PLATFORM

STOURBRIDGE LINE USER GROUP

Issue 2 January 2016

Chiltern Railways Class 68 No. 68014 waits at Birmingham Moor Street with a Silver Set service to London Marylebone

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CHAIRMAN'S COMMENTS

The last two months have been a flurry of activity and in addition to routine Committee meetings, me and my fellow officers have been busy liaising with Councillors, Members of Parliament and the Member of the European Parliament. All of this engagement has been in response to developments on the Stourbridge to Dudley railway line which is explained elsewhere in this newsletter.

SLUG Officers Gary Adams and Rob Hebron meet Mike Wood MP

Our elected representatives are the first port of call when important issues have both a local and national implication. However, before very long, Members of Parliament will be much less involved in public transport as a consequence of devolution. Although the government will still own Network Rail, local rail planning and budgets will be the responsibility of Local Enterprise Partnerships who will work alongside West Midlands Rail. This organisation is not to be confused with the West Midlands Combined Authority (WMCA) which is a collective of counties and that will oversee the delivery of train, bus and tram services in the area.

Rob and Gary meet Margot James MP

How will this affect the Stourbridge Line? In theory, many long standing peripheral projects will reach fruition. I'm being optimistic but I hope that the Camp Hill Chords and Metro Line Two are both examples. The trouble is that the Stourbridge Line runs southwards into Worcestershire and the County of Worcestershire has not joined up to the WMCA. Devolution will not necessarily solve the problem of the bottlenecks at Worcester Foregate Street or Shrub Hill stations. Even if Worcestershire joined the new Authority, there is no guarantee that the situation would be any better. A budget is a budget and there would be too many dogs at the dish. Cash-strapped Worcestershire has to protect its Council Tax payers and ensure that public transport provision is value for money.

SLUG is a campaign group and equally interested in value for money. In that context, I mean benefit for all passengers along the line and better journey opportunity. Consultation with Rail User Groups will continue. We mill meet the same people as before, but what if we fundamentally disagree with one particular policy or an aspect of it? Can will still call on Members of Parliament or will they say "It's not our concern". Probably not, as they have proved to be very approachable. Do we now have appeal directly to the Secretary of State or Department for Transport? I would like to know the route.

A UNIQUE OPPORTUNITY
by Rob Hebron

The Stourbridge Line User Group is pleased to continue working with London Midland to improve services on the Snow Hill lines. However, the Group is very disappointed by the lack of benefits to Stourbridge Line passengers in the package of improvements offered by the company which were conditional or optional in attaining the Direct Award.

In order to achieve a seamless transfer from the current rail franchise to the devolved structure, the Department for Transport has granted London Midland the licence to operate trains up until October 2017. This has been a missed opportunity -not by SLUG which has publicly declared its campaigns but by London Midland ignoring the potential of the Stourbridge Line.

Improvements to the West Midland area train services outside of our line, include

- Earlier Sunday services into Birmingham for morning workers and shoppers.
- Extra evening services from London to Trent Valley.
- Later services on the Abbey Line.
- 437 more parking spaces spread over three stations
- Electrification planned for Walsall to Rugeley

The earlier Sunday services are on the lines into Birmingham Snow Hill via Tyseley. They are most likely the ones which form the existing Stourbridge return journeys. This is of no use to passengers wishing to travel from Worcestershire stations to Birmingham to make early inter-city connections.

Worcester Shrub Hill where better connections are needed

In many cases, a backward facing journey to Birmingham is necessary to reach southern destinations because of the lack of frequent connections at Worcester in the natural direction of travel.

Poor Sunday morning services and inferior Worcestershire connections are both in need of remedial action. The chance to submit journey remedies will be through another channel. That route will be the fourteen week long consultation which is underway for West Midland Rail, the successor to the existing DfT controlled franchisee. As budgets and powers are devolved from Westminster to the West Midlands councils (collectively West Midlands Rail), there is a unique opportunity for the Stourbridge Line User Group to identify all that needs to be addressed to attain a train service which is efficient and fully integrated with the national rail network.

SLUG has worked on its own “wish list” and will submit requests which cover many of its outstanding campaigns:-

- Services beyond Worcester to access the south - west of England.
- Earlier Sunday services into Birmingham for morning workers and shoppers.
- Extra evening trains from Birmingham.
- A Sunday service for Hartlebury.
- A bigger car park for Hartlebury.
- Longer trains for special events.

The consultation is a unique opportunity, not only to fulfil campaigns but also to influence the planning of forthcoming projects such as Birmingham Snow Hill redevelopment. The Department for Transport is keen to devolve responsibility to the region and there will be much competition between counties for project funding. The Stourbridge Line User Group will endeavour to ensure that the Stourbridge Line has the best possible service and journey opportunities both in the West Midlands and Worcestershire.

MOVEMENT FOR GROWTH
by Roger Davis

Will we see Midland Metro trams on Castle Hill, Dudley by 2026 ?

On 17 December, the West Midlands Integrated Transport Authority, in one of its last acts before metamorphosing into the West Midlands Combined Authority, authorised the publication of “Movement For Growth”, the strategic transport plan for improvements over the next twenty years.

The document details plans for all modes of transport - walking, cycling, road, buses and coaches. However, it is the area of rail and rapid transit that is of interest to SLUG. The majority of the rapid transit network is proposed for SPRINT operation, which has been described as a bus that thinks it’s a tram. Apparently, somebody has gone off the rails recently. The first SPRINT route will operate from Birmingham City Centre to Quinton via the Hagley Road and will come into operation in 2018, so it will be interesting to see how successful this proves and how it will impact on the current service 9 from Stourbridge to Birmingham.

Rail based enhancements can be split into two parts - those that are considered a priority for implementation by 2026 when HS2 phase 1 opens, and those that are proposed for the period after 2026.

The former category includes the following enhancements of interest to the Stourbridge line :-

- The reopening of Snow Hill platform 4 and the provision of a bay platform at Rowley Regis to provide a more intense service in the inner area on the Snow Hill lines. One concern to SLUG is that this may impact on the frequency of services west of Rowley Regis and SLUG will be campaigning to ensure that the 10 minute frequency service from Stourbridge Junction is maintained.

Rowley Regis. The bay platform would be to the left of the Birmingham bound platform

- The extension of the Midland Metro from Wednesbury to Brierley Hill via Dudley and Merry Hill.

In the longer term, the following enhancements are proposed :-

- The reinstatement of a through rail service from Stourbridge to Walsall, running parallel to the Midland Metro extension between Harts Hill and Wednesbury. This would most likely be tram-train, although heavy rail is possible, and would extend north of Walsall to Aldridge on the Sutton Park line and to Pelsall and Brownhills on the Lichfield line. SLUG is of the opinion that a link from Stourbridge to Harts Hill to link with the Midland Metro line should be prioritised to open in the same timescale as the Midland Metro line and will campaign for this to happen.

- The reopening of the station at Fernhill Heath between Droitwich Spa and Worcester.

One interesting paragraph in the Movement For Growth document reads as follows.

> 4.40 The role of innovative technologies such as Monorail and Very Light rail will be explored for appropriate corridors. Very light rail could be a valuable interim solution for elements of longer term rail corridors. The Dudley Very Light Rail innovation centre and test track will be delivered so that it does not conflict with development of metro, tram-train and potential longer term rail in the Walsall – Stourbridge corridor.

This is good news as SLUG was concerned that Dudley Council's proposals for the VLR Innovation Centre seemed to be working in conflict to the ITA proposals.

The devolution deal to set up the West Midlands Combined Authority was signed by the Chancellor of the Exchequer on 17 November and, subject to parliamentary approval this coming April, will see £1 billion of government investment to kick-start the priority projects.

SLUG will keep you informed of developments as and when they occur.

FIRST ANNIVERSARY OF THE STOURBRIDGE LINE 68s
by Paul Humphreys

Chiltern's Class 68 locos debuted unceremoniously on our line in February last year, fronting the Silver Sets. My first experience of one was on February 24th, 68011 tandemed with Driving Van Trailer 82301 running Kidderminster to Leamington Spa. The terminus is important. This was the time of the hugely impacting Harbury Tunnel incident, which probably absorbed any spare work capacity Chiltern may have had at the time. Combined with a considerable resource demand of driver training it meant that the 68s rolled out with no big launch, no whistles & bells. The introduction had originally been scheduled for the beginning of the Winter 2014 timetable. In the poet T.S. Elliott's words it was "Not with a bang, but with a whimper".

Chiltern Railways Class 68 No. 68011 approaches Stourbridge Junction

What then, to use a dreadful but popular media term, of the 'backstory'? The Class 68s are built near Valencia in Spain by Vossloh. To date (January 2016) 19 have been manufactured with a further 13 on order. Their international name is Vossloh Eurolight and the ones working in this country, unsurprisingly, UKLight. Production began in 2013 with extensive testing of 68001 by the Czech Railway Research Institute's Velim Railway Test Circuit. Separately 68002 arrived in the UK in January 2014 for extensive testing in this country.

In January 2012 Direct Rail Services (DRS) had placed an order for 15 Class 68s at an estimated contract price of £45million. A trade advertisement by them claimed a number of 'benefits' for them including

- Minimum of 7.07% fuel saving over an EMD power unit
- Significantly enhanced haulage capability with advanced adhesion control systems and superior power to weight ratio
- Cutting costs and using recycling braking energy.
- Combined with improved fuel efficiency this significantly extends range
- Offers superior driver comfort and wins the support of driver unions. *(How many of you know that?)*

An option for a further 10 UKLights was taken up by DRS in September 2014 and a further seven in July 2015. Their original storage was at Crewe Gresty Bridge depot.

The first passenger trains hauled by Class 68s in the UK were DRS special services for the 2014 Ryder Cup at Gleneagles.

The initial period of their operation on the Stourbridge line was not trouble-free. At a SLUG committee meeting on 14th July 2015 Chiltern representative Alan Riley reported a disappointing PPM of 93.91% against a target of 95.59% which he attributed largely to “some problems with the Class 68s and some signalling in London”. In email communication (September 2015) he later elaborated “The reliability of the Class 68s is improving. Problems encountered have been a mix of typical early life failures, typical design and manufacturing defects and the inexperience of all involved. It may be of interest that we are the lead user of this class of loco and are way ahead in terms of miles run of anyone else. Bottom line is we understand the cause of every failure we have had and plans are in place to counter the risk of reoccurrence”.

Only DRS (68001-68005; 68008-68009) and Abellio ScotRail (68006-68007) also run 68s. The Chiltern range (sub-leashed from DRS as is Abellio ScotRail) – just in case you didn't know - is 68010-68015.

Many of you will recall that the 67s, which the 68s replaced, were all named. It's interesting to note that all but those running in the Chiltern colours are also named:
68001 Evolution; 68002 Intrepid; 68003 Astute; 68004 Rapid; 68005 Defiant; 68006 Daring; 68007 Valiant; 68008 Avenger; 68009: Titan. [Avenger and Titan can often be seen parked in the Stourbridge sidings]. Even the four 'post-Chiltern' ones have been named: 68016 Fearless; 68017 Reliance; 68018 Vigilance; 68019 Hornet.

DRS No. 68008 *Avenger* at Birmingham Moor Street

So, come on Chiltern, how about 'ours'? Alan Riley says, “We currently have no plans (to do so). I would imagine that this is something that will happen, just not in the near future”.

Perhaps we could run a competition on our facebook page to give them some ideas and get the ball rolling. How about “SLUG”? Okay, perhaps not....

STOURBRIDGE LINE USER GROUP
PUBLIC MEETING AND ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING 2016

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 10 May 2016 starting at 7.30 p.m.

The Public Meeting is open to members and non-members and will feature presentations from TOCs and local transport authorities.

Kidderminster Town Station

NEWS IN BRIEF
edited by Paul Humphreys

Our local top twenty (well almost). Which stations on our line are most used and which least? And which are the 'risers' and which the 'fallers'? Below are the figures recently released for 2014/5 with the % figures of increase or decrease from the previous year.

1. Birmingham Moor Street. 6,521,272 (+4.8%) [interchanges: 421,291]
2. Birmingham Snow Hill. 4,538,108 (+2.30%). [interchanges: 239,372]
3. Worcester Foregate Street. 2,207,508. (+20.37%)*. [interchanges: 208,193]
4. Kidderminster. 1,561,914. (-1.46%)
5. Stourbridge Junction. 1,323,834 (+3.75%) [interchanges: 415,470**]
6. Rowley Regis. 921,116. (+0.38%)
7. Cradley Heath. 740,842. (+2.04%)
8. Worcester Snow Hill. 595,402 (-38.54)* [interchanges: 117,435]
9. Smethwick Galton Bridge. 577,222 (+2.77%) [interchanges: 461,664]
10. Droitwich Spa. 533,268 (-1.01%) [interchanges: 71,300]
11. Stourbridge Town. 497,736 (+2.95%)
12. Hagley. 480,457. (-1.93%)
13. The Hawthorns. 422,750 (-2.30%)
14. Jewellery Quarter. 395,202 (+2.58%)
15. Old Hill. 185,406 (+3.29%)
16. Langley Green. 169,866 (-0.37)
17. Blakedown. 91,698 (+2.74%)
18. Lye 82,104 (-0.68%)
19. Hartlebury 39,250 (+77.88%. Editor's note: a remarkable achievement)

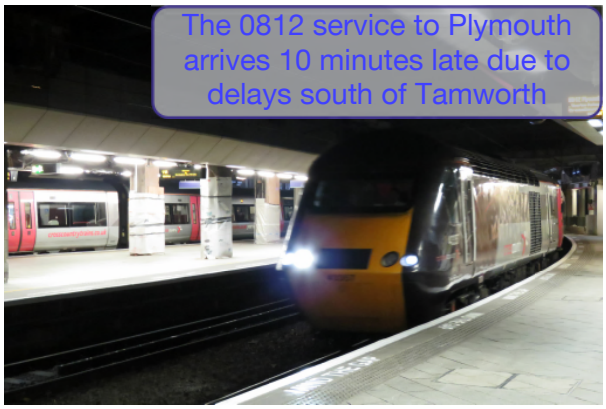
* The dramatic changes for the two Worcester stations may at least partially be explained by changes in criteria for estimating footfall at these stations. Footfall is largely based on ticket sales. Tickets to Worcester are issued to 'Worcester Stations', so are valid to either Shrub Hill or Foregate Street. This year's allocation between these stations probably acknowledges that last year's 'guesswork' ignored the city centre location of Foregate Street.

** Almost a third of passengers at Stourbridge Junction transferred between trains, suggesting the importance of the Town shuttle, and the Stourbridge Town footfall figure suggests the vast majority of shuttle users continued by rail from the Junction.

(sources Roger Davis, Keith Flinders and Office of Rail and Road at http:orr.gov.uk/statistics/published-stats/station-usage-estimates)

Banning of electronic cigarettes. On December 1st London Midland introduced a new policy asking customers "not to use" electronic cigarettes when travelling on its trains, passing through stations or working at any LM site. A spokesperson said "E cigarettes produce a vapour to mimic smoke and can look very similar to the real thing. As their use has increased in popularity, so have instances of conflict and confusion amongst customers..." *(source: London Midland 21/11/2015)*

Birmingham suffers the most train delays. A report published in December stated that between September and November 2015 46% of services into New Street, Moor Street and Snow Hill between 7 am and 10 am were late. Birmingham came bottom of the list of 16 major cities studied by ODI. The data showed furthermore that between 8 am and 9 am more than half of services (52%) were delayed. This was 11% above the average across all 16 cities. A spokesperson for the Rail Delivery Group, representing Network Rail and train operators said "Train operators and Network Rail are working hard together every day to deliver a better, more punctual railway system and to give people better information when things go wrong … but a busier network means that incidents can have a greater knock-on effect". *(source: Birmingham Post 17/12/2015)*



The 0812 service to Plymouth arrives 10 minutes late due to delays south of Tamworth

ORR cornered on delay refunds in Which? 'super-complaint'. The Office of Rail and Road (ORR) has 90 days to respond to Which? calling for an investigation into rail delay refunds The consumer organisation is calling for action to make the compensation process easier to understand after a survey of nearly 7,000 passengers found just one-third of those entitled to delay compensation actually made a claim. Only one-third remembered being told their rights after their last delay experience. In August RTM (rail technology magazine) revealed that the amount of cash paid in delay and repay compensation to passengers by most TOCs had more than doubled over the last five years. *(source: rail technology magazine, 27/12/2015)*

London Midland staff to wear body cameras. London Midland's Revenue Protection and Security teams are being equipped with mobile body cameras "to improve customer service, safety and security". A spokesperson said "There are clearly a number of advantages with this initiative. Not only does it act as an enhancement to the safety of our employers and customers, it also plays a pivotal role in the evidence gathering process when taking action against fare evaders and those committing anti-social behaviour. The evidence gathered from the body cameras, which effectively act as mobile CCTV, will really help us to secure prosecutions against persistent and high-level offenders". *(source: London Midland 08/12/2015)*

WORCESTERSHIRE RAIL USER GROUPS ALLIANCE
by Rob Hebron

The Worcestershire Rail User Groups Alliance (WRUGA) meets four times per year and is chaired by David Balme, Worcestershire County Council's Transport Planning Officer. As well as SLUG, the meeting is attended by representatives of the Bromsgrove Rail User Group (BRUG), the Shakespeare Line Promotion Group and the Cotswold Line Promotion Group.

At the last meeting, the current situation at Network Rail was discussed. A new chairman has been appointed – Sir Peter Hendy – and he is now carrying out an in depth review of the whole Network Rail business. This means that the Network Rail West Midlands and Chilterns Route Study will not be available for consultation until 2016 and the Electrification Route Study is also not anticipated until 2016. The final version of the Western Route Study has however been published.

The West Midlands Rail devolution proposals are being developed and have received the support of the Department for Transport. It will cover all routes in Worcestershire except for the Cotswold line. A paper is going to the November cabinet meeting of Worcestershire County Council to discuss the proposals and for the County Council to formally agree to join West Midlands Rail.

The direct award franchise for London Midland is yet to be agreed between London Midland and the Department for Transport and early works are now starting for the Cross Country direct award to run from October 2016 until a new longer term franchise starts in October 2019.

Discussions are also taking place surrounding the West Midlands Combined Authority, which will take over the role of the Integrated Transport Authority and absorb Centro. Bromsgrove District Council, Redditch Borough Council and Wyre Forest District Council have been invited to join.

Each line was then discussed in turn. On the Great Malvern, Worcester and Cotswold line, the new Great Western rail franchise has now started and the franchise is now trading as Great Western Rail. A meeting at the House of Commons, involving MPs and Council and LEP representatives along the line, gave wide support for further doubling of the line along with reductions in journey time. The installation of a turn back at Henwick is believed to be going ahead but there is no commitment to a new signalling system in Worcester replacing the existing semaphore system.

Worcestershire Parkway

Planning permission for Worcestershire Parkway station was granted during August, and talks are taking place with contractors regarding the construction of the station with work hopefully commencing on site during the spring of 2016. CLPG voiced concerns that the new station could impact on Pershore station, with trains being removed and existing users transferring to Parkway.

On the Shakespeare Line, there have been a number of developments over the past three months which could help build the case for reopening the Stratford to Honeybourne line. Cala Homes are about to submit a planning application for a housing development close to the line shortly while Stratford-upon-Avon District Council has bid for £500,000 from the Warwickshire LEP to undertake a more detailed study of the reopening of the line. The Avon Rail Link has updated their business case and has now established a benefit: cost ratio of almost four, and a second campaigning group has been set up to campaign for the line to be reopened (http://suawoox.com/index.html)

The new Bromsgrove Station (*Tony Woodward*)

On the Birmingham to Cheltenham line, work is proceeding on the new Bromsgrove station and the works to electrify the line from Barnt Green to Bromsgrove. The station is expected to open during Spring 2016, with the Cross City service to Bromsgrove starting in May 2017. This will involve a twelve day blockade during autumn 2016 for electrification works.

On the Birmingham to Worcester via Kidderminster line, initial works have started on Kidderminster station, with a review of the 2010 designs to ensure that they still meet current design standards and legal requirements, and David Balme has been involved in providing a brief for the architect.

Kidderminster Station

London Midland have also committed to strengthening services on the Stourbridge line.

The WRUGA meetings give the Rail User Groups of Worcestershire the chance to exchange information between themselves and receive the latest news from Worcestershire County Council. This will enable SLUG to keep you informed as the Kidderminster station project progresses.

THE ESTABLISHMENT OF STANDARD BRITISH TIME
by Paul Humphreys

Although the 1830s was a time of booming railway building and usage the first national timetable was not published until October 1839 – the legendary Bradshaw's Railway Time Tables, which aimed to rein in rampant confusion within an uncoordinated system. The volume included train times both north and south along with an 'Assistant to Railway Travelling with Illustrative Maps and Plans'.

But it raised one fundamental question: what time is it? Then it was set locally according to the sun. So when a train left London at 6.00pm it was already 6.05 in Oxford! One local railway guide of the period addressed this by indicating the number of minutes to be added or subtracted en route. As the cited article points out, “prior to the railways these differences weren't much of an issue. But now, travellers found that their watches were hopelessly unsynchronised”.

As a solution to this nonsense in November 1840 the GWR imposed Greenwich Mean Time on its stations and by September 1847 'Railway Time' was used across the network. By 1855 98% of British towns were using GMT. It is worth however recalling a statement made by one local railway director who refused to supply his train times to Bradshaw for the 1839 edition stating 'I believe it would tend to make punctuality a sort of obligation'. Beat that, today's TOCs!

primary source: The Independent Magazine, 24/10/15

The Corn Exchange in Bristol has a clock with two minute hands - one showing “Bristol Time” and the other showing “London Time”