange (*below right*) near the airport and marked the start of a series of public consultation events across Birmingham and Solihull during October which allowed the public to ask questions and give feedback on the proposals. *(Source: - GOV.UK)*



Moor Street Upgrade Plans. Plans to redevelop Birmingham Moor Street station were unveiled at the West Midlands Rail Executive annual conference in November. The plans involve building a new distributor bridge and concourse at the southern end of the platforms to provide a direct access route to the new HS2 station at Curzon Street. *(Source: - West Midlands Rail Executive)*