BIRMINGHAM - STOURBRIDGE
KIDDERMINSTER - WORCESTER
STOURBRIDGE LINE
USER GROUP

PLATFORM

Issue 15 March 2019

GWR Castle Class locomotive 7029 *Clun Castle* steams through Stourbridge Junction on 28 February on its return to main line operation.

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IMPROVED SERVICE FROM MAY (THE MONTH, NOT THERESA!)
by Roger Davis

Having been postponed from December 2018 on the instructions of Secretary of State Chris Grayling, the first tranche of service improvements promised in the West Midlands Trains franchise award will take place from 19 May. The improvements to West Midlands Railway Stourbridge line services can be summarised as follows :-

The 1742 Whitlocks End - Kidderminster service departs Stourbridge Junction on 28 February

Improved Monday to Saturday Evening Services. The current evening pattern sees two trains per hour – Stratford-upon-Avon to Stourbridge Junction and Dorridge to Worcester/Great Malvern - both calling at all stations from Birmingham to Stourbridge. From May, there will be three trains per hour – Stratford to Kidderminster, Whitlocks End to Worcester or Great Malvern, and Dorridge to Kidderminster – with the last of these not stopping at Langley Green, Old Hill and Lye. This means an increase in service at Kidderminster from 1 to 3 trains per hour, in addition to the through Chiltern Railways services from London Marylebone. The downside is that these services are spaced irregularly, with gaps between Kidderminster arrivals ranging from 6 to 51 minutes.

Additional Weekday Rush Hour Services. Additional morning services will be introduced at 06:19 from Kidderminster to Whitlocks End, 06:45 from Stourbridge Junction to Leamington Spa, 07:09 from Stourbridge Junction to Whitlocks End and 09:15 from Stourbridge Junction to Birmingham Snow Hill. In the evening, additional services operate from Whitlocks End to Stourbridge Junction and Dorridge to Stourbridge Junction, which leave Snow Hill at 17:30 and 18:53 respectively. Some existing services will be retimed to accommodate the new services, including the 07:05 Chiltern service from Kidderminster to Marylebone which will run 5 minutes later. In the middle of the day, the half hour gap between services to and from Kidderminster will be closed by extending the 12:40 departure from Whitlocks End to Kidderminster, with the 13:37 service from Stourbridge Junction to Whitlocks End starting back at Kidderminster at 13:25.

Extra Early Stourbridge Town Services at Weekends. At present, a restricted service operates on the Town branch before 07:00 on Saturdays. However, the May timetable will see a full 10-minute service in operation from 05:45 as on Mondays to Fridays. On Sundays, the first round trip is currently the 09:43 from the Junction returning at 09:48 from the Town. The May timetable will see this replaced by two round trips – at 09:35 and 09:45 from the Junction, returning at 09:40 and 09:50. These journeys were originally timed to operate 5 minutes later, but SLUG approached West Midlands Rail Executive and pointed out that the original timings missed connections with main line services at Stourbridge Junction. WMRE contacted West Midlands Railway and the journeys were retimed - a triumph for localised management of the franchise.

One of the extra units is seen on a driver training run at Yardley Wood on 14 March

Extra Capacity. The arrival of eight 2-car Class 172 DMUs from London Overground will enable some rush hour services to be strengthened. Two of these sets will be used on Nuneaton - Coventry - Leamington Spa services, leaving up to six units available for Snow Hill line services. At the time of going to press, the trainset diagrams for the May timetable were still being finalised. Therefore, we will publish details of which services will be strengthened on our website as soon as we receive them.

Improved Sunday Services at Droitwich Spa and Worcester. The Birmingham New Street – Bromsgrove – Droitwich Spa – Worcester - Hereford service currently operates approximately every 2 hours on Sundays. From May, this service will be supplemented by extra services between New Street and Worcester to form an hourly service on this section of the route.

Improved Connecting Services at Smethwick Galton Bridge. At present, Stourbridge line services connect with the following services in each direction – two per hour on the Wolverhampton to Walsall via New Street all-stations service, one per hour on the Aberystwyth/Pwllheli or Holyhead to Birmingham International service, and one per hour on the Liverpool Lime Street to New Street service. From May, the hourly Liverpool Lime Street to New Street service will be extended to London Euston while there will be an additional train every hour from Crewe to London Euston via Stoke-on-Trent. This means that Smethwick Galton Bridge will see two through trains every hour to Coventry, Northampton, Milton Keynes and London Euston, three trains every hour to Birmingham International, and one train every hour to Stoke-on-Trent.

On 14 March, the 1401 B'ham New Street to Liverpool Lime Street service picks up at Galton Bridge. From 20 May, this service will start at London Euston

Further timetable improvements are planned for December 2019 and May 2021, and there is the possibility that December 2019 may see the first Sunday services at Hartlebury for over 50 years.

The SLUG website has been updated to display the new timetables in full, including connecting services at Smethwick Galton Bridge, Droitwich Spa and Worcester, and these can be viewed by clicking on the navigation bar on the home page. Alternatively, a comparison of current and future services at any station can be viewed at https://live-departures.info/rail/timetable-comparison/.

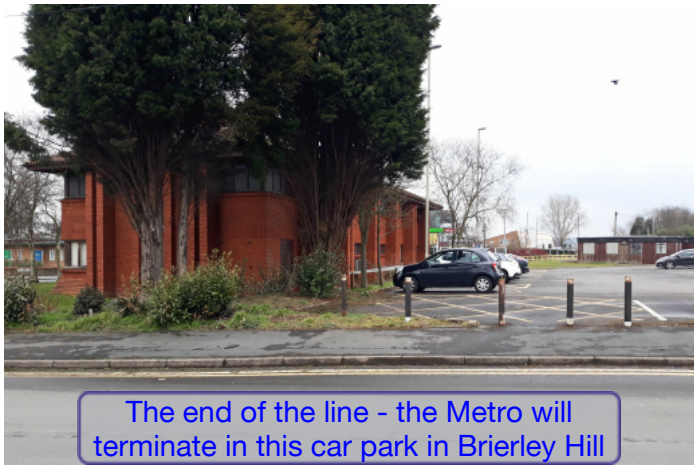
THE FOSS WAY
by Roger Davis

SLUG member Phil Tonks, a driver on the Stourbridge Town branch, is currently setting up a new community group, "Friends of Stourbridge Stations" (or FOSS in short) that will help keep both Stourbridge Town and Stourbridge Junction stations tidy as well as introducing new floral displays. Phil hopes that the group, which SLUG fully supports, will be formally launched at around Easter time. A full report on the new group will appear in the next edition of *Platform*, and details will also be available at the SLUG public meeting in May (see page 8 for details). If anybody feels that they would like to support FOSS, please get in touch with us and we will put you in touch with Phil.

The group intends to organise a double celebration this year to mark 140 years of the Stourbridge Town branch (opened 1 October 1879) and 10 years since Pre Metro Operations took over operation of the branch using the two Parry People Mover Class 139 vehicles. They intend to issue a small commemorative booklet on the history of the branch as well as issuing a commemorative badge. They also plan to celebrate the anniversary by having a band playing on the platform at Stourbridge Junction. Again, SLUG fully supports this initiative and will keep you informed of developments.

HEAVY RAIL TO BRIERLEY HILL SCUPPERED
by John Warren

SLUG has been told by the Executive Director of the West Midlands Rail Executive that the proposal to reverse Stourbridge Junction terminators and extend them to Brierley Hill (Canal Street) will not happen. The reason given was that 5 minutes would be needed at Stourbridge Junction to reverse the service, which would require an extra turnback platform and track modifications. This made the proposal unviable.



The end of the line - the Metro will terminate in this car park in Brierley Hill

An alternative light rail option is under consideration to provide a link between the Brierley Hill terminus of the West Midlands Metro and Stourbridge, with potential routes currently being investigated. You can be assured that SLUG will be pressing WMRE for this link to be provided as a matter of urgency. A rail based link from Worcestershire to Merry Hill and Dudley is a necessity.

NEWS IN BRIEF
Edited by Rob Hebron

Rowley Regis Station Car Park

Cars vandalised at Rowley Regis. Nine car windscreens were smashed and other vehicles had wing mirrors kicked off at the station's car park on 28 February. The incident has led to police stepping up patrols of the car park off Station Road and sending a warning to train users not to leave valuables in their vehicles.

(Source: - Stourbridge News)

Too many hurdles. Ambitions to open the Midland Metro extension from Bull Street in Birmingham to Digbeth have suffered a setback. The timescale should have been sufficient to commence services, coinciding with the opening of the 2022 Commonwealth Games. Local planners have admitted that this will not be the case due to too many hurdles. The major obstacle is the uncertain starting date which was dependent on the government granting TfWM powers to begin construction. Once the authority has the powers it has to finalise the business case and get the government to approve the funding allocation. *(Source: - Birmingham Post)*

Rail operators call for fare rules shake-up. Train operators are calling for a major shake-up of fares that would throw out current rules governing peak and off-peak pricing and also end the need for so-called split-ticketing. The Rail Delivery Group (RDG) says it wants to simplify the system under the principle that customers "only pay for what they need and are always charged the best value fare". It said some fares would go up and some would go down under the plan though claimed that overall it would be "revenue neutral". It said its plan for passengers to always be charged the best value fare would also remove the need for "split ticketing". The "easier fares for all" plan has been submitted to the government's Williams Review, which is evaluating all aspects of the rail network.

(Source: - Yahoo News)

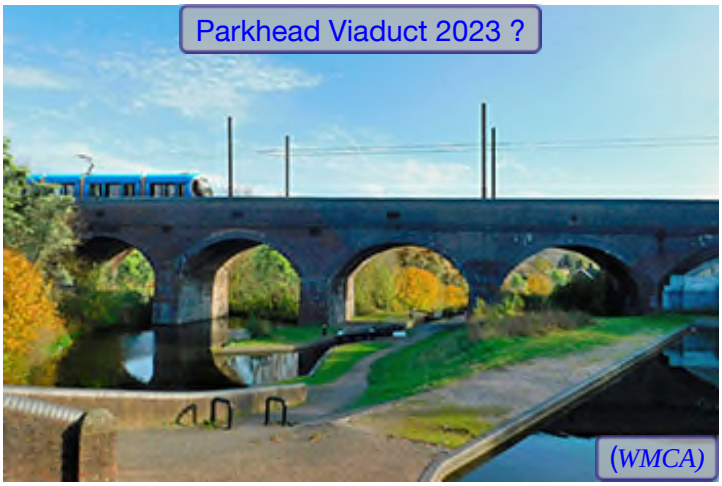
West Midlands Rail Investment Strategy Approved. The finalised version of the West Midlands Rail Investment Strategy was approved by the board of the West Midlands Combined Authority on 15 January. The finalised document matches the draft document as far as Stourbridge line services are concerned, and this was discussed in full in issue 14 of *Platform*.

(Source: - WMRE)

A CGI of the new Snow Hill entrance (WMCA)

Work To Start On Snow Hill Third Entrance. Contractors have now been appointed to build the third entrance at Birmingham Snow Hill. This entrance will be an extension of the current Livery Street entrance and will directly link the station to St Chad's adjacent to the Metro stop. The entrance is scheduled to open later this year. It is possible that the Metro stop will then revert to its original name of Snow Hill.

(Source: - WMRE)



New West Midland Metro line back on track - but costs are up £100m. The West Midland Metro line from Wednesbury to Brierley Hill is to go ahead – as it emerged costs have spiralled by more than £100 million. Work is due to start this year, after the West Midlands Combined Authority put forward a new funding package to pay for the biggest project it has ever taken on. The line will now cost £449m – up £106m – with the shortfall paid for by profits from the Metro, which the WMCA has run since last year. It is set to open in 2023. *(Source:- Express & Star)*

Rail Review Chair says franchising cannot continue in its current form. Keith Williams, independent chair of the first 'root and branch' Rail Review to be supported by government, announced that the rail franchising system cannot continue in the way it is now. He said, "I have heard a great deal about the franchising model….driving growth in passengers and benefits to services. But with this growth the needs of passengers have changed whilst many of the basic elements of our rail system have not kept pace. Put bluntly, franchising cannot continue the way it is today. It is no longer delivering clear benefits for either taxpayers and farepayers. I believe that for the railway to be successful it needs to put passengers at its heart. We need to recognise that there is unlikely to be a 'one size fits all' solution which will work for every part of the country and all types of passenger". *(Source:- gov.uk)*

TICKET TO RIDE
by Roger Davis

Two of the biggest complaints of SLUG members involve overcrowding on trains and the lack of ticket checks. To find out what is being done to reduce ticketless travel, three of the SLUG committee met up with the four members of the Worcester Revenue Protection Team, who are responsible for the line from Birmingham Snow Hill to Hereford.

It is this team that operates revenue blockades at stations and on-board trains, issuing penalty fares to passengers without valid tickets, and MG11s which lead to court proceedings against those passengers who refuse to pay the penalty fare. In addition, any passenger who has already been issued two penalty fare tickets will automatically be issued an MG11 for on the third occasion.

The team is also responsible for enforcing railway bylaws and regularly liaising with rail user groups. One reason for this is that the user groups can pass on any local knowledge as the revenue protection team is not allowed to work on lines close to where they live (in case of retribution from disgruntled passengers).

The team is also responsible for educating senior conductors. When SLUG expressed its concern that many journeys see no on-board ticket checking, the team admitted that this was a problem that they needed to improve as some senior conductors do not do ticket checks because of the frequency of stops and for fear of confrontation. In fact, some conductors do not even book out a portable ticket machine before starting their duty, something that the team is keen to address.

In fact, the team itself is subject to confrontational and aggressive behaviour, not only from the offender but from other passengers on the train who decide to put their oar in, and it is always appreciated when other passengers thank them for doing their job. One problem is that the team wears the same uniform as normal senior conductors, and they are pressing for a change of uniform to distinguish themselves from normal on-board staff.

The gateline at Birmingham Snow Hill before WMR started to staff it from start to end of service

One thing that the team would like to see is the installation of ticket barriers at more stations, particularly the ones with the higher footfalls, to enable them to concentrate their operations on other areas. For instance, the barriers at Snow Hill are staffed from start to end of service, and the third week of February saw the barriers closed 100% of the time, something that doesn't happen at New Street where the barriers are open every time the Virgin staff take their break. An offer from West Midlands Trains to staff the barriers during the VT break time was turned down.

So, what was the effect of a blockade by the Revenue Protection Team ? In the 4-week period prior to our meeting, 212 penalty fares and 7 MG11s were issued. A recent blockade at The Hawthorns from 0730 to 0930 saw 60 penalty fares and 1 MG11 issued, 50 of these to school students, while a recent revenue block at Kidderminster from 0600 onwards saw the team withdraw 11 out of date educational passes. What was also evident was that there was a marked increase in ticket sales at a station while the revenue protection team was there.

A revenue blockade at Wolverhampton (*Express & Star*)

The meeting was most informative and, as a follow-up, SLUG has been invited to join the team for a day to observe them at work. We will report back on this in a later edition of *Platform*.

A NEW ENTRANCE FOR BIRMINGHAM MOOR STREET STATION ?
by John Warren

West Midlands Rail Executive has revealed plans for a new distribution bridge and exit at the eastern end of Moor Street station to coincide with the opening of the HS2 station at Curzon Street. The bridge would provide direct access to the new station as well as providing a more direct route to the Bull Ring markets and Digbeth areas.

CGI images of the new bridge linking Selfridges (left) and Moor Street station to Curzon Street station (top right).

(WMRE / TfWM)

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 14 May 2019 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.

CHRISTMAS PHOTO QUIZ ANSWERS

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

1 - Seven of One - Prisoner and Escort (Pilot for Porridge), 2 - Pie In The Sky, 3 - Between The Lines, 4 - 'Allo 'Allo, 5 - Inspector Morse, 6 - Whatever Happened To The Likely Lads, 7 - Howards' Way, 8 - Shoestring, 9 - Dad's Army, 10 - Dempsey and Makepeace, 11 - Oh Doctor Beeching!, 12 - Miss Marple, 13 - Hi-De-Hi, 14 - Heartbeat, 15 - London's Burning, 16 - The Fall and Rise Of Reginald Perrin, 16 - Foyle's War, 18 - Last Of The Summer Wine.