

CfR NEWS ARCHIVE 2017

1 January 2017
Through Trains To Wales Saved



Some good news to report, following an intervention by *Campaign for Rail*. The Welsh Assembly Government (WAG) has announced that the new Wales and Borders rail franchise will include cross-border services between England and the principality.

A consultation held at the start of the year on the new franchise had included the suggestion that these services should have been split at the border, with WAG having responsibility for the portion running within Wales and another franchise running the portion in England. The result could have been rail passengers wishing to travel to or from Wales being forced to change trains at stations such as Shrewsbury or Hereford on the border.

Campaign for Rail reminded WAG in its comments to the “Setting the Direction for Wales and Borders Rail” consultation that these cross-border services are important for users both in Wales and England and that they should be maintained. WAG has now stated “it has reached an understanding with the UK Department for Transport that the current Wales and Borders franchise map will remain intact”.

This is a victory for rail passengers. Current through services such as Birmingham – Aberystwyth, Birmingham – Holyhead and Manchester – Cardiff will continue, and WAG are looking at the possibility for additional services from Wales to Bristol and Liverpool.

Four companies are currently bidding for the new Wales and Borders franchise. They are:

- Abellio Rail Cymru;
- Arriva Rail Wales/Rheilffyrdd Arriva Cymru Limited;
- KeolisAmey;
- MTR Corporation (Cymru) Ltd.

A further consultation on the Invitation to Tender and service specification is to be held at the start of 2017 by an organisation called “Transport for Wales” established by WAG. The winning bidder will be known later on in the year.

3 January 2017
CrossCountry Trains Must Do Better



The following is a press release issued by Campaign for Rail

RAIL CAMPAIGNERS have condemned a proposed recast of a train operator's timetable which is planned to take effect in December 2017. *Campaign for Rail* has described the plans of Birmingham based Cross Country Trains as "lacking vision" and being unable to satisfy rising demand.

Cross Country claim that they will be "improving the experience for 250,000 passengers". However, they will be reducing services and making them less attractive for customers. The proposals include:

- The withdrawal of all Cross Country stops from Bromsgrove, which has just had millions of pounds spent on a brand new station which *CfR* believe should cater for the Nottingham – Cardiff service. Whilst the Cross City service operated by London Midland should be extended to Bromsgrove by May 2018, passengers from Bromsgrove and South Birmingham will be forced to travel to New Street and change trains there.
- The reduction of through services west of Exeter. Passengers value through trains and the plans to withdraw all through trains from Birmingham to Torquay and Paignton will make rail a less attractive option for long distance passengers between the Midlands and South West, such as students and holidaymakers.
- Replacing a 13:03 service from Birmingham – Aberdeen with one departing at 06:00 from New Street. This will make the service much less attractive as it is not possible to get into Birmingham by 06:00 from most parts of the country by train. The only through train of the day from Aberdeen now gets to Birmingham at 16.03. Under Cross Country's supposed improved

timetable, that would become 23.25! Anyone wishing to take the rail option would need to stay overnight in Birmingham.

- Cutting back the 1225 Plymouth – Glasgow Central to terminate at Edinburgh, and the 1325 Plymouth – Edinburgh to terminate at Newcastle. The current first train from Edinburgh to Plymouth at 0606 would start in the planned new timetable at Newcastle.
- “Improving journey times”, but scant detail as to how this would be achieved.

Ian Jenkins from *Campaign for Rail* stated the proposals were “a poor show by Cross Country”. He added:

“The way both Cross Country and the Department for Transport Rail Group in London (who specify the franchise) have gone about this is wrong. Rather than seeking to provide additional capacity to meet growth they are attempting to stick to the resources available. In the long run it will mean overcrowded trains and dissatisfied passengers, especially as fares go up. It is the same sort of trick British Rail used to try, to stifle demand rather than cater for it.

“Also, Arriva own both Cross Country and Chiltern. The difference in attitude between the two is striking. Chiltern have obtained additional carriages and have run extra trains to cater for growth. Cross Country seems to have no wish to expand its business. There is no entrepreneurial flair.

“The timetable proposals are frankly not good enough and need to be revisited. But Cross Country is the backbone of the UK passenger rail network, so in addition a long-term strategy needs to be developed for this vital franchise.”



4 January 2017
Class 230 Project Must Continue



There has been a set back to the project to introduce a class 230 unit to operate the Nuneaton – Coventry line. The prototype unit, 230 001 suffered a fire during a test run on Friday.

It appears the fire occurred in an engine module. All of the staff travelling on the test run from Viva Rail managed to evacuate safely from the unit. The train has been moved to Tyseley depot for an investigation to take place and for an assessment of the unit.

Campaign for Rail hopes the project will continue. There is a desperate need for additional passenger trains and the class 230 project offers an innovative solution. As well as providing more capacity on routes like Coventry – Nuneaton and the Marston Vale line the unit could be an option for a number of re-opening projects, where the costs of obtaining rolling stock are at present prohibitive placing a barrier to the scheme.

We do hope that the development work continues, that lessons are learnt from the incident last week and that it will be possible to introduce a class 230 unit into revenue earning service during the course of 2017.

8 February 2017
Rail Devolution Hits The Buffers



The following is a press release issued by Campaign for Rail

PLANS TO DEVOLVE the specification and management of rail services in the West Midlands to a consortium of local authorities have been shunted into the sidings by Secretary of State for Transport Chris Grayling. Rail campaigners have described the move as “a politically motivated betrayal” and said this shows Mr. Grayling to be “out of touch with rail passengers in the Midlands”.

The revelation is contained in the latest edition of the journal *“Modern Railways”*. This states that Mr. Grayling has ruled out “full devolution” and references to this in the collaboration agreement between the DfT and West Midlands Rail have been removed. Instead, the document states the parties will meet on an “annual basis to discuss progress”.

Mr. Grayling blocked the devolution of the commuter routes operated by SouthEastern to the London Mayor last December. It subsequently emerged that Mr. Grayling had written a letter to the former London Mayor Boris Johnson opposing rail devolution in 2013, for fear a Labour Mayor would gain control of transport links. This led to fury from a senior Conservative backbencher Bob Neill who said Mr. Grayling should step down.

Ian Jenkins from Campaign for Rail said “We can only conclude that yet again Mr. Grayling is putting party political dogma before the interests of rail passengers. Commuters are frankly fed up with the service offered by the current franchisee. Devolution would ensure the rail operator is more accountable to the people it served. The current arrangement does not work and the Department for Transport in Whitehall do not have a clue what is going on here.

“If Mr. Grayling has blocked the proposal for fear that voters will elect a Labour Mayor, that is pathetic. There is support for the devolution scheme across the political spectrum in the region and the Conservative leaders of Staffordshire County Council, Warwickshire County Council and Worcestershire County Council support it, as does the Conservative Chair of the West Midlands Combined Authority. The devolution would be across the region, not just in the Metropolitan area.

“Devolution has delivered better rail services and better value for taxpayers elsewhere.

“We think that Mr. Grayling should consider the words of his colleague Bob Neill carefully and his position.”

16 February 2017
HS2, Brexit and Newts



*The Campaign for Rail team with HS2's Jonathan Lord, Senior Engagement Manager for Phase 1, Conrad Jones, Area Manager for Phase 2b and Public Affairs Officer, Lee Marsham.
Photo: Hugo Semner, HS2*

When the team from Campaign for Rail and HS2 agreed the date of our February meeting, it was in the expectation that Royal Assent would have just been granted to the bill for Phase 1 of the new line. This is the section from a rebuilt Euston to Birmingham Curzon and to join the Trent Valley line at Handsacre, north of Lichfield Trent Valley. The parliamentary process has, however, been delayed by a few weeks as politicians have been preoccupied with Brexit.

However, ground investigations are already underway and contractors appointed. At some sensitive sites, archaeological investigations are about to begin for which HS2 has its own staff. Also underway is the relocating of wildlife such as newts. New ponds for them are being constructed this spring, so that these are ready for moving the newts into in 2018.

Then the bulldozers will move in and tunnelling work also gets underway in earnest in the autumn of next year, for completion in 2023. Track laying and electrification follow, with the first trains in 2026. They will be part of the West Coast franchise to be awarded next year.

The first part of the second phase [2a], from Handsacre to Crewe is just a year behind. So, after only a year's intensive use, the link north of Lichfield is likely to see only the one train an hour that will call at Stafford. The rest of HS2 [2b] is from a triangular junction near Coleshill to Leeds and Church Fenton, near York, plus north from Crewe to Manchester and Golborne, near Wigan. Last November, the property consultation and route refinement exercise for 2b began. Most of the route was confirmed, but changes were proposed for seven stretches, including a longer viaduct at Kingsbury, south of Tamworth, past Measham and East Midlands Airport, plus a rethink for Sheffield and a parkway station in South Yorkshire. By the end of this year, the route should be finalised, with a hybrid bill set before parliament before the end of 2019 and construction of Phase 2b is due to begin in 2022 or 2023, with trains running by 2033.

CfR asked for an update on a link in north London to HS1. Disappointingly, Camden Council is being funded to look at ways of making the walk between Euston and St. Pancras less unattractive, but we saw a glimmer of hope in that both stations, Curzon and Interchange are still planned to be built with international provision [passport checking, customs etc.]. Our campaign to ensure that the Washwood Heath site included HS2 use has been successful. This was confirmed as HS2's principal maintenance depot and the HS2 Control Centre. As we have argued, there will still be land on the old Alstom and DAF sites for other new industries. We predict the HS2 presence will itself attract other hi-tech rail related businesses here, helping regenerate this part of Birmingham. We asked that consideration be given to adding a chord from the classic line out to Water Orton to the HS2 Birmingham branch so that services such as the Plymouth - Edinburgh trains could use HS2 between Birmingham and York.

The rate of progress had noticeably increased since our last meeting with HS2 and when we next meet we expect to hear about the specification for the new trains, more on interchange between the West Midland stations and the extent to which HS2 will meet the Midlands Connect aspirations of improving travel between West and East Midlands.



3 March 2017
Campaign for Rail Annual General Meeting on 18 March



The 2017 Annual General Meeting of *Campaign for Rail* will be on Saturday 18 March 2017 starting at 10.30 am and finishing at 12.15 pm.

The venue is the Bertha Wright Room in the Carr's Lane Church and Conference Centre, just across the road from Birmingham Moor Street station. A map showing the exact location is displayed below.

We are very pleased to welcome this year's guest speaker, Faye Lambert who will be giving a presentation "Your Community, Your Station, Your Railway". Faye at present is the Community Engagement Lead for London Midland, who is the current operator of local rail services in the West Midlands. London Midland is currently encouraging more community groups to adopt their local station. Groups in Longbridge and Hednesford have already taken up the offer.

Faye has also worked as the Community Rail Officer co-ordinating the "North Staffordshire Community Rail Partnership", which has been running for 10 years on the Crewe – Stoke – Derby line.

As well as CfR members we would welcome any community groups in the West Midlands interested in their local station and wishing to find out more about the station adoption scheme.

It will be followed by our AGM, in which we report on our campaigning and you tell us about your experiences and aspirations. We look forward to seeing you.

12 July 2017
The Great Train Lottery



Each week, hundreds of thousands of people buy tickets for two lotteries each weekend. One lot are hoping to be “in it to win it”, with their numbers coming up and receiving a prize or a jackpot of several million pounds. The other are just hoping the train they need to go and see relatives, or go on a trip away, or to a sporting event, or to get to work turns up.

Recent weeks suggest travelling by train on a Saturday or Sunday is becoming more of a lottery, with cancellations due to “staff shortages” becoming a more regular occurrence. At one point London Midland could have been considered to be the worst offender. However, the company have improved their act by taking extra traincrew on, although cancellations due to staff shortages at the weekend still happen, notably on the Birmingham – Liverpool route.

Virgin West Coast had an appalling weekend on the 1st and 2nd July. Given how PR savvy the company normally is, deciding to “blame a driver going AWOL” was not the smartest move. (The driver booked for the service actually could not work it, as a delay caused by a suicide meant if he had worked the train concerned, he would have breached drivers rest rules). Virgin then went on to say “not enough drivers were volunteering to work rest days” – though the cynic might wonder how on earth they can run a service relying on volunteers working rest days. It’s like a hospital planning its routine operations by assuming that the surgeons and nurses needed to perform the procedures will come in to do them on their days off.

GWR have also had the same issues – with cancellations due to driver shortage happening on a weekend when cricket fans would have wanted to travel from Bristol to Cardiff for a T20 game between England and South Africa.

The rail industry knows that more people are travelling by train and at weekends than they did in British Rail days and are running more services – yet the TOC's have failed to ensure they have enough staff available to run the advertised timetable when planning their bids for the franchises.

If it's not staff shortages then it is industrial action, on Northern (operated by Arriva), on Merseyrail, on GTR/Southern. It centres on the removal of conductors from trains and the extension of Driver Only Operation. The dispute on Southern has now spread elsewhere around the network as the Department for Transport continues to push for an extension of DOO in new franchises in the belief it will save money – even though the vast majority of users value the presence of a conductor. Of course, a disgruntled workforce could show their frustrations with their employer by deciding not to come in on a rest day or do overtime on Saturdays – with cancellations being the result. Then rail strikes on a Sunday inevitably mean problems both on the Saturday before and the Monday morning with stock being in the wrong place.

Infrastructure is also temperamental and can have a habit of failing at the wrong time, such as a summer Saturday. Such as a “multiple” points failure at Bristol Temple Meads on the 1st July. The result was delays, cancellations and chaos effecting GWR services, but also those of Cross Country. A problem at Bristol can affect Cross Country services as far away as Manchester and Glasgow. The offending sets of points will cost Network Rail millions as they receive claims for compensation from the TOC's, which will then face claims from disgruntled passengers who've had their weekends ruined.

A whole set of staff spend their days deciding who to attribute responsibility for delays; is it the fault of a TOC, or Network Rail? Millions are spent playing the blame game, which could actually be used to get the infrastructure improved so that it was more resilient.

For the regular commuter (although it may not seem it) reliability has improved. But for the occasional passenger using the trains on a weekend their experience may well decide if they will use rail again or will take the car next time. Given suggestions that we are now going into a period of economic turbulence losing customers is the last thing the rail companies need. Having to take the same chance of their train running as picking their six lucky numbers or the winner of the 2:45 at Newmarket is not going to encourage the weekend leisure passenger to use rail.



20 July 2017
Passengers “Short Changed” As Wiring Scrapped



The following is a press release issued by Campaign for Rail

RAIL CAMPAIGNERS have said passengers in the East Midlands are being short changed after the Government announced plans for electrification of the areas main Inter-City line are being axed.

It was originally planned the line from London St. Pancras to Derby, Nottingham and Sheffield would be electrified by 2023. However, the line will now only be electrified as far as Kettering in Northamptonshire with hybrid “bi-mode” trains being used. The Department for Transport have claimed these “would improve journey times sooner, without the need for wires and masts on the whole route”.

Ian Jenkins of Campaign for Rail said the “East Midlands was being left with a second class railway”.

He added: “Today’s announcement is a kick in the teeth for rail users in the East Midlands and South Yorkshire and businesses who wanted better transport links.

“The DfT announcement is also total spin. Full electrification would have delivered a faster service with more capacity for other trains, such as local trains and freight, as electric trains can accelerate faster freeing up paths.”

“As for the claims that electrification is expensive and causes disruption, why hasn’t Chris Grayling challenged Network Rail? Other countries have electrified main lines on their networks more quickly than we have. Even the much derided British Rail delivered the major electrification of the East Coast Main Line from London Kings Cross to Edinburgh on time and on budget.”

Mr. Jenkins also pointed out that the Inter-City service from Birmingham to Nottingham is woeful. “The current service from Birmingham to Nottingham has an average speed of just 47 mph – more slow-coach than Inter-City. Had Midland Main Line electrification taken place it would have made sense for the gap from Proof House Junction via Tamworth and Burton on Trent to Derby, and the Derby – Trent Junction – Nottingham line to be wired. It would have allowed Birmingham – Nottingham services to be operated by electric trains and would have freed diesel units for capacity enhancements elsewhere.”

“Today’s news just shows there is no national plan or strategy for electrifying Britain’s railways and the Department of Transport Rail Group is simply not fit for purpose”.

19 October 2017
The Best Laid Plans



ON PAPER it all looked so good. “In the fortnight before the launch, do publicity for the new trains with the Famous Five on social media and on TV, making out their introduction into service will be a “big adventure”. Then on the big day, run them on two crack services between London and Bristol. Invite all the press, TV and Twitter people, ask the Fat Controller (aka the Secretary of State for Transport) if he can come for the ride to Paddington and have some helicopters filming from above to show the nice shiny new trains overtaking the old ones. Oh, and bring lashings of Ginger Beer!!!!”

Except, as the reader of an Enid Blyton book will tell you, things do not always go according to plan. Especially on the railways, where a lack of attention to detail has meant defeat often being snatched from the jaws of victory. For example, the disastrous launch of the Advanced Passenger Train in 1981, timed to coincide with what is known to cause problems to all shiny new trains – heavy snow. That and giving out loads of booze to the press pack resulted in the trains being given (unfairly) the Queasy Rider sobriquet and eventually being hidden from view and scrapped.

There was no beer for those awaiting the 06:00 from Bristol Temple Meads to Paddington on Monday morning, hauled by GWR's brand new class 800 bi-mode trains. But the service left 25 minutes late, hardly an auspicious start. Instead of having a constant temperature, the train had been set to Gas Mark 4. The air conditioning also failed, but instead of water dripping into tanks it ended up pouring inside the carriages – in the process short-circuiting a passenger's laptop. Further technical problems meant delays en route resulting in arrival at Paddington at 08:25 – 41 minutes down.

However, the train that did not receive all the press attention going the other way had rather a better start. The 07:00 London Paddington – Bristol left on time. There were no reports from that service of overheating or malfunctioning air conditioning units. It arrived six minutes late at Temple Meads.

It has been an embarrassing launch for the class 800's. But they need to settle down into service quickly, without further hiccups. The InterCity 125's, which have given 40 years reliable service to the railway are going from the Western. If the class 800's can offer high reliability then yesterday will soon be forgotten. However, if the new trains suffer rather more serious problems then some hard questions once again need to be asked about the competence of the Department for Transport in specifying franchises. We must remember that the operators have had pretty minimal involvement in the specification of these trains, compared to other fleets.

Perhaps those bringing new trains into service should also concentrate on getting them on track fault-free, rather than arranging glittering launches with managers and ministers. Curiously British Rail just put the InterCity 125 into service 40 years ago with no fanfare, introducing onto an existing service with slightly revised timings. The Chairman of BR and the then Railways Minister were nowhere to be seen.

As a footnote, the APT may have been a spectacular failure as a marketing exercise, but the technology wasn't. The APT is the grandfather of Virgin's fleet of Pendolinos, which are now in their fifteenth year of operation and have given reliable operation on the West Coast Main Line day in and day out, from London Euston to Glasgow. They will surely prove to be as iconic as the InterCity 125. The Class 800s have a high standard they need to meet.



31 October 2017
All Change And About Time Too



The next few weeks will see the biggest changes to the rail network in the West Midlands for over ten years. London Midland, who've operated local services and semi-fast trains between Birmingham and Liverpool and on the Trent Valley line from Euston since 2007 are approaching their final station. Abellio, who will be operating local services in the West Midlands under the West Midlands Trains banner and on Trent Valley as London Northwestern are mobilising to take over from Sunday 10th December.

However, London Midland leave a legacy of issues that have not been dealt with, which the new brooms will need to get to grips with rather quickly.

Firstly, staffing. Last week was school half-term week. It is a period when many workers want to take time away to spend with their families. Most other businesses take this into account in their workforce planning and ensure they have enough staff available to deliver their services during their week. London Midland was cancelling services left, right and centre owing to "a shortage of train-crew". Clearly LM's complement of staff is not enough to deliver the advertised service. No-one begrudges railway staff having time off over half-term, but families using the network for trips out may not repeat the experience if trains keep being cancelled.

CfR have also suspected for some time that London Midland mask cancellations for train-crew shortages for other reasons, such as "the late running of the inbound service". As an example, on the 24th October the 15:12 service from Birmingham New Street to Rugeley Trent Valley was cancelled owing to "the late running of the inbound service". The stock for this train is formed using that of the 14:45 from Walsall to New Street, due in at 15:08. Curiously this late train arrived at New Street at

15:05, three minutes early. Perhaps Pinocchio works updating the London Midland performance computer.

Abellio have made a pledge to increase the Sunday service across the West Midlands, so that by May 2021 there are as many services on Sundays as there is on a Saturday. Given that weekend services at present are reliant on rest day and overtime working, they need to ensure they recruit more drivers and conductors to the staffing establishment is larger than that bequeathed to them by London Midland. As more and more people are travelling on a Sunday this pledge is one that we expect Abellio to keep.

This week also marks the start of the “leaf fall” timetable on the Cross City line. It means misery for commuters, as services see skip stops and often have 3 car trains on all station services where six would be better. *CfR* understands leaves on the line are a serious problem, but the current timetable is, to put it frankly, a joke. It is best illustrated by the trains that arrive at Longbridge – a station with a huge car park, a new college within walking distance and a growing district of Birmingham. Rather than picking up passengers there then running non-stop to University which would help ease the pain for commuters, London Midland start two trains per hour from Selly Oak, running them empty from Longbridge. The leaf fall timetable is not agreed with West Midlands Rail in Birmingham, but by DfT mandarins in London. Presumably if the DfT Rail division was based in Birmingham and the staff there had to endure the non-passenger friendly leaf-fall service something rather different would be offered.

Abellio have promised new trains though for the Cross City line, with the 25 year old Class 323 units being replaced with 36 three car Aventra EMU's. Hopefully the specification will include a rather beefier traction package and a little bit more weight, so that they can cope with falling leaves rather better than the venerable class 323's, so the leaf fall timetable, like London Midland, can be consigned to the annals of history.



13 November 2017
New Abellio West Midlands Franchise



On 10 August, the Department of Transport announced that West Midlands Trains Ltd had won the bid to operate the West Midlands franchise from 10 December 2017, taking over from Govia who had operated the franchise since 2007 under the London Midland brand.

In a document titled “Headlines and Benefits” released by West Midlands Rail the same day, the executive summary announced the following benefits for passengers.

West Midlands Trains Ltd (a joint venture between Abellio, East Japan Railway Company and Mitsui & Co Ltd) will deliver substantially more space for passengers and a fleet of brand new and refurbished trains serving the region. Improved passenger information and accessibility standards, more services at weekends and evenings, flexible ticketing for part-time workers, better compensation, free Wi-Fi, station upgrades and an innovative staff gainshare scheme will all contribute to a significantly enhanced passenger experience across the entire network.

The franchise will operate from 10 December 2017 through to March 2026.

Passengers in the West Midlands will benefit from 180 new train carriages creating more space for people, especially during rush hour. This includes an investment in 100 new carriages on the Cross City line in Birmingham, and a further 80 for the Snow Hill line. The new Cross City line carriages will offer metro-style passenger facilities, with increased space to carry more passengers and wider doors.

There will be more than 300 extra Sunday services across the franchise, with most routes operating at Saturday frequencies. There will be more evening and later Saturday services from Birmingham and a new hourly service from Birmingham and Wolverhampton to Crewe via Stafford and Stoke-on-Trent.