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STOURBRIDGE LINE USER GROUP

Platform

Worcester Shrub Hill will be served by a regular hourly service from the Stourbridge line on Monday to Saturday from 22 May as a result of a major timetable change.

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WILLIAM WHITING
by Roger Davis

We start this issue of Platform with the very sad news that William Whiting, the Chairman of SLUG for the past seven years, passed away suddenly on 29 January, aged 67. William was a selfless and tireless champion of rail transport in our area and campaigned for improved rail services throughout his life, engaging rail companies and local authorities with reasoned arguments put forward in his usual polite manner. William was also a passionate supporter of community rail and served as Chairman of the Worcestershire Community Rail Partnership for the first three years of its existence.

William was held in high regard and SLUG received tributes from very senior rail managers at West Midlands Rail Executive (WMRE), West Midlands Railway (WMR) and Chiltern Railways as soon as the news of William's death was announced.

A special part of William's nature could be encapsulated with the words "polite and rational". He was a very kind man and I was honoured to be a friend as well as a work colleague.
(Fay Easton, Head of Stakeholder and Community, WMR)

I and the team have very much enjoyed working with William over the years, and it was always a pleasure dealing with someone who was so passionate about improving rail services, and who was always so polite, knowledgeable and engaging. The rail users on the Stourbridge Line have lost a true champion for their cause. (Peter Sargant, Head of Rail Development, WMRE)

William always conducted himself like a true gentleman, even if there was something he didn't like or disagreed with! We have lost a passionate advocate for rail in the West Midlands and we at WMRE have lost a valued critical friend. (Toby Rackliff, Strategic Lead, Rail Policy, WMRE)

I'm very saddened that we have lost such an advocate for rail and, as has already been said, such a genuinely caring, sensitive and polite man. The West Midlands rail scene will forever be a poorer place for losing William. (Malcolm Holmes, Executive Director, WMRE)

William gave a huge amount of his time and effort to support the development of the railway network in the West Midlands. From his work lobbying Chiltern to enhance through services to London, to promoting Community Rail across the county of Worcestershire, William leaves a brilliant legacy behind. (Zach Bailey, Stakeholder Manager, Chiltern Railways)

These tributes show that William and, by association, the SLUG committee always had the ear of local rail managers. William's death will not change this and SLUG will continue to engage regularly with rail industry managers as a "critical friend".

However, SLUG is run by a very small committee, which tragically has become smaller. New committee members are urgently needed, either as administrators, campaigners or as community rail supporters. Meetings take place every 2 months and are now held via Zoom, which means there isn't the need to drag yourself to Kidderminster on an icy Tuesday evening.

If you are at all interested, please email platform@stourbridgelineusergroup.info and we will get back to you and let you know how we operate.

ALL CHANGE IN MAY
by Roger Davis

Peak and school time through services between Hagley and Worcester will remain but off-peak services have been withdrawn.

To put it bluntly, the current Stourbridge line timetable is a disaster with up to ⅓ of journeys at least five minutes late at Snow Hill. This is due to short layover times at destination stations (as low as three minutes at Worcester, Dorridge and Stratford), which make it difficult for a late running service to get back on time. Therefore, the operator resorts to either skipping stops to make up time (e.g. by running a service non-stop from Snow Hill to Stourbridge Junction) or terminating a service short of its timetabled destination (e.g. terminating a Worcester service at Kidderminster, or a Kidderminster service at Stourbridge Junction).

Therefore, it is encouraging that West Midlands Rail Executive (WMRE) and West Midlands Railway (WMR) have revamped the Monday to Saturday timetable from 22 May to improve resilience. The new timetable will include the following changes:-

- Layover times will be increased significantly – for instance at Kidderminster from 9 minutes to 30 minutes and at Dorridge from 3 minutes to 16 minutes.
- Every daytime journey to/from Worcester will serve Foregate Street station thus providing a clockface service approximately every 30 minutes.
- One train per hour to/from Foregate Street will operate via Shrub Hill thus providing a clockface hourly service.
- A clockface 30 minute service will run between Snow Hill and Dorridge and between Snow Hill and Whitlocks End.
- Small Heath, Tyseley and Lapworth all gain an extra service every hour, while The Lakes, Wood End, Danzey and Wootton Wawen become scheduled stops rather than request stops.
- No changes will be made to Sunday services at this time due to DfT constraints.

However, services to/from Worcester will stop at Langley Green, Old Hill and Lye while services to/from Kidderminster will stop at Hagley and Blakedown. SLUG has campaigned vigorously for the calling patterns to be reversed to provide through services between Hagley, Blakedown and Worcester off-peak, but WMR has refused this request, citing ~~excuses~~ reasons which bordered on the absurd. Rest assured that SLUG will campaign for this link to be restored as soon as possible.

Frequencies will remain unchanged as the summary of Monday to Saturday daytime services on the next page shows. Please note that this is only a guide and that full timetables will be available from journey planners such as Realtime Trains, the WMR website, and the SLUG website closer to the start date.

WOF		15	..	41	..
WOS	arr	..	..	43	..
WOS	dep	..	..	48	..
DTW		24	..	57	..
HBY		31	..	↓	..
KID		37	54	07	24
BKD		↓	58	↓	28
HAG		↓	01	↓	31
SBJ		45	05	15	35
LYE		49	↓	19	↓
CRA		52	11	22	41
OHL		56	↓	26	↓
ROW		59	16	29	46
LGG		03	↓	33	↓
SGB		06	21	36	51
THW		08	23	38	53
JEQ		12	27	42	57
BSW	arr	16	31	46	01
BSW	dep	21	35	51	05
BMO		25	39	55	09
SMA		↓	42	58	12
TYS		30	45	↓	15
SRI		..	48	..	18
HLG		..	50	..	20
YRD		..	53	..	23
SRL		..	56	..	26
WTE		..	59	..	29
WYT		..	02	..	..
EWD		..	04	..	..
TLK		..	07	..	..
WDE		..	09	..	..
DZY		..	13	..	..
HNL		..	18	..	..
WWW		..	21	..	..
ACG		33	..	03	..
OLT		35	..	05	..
SOL		39	..	09	..
WMR		42	..	12	..
DDG	arr	47	..	16	..
DDG	dep	..	..	20	..
LPW		..	..	24	..
WMC		..	27	↓	..
STY		..	30	39	..
SAV		..	34	43	..

SAV		..	43	08	..
STY		..	46	12	..
WMC		..	50	↓	..
LPW		..	..	27	..
DDG	arr	..	..	31	..
DDG	dep	03	..	34	..
WMR		08	..	38	..
SOL		11	..	41	..
OLT		14	..	44	..
ACG		17	..	47	..
WWW		..	55	..	..
HNL		..	59	..	..
DZY		..	03	..	..
WDE		..	07	..	..
TLK		..	09	..	..
EWD		..	12	..	..
WYT		..	15	..	..
WTE		..	17	..	47
SRL		..	20	..	50
YRD		..	23	..	53
HLG		..	26	..	56
SRI		..	29	..	59
TYS		21	33	↓	03
SMA		↓	35	52	05
BMO		27	41	57	11
BSW	arr	29	43	59	13
BSW	dep	31	46	01	16
JEQ		34	49	04	19
THW		38	53	08	23
SGB		41	56	11	26
LGG		44	↓	14	↓
ROW		47	01	17	31
OHL		50	↓	20	↓
CRA		54	06	24	36
LYE		57	↓	27	↓
SBJ		01	12	31	42
HAG		↓	15	↓	45
BKD		↓	19	↓	49
KID		09	24	39	54
HBY		↓	..	44	..
DTW		21	..	53	..
WOS	arr	28	..	..	..
WOS	dep	33	..	..	..
WOF		35	..	02	..

However, the changes in May do not only apply to West Midlands Railway services. Both Great Western Railway and Chiltern Railways are making changes to their timetables and while the former brings good news at Worcester, the latter brings bad news for the Stourbridge line in general and Kidderminster in particular.

First the good news. The GWR service from Worcester to Bristol will improve greatly with the current two-hourly frequency being increased to hourly. This is something that SLUG has long campaigned for, to improve connectivity with the South West.

However, Chiltern has dropped a bombshell by withdrawing all through services between Marylebone and Kidderminster with all remaining services cut back to Stourbridge Junction. The morning through service from Kidderminster is being withdrawn as Chiltern needs the unit to be sent empty to Leamington Spa to operate a morning peak service back to Snow Hill instead. Because of this, the company is claiming that, due to the dwindling number of drivers with knowledge of the route beyond Stourbridge Junction and the alleged low number of passengers who travel between Kidderminster and Marylebone, it can no longer justify operating the service. Given that the Monday to Friday morning through service will be reduced to just one train - at the very inconvenient time of 0614 from Stourbridge Junction - one has to ask how long it will be before Chiltern finds an excuse to withdraw all services west of Birmingham Snow Hill.

West Midlands Rail Executive and Worcestershire County Council have approached Great Western Railway and it is supportive of a rush hour service being introduced in the medium term between Kidderminster and Paddington via Oxford subject to it being financially viable. SLUG has provided suggestions on services that could run to and from Kidderminster and we will keep you informed of any developments. In the meantime, it will be interesting to see if Chiltern Railways accepts SLUG's invitation to attend the Public Meeting in May (see below).

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 Thursday 11 May 2022 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.

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 - Dempsey and Makepeace, 2 - Grace, 3 - Dial 999, 4 - Law and Order UK, 5 - Dalziel and Pascoe, 6 - Wycliffe, 7 - New Tricks, 8 - Taggart, 9 - Mallorca Files, 10 - Softly Softly, 11 - D I Ray, 12 - Unforgotten, 13 - Prime Suspect, 14 - The Sweeney, 15 - A Touch of Frost, 16 - Luther, 17 - Inspector Alleyn Mysteries, 18 - McDonald and Dodds

NEWS IN BRIEF
edited by Rob Hebron

The prototype PPM50 vehicle on the experimental Sunday service in 2006

One of a Kind. SLUG is sorry to report the passing of John Parry OBE, aged 85. He will be remembered for creating his unique flywheel-assisted, lightweight Class 139 rail cars and providing a low-cost solution to re-opening closed railway lines. His two PPM60 vehicles are in service on the Stourbridge Town branch. A fitting tribute has been made by Toby Rackliff of West Midlands Rail Executive who states, "John was a huge character with a real drive to make the world a better place through his own pioneering research and development". *(Source: Rail Magazine)*

Another Platform? The Cotswold Line Promotion Group (CLPG) has proposed a northbound bay on Platform 2 at Worcestershire Shrub Hill to serve Birmingham trains. Bay Platform 3 is no longer in use, and trains from London can only use Platform 1, which regularly causes delays at peak times. CLPG has long sought to see the Wyld's Lane crossover in use, so inbound passenger trains could access either platform. In the longer term, Platform 3 could be upgraded for through running. SLUG supports CLPG with this campaign. *(Source: Rail User Express)*

More Stations! Transport for West Midlands (TfWM) and West Midland Rail Executive (WMRE) have nominated five new stations for the region, short-listed from a group of fifteen. The locations are Balsall Heath and Castle Bromwich in Birmingham, Coventry East and Foleshill in Coventry and Tettenhall in Wolverhampton, The last of these is actually in Aldersley on the Shrewsbury line and over a mile from the old Tettenhall station on the Wombourne line. Suburban stations combat traffic congestion in the cities. It is a great shame that re-opening of old Worcester suburban stations is not progressing at a pace. *(Source: Business Live)*

Brutal Reality. The decommissioned Birmingham New Street power signal box is one of Birmingham's best surviving examples of Brutalist architecture. For this reason, it was given Grade 2 listed status in 1995 and cannot be demolished. The region's train movements have passed to the West Midlands Signalling Centre, leaving the iconic (but ugly) building empty. A ballot has given railway enthusiasts and architectural fans a unique opportunity to tour the signal box on 31 March. After the tours, Network Rail will prepare the building for its new purpose as a training centre for the next generation of railway signallers.
(Source: Rail Technology Magazine)

Birmingham New Street Signal Box

THE TRAM-TRAIN [R]EVOLUTION
by John Warren

SLUG has long campaigned for the reinstatement of the line from Stourbridge Junction to Dudley and on to Walsall and (potentially) Lichfield. All recently published documents from the West Midlands Combined Authority and its constituent departments have stated that the preferred mode of transport for this corridor will be tram-train. So, what is a tram-train and how did it evolve?

A tram-train is a type of light rail vehicle that meets national main line standards permitting operation alongside main line trains as well as being able to operate on a street running tramway such as the West Midlands Metro. This would allow services to run on existing heavy rail lines from Stourbridge Junction to Round Oak and then use Metro tracks to Wednesbury and on to Wolverhampton, Birmingham and Walsall.

The Karlsruhe Stadtbahn

(Leiflives)

What is the history of this "new" mode of transport? It was pioneered by the German city of Karlsruhe as long ago as the late 1980s, resulting in the creation of the Karlsruhe Stadtbahn. Commencing service in 1992, the system in Karlsruhe has provided a connection between the regular railway network and the city's local tram network of 12 lines and 190 stations, allowing services from distant towns to run directly into the city centre rather than terminate at the inconveniently and remotely situated main station. The concept was quickly adopted in other European cities such as such as Mulhouse (France), Alicante (Spain) and Kassel, Nordhausen and Saarbrücken (Germany).

Of course, the Department for Transport was quick off the mark in identifying tram-train as a possible mode of transport in the UK and it was only 16 years later, on 18 March 2008, that it released details of a plan costing £24m to trial tram-trains for two years starting in 2010. The new tram-trains would share tracks with conventional trains on the 37-mile Penistone line between Sheffield, Barnsley and Huddersfield. Northern Rail, the operator of passenger services on the line, were to source five vehicles which it would then lease. Network Rail was to invest £15m in track improvements and alterations to stations.

With the Department of Transport involved, 2010 became 2011, and 2011 became 2012. Finally, in May 2012 this plan was abandoned and replaced by a scheme to build a link between the Sheffield Supertram network and the national rail network close to Meadowhall Shopping Centre to enable tram-trains to operate on the tram line from Cathedral to Tinsley and thence over Network Rail lines through Rotherham Central to Parkgate Shopping Centre. where services terminate on a short spur at the side of the railway. Given that the Sheffield Supertram, like the West Midlands Metro, has low level platforms, the two high level platforms at Rotherham Central had to be extended to provide low level access as well.

A tram-train departs Rotherham Central low level platform 4 and passes through high level platform 2

(Man of Yorkshire)

Class 399 tram-train 399 203 waits at Cathedral stop in Sheffield city centre

(emjdt42)

To operate the service, seven tram-train electric multiple units with low level doors were purchased from Vossloh/Stadler and designated as Class 399, although only four of these units have wheel profiles which allow them to operate on heavy rail lines. The first units were delivered in December 2015, when tram-train operation was due to start. However, they didn't enter service until 14 September 2017 and, even then, it was solely on Sheffield Supertram tracks. After test runs on the national network which started in May 2018, the tram-train service to Parkgate started on 25 October 2018, just 10 years after the initial plans were announced.

However, it is the devolved Welsh Assembly and its publicly owned subsidiary Transport for Wales which have made the first moves towards the squadron entry into service of tram-trains. 36 Citylink bi-mode electric/battery tram-trains are currently being built by Stadler in Valencia and are due to enter service in 2023/2024 on Cardiff Valley Lines services to Treherbert, Aberdare and Merthyr Tydfil, and on the City and Cardiff Bay lines in Cardiff. The Cardiff Bay line will be re-doubled, a new intermediate station built, the existing terminus station rebuilt, and the line eventually extended along the streets to a terminus closer to the bay. Unlike the Sheffield Class 399 units, the Class 398s will have high level doors to serve existing stations.

A Class 398 tram-train for Transport for Wales. Note the higher doors compared with the class 399

(Transport for Wales)

Therefore, the technology now exists in the UK for tram-train operation from Stourbridge Junction to Walsall. Modifications would be needed at Stourbridge Junction, and at Stourbridge Town if the branch became tram-train, to provide low level platforms for the tram-trains as they would have to have low level access to run over the West Midlands Metro network. Stops would need to be provided between Stourbridge and Canal Street and a junction (delta?) would be needed at Canal Street to link the heavy rail formation to the Metro network.

Therefore, the technology exists and the line from Stourbridge Junction to Dudley and beyond is an obvious candidate to be reopened to passenger traffic. All that is needed is the funding and the desire by local politicians to make it happen.