



# Platform



A Margam to Round Oak freight train passes the site of a potential stop at Moor Street (Brierley Hill) if passenger rail-based services were restored between Stourbridge and Harts Hill

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## HAGGLING OVER HAGLEY ... AND BLAKEDOWN

by Roger Davis

The late, great Adrian Shooter, who transformed Chiltern Railways from a secondary commuter route into the finest train operator in the country during his tenure as Managing Director and Chairman, once said that the secret of running a successful operation was to “ask people what they want and then give it to them”. His mantra was to “delight our customers”. Perhaps this philosophy should have been adopted by West Midlands Trains (WMT) who designed the new December 2022 and May 2023 timetables without consulting its stakeholders and only letting them in on the details when it was too late to effect any significant changes.

The December changes saw Smethwick Galton Bridge downgraded as an interchange station when services to North and West Wales and to Birmingham International were withdrawn. The latter could have been retained very easily by reorganising the Birmingham International to Rugeley Trent Valley and Wolverhampton to Walsall services so that one train per hour ran from Wolverhampton to Birmingham International. SLUG’s proposal to do this has since fallen on deaf ears at WMT in the name of “simplifying the timetable”.



However, the May 2023 timetable changes saw Hagley stops reduced from three to two trains per hour and the hourly off-peak direct service between Hagley and Worcester withdrawn in favour of off-peak direct services between Worcester and Langley Green, Old Hill and Lye. The first reason SLUG was given was that the number of passengers travelling between Hagley and Worcester was low. Our retort was that even fewer

people will travel between Langley Green and Worcester. After that, the reasons for the withdrawal of services became even more surreal, culminating in the excuse that stopping Worcester services at Hagley and Blakedown would affect people travelling to/from Hartlebury. West Midlands Trains had obviously conveniently forgotten that, when a Worcester service reaches Hartlebury, passengers already on board would include those from Hagley and Blakedown who had been forced to catch an earlier train and change at Kidderminster – that is if they have not decided to give up on the train and further increase the chronic traffic congestion in Worcester.

The link needs to be restored and an idea which is brilliant in its simplicity was suggested by SLUG member Chris Perry. It is to swap the stopping patterns so that Kidderminster terminators stop at Langley Green, Old Hill and Lye (as they did in the earlier timetable) while Worcester terminators stop at Hagley and Blakedown. SLUG has backed his idea and has produced a more comprehensive report with the following alternative hourly timetable pattern.

		WMR Timetable				SLUG Alternative			
WOF		40	...	15	...	40	...	15	...
WOS	arr	42	...	...	...	42	...	...	...
WOS	dep	47	...	...	...	47	...	...	...
DTW		57	...	24	...	57	...	24	...
HBY		▼	...	31	...	▼	...	31	...
KID	arr	06	...	36	...	06	...	36	...
KID	dep	07	24	37	54	07	22	37	52
BKD		▼	28	▼	58	11	▼	41	▼
HAG		▼	31	▼	01	14	▼	44	▼
SBJ	arr	15	35	44	05	18	30	48	00
SBJ	dep	15	35	45	05	20	30	50	00
LYE		19	▼	49	▼	▼	34	▼	04
CRA		22	41	52	11	26	37	56	07
OHL		26	▼	56	▼	▼	41	▼	11
ROW		29	46	59	16	31	44	01	14
LGG		33	▼	03	▼	▼	48	▼	18
SGB		36	51	06	21	36	51	06	21
THW		38	53	08	23	38	53	08	23
JEQ		42	57	12	27	42	57	12	27
BSW	arr	46	01	16	31	46	01	16	31

		WMR Timetable				SLUG Alternative			
BSW	dep	01	16	31	46	01	16	31	46
JEQ		04	19	34	49	04	19	34	49
THW		08	23	38	53	08	23	38	53
SGB		11	26	41	56	11	26	41	56
LGG		14	▼	44	▼	▼	29	▼	59
ROW		17	31	47	01	16	32	46	02
OHL		20	▼	50	▼	▼	35	▼	05
CRA		24	36	54	06	21	39	51	09
LYE		27	▼	57	▼	▼	42	▼	12
SBJ	arr	31	41	01	11	26	46	56	16
SBJ	dep	31	42	01	12	27	46	57	16
HAG		▼	45	▼	15	30	▼	00	▼
BKD		▼	49	▼	19	34	▼	04	▼
KID	arr	39	54	09	24	39	54	09	24
KID	dep	39	...	09	...	39	...	09	...
HBY		44	...	▼	...	44	...	▼	...
DTW		53	...	21	...	53	...	21	...
WOS	arr	...	...	28	...	...	...	28	...
WOS	dep	...	...	33	...	...	...	33	...
WOF		02	...	35	...	02	...	35	...

The only times that change in the SLUG proposal are those in red at stations from Kidderminster to Langley Green. Therefore, the following negative comments made by West Midlands Trains can be discounted.

*Other operators' services will be affected by these changes. No they won't.*  
*These changes will cause services to bunch and become delayed. No they won't.*

Langley Green, Old Hill and Lye have a consistent 30 minute timetable throughout the day, whereas Hagley and Blakedown see their 30 minute service augmented by additional services during school and rush hours. This means that Worcester services see shorter turnround times when these additional stops are made. It also means that the additional stops can only be made on services that bypass Shrub Hill as the turnround time



for services via Shrub Hill is only five minutes. By swapping the stopping pattern as SLUG is suggesting, it will be the Kidderminster services with turnround times of 28 minutes which will see these times reduced when additional stops are made. Thus, Worcester services can operate with a clockface timetable throughout the day.

SLUG is asking West Midlands Trains to consider our proposals objectively. We believe that it will give people what they want. Isn't that what Adrian Shooter advocated when he transformed Chiltern Railways?

## PUTTING PASSENGERS LAST by John Warren

For most people travelling to Worcester, unless there is an onward train connection or they are travelling to a location close to Shrub Hill, Foregate Street station is the more convenient destination as it is closer to the shops and attractions such as the cathedral, river, cricket ground and racecourse. Even for people travelling on from Worcester by bus, Foregate Street has to be the railhead as the bus station is nearby and bus services at Shrub Hill can best be described as appalling.

When promoting the May 2023 timetable, West Midlands Railway (WMR) emphasised the new stopping pattern in Worcester as a major improvement, given that the previous timetable served the Worcester stations randomly. As can be seen in the timetable on the previous page, two trains per hour operate to Foregate Street (arriving at xx02 and xx35, and departing at xx15 and xx40) while one of these trains operates via Shrub Hill (arriving from Stourbridge at xx28 and departing at xx47).

However, there are two services on Mondays to Fridays that do not serve Foregate Street. The 1028 arrival at Shrub Hill does not continue to Foregate Street and starts back to Stratford-upon-Avon from Shrub Hill at 1047. The 1502 arrival is diverted from Foregate Street to Shrub Hill, departing from Shrub Hill at 1516 to Dorridge. This leaves an hour's gap between departures from Foregate Street in each case.

SLUG has uncovered the reason for these anomalies that WMR seems loathe to publicise. The arrival at Shrub Hill at 1028 is a 4-car unit from Dorridge. This unit is then split into two with one 2-car unit shunted into the siding behind Shrub Hill. The remaining 2-car unit then operates to Stratford-upon-Avon at 1047 and does a round trip before arriving back at Shrub Hill at 1501. The other 2-car unit is then retrieved from the siding, attached to the train which departs at 1516 as a 4-car unit to Dorridge.

The 1042 (5-car) service to Dorridge leaves Foregate Street in May 2022. A service at this time is now 2-car and starts at Shrub Hill



One has to question this action given the commitment in recent years that every Stourbridge line service would be booked to run with at least three carriages.

This will inconvenience passengers who turn up at Foregate Street at about 1030 and 1500 expecting a half hourly service. It will also inconvenience passengers who turn up at one of the Birmingham stations just before midday on a bright sunny day and find themselves crammed onto a 2-car train to the tourist destination of Stratford-upon-Avon. It would not be so bad if the removed unit was used on another service. However, it just sits in a siding behind Shrub Hill station for 4½ hours.

SLUG is campaigning for the two services to run through to Foregate Street and for the train to run as a 4-car unit throughout the day. It has approached West Midlands Railway and West Midlands Rail Executive for their reaction. Passengers need to be put first rather than last.



**Bugle Call.** The article “Memories of a Stourbridge Engineman”, which we published in *Platform 3* last October, has recently been serialised in three parts and published in the Black Country Bugle. *(Source: SLUG)*

**No Parking.** The Covid crisis and the resultant change in rail travel patterns have put on hold plans to increase the number of car parking spaces at Kidderminster and Blakedown. *(Source: Worcestershire County Council)*

**Carbon Reduction.** The Class 68 diesel locomotives that power Chiltern’s Silver Sets are being converted to operate using HVO (hydrotreated vegetable oil) rather than diesel. Stourbridge Depot is being adapted to enable the Class 68s to be fuelled using HVO. *(Source: Chiltern Railways)*

**The Roaring Forties.** The ever popular “Forties Weekends” are returning this summer on the Severn Valley Railway. On 24/25 June and again on 1/2 July, visitors can step back in time to wartime Britain. Period costume is optional and food is not rationed! *(Source: SVR website)*

**The Hills and Beyond.** The Worcestershire Community Rail Partnership has produced an interesting book titled “The Hills and Beyond” based on the railway line between Worcester and Hereford. It contains geographical and historical information as well as folklore and anecdotes. It is free to download as a pdf file and is a thoroughly good read. <https://wcrp.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/03/The-Hills-and-Beyond-The-Malverns-and-Herefordshire.pdf> *(Source: WCRP website)*

**The Bee’s Knees.** Stourbridge Junction had some unusual visitors on Monday 15 May. Customers reported hundreds of bees on the overspill car park. The likely explanation is that the queen had fallen out of the nest and the others were protecting her. Social media was soon “buzzing” with comments and one wag suggested that it was the bee police, conducting a sting operation on local public transport services. *(Source: Dudley Express & Star)*

**Class 170 Farewell.** The May timetable change saw West Midlands Railway transfer its remaining Class 170 units to East Midlands Railway. The Class 170s could often be found on Stourbridge line services alongside the regular Class 172s. *(Source: Modern Railways)*



## BRIERLEY HILL OPTIONS by Roger Davis

Since its inception, one of SLUG's flagship campaigns has been the reinstatement of passenger services between Stourbridge Junction and Dudley. SLUG initially campaigned for heavy rail passenger services to be introduced between Stourbridge Junction and Walsall. However, a number of external factors has forced this objective to change. Firstly, Network Rail announced that freight services over the

The Very Light Rail National Innovation Centre occupies the entire trackbed on the old Dudley station site.



line, onto which passenger services could be piggybacked, would not return until the 2040s at the very earliest. Added to that, West Midlands Metro tracks will take over the line from Wednesbury to Tipton Road (Dudley) and, hopefully, from Cinder Bank to Harts Hill. Finally, the middle section, which takes in the Dudley station site, Dudley Tunnel and Blowers Green, has been taken over by the Very Light Rail National Innovation Centre and its test track, leaving no space for even a single heavy rail freight line until the centre is no longer required and is demolished.

Since then, a number of independent schemes have been put forward – extending the Metro from Brierley Hill to Stourbridge; extending the West Midlands Railway services that terminate at Stourbridge Junction to Harts Hill with an intermediate stop at Moor Street; tram-train from Stourbridge Junction to Walsall; and a Pre-Metro Operations proposal for a shuttle light rail service between Stourbridge Junction and Harts Hill. It is the last of these options that has been picked up by local MPs, not because it was the best option but because it gave them the chance to get their photos taken to show their constituents that they were actually doing something.



### EVALUATION OF OPTIONS FOR UTILISING THE STOURBRIDGE JUNCTION TO BRIERLEY HILL RAIL CORRIDOR



May 2023 (Edition 1)  
Contact us at [campaign@stourbridgelineusergroup.info](mailto:campaign@stourbridgelineusergroup.info)

It is against this background that SLUG has decided to publish a document which combines all options into a single booklet. It was launched on 8 May and electronic copies were sent to all SLUG members with an email address. The document is available on the SLUG website at :-  
<http://www.stourbridgelineusergroup.info/brierley-hill-options.html>

The document was also sent to the Metro Mayor, local MPs, Dudley councillors with responsibility for transport, the Chair and Vice-Chairs of the West Midlands Combined Authority Transport Delivery Committee, West Midlands Rail Executive (WMRE), Transport for West Midlands (TfWM), and other Rail Campaign Groups.

Response so far has been mixed. Rail campaign groups Railfuture and Campaign for Rail immediately responded offering their support. West Midlands Rail Executive has offered to send a TfWM report on the Stourbridge to Brierley Hill corridor to the SLUG committee with a joint WMRE/TfWM/SLUG meeting to follow.

However, at time of writing this article (2 June), local politicians have been conspicuous by their silence with only one, non-committal, reply received. When it comes to public transport, Dudley has been the runt of the litter in the West Midlands since Cllr Angus Adams sadly passed away. The inaction of the current Dudley MPs and Councillors demonstrates why this is true. In addition, local newspapers have ignored our press release, deeming that the Philip/Holly handbags fight has greater significance in this region than the reinstatement of a local rail based service.

The document was designed to stimulate discussion by decision makers in order to formulate a single, universally agreed, option for the route. Unfortunately, it appears that local politicians would be happier if a fence was built between Stourbridge and Brierley Hill to give them something to sit on. Unless some decisive action is taken, all we'll see are yet more splinter groups coming up with ideas that will only muddy the waters and divert attention away from the strategic way forward. If that is the case, I think I'll break ranks and come up with my own dotty idea which has proved very popular on most of the Paseo Maritimos on the Spanish Costas.



1 April 2024 seems a good day to launch my proposal as, by then, our local politicians will support anything that gives them plenty of photo opportunities as they fight to retain their seats in next year's General Election!

## SLUG PUBLIC MEETING AND AGM by Roger Davis

We would like to thank everybody who attended the Public Meeting and AGM on 11 May. We would also like to thank Ian Baxter (SLC Rail), Tom Painter (West Midlands Rail Executive), Zach Bailey (Chiltern Railways) and Vicky Cropper-Clarke (West Midlands Trains) who gave up their evenings to address us. A good sized audience was treated to four excellent presentations.

A question and answer session followed with questioners expressing their concern about the level of on-board ticket checks, the removal of through services between Hagley and Worcester and the potential of fare increases if return tickets are abolished.

We look forward to inviting you all to next year's meeting which will be held sometime during May 2024.

## GO WEST by John Warren

One of SLUG's major campaigns has been to improve links between the Stourbridge line and the South West. Ideally, we would like to see this achieved by extending Stourbridge line services to Cheltenham Spa and Gloucester. Alternatively, they could be extended to Evesham via Worcestershire Parkway but this would require a second track to be reinstated, and one or both of the CrossCountry Manchester to Bristol and Edinburgh to Plymouth services to stop at Worcestershire Parkway.

Thankfully, the May 2023 timetable change has seen Great Western Railway double its services between Worcester and Bristol Temple Meads from every two hours to hourly on Mondays to Saturdays. With fairly decent connection times, journeys from Kidderminster to Bristol are now quicker via Worcester than via Birmingham.

As an example, let's look at services in both directions departing after 0900 hrs. A train leaves Stourbridge Junction at 0901 and Kidderminster at 0909 to both Shrub Hill and Foregate Street. Connection can be made at either station onto a GWR service leaving Foregate Street at 0952 and arriving at Bristol Temple Meads at 1127. Unfortunately, the Worcester to Bristol service is slow with intermediate stops at Ashchurch

The 1149 service to Bristol Temple Meads waits to depart from Worcester Foregate Street on 8 June 2023



for Tewkesbury, Cheltenham Spa, Gloucester, Cam & Dursley, Yate, Bristol Parkway and Filton Abbey Wood, and could get even slower if the much needed station at Charfield is opened in the next few years. However, the train calls at Cheltenham Spa at 1023 where a connection can be made onto a CrossCountry service departing at 1032 and arriving at Bristol Temple Meads at 1112, just over two hours after leaving Kidderminster. A similar pattern of service runs hourly throughout the day from 0801 to 1901 on Mondays to Saturdays. In addition, two of the CrossCountry services from Cheltenham Spa continue past Bristol Temple Meads to Paignton.

Northbound, an almost clockface hourly pattern exists for departures from Temple Meads from 0838 to 1838. For instance, the 0938 departure from Bristol arrives at Worcester Foregate Street at 1120. Again, connections can be made at both Foregate Street and Shrub Hill onto the 1140 departure from Foregate Street which arrives at Kidderminster at 1206 and Stourbridge Junction at 1214. A later CrossCountry departure from Temple Meads at 1000 arrives at Cheltenham Spa at 1038, where you can catch the Bristol to Worcester service at 1044. As with the southbound service, two CrossCountry services per day start from Paignton.

Unfortunately, there is insufficient space to print the full timetable. However, we have published a guide to these services on our website at

<http://www.stourbridgelineusergroup.info/files/News---Worcester-to-Bristol.pdf>