PLATFORM

STOURBRIDGE LINE USER GROUP

Issue 6 December 2016

In the next West Midlands franchise, the colour scheme for train liveries will be specified by West Midlands Rail. This is an artist's impression of how the livery could look, although the bidders will put forward their own designs as part of the bidding process.

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VIEWPOINT
by Roger Davis

On Saturday 17 September, SLUG Officer Keith Flinders uncovered two additional services operated by Chiltern Railways. This was a return Silver Set journey from Stourbridge Junction to London Marylebone and back, leaving Stourbridge Junction at 0645 and returning from Marylebone at 1910. The Class 168 Turbo services that normally departed at these times were retimed to run a few minutes later. When SLUG asked Chiltern about the extra services, it was told that this was because of the Cricket One Day Cup Final between Warwickshire and Surrey at Lords. In addition, a landslip on the West Coast Main Line near Watford Junction had reduced Virgin services by a third. The additional services operated to and from Stourbridge Junction rather than Birmingham because the Silver Set was based at Stourbridge Depot giving cricket fans in the Stourbridge area through services to and from Lords. This possibly ignored the fact that Stourbridge is historically in the county of Worcestershire and the majority of cricket fans in the area are "Pears" rather than "Bears". Unfortunately, the match finished 30 overs early just before 4 pm so it turned out that the return service to Stourbridge was a bit late for most cricket fans.

Saturday morning services

SLUG has long campaigned for through services from Marylebone on Saturday evenings, and for return services on Sundays, given that Chiltern trains are stabled at Stourbridge throughout the weekend and operate out of service between Stourbridge and Birmingham. The actions on that Saturday prove that Chiltern are willing to operate through services under certain circumstances, although no attempt was made to advertise them along the Stourbridge line. The four Saturday morning services from Kidderminster to Marylebone are always well patronised at Stourbridge line stations despite passengers having to change at Birmingham on the return journey, sometimes having to wait up to 57 minutes for a connecting service to Kidderminster on Saturdays and up to 74 minutes on Sunday evenings. Therefore, SLUG believes that Stourbridge line passengers who travel on direct services to London on Saturday mornings deserve through return services in the evening and would support them. SLUG also believes that Stourbridge line passengers would also fully support through Sunday services to and from London.

Saturday evening and Sunday services

Three Saturday evening services that terminate at Birmingham then continue out of service to Stourbridge Depot, while two return out of service journeys operate on Sundays. SLUG believes that some, if not all, of these journeys should operate in service and will continue to press Chiltern Railways to provide these services.

IN COMMITTEE
by Paul Humphreys

At the November 2016 meeting, the following items relating to London Midland and Chiltern Railways were discussed.

London Midland. Brenda Lawrence, the Snow Hill Line Manager at London Midland, provided the committee with an update on **Kidderminster station** development work. SLC Rail has been appointed as project managers for the work and CH2M has won the contract for developing the forecourt. Considerable work will be involved here including access to and from Comberton Hill and improvements to the bus interchange. The planning work is underway and by the New Year we will know how things will look. She said that there will be "enhancement over previous proposals".

The committee have noted the number of **short formed trains** over recent periods (e.g., two carriages instead of timetabled three; three instead of four). Brenda said short forms are discussed within London Midland every morning and that January will see carriages damaged earlier in the year by engine fires returned to service.

SLUG has long been campaigning for a better **evening service**, including that on weekends. This is not just a question of the number of trains but their uneven spacings. For example, passengers travelling late (sic) out of Moor Street towards Stourbridge on weekday evenings have trains at 2218, 2256 (a gap of 38 minutes) and then the last train at 2300 (just 4 minutes later!). SLUG gathers that due to "technical challenges" this is unlikely to change until the new franchise at the earliest.

Chiltern Railways. The committee has noted that when there are **incidents in the London area** (such as the fairly recent cable fire in the Kilburn area) Birmingham/Kidderminster bound services are often cancelled throughout their entire run instead of a foreshortened run from/to, say, Leamington Spa or the Birmingham stations. London Midland has been expected to pick up the slack. But this has led not only to inconvenience but in some cases severe overcrowding. David Heathfield, new Chiltern rep, has informed the committee that these decisions have not been "optimal" and that "lessons learned (from such incidents) will be incorporated into future contingency plans".

Chiltern received special praise from SLUG committee member Roger Davis, who had travelled with friends to Wembley Stadium. His friends were very impressed with the Silver Set on the outward service from Stourbridge Junction, and that an additional stop at Wembley Stadium had been provided on both services. In addition, the return service to Birmingham had been strengthened from 4 to 6 carriages meaning that everybody got a seat. The only thing that could have improved matters would have been the return journey continuing to Stourbridge!

NEWS IN BRIEF
edited by Rob Hebron

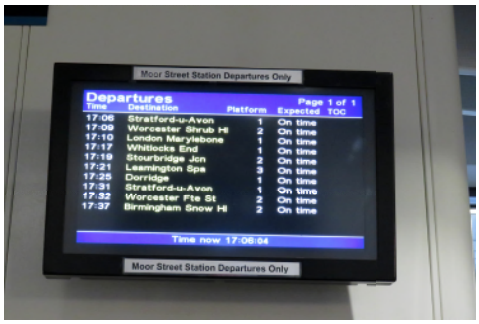
Metro Stop Re-named. The problem of the misnamed Snow Hill Metro tram stop appears to have been recognised by Transport for West Midlands (TfWM). The designated interchange for Birmingham Snow Hill railway station is now Bull Street and the inappropriate Snow Hill will be re-named St Chads from January 2017. The Bull Street Metro stop provides level access to the nearby Snow Hill station and has a pleasant walking link route.

(Source: Birmingham Post and Mail)

Metro to Stourbridge? This is posted on the WMCA website - "In relation to the Wednesbury to Brierley Hill Extension, Councillor Huxtable reported of the need to be ambitious and suggested that a Metro link to Stourbridge Junction could form part of the scheme. The Metro Programme Director concurred with the need to be ambitious and advised that the Metro link to Stourbridge would need to fit with the wider transport plan so that this could be taken forward as an add on if appropriate".

(Source : Minutes of West Midlands Combined Authority Transport Delivery Committee, Oct 2016)

Birmingham Moor Street Departure Information. A screen showing live departure information for Moor Street station has been installed at New Street station. It is situated on the pillar between the two exit doors that lead to the Bull Ring Centre. This enhancement follows a campaign by SLUG to get such a facility installed for the benefit of Stourbridge line passengers transferring between New Street and Moor Street. All that is needed now is a screen on Moor Street station showing live departure times from New Street. SLUG will keep pressing for this.



(Source: Roger Davis, SLUG)

PPM for Wednesbury? The pioneering Class 139 vehicle which operates the Stourbridge Town branch is being considered for another application in the Black Country. The railcar, also known as the Parry People Mover or PPM60 may be the preferred option for transporting passengers between the metro tram stop in Wednesbury and the town's bus station. Plans are at a very early stage but councillors are excited about a proposal for a loop line which will connect the two locations at a considerably lower cost than to build a Metro extension from the Great Western Street tram stop. Bosses said they are 'very hopeful' about the project, which could be up and running within two years. Parry People Movers Ltd is being consulted to design a railcar which would be capable of carrying the optimum number of passengers expected to use the new facility. SLUG is pleased to learn that the PPM railcar is back in favour with transport planners and its crew has received a well-deserved commendation from the rail industry for service and performance.

(Source: - Express and Star)

A TALE OF TWO TIMETABLES
by Roger Davis

I travel regularly from Birmingham New Street on the 1117 Plymouth service, a train which carries a large proportion of occasional rail travellers. On every journey, I observe a number of passengers either checking their watches or staring at the time on the platform's departure screen and tutting as the time passes 1119 with the train still stationary in the platform. However, when the train departs at 1120, it is actually on time although 3 minutes late in the opinion of most passengers.

This passenger has been staring at the time on the screen since 1117 and the train hasn't moved!

The reason is that the rail industry has two timetables. The first is the Great Britain Timetable (GBTT) which is the one that the public sees at stations, on websites and in printed timetable booklets and leaflets. The second timetable is the Working Timetable (WTT) and this is the one that the rail industry uses to operate its services. The WTT differs from the GBTT in three major areas :-

The train leaves - on time !

(1) All WTT timings are to the nearest half of a minute.
(2) Arrival and departure times are shown for stations and junctions along the route, in addition to the calling points.
(3) On a minority of occasions, the times in the WTT do not match those in the GBTT.

It's 1127 and the train is on time as it approaches Selly Oak

It is point (3) above that explains the anomaly of the Plymouth service as the WTT clearly shows the departure time from New Street as 1120, and not 1117 as the public are led to believe. One explanation I was given was that the GBTT shows the earlier time to ensure that passengers are on board by 1117 to enable the train to depart promptly at 1120. If this is true, then why are the GBTT and WTT times the same at other major stations along the route, such as Edinburgh Waverley, Newcastle, Leeds, Sheffield and Bristol Temple Meads?

However, one area in which the WTT and GBTT times are known to differ more frequently is the arrival time at the destination station. A few years ago, the national press had a field day when they discovered that Penzance-bound services heading downhill from St Erth took over twice the amount of time needed for trains travelling uphill in the opposite direction. They accused First Great Western of massaging the arrival times to improve performance figures.

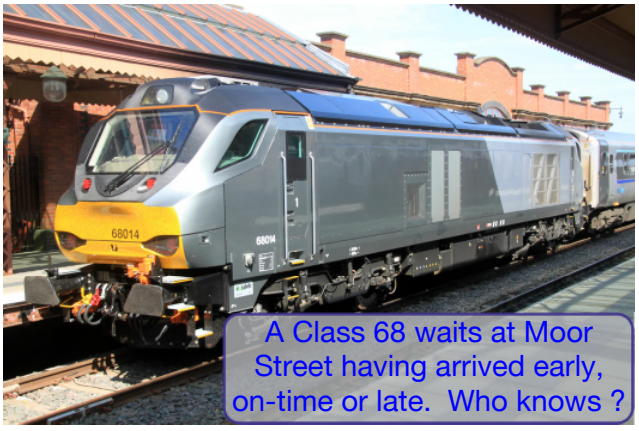
Unfortunately, the practice still continues in other areas and you don't have to look too far from home for an example. The following table shows the five Monday to Friday evening services operated by Chiltern Railways from London Marylebone to Stourbridge Junction or Kidderminster. The red times are the GBTT timings and the blue figures those from the WTT.

London Marylebone	1615	1715	1815	2010	2110
Lye	↓	↓	↓	↓	2343
Stourbridge Junction	1828	1928	2034	2237	2347 2352
Kidderminster	1839 1844	1936 1941	2043 2048	2245 2250	....

The 0910 (SO) service from Kidderminster arrives at Stourbridge Junction at 0918. Why does a similar service need 16 minutes in the opposite direction?

Thus, as far as the public are concerned, the four Kidderminster terminators are given between 13 and 16 minutes to travel from Stourbridge junction to Kidderminster non-stop, while the Stourbridge Junction terminator is allowed 9 minutes from Lye to Stourbridge Junction. One explanation may be that Len McCluskey has threatened strike action by Unite members if the man with the red flag who obviously walks in front of these trains is redeployed in contravention of medieval Health and Safety Rules. The more obvious explanation is that the timings in the GBTT allow a train leaving the penultimate station 5 minutes late to reach its destination on time. Even more disturbing is that a train leaving the penultimate station just over 30 minutes late will arrive at its destination within 30 minutes of its scheduled arrival, meaning no compensation for those passengers still on the train under the Delay Repay scheme.

The situation is the same with the 31 Monday to Friday services from London Marylebone that terminate in central Birmingham. On 30 of the 31 services, the arrival time at Birmingham is later in the GBTT. However, 27 of these services have an arrival time in the GBTT which is 5 minutes later than in the WTT, while the other three services see discrepancies of 2, 3 and 3 minutes.



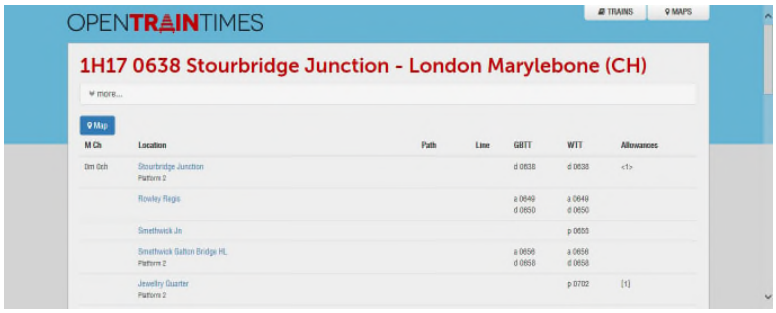
A Class 68 waits at Moor Street having arrived early, on-time or late. Who knows ?

The Moor Street terminators are allowed an average of 14 minutes to run non-stop from Solihull to Moor Street, a time matched by London Midland services stopping at Olton, Acocks Green, Tyseley and Small Heath. However, the Snow Hill terminators can take as little as 8 minutes in the GBTT to travel from Solihull to Moor Street but then need an average of 8 minutes to get to Snow Hill.

This leads to confusing information for passengers changing onto Stourbridge line trains. As an example, a traveller on the 1310 service from Marylebone will see in the Chiltern Railways booklet, which of course uses the GBTT, that the train arrives at Moor Street at 1459, in time to catch the 1509 service to Stourbridge Junction (arr 1538) and Kidderminster (arr 1551). However, as the WTT reveals, the train actually arrives at Moor Street at 1454 allowing enough time to get to platform 2 to catch the 1459 service to Stourbridge Junction (arr 1528) and Kidderminster (arr 1540).

So what needs to happen? Quite simply, the times in the GBTT need to be within 30 seconds of the corresponding time in the WTT at each calling station (rounded up or down to the nearest minute). By doing this, the travelling public will know what is actually happening rather than have to rely on misleading times in the GBTT.

The Working Timetable can be viewed on-line on a number of websites. One excellent example is the Open Train Times website (shown right) which may be accessed at www.opentraintimes.com



YOUR SLUG SUBSCRIPTION

The SLUG subscription of £3 for members who receive an electronic copy of Platform via email and £4 for members who receive a printed copy via post has remained unchanged since April 2009.

Unfortunately, in that period, postage costs have increased from 30p to 54p per issue, while printing costs have also increased significantly. For that reason, the Annual General Meeting held at Kidderminster SVR station in May voted to change the subscription rates from 1 January 2017. The good news is that the subscription for on-line members will remain unchanged at £3. However, to cover costs, we have been forced to increase the subscription for postal members to £5.

Obviously, it was not a decision we took lightly, but we hope that you will agree that £5 for four issues of Platform per year is still a good deal.

CHRISTMAS PHOTO QUIZ

The following are photographs taken at well-known railway locations in the UK. Larger images can be viewed on the SLUG website. Can you name the locations?