

# *CfR* NEWS ARCHIVE 2019

1 February 2019  
Joined Up Thinking at New Street



At the May timetable change, West Midlands Railway brings in a new service pattern, including joining up services that now terminate at Birmingham New Street. The Chase Line from Rugeley sees the start of electric services using mainly Class 350s, which being four car trains considerably increases the number of seats over the Class 170 and Class 153s. It has also needed platforms to be extended. The service is already twice an hour, but from May, trains at xx.19 from Rugeley Trent Valley run to London via Walsall in 3 hours 9 minutes. Trains at xx.46 are through trains to Birmingham International.

Northbound is a little different. Trains arrive at Rugeley TV at xx.10 and xx.38, and both are through trains from Euston. They leave London just 13 minutes apart though [xx.13 and xx.24]. The first of these divides in Platform 3 at New Street, with the rear set reversing and heading for Rugeley via Aston. At the same time [xx.20], the front set leaves as a new service to Crewe via Stoke on Trent. As a four-car train, it provides the service to Stone and the North Staffordshire stations that cannot take longer trains. They are presently served by the xx.46 trains from Euston to Crewe via the Trent Valley. These Trent Valley trains are currently restricted to four cars and often severely overcrowded. Some can now be eight cars as they will go non-stop from Stafford to Crewe.

A benefit of Trent Valley trains going direct from Stafford is connections at Crewe. Northbound, they connect into Virgin's Edinburgh/Glasgow trains an hour earlier. Southbound at present, Virgin trains get to Crewe just three minutes before the Trent Valley trains leave, so effectively the 'connection' is 63 minutes!

The other joining up of services is the Liverpool - Birmingham trains continuing to London via Northampton. The xx.33 from New Street is made up of a 350 from Liverpool coupled to a set that comes in from Crewe via Stoke on Trent. Journey times are longer than by Virgin, but not much longer. The xx.33 takes 1 hour 57 minutes to London compared with 1 hour 25 by the xx.30 Pendolino. In the other direction, one of the twice an hour Liverpools is through from Euston, the other starts from Birmingham International.

*In all of the above, note that times may vary a little in some hours.*

People prefer through trains. The new timetable offers lots of new journey possibilities. It deserves to do well!

*Keith Flinders*

**14 May 2019**  
**CrossCountry Overcrowding Petition Launched**



A petition calling for the Department for Transport (DfT) to take immediate action to address serious overcrowding and reliability issues on CrossCountry services has been launched.

The CrossCountry franchise was due to be replaced this year but the competition was suspended by the DfT because of the impending Williams enquiry into the rail industry (although it hasn't stopped DfT continuing to run competitions and awarding new franchises in other areas). Thus, any improvements to the CrossCountry network that a new franchise would potentially provide have been put on hold by DfT for the foreseeable future.

This means that the gross overcrowding on CrossCountry trains on routes out of Birmingham New Street will not be addressed unless the DfT takes action to provide additional capacity.

In addition, CrossCountry are guilty of cancelling services west of Exeter St David's on a regular basis because of the inability of their Voyager trains to operate along the Dawlish sea wall during very high tides. In November 2018, services were cancelled on 11 of the 30 days with the only CrossCountry services west of Exeter being the small number operated using HST sets. This has resulted in significant delays and inconvenience to passengers travelling to Torbay, Plymouth and Cornwall.

Both issues could be solved very easily. Hundreds of HST vehicles operated by GWR and LNER are currently being replaced by new Hitachi Inter City Express Trains, taken off lease and stored. These trains could be refurbished and used by CrossCountry on all services to Devon and Cornwall, thus releasing existing Voyager units to strengthen other CrossCountry routes. This cannot happen unless DfT agrees and gives permission to CrossCountry to use stored HSTs.

Despite calls from industry experts and much of the railway media for this to happen, DfT has done nothing. For this reason, a petition has been started to put pressure on MPs/politicians to make DfT take action. Campaign for Rail supports this petition and asks you click on the link below to read the petition narrative and hopefully join other rail users who have already signed it.

**8 August 2019**  
**Emergency Chase Line Timetable Demanded**



**Emergency timetable needed to stop train service 'shambles'**  
**(A Press Release issued by Campaign for Rail today)**

An emergency timetable should be introduced no later than September so that passengers can be confident that their train will complete its journey to Rugeley. That's the suggestion being made by Midlands-based Campaign for Rail as passengers continue to complain that they cannot rely on the train service from Birmingham reaching Rugeley.

The demand for an emergency timetable for train services between Birmingham and Rugeley, on what is known as the Chase Line, comes as high numbers of train cancellations and the late running of services between Birmingham and Rugeley since the introduction of May timetable continues.

Yesterday, 7 August 2019, saw passengers suffer 11 cancellations to and from Rugeley by 20.00hrs. Rush hour services were particularly severely affected with no trains to and from Rugeley between 16:29hrs until 19:38hrs. One passenger commented on social media 'it would have been quicker to walk between Cannock and Rugeley'.

The Chair of CfR, Ian Jenkins said **"CfR welcomed the recent investment and electrification of the Chase Line. However, the train service operator, West Midlands Railway Ltd, is delivering a disgraceful level of unreliability for train passengers at Rugeley."** Things have got so bad that some passengers are now considering legal advice. Another user of the service has written to the new Secretary of State for Transport, Grant Shapps MP, stating that "the whole situation is a shambles".

The problems have arisen since May when, as part of the new timetable train operator West Midlands Railway Ltd, decided to operate some of its Chase Line trains through from London Euston. Extending what was previously a local service has meant any late running services have been stopped short of Rugeley and turned back so they can make the return journey to Euston on time from Birmingham New Street. The problems have also affected passengers at Cannock and Walsall.

The service unreliability problems have also been compounded by WMT staff shortages that have also led to train service cancellations along the line. The Member of Parliament for Rugeley and Hednesford, Amanda Milling said: "It is clearly unacceptable to terminate late running services at Hednesford and leave Rugeley passengers with no way of completing or starting their journey."

**"Running to and from London Euston, while great in principle for Chase Line passengers, has led to far too frequent service unreliability mainly due to late running. People use the Chase Line largely as a local service, we need an emergency timetable that passengers can rely upon, and we need it in place urgently after the summer holidays from September."** Ian Jenkins added.