BIRMINGHAM - STOURBRIDGE
KIDDERMINSTER - WORCESTER
STOURBRIDGE LINE
USER GROUP

PLATFORM

Issue 5 September 2016

Will the rail network around Worcester see improvements in 2023 as proposed in the West Midlands and Chiltern Route Study ?

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EDITOR'S COMMENTS

Following the Annual General Meeting and Public Meeting, SLUG Chairman Rob Hebron announced that he wished to stand down from full time duties as Chairman, Publicity Officer and Committee member to enable him to find the time to pursue other interests that had taken a back seat due to his SLUG duties. Fortunately for us, Rob will continue to help the SLUG committee in an administrative role, and the fact that you are reading this is due to Rob sending out the current editions of Platform by post and email (and possibly by carrier pigeon if that was necessary).

Rob Hebron (right) with SLUG Treasurer Gary Adams (left) and Mike Wood MP (centre)

Rob has served on the SLUG Committee for the past 14 years in many roles including Secretary, Newsletter Editor and Publicity Officer, and for the past 8 years has acted as the figurehead for the organisation as Chairman. We wish Rob all the best in his future pursuits, and thank him for the unstinting dedicated work he has put in over the past 14 years. It is down to his enthusiasm that SLUG has become one of the largest Rail User Groups in the West Midlands, and one which has the respect of local authorities and Train Operating Companies. The SLUG Committee looks forward to working with Rob in the future, albeit in his reduced role.

Rob's departure as a full time Committee member means that there is a big hole to fill on the SLUG committee. Don Barton has taken over the role of Chairman, with Paul Humphreys taking over as Secretary aided by Caspar Lucas. However, if any SLUG member feels that they would like to take a more active role in the running of SLUG, they would be most welcome. The meetings occur every two months at Kidderminster SVR station and give committee members the chance to interact with representatives of both the local authorities and the Train Operating Companies. If you want to find out what happens at these meetings, you could come along as an observer - the next one is at Kidderminster SVR station on Tuesday 8 November starting at 7.30 pm. You never know - you may feel after the meeting that you would like to join the committee.

JOURNALISM AT ITS BEST
1. Wolverhampton Express & Star

New station is on track for success

A new multi-million pound railway station will open next month.

Passengers at the new Bromsgrove station will benefit from a range of improved facilities including a staffed ticket office, a waiting room, toilets and 350 on-site car parking spaces. Bromsgrove sits along the line that runs through Stourbridge and Hagley stations.

The Express and Star shows its knowledge of the local rail network by moving Bromsgrove station onto the Stourbridge line.

Alternatively, it has moved Stourbridge and Hagley a few miles to the east!

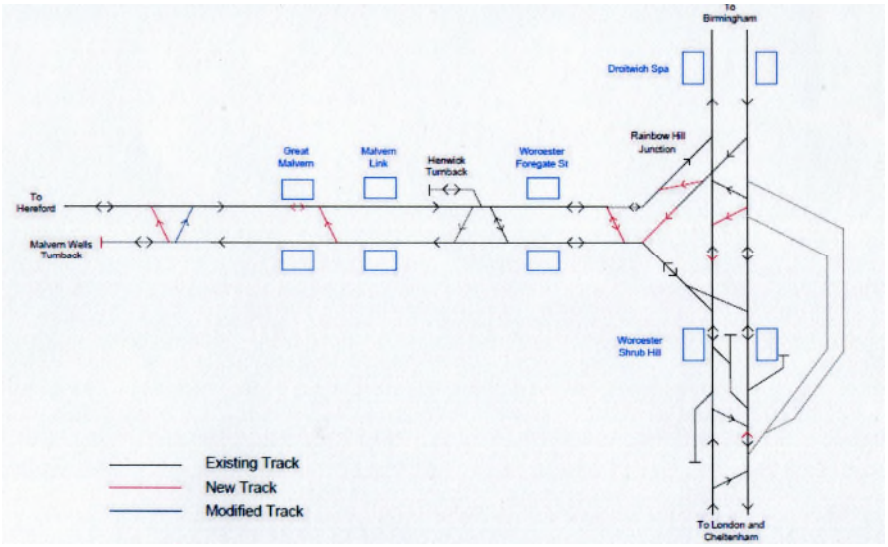
THE WEST MIDLANDS AND CHILTERN ROUTE STUDY
by Roger Davis

On 30 June, Network Rail published its West Midlands and Chiltern Route Study which details its plans to support the growth of rail usage on the existing network in the region in the period up to 2043. This means that new routes such as Stourbridge Junction to Walsall are outside the scope of this study, although the reopening of the line as a through freight route by 2043 is mentioned but not considered an option as the forecast growth in traffic will not support the reopening of the line.

By 2043, the pattern within each hour on the Stourbridge line is predicted to be :

1	Semi-Fast	Cardiff - Gloucester - Worcester Foregate Street - Kidderminster - Stourbridge Junction - Birmingham - Leamington Spa
1	Semi-Fast	Worcester - Kidderminster - Stourbridge Junction - Birmingham - Leamington Spa
1	Local	Kidderminster - Stourbridge Junction - Birmingham - Leamington Spa
1	Local	Kidderminster - Stourbridge Junction - Birmingham - Dorridge - Stratford-upon-Avon
1	Local	Stourbridge Junction - Birmingham - Whitlocks End - Stratford-upon-Avon
1	Local	Stourbridge Junction - Birmingham - Whitlocks End
2	Local	Rowley Regis - Birmingham - Whitlocks End

To achieve this timetable, which would see the longer distance services from south of Kidderminster speeded up, two major infrastructure improvements would need to be undertaken.



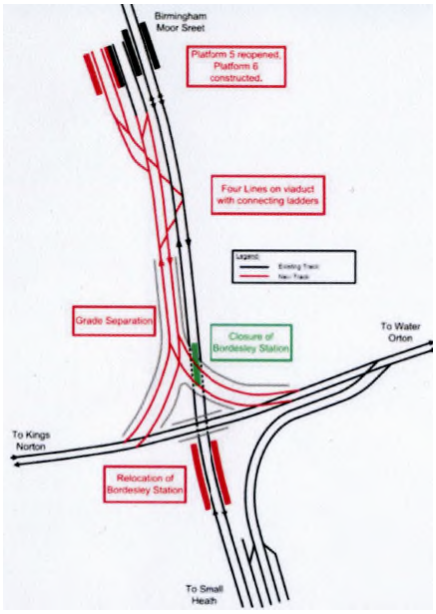
The first will involve improvements to the track layout in Worcester. The proposals, to be carried out in about 2023, would redouble the track between Worcester Tunnel Junction and Foregate Street station and would provide crossovers to enable trains between the two Worcester stations to access platform 2 as well as platform 1 at Foregate Street. In addition, a crossover between Worcester Tunnel Junction and Shrub Hill station would enable trains from Droitwich Spa to access platform 1 at Shrub Hill. The greater flexibility between the two Worcester stations would mean that trains on the Stourbridge line could operate Droitwich Spa - Worcester Foregate Street - Worcester Shrub Hill - Worcestershire Parkway or Cheltenham Spa and beyond, something that SLUG has been campaigning for and has requested in the new West Midlands franchise.

The second major infrastructure improvement is the proposal to build a turnback platform at Rowley Regis and reopen platform 4 at Snow Hill by 2019. The Study is quoted as follows :-

A concept has been developed for a new 6-car turnback at Rowley Regis station to support this service option. The preferred location for the new turnback is on the car park side of the station, where an old cattle dock remains. The Up Rowley Regis Goods Loop is removed and replaced with a shorter lead and turn back as part of this concept. The ITSS proposes a new inner suburban service operating between Rowley Regis and Birmingham Snow Hill. The turn back would support this service operation and also offers potential journey time savings into Birmingham for fast services originating from Kidderminster, Stourbridge Junction and Worcester which may not need to call at inner Birmingham stations (stations which would be served by the new inner suburban service).

In addition, four Stourbridge line stations have been identified as needing work to prevent overcrowding on platforms. It is proposed that Birmingham Moor Street and Birmingham Snow Hill need improvements by 2019. Moor Street needs major work on platform 1 which is far too narrow for the number of passengers who use it as well as extra shelters at the London end to encourage passengers to spread out more. The gate lines on the main concourse are also identified as needing to be expanded. At Snow Hill, the main proposal is the reinstatement of platform 4. Worcester Foregate Street station is proposed for enhancements by 2024 as the single flight of stairs and single lift from each platform is considered to be insufficient to allow passengers to disperse from the station at peak times. Finally, Smethwick Galton Bridge is considered confusing to passengers changing between trains because of its multiple levels and is under consideration for improvements in the longer term.

Capacity on Stourbridge line services is addressed in the document, with two options proposed to increase the number of carriages by 2023 - either by 8 carriages which is considered to have high value for money or by 13 carriages which is rated as medium value for money. It is estimated that an additional 36 carriages will be needed by 2043.



Improvements to capacity in central Birmingham are proposed by the building of the Camp Hill chords that would link the lines from Water Orton and Kings Norton with Moor Street station. Platforms 5 and 6 would be opened at Moor Street to accommodate trains from Nottingham/Leicester and the South West via Worcester, this necessitating the Chiltern stabling sidings south of Moor Street being moved. It is suggested that the sidings north of Snow Hill could be extended to serve this purpose.

Finally, the rerouting of Stourbridge line trains to New Street is considered in this document but this is considered of secondary importance.

The full route study may be found at
http://www.networkrail.co.uk/long-term-planning-process/West-Midlands-and-Chilterns-Route-Study/

NEWS IN BRIEF
edited by Rob Hebron

HS2 project post Brexit. At the time of going to press, it is unclear whether our new Prime Minister will support the implementation of High Speed Rail Phase 2 (HS2) but clearly, funds from the EU which were not committed before Brexit are no longer available. It now appears that there is some measure of appeasement to HS2 opponents, so as to keep the project on track. It has been announced that the line will be diverted to call at Sheffield Midland in order to plug in to the national rail network in the North of England. This is significant and may be the beginning of a new approach. The implications for the Stourbridge Line are minor but Sheffield would be more readily accessible by changing at Birmingham Moor Street/Curzon Street rather than Birmingham New Street. Whether the walk between platforms is compensated by the reduced train journey times is uncertain.

(Source: Rail Technology Magazine)

Combined Authority offshoot is launched. A new partnership which will precipitate the £1.2 billion construction of future tram routes across the West Midlands has been formally launched. The Midland Metro Alliance brings together a team of planning, design and construction specialists building four new tram extensions over the coming decade on behalf of the newly formed West Midlands Combined Authority (WMCA). It consists of the WMCA, proprietors of the Metro system, rail construction specialists Colas Rail – with Colas' partners Colas Ltd, Barhale, Thomas Vale (part of Bouygues UK and Auctus Management Group) and a consortium of design experts from Egis, Tony Gee and Pell Frischmann.

Transport for West Midlands, the replacement body for Centro is now the executive arm of the WMCA and is charged with delivering Metro extensions using portions of a £1.2 billion pot associated with HS2 connectivity.

(Source Centro/ Network West Midlands)

London Midland and TfWM sign Partnership Contract. The new partnership focuses on a 45-point plan, which London Midland said would 'build on past successes and deliver further local improvements'. In particular, services on the Chase line between Birmingham New Street and Rugeley Trent Valley are set to be improved following electrification, while London Midland and TfWM will agree a schedule of capital projects which they will aim to deliver jointly. The schedule will include at least the existing projects for Stratford-upon-Avon and Longbridge. Other areas in line for improvements include the Midland Metro at Birmingham New Street, the redevelopment of the interchange at Wolverhampton station, which is set to be served by Midland Metro with an extension of the tram line from St George's, and identifying suitable locations for more park and ride sites at stations. There is also a pledge to provide more wi-fi on passenger services, improve ticket machines at stations and improve CCTV on trains. *(Source Railnews)*

THE WEST MIDLANDS RAIL FRANCHISE - THE STORY SO FAR
by Roger Davis

In issue 3 of Platform, we reported on the public consultation for the new West Midlands Franchise that is scheduled to replace the current London Midland franchise in October 2017. SLUG attended meetings and subsequently responded to this consultation which ended on 22 March. So what has happened since?

On 7 April 2016, the Government announced that three companies had been shortlisted to operate the new franchise. They were :-

- London & West Midlands Railway Ltd, a bid vehicle formed by the Govia joint venture of Keolis (35%) and Go-Ahead Group (65%) which has operated the current franchise since 2007 under the London Midland brand.
- West Midlands Trains Ltd, a subsidiary of the Abellio Transport Group Ltd business of Dutch national passenger operator NS, with East Japan Railway and Mitsui Corp as minority partners.
- MTR Corp (West Midlands) Ltd, formed by Hong Kong MTR subsidiary MTR Corp (UK) Ltd.

However, on 22 June 2016, MTR announced that they were pulling out of the competition, 5 days after joining forces with First Group to bid for the new South Western franchise.

Thus the competition was down to two bidders with none of the “big boys” such as First, Virgin, Stagecoach, Arriva and National Express considering the franchise as important (or profitable?) enough to operate.

Govia, as well as operating the London Midland franchise, currently operates the Southeastern and Govia Thameslink Railway franchises, the latter franchise consisting of Thameslink, Great Northern, Gatwick Express and Southern. Southern and Gatwick Express have been the subject of much negative media publicity recently as the result of rail strikes, last minute service cancellations and late running, forcing an emergency timetable to be introduced with 341 services cancelled. It has meant that some towns have seen their train service substituted by a replacement bus service and this has resulted in one Cabinet member remarking that Govia should not be allowed to bid for new rail franchises unless it can sort out the appalling situation at Southern.

Electric Multiple Units for Thameslink (white), Gatwick Express (red) and Southern (green) at Brighton station

Abellio has operated the Merseyrail franchise since July 2003, and operated the Northern Rail franchise for over 11 years, losing out to Arriva in March 2016. It gained the ScotRail franchise this year, although this franchise has also been beset by industrial action recently. The East Anglia franchise which it gained in February 2012 was retained in July 2016 and Abellio will operate it until 2025, promising to invest £1.5bn to replace one of the oldest train fleets in the country with 1,043 completely new electric and bi-mode vehicles by 2020, and operate 1,144 additional weekday services. However, local commentators in East Anglia have expressed dismay at Abellio retaining the franchise.

An impression of a new Stadler Flirt Electric Multiple Unit for East Anglia

With the shortlisted companies announced, the timetable for the new franchise was to be as follows :-

July 2016	Publication of the Invitation to Tender (ITT)
29 November 2016	Govia and Abellio submit their final bids
June 2017	The preferred bidder is named
15 October 2017	The new franchise starts

The Invitation to Tender sets out the minimum requirements which bidders must include in their detailed proposals and was published a month late on 30 August. The major improvements promised for the Stourbridge line are an increased evening frequency on Mondays to Saturdays from December 2018 with three services per hour operating to Kidderminster, two of these continuing to Worcester. December 2021 will see the Sunday service increased to six trains per hour between Birmingham and Stourbridge with four per hour serving Kidderminster and two per hour continuing to Worcester. The Stourbridge Town branch would also see six trains per hour on Sundays from December 2021, while the new franchisee is required to address crowding problems encountered on this service. Better connections at Worcester for onward services to Gloucester is mentioned in the ITT. However, although the Rugeley, Cross City, Bromsgrove, Solihull, Shirley and Northampton lines have been promised earlier services on a Sunday morning, the Stourbridge line has not. SLUG will be raising this very serious issue with West Midlands Rail and the shortlisted companies as soon as possible.

Although publication of the ITT was a month late, the rest of the timetable is shown as unchanged with the new franchise starting next October. However, if it is not met, there is a clause in the current London Midland franchise extension agreement that allows the current franchise to continue for up to 13 months to November 2018. We will keep you informed of developments as they occur in future editions of Platform.

COMMITTEE NEWS
by Paul Humphreys

Stourbridge Line Visitors. The Stourbridge line will see changes to services using the line when the line through Bromsgrove is closed from 26 October to 6 November.

A Plymouth to Edinburgh HST passes through Stourbridge Junction on 27 July 2014.

On Mondays to Saturdays from Wednesday 26 October to Friday 4 November, there will be four additional CrossCountry services per hour passing through Stourbridge Junction at xx13 to Cardiff Central, xx22 to Edinburgh, xx44 to Plymouth and xx52 to Nottingham. Stourbridge line services to and from Worcester are liable to be fuller on these days as Birmingham New Street to Hereford services will not operate between New Street and Worcester Shrub Hill.

On Mondays to Fridays, off-peak services at xx57 from Stourbridge Junction and xx23 from Birmingham Snow Hill will be cancelled between Stourbridge and Snow Hill, with the following journeys at xx07 from Stourbridge Junction and xx33 from Snow Hill making additional stops at Lye, Old Hill and Langley Green.

On Sunday 30 October, the CrossCountry services to Cardiff, Edinburgh, Plymouth and Nottingham will operate along the Stourbridge line, as well as Birmingham New Street to Hereford services. On Saturday 5 November and Sunday 6 November, only Birmingham New Street to Hereford services will operate via Stourbridge. Normal Stourbridge line services will operate alongside the interlopers.

Kidderminster Station Improvements. David Balme (Worcestershire County Council) has told us that the late opening of the new Bromsgrove station has delayed the intention to display the proposals for Kidderminster station during the summer. However, there is now a new project manager leading on this, an architect is working on the building and designs for the forecourt are also progressing. Hopefully, we can pass on more concrete news in the next edition.

Kidderminster Station

Brenda Lawrence, the Snow Hill Lines Manager at London Midland, told us that a "Meet The Managers" session has been arranged for early evening on Tuesday 8 November at Kidderminster. This will give Kidderminster train users the opportunity to put their views to Brenda. She also hopes to have more information about the improvements to Kidderminster Station to pass on to customers at the session.