Brighton has a daily slow service from Worcester but no service from Birmingham

However, one of the biggest reasons for the removal of through journey opportunities came in 2004. The Strategic Rail Authority, which had been set up by John Prescott, was disbanded by Alistair Darling and micro-management of the rail network passed from rail professionals to the civil servants at the Department for Transport. DfT decided that each franchise should have its own defined area and many through journeys that crossed these boundaries were split between two or more franchises. One example was the well-patronised service from Scotland, Manchester and Birmingham to Brighton which served Gatwick Airport. Faceless DfT officials based in London decided that passengers who used this service were happy to fight their way onto the London Underground to get from Euston to Victoria and sit (if lucky) with their suitcases in an overcrowded carriage with somebody's crotch a couple of inches from their faces. The public's fears after Covid will mean that they will avoid this journey. Passengers using the Scotland to Plymouth service to reach the South Devon resorts face the slightly more palatable prospect of getting off the express train at Exeter St David's and forcing themselves and their suitcases onto an overcrowded, uncomfortable local service to complete their journeys.

Birmingham still has through services to West and North Wales, Blackpool, Bournemouth, Weston-super-Mare, South Devon and Cornwall. Worcester has a slow direct stopping service to Worthing and Brighton which takes over 5 hours. It also has a direct stopping service to Weymouth, but not from Weymouth! Luckily, the through service to Brighton survived an attempt by DfT to terminate this service at Southampton Central and force passengers to change trains there. An outcry from stakeholders, including SLUG, forced that aspiration to be scrapped.

Keith Williams has undertaken a review of the rail network and spoke at the conference. At the time of writing, the Williams Report has yet to be published, although there have been hints about some of the recommendations. It is well known that franchising will be replaced by National Rail Contracts and West Midlands Rail Executive is already in negotiations with Abellio over the contract for our local services. It is widely assumed that a new "arms length" authority will take over from DfT to manage the rail system, and informed sources are speculating that this will be a revamped and renamed Network Rail.

Therefore, with rail professionals replacing civil servants in managing the rail network and the same professionals accepting that leisure travel is the key to post-Covid growth, action must be taken to attract these travellers. People do not like having to change trains, especially if they are going on holiday and are carrying suitcases. Thus, the rationalisation of rail services imposed by DfT over the past 17 years must be reversed. By providing a wider range of through destinations, the railway will improve its chances of attracting leisure passengers back onto its trains.

STOURBRIDGE LINE USER GROUP

PLATFORM

Issue 23 March 2021

This flashback to Sunday 6 July 2014 will be repeated on the last two Sundays of March when CrossCountry services are diverted via Stourbridge Junction

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STAYING IN THE LOOP
by Roger Davis

The Covid crisis has put a stop, hopefully temporarily, to the conferences and meetings that SLUG officers attended on behalf of our members. This does not mean that SLUG has become dormant and, thanks to Zoom and Microsoft Teams, we have been able to liaise with senior rail managers from the comfort of our own homes. Since the start of 2021, we have "attended" a presentation from Dave Penney (Central Route Director at Network Rail) and have "met" with Peter Sargant (Head of Rail Development at the West Midlands Rail Executive) and Mark Lawton (Snow Hill Lines Station Manager at West Midlands Railway).

Dave Penney was appointed as Central Route Director a year ago but was already known to SLUG from his previous job as Managing Director of Chiltern Railways. He was offered his current position by Andrew Haines who had taken over as Managing Director at Network Rail with the desire to devolve the organisation into regional areas to provide closer co-operation with the Train Operating Companies. The Central Route comprises all lines from London Marylebone to Birmingham and Aylesbury and the lines in the West Midlands conurbation as far south as the northern limits of Worcester. Worcester itself is currently the northern extreme of the Western Route but, after Dave argued that the majority of traffic is to and from the Birmingham area, it will be moved to the Central Route next month. SLUG has long campaigned for infrastructure and signalling improvements in Worcester and the transfer to the Central Route should mean that the replacement of the old semaphore signals, and the transfer of the area to the West Midlands Signalling Centre at Saltley, could happen quicker than originally planned.

The semaphore signals at Worcester Shrub Hill will soon transfer to Network Rail's Central Route

These meetings have meant that SLUG has been kept "in the loop" regarding current and future developments along the Stourbridge line which we can now pass onto you.

Old Hill Tunnel. You may remember that, shortly before the first lockdown, the line was closed on six Sundays for repair works in Old Hill Tunnel. The problem was an old ventilation shaft about halfway along the tunnel which had been filled in many years ago. The infill material had started to press down on the roof of the tunnel and, had it not been dealt with, could have caused a roof collapse in the future.

Work in progress to repair the roof at Old Hill Tunnel

(Network Rail)

A TRIP TO THE SEASIDE
by Roger Davis

At the end of February, I attended the "virtual" National Rail Recovery Conference which featured presentations by senior rail professionals. The rail industry has accepted that the five-day rush hour will be a thing of the past (in fact, Friday traffic was lighter even before the pandemic). It is thought that a midweek rush hour could still exist as employees visit the office on a more flexible basis, thus necessitating the introduction of flexible season tickets. However, it is leisure travellers who will lead the recovery of passenger numbers. Bookings at British seaside hotels are already surging as people are afraid of the possibility of being caught up in restrictions abroad and of being forced to quarantine on return. To corner this market and convince would-be passengers, old and new, that travelling to their staycation by train is preferable to using their car, rail operators have identified that their offering must be cost-effective, safe, convenient, comfortable and reliable. One action being considered by Network Rail is moving engineering works from weekend to midweek.

So, let's think about where we can go from this area.

- Stourbridge or Kidderminster to Barry Island or Tenby.
- Worcester to Weston-super-Mare, Dawlish, Teignmouth, Torquay, Paignton or Penzance.
- Birmingham to Margate, Broadstairs, Ramsgate, Deal, Dover, Hastings, Eastbourne, Brighton, Southsea, Weymouth, Exmouth, Great Yarmouth, Cleethorpes, Skegness, Bridlington, Filey and Scarborough.

What connects the above journeys? All of them have been through journeys in the past, whereas today some of these journeys require 4 different legs. Co-operation between the British Railway regions in the 1950s was responsible for these holiday specials. One of the most unusual through services, which gave West Midlands passengers direct access to resorts at either end of the country, operated through all four regions of British Railways. It ran in both directions linking the Lincolnshire resort of Cleethorpes with the Devon resort of Exmouth via Lincoln, Nottingham, Leicester, Birmingham, Bath and Templecombe. In addition, rather than force passengers for Sidmouth to change onto a local train, a portion of the train was attached/detached at the remote Devon station at Tipton St John's.

The Cleethorpes to Exmouth service slows to stop at Evercreech Junction in August 1962

(Norman Lockett)

The Beeching Report in the early 1960s and the rationalisation of the network to create British Rail saw many of these services withdrawn as the private car took over as a family's primary mode of transport. A later decision by British Rail saw Worcester unceremoniously removed from the Cross Country network with through express services to resorts in Somerset, Devon and Cornwall withdrawn.

Spick and Span. Plans to repair an historic luggage bridge at Worcester Shrub Hill have been thwarted due to years of corrosion caused by the elements. However, a facsimile has been constructed to take its place. Network Rail has rebuilt the structure using modern materials and it will once again span platform 1 and 2 within the Grade II listed station. Trains will not be disrupted while the bridge installation takes place over the weekend of 9-11 April.

(Source: - Rail Technology Magazine)

Red Light for 56 Year Old Signals. Work to resignal New Street station and its environs has started. One platform at a time will be closed from January 2021 to June 2022, with platforms 12 to 8 being followed by platforms 1 to 7 in order. A blockade over Christmas 2022 will commission the new signals, with control passed to the West Midlands Signalling Centre at Saltley. *(Source: - Network Rail)*

STOURBRIDGE LINE USER GROUP PUBLIC MEETING AND ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

The Stourbridge Line User Group Public Meeting and Annual General Meeting will take place on Tuesday 11 May 2019 starting at 7.30 p.m. The Public Meeting is open to members and non-members. There will be presentations from Train Operating Companies and local transport authorities.

Because of the current restrictions, the meeting will be conducted virtually via Zoom. Instructions on how to join the meeting will be emailed to members nearer to the date and will also be published on the SLUG website and the SLUG Facebook group.

For postal members, instructions can only be emailed if we know your email address. This is printed on the membership renewal form enclosed. If your email address is "Unknown", please contact us at admin@stourbridgelineusergroup.info and we will add your email address to our records.

Members are reminded that their membership renewal is due and a membership form has been included with this mailing.

CHRISTMAS PHOTO QUIZ ANSWERS

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

1 - Midsomer Murders, 2 - Some Mothers Do 'Ave 'Em, 3 - Casey Jones, 4 - Keeping Up Appearances, 5 – Vera, 6 - Mr Bean, 7 - Father Brown, 8 - I Didn't Know You Cared, 9 – Casualty, 10 - The Detectives, 11 - The Indian Doctor, 12 - Gavin and Stacey, 13 - All Creatures Great and Small, 14 - One Foot In The Grave, 15 - Inspector George Gently, 16 - Terry and June, 17 - Silent Witness, 18 - Endeavour

Snow Hill. Both Network Rail and West Midlands Rail Executive are keen to accelerate the reopening of platform 4 to increase capacity at the station and it is hoped that work will start in the not too distant future. A masterplan, led by Birmingham City Council, to redevelop the Snow Hill area includes proposals to redevelop the station above platform area with a larger concourse and additional entrances in Livery Street and Snow Hill Queensway. This proposal is progressing slower than expected and we will publish more details as they become available.

Good News ; The car park will be demolished
Bad News ; To be replaced by office blocks

Brierley Hill to Stourbridge. SLUG was informed at the meeting that a preliminary study on how to link Stourbridge to Brierley Hill has been produced by Steer Consultants and TfWM has met with Dudley Council. The next stage will be the production of a strategic outline business case to determine the preferred mode of transport. Therefore, it came as a surprise on 24 February to see the Metro Mayor and the local MP taking the political opportunity to publicise a bid by Pre Metro Operations to obtain funding from DfT to produce their own business case to operate a service on the line. SLUG would like an integrated link between the Metro at Brierley Hill and the main line at Stourbridge Junction. It hopes that PMOL is liaising with TfWM on proposals for this corridor and not going it alone with its own proposals.

The proposed terminating platform would be on the far side of the Birmingham bound platform where a previous platform, although filled in, is still visible.

Rowley Regis. The proposal to add an extra terminating platform at Rowley Regis is still on the table but is now being promoted alongside aspirations to electrify the Snow Hill lines in the future. Network Rail is preparing a strategic outline business case.

May 2021 Timetable. It is proposed that the May 2021 timetable will see the restoration of 6 trains per hour to Stourbridge Junction, 4 trains per hour to Kidderminster and 2 trains per hour to Worcester.

As far as SLUG committee members are concerned, both meetings were both interesting and informative. As a committee, we are always looking for additional members. I was talked into joining the committee about 10 years ago. At the time, I knew very little about railway matters. In fact, many people would say that nothing has changed! However, I can honestly say that I have enjoyed every minute, especially the meetings with senior managers from the rail industry. Therefore, if you feel that you would like to join the committee, please let us know. You can contact us at admin@stourbridgelineusergroup.info if you require any further information.

A SMOOTHER RIDE ?
by John Warren

New sleepers and track lined up on Sunday 7 March ready for track replacement

To demonstrate the improved co-operation between Network Rail and the operators, a two week closure of the Stourbridge Town branch from 8-21 February not only enabled Pre-Metro Operations to refurbish the interiors of the two Town Cars but also enabled Network Rail to clear vegetation, cut back and remove overhanging trees that are a risk to the safety of the trains, tidy up lineside rubbish, remove graffiti and inspect the track. A compound was set up alongside the track to enable Network Rail to relay and weld the track along the branch during a second closure from 6-12 March. The Town branch is very popular with passengers and there have always been complaints about the bumpy ride caused by the state of the track. Hopefully, this work will make the three minute journey a lot smoother.

CUCKOO IN THE NEST
by John Warren

It is widely known that passenger services along the Stourbridge line are shared between two operators. The bulk of services are operated by West Midlands Railway with a few long-distance services operated by Chiltern Railways. What is less widely known is that a third operator – CrossCountry Trains – operate services along the line most weekdays, albeit non-stop. The services are as follows :-

		KID	SBJ
Mon-Sat	0500 Birmingham New Street to Cardiff Central	0523	0518
Mon-Fri	2020 Paignton to Birmingham New Street	2316	2322
Mon-Fri	2145 Cardiff Central to Birmingham New Street	2334	2340

Until recently, the 0612 Birmingham New Street to Paignton service also operated via the line, but this now departs at 0642 and runs directly via Bromsgrove.

A CrossCountry HST on a Plymouth to Edinburgh service passes Stourbridge Junction in July 2014

These services operate via the Stourbridge line to maintain route knowledge for CrossCountry drivers as the line is used as a diversionary route when the main line via the Lickey incline is closed for maintenance work. This is happening as this edition of *Platform* is being published with CrossCountry services to Scotland, Plymouth and Cardiff traversing the line non-stop on 21 and 28 March. What a pity that CrossCountry services cannot stop at Stourbridge Junction and/or Kidderminster !

NEWS IN BRIEF
compiled by Rob Hebron

The right connections. The green light has been given for the new Dudley Interchange which will bring together tram, bus and Sprint services. The new multi modal transport hub will cost £24 million and fulfils part of the Council's commitment to regenerate Dudley town centre. *(Source:- WMCA)*

Dudley Interchange (WMCA)

(WMCA)

Loosening The Grip. For large projects, such as the rebuilding of Kidderminster station, Network Rail used the GRIP (Governance for Railway Investment Projects) process. GRIP has been criticised for being too slow as each of the 8 stages has to be completed and signed off before the next stage can commence. For this reason, it is being replaced by a new process called PACE (Project Acceleration in a Controlled Environment). The new process is designed to deliver projects more quickly, at lower cost and higher quality. *(Source:- Network Rail)*

University (WMCA)

Perry Barr (WMCA)

On Your Marks … Plans to rebuild two Birmingham stations in time for the 2022 Commonwealth Games are gathering pace. Contractors have been appointed for the rebuilding of University station and work should start on site shortly. Birmingham City Council has approved the planning application to rebuild Perry Barr station, with the work put out to tender and due to start by the summer. *(Source:- WMCA)*

… for the Commonwealth Sprint. Transport for West Midlands has announced that National Express West Midlands will operate the first Sprint route (Walsall - Birmingham - Solihull) on its behalf from May 2022. Initially, a fleet of hydrogen-fuelled double-deck buses funded by Birmingham City Council will be used on the route but it is intended that these will be replaced by low floor tram-style articulated vehicles during 2023. SLUG feels that it is purely a vanity project to introduce vehicles that have been rejected by other cities as they are less manoeuvrable, take up more road space and seat fewer passengers. *(Source:- TfWM)*

(NXWM)