

CfR NEWS ARCHIVE 2013

18 December 2013
A Week In February - The Water Orton Corridor



From 15 to 21 February 2014, the rail companies have to manage without the route from Birmingham to Water Orton. This is the first part of the routes to Derby and Leicester. The first route normally has four Cross Country trains an hour: a long distance train on the Plymouth to Edinburgh axis, a Reading to Newcastle, a Cardiff to Nottingham, plus another Nottingham train that starts from Birmingham. The second route has a Birmingham to Stansted Airport and a Birmingham to Leicester service each hour. To the credit of Cross Country and Network Rail, no bustitution is planned, except on the Saturday and Sunday. Three lines that are normally freight only are to be used for diversions.

North East – South West long distance services

These run to their normal times north of Derby and use the line past the National Memorial Arboretum at Alrewas to reach Lichfield. They come into Birmingham via Sutton Coldfield, but then take up the route of the train normally half an hour later. So services that usually run to Reading will go to Plymouth instead. This produces some strange through trains, such as Aberdeen to Guildford, probably a first in railway history!

Normally the Scotland to the South West trains call at Burton on Trent in one hour and Tamworth in the next. For this week, a call at Lichfield City replaces Tamworth and both Burton and Lichfield are to be served every hour.

Stansted Airport

These trains leave 40 minutes earlier than normal, running non stop through Walsall and Aldridge [where we hope to see the station reopened before the end of the decade] to regain their route at Water Orton. They then pick up all the stops of the Leicester trains that are cancelled for the week and after Leicester, run to their normal timetable.

Cardiff – Nottingham

These run in their normal times south of Birmingham New Street, where they reverse to take the Soho Loop to pass through Walsall and Sutton Park, a few minutes behind the Stansted train. Unusually, at Water Orton, they do not use the 1909 cut off to Kingsbury but take the original route to Derby, which goes to the east of Hams Hall. This is now a freight link from Whitacre Junction to Kingsbury Junction.

These trains also call at Coleshill Parkway, providing for a week an hourly service between there and Tamworth, even though no direct fare exists for the journey!

Coleshill Parkway to Birmingham takes 46 minutes this week, against 12 to 13 minutes usually. Then Cardiff trains sit at New Street for 20 minutes, to take up the paths of those an hour later.

Cross City North

Instead of six trains an hour, this important local service becomes four an hour, at 10 – 20 – 10 – 20 minute intervals. New Street departures at xx.05 and xx.35 will not run. These are the trains from Redditch. For this week they will wait 12 minutes in Birmingham before becoming all stations to Four Oaks. The cancelled trains are the ones that normally run through to Lichfield Trent Valley, so the xx.25 and xx.55 from Birmingham are extended to Trent Valley to replace them.

Departures south from Lichfield Trent Valley are 10 minutes earlier than usual, as the xx.01 and xx.31 arrivals in New Street are not running to make room for diverted long distance trains. So Lichfield City, Blake Street and Butlers Lane drop from four Cross City trains an hour to two. The compensation for Lichfield City is an hourly stop by a Cross Country service. From Lichfield City at xx.55, nonstop to Birmingham in 26 minutes is matched by xx.30 from New Street in 37 minutes, stopping at quite a few signals as it follows a local train. It does give Lichfield a week of wonderful connectivity, with through trains as far as Southampton and Aberdeen!

15 December 2013
Kenilworth Station Gets Government Approval



Plans to reopen Kenilworth railway station, which closed in 1965, have been given final government approval. The Department for Transport has announced it will give £5m towards the £11.3m railway station in Kenilworth. Work will start in 2015 and it is hoped local services between Coventry, Kenilworth and Leamington Spa could start in December 2016, followed by rail services between Kenilworth and Birmingham in 2019. The remaining money needed for the project will come from Warwickshire County Council.

After years of campaigning, the latest bid for Kenilworth Station was submitted in February and received government support a few months later. The station will be on Priory Road in Kenilworth, a short distance from the former station which is now a housing development. The new station would be managed by London Midland and include a ticket office, 90-space car park and cycle parking.

It would be served initially by a new hourly train service between Coventry and Leamington and is forecast to attract 446 return passenger journeys per day. CrossCountry Trains said it supports the station plans but has not made any local service decisions.

12 December 2013
Has London Midland Given Up On The Cross-City Line?



Passengers on the Cross City line through Birmingham, one of the busiest outside of London, must be wondering what has happened to their rail service over the last few months.

Stations on the line have had booking office opening hours reduced, which has forced passengers to use vending machines which do not sell the full range of tickets resulting in passengers paying more than they need to. Meanwhile the sight of a ticket inspector is a rare one. Thousands of pounds of revenue must be being lost every day.

The route has seen frequent cancellations owing to staff shortages, although to be fair to the company the weather has not helped with the recent storms blowing down trees and power cables. But passengers wanting to travel to Birmingham's Christmas lights switch-on last month from Longbridge faced difficulties owing to services being cancelled because of train-crew unavailability.

The company's difficulties made headlines on the BBC Midlands Today news programme after new figures revealed one in five of London Midland's services were either delayed or cancelled. This comes after extensive problems last year when a number of drivers left. LM has recruited and trained 50 new drivers, but about 40 have left. Staff turnover has meant the firm is still carrying a number of vacancies, resulting in Cross City trains frequently being targeted for cancellations.

Meanwhile a councillor on Centro/West Midlands ITA has branded the firm "Scrooges" for deciding to slash Cross City services on Christmas Eve. It is one of the busiest shopping days of the year. It is a normal working day for many people and for passengers travelling to see relatives the Cross City line may provide an important connection. So London Midland has decided to reduce services to half hourly from 14:00. The cynic suspects this has been done by the company as it does not have enough staff to operate the weekday service that operated on Christmas Eves past, so avoiding hefty penalties from the DfT.

Perhaps the interim DfT Franchising Director, Peter Wilkinson might like to get long-suffering Cross City commuters a Christmas present. Getting the company to put more money into the pot to recruit sufficient numbers of train-crew to operate the full timetabled service would be a start. Devolving the management of the franchise to Centro and giving the authority real bite would be another. If action is not taken the Cross City line could end up rapidly becoming the Midlands "misery line".

26 November 2013
New Gas Turbine Locomotive in Russia



Russian Railways have agreed to test a new prototype locomotive built by Sinara Traction at their Production Plant in Lyudinovsky. This new locomotive has a Gas Turbine power unit which uniquely is fuelled by Liquefied Natural Gas (LNG) which powers the turbine at high speed, all of which is then coupled to an electric generator supplied by YETM Privod, to generate electric current for the axle mounted traction motors.

The two four-axle bogies fitted to this loco are designated as 'D0+D0+D0+D0' axle arrangement and are rated at 8.3 MW power output. This loco itself has a maximum speed of 62 mph, or 100 kph. The Gas Turbine power unit was supplied by Kuznecov with all fuel Injection systems supplied by Kriomash BZKM. The tender also depicted above is the second section of this prototype loco and contains the LNG tanks, as supplied and fabricated by Uralkriomash.

The manufacturer of this Gas Turbine loco claims it is unique, but unfortunately that is only partly true as there have been other Gas Turbine locomotives - number 18000 was operated by British Railways from 1949 to 1960 with another oil fired Gas Turbine locomotive operated by the Union Pacific Railroad Inc in the USA in 1958 (these locomotives are pictured right). Neither loco was considered to be an operational success, as both had an unhealthy appetite for fuel, which in the final analysis made them both uneconomic to run as freight traction units. So it will be interesting to monitor the ongoing trial and success of this LNG Powered Turbine locomotive in Russia.

25 November 2013
DRS orders new Type 88 Electro-Diesel Locomotives



Direct Rail Services (DRS) of Carlisle have recently ordered ten (10) new Electro-Diesel Vossloh locomotives, primarily for freight operations in the UK. This new loco will be titled Type 88 and will be capable of electric operation from the 25 kVa overhead power supply, or in self-powered Diesel Engine mode via a Caterpillar V12 Diesel Engine producing circa 3250 bhp at 1500 rpm. The 25 kVa AC Electric Traction package is supplied to Vossloh by ABB of Switzerland and in electric mode alone, this type of locomotive will be rated at 4 MW, to permit rail freight operations at up to 100 mph, or circa 160 kph. The Cat Diesel Engine of 105 litres may be utilised to provide 500 kW of auxiliary power for use when hauling passenger trains, thus giving 317 kN of Tractive Effort in both modes simultaneously.

This New Type 88 Electro-Diesel Loco is an exciting development and will give the operator DRS an enormous increase in operational flexibility. Moreover, these are the first new Electro Diesel locomotives to be operated on Britain's rail network in 60 years.

13 October 2013
Planning Permission granted for new Bromsgrove Station

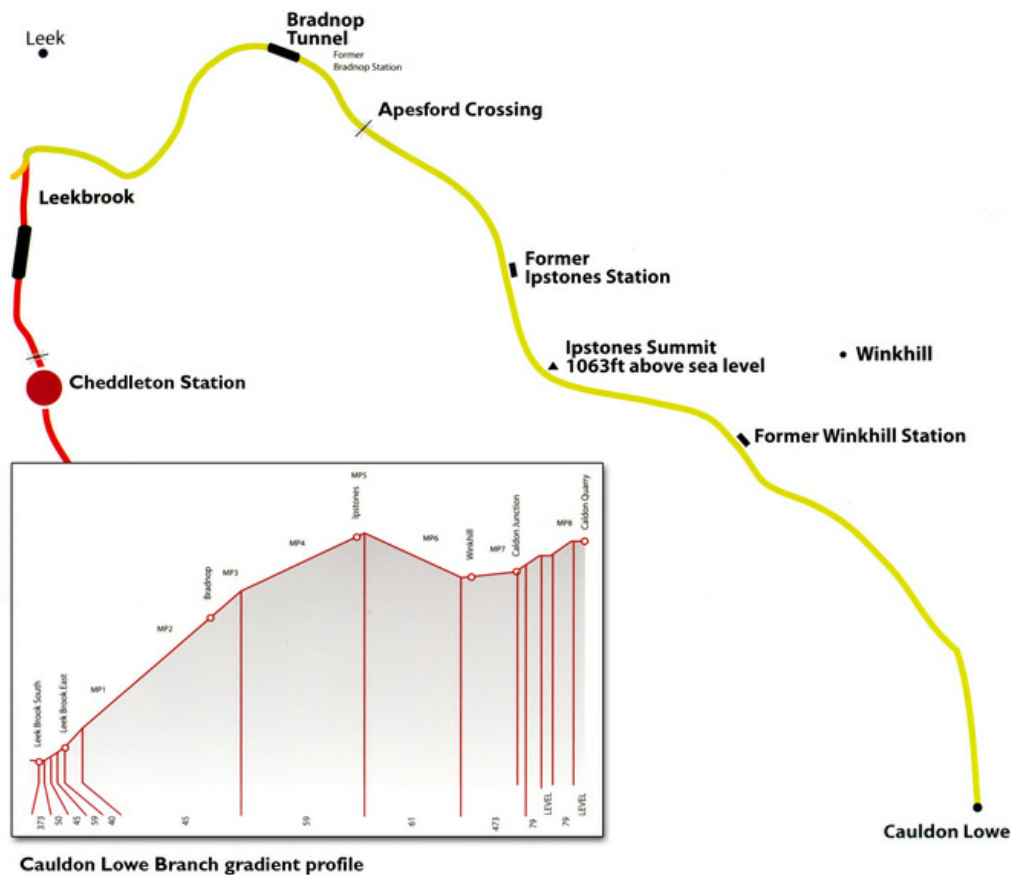


Worcestershire County Council granted planning permission on Tuesday 24 September and work is set to start on the new station complex next spring (2014), for completion in April 2015. This new station will be built in the ex-UK Oil terminal yard 250 metres south of the existing two platforms at Bromsgrove. The £14 million Railway Station project will have four platforms, a manned ticket office, toilets, together with a 350 space Car Park and facilities for buses, bikes and taxis. There will be a DDA compliant Bridge for the less able bodied for access to southbound platforms.

This will be followed by electrification of the Lickey Incline (Barnt Green to Bromsgrove) and corresponding introduction of the extended Cross City Line service from Longbridge down to Bromsgrove, due to commence in either May or December 2016.

There will then be in place an alternating 3 tph from both Bromsgrove and Redditch, with 6 tph from Barnt Green to Longbridge and beyond. We understand that there will also be a new alternating destination pattern for each of those 3 tph northbound services which emanate from both Bromsgrove and Redditch as follows :- *Four Oaks - Lichfield City - Lichfield Trent Valley.*

5 September 2013
Moorland and City rethink Cauldon Lowe



West Midlands Rail User in October 2012 reported on Moorland and City's plans to reopen the mothballed line from the Staffordshire Moorlands to the national network at Stoke on Trent. The section from Leekbrook Junction, where it meets the Churnet Valley heritage line, to Cauldon Lowe had already opened and CVR has run occasional trains on it. The real prize, though, is freight from and to Lafarge Tarmac's quarries and cement works. The business case is sound and the Government's Regional Development Fund awarded £1.65 million, but this is only payable on completion. The company has struggled to raise working capital.

Now, in a surprise twist, MCR has decided to lift the track and remove the ballast for the final three miles to Cauldon Lowe and terminate passenger trains at a reopened platform at Ipstones at the top of the 1 in 45/1 in 59 bank.

The company has not given up on Cauldon Lowe and hopes eventually to relay to there and include a short branch to Waterhouses for passenger services. The station site is still there although it closed in 1935. It was the branch terminus as well as the start of the narrow gauge Manifold Valley line. This is now a cycle track. Waterhouses is accessible by trunk road (A523), has parking and cycle hire, and is on the boundary of the Peak District National Park.

Until then, Cauldon Lowe's industry cannot easily access railfreight. Lafarge Tarmac has quarries and a cement works which generate about 140 lorry movements a day. As well as cement and limestone out, there is flyash brought in. Fuel includes coal, dried sewage pellets and shredded tyres from the Black Country, all of which could use rail when track is reinstated and the link through to Stoke reopened. CfR hopes this will be soon.

1 August 2013

CfR reaction to ORR decision on direct London trains from Shrewsbury and Blackpool



CAMPAIGN FOR RAIL considers the decision of the **Office of Rail Regulation (ORR)** to refuse a track access application for services from London to Shrewsbury and London to Blackpool which were planned to call at Nuneaton, giving it extra London services, to be “extremely disappointing”.

Virgin Trains planned to introduce the services from the December 2013 timetable change and applied to ORR for the necessary paths. The regulator declined the application, claiming there was not sufficient capacity and that “Network Rail were not meeting the punctuality targets it was funded to deliver”.

Rail users may wonder why ORR have declined the application, given that the Shrewsbury and Blackpool services were an intrinsic part of both Virgin and First Groups bids in the aborted West Coast franchise competition of 2012.

Network Rail also has questions to answer. Millions of pounds have been spent upgrading the West Coast Main Line and that investment of course is continuing. But why are thousands of customers who use the WMCL daily suffering delays caused by NR? After all that money going into infrastructure and with WMCL fares being some of the dearest in the country, surely rail users should be getting a reliable and punctual service now - after years of pain during the WMCL upgrades? There is something odd about NR needing “spare paths” to ensure trains run on time and not providing them for new services that have been identified as meeting a public need. All rail operators, both passenger and freight, should be concerned at the conduct of NR in this whole affair.

The decision is a blow for the people of Shropshire, for the county’s businesses and the local economy. Shropshire is the only English county without direct trains to London. Telford is a new town with a growing population, with several blue chip employers based within its boundaries and a modern rail station, yet many rural lines have a better service.

The businesses and residents of Blackpool and the Fylde coast will also be furious. The area has suffered horrendous economic decline, and news that Network Rail were objecting sparked the local paper to start a petition. Whilst a direct rail service to London can only be part of the answer to regenerate this part of Lancashire, it wouldn’t half help. The line to Preston will be electrified soon, and of course Pendolino trains will be able to be used.

CfR thinks the ORR decision is a set-back, but will continue to push for both Shrewsbury and Telford, and indeed Blackpool and the Fylde coast, to get the rail services to London they deserve sooner rather than later.

31 July 2013

30% off Chiltern Railways walk up tickets from Birmingham Moor Street to London Marylebone



From 24 July to 1 September, Chiltern Railways are offering 30% off the price of walk up return tickets from Birmingham Moor Street to London Marylebone.

To qualify for this offer, simply click on the link on the left, register your details on the form on the right of the webpage, download and print your voucher, then just turn up at Moor Street station and buy your 30% off ticket..

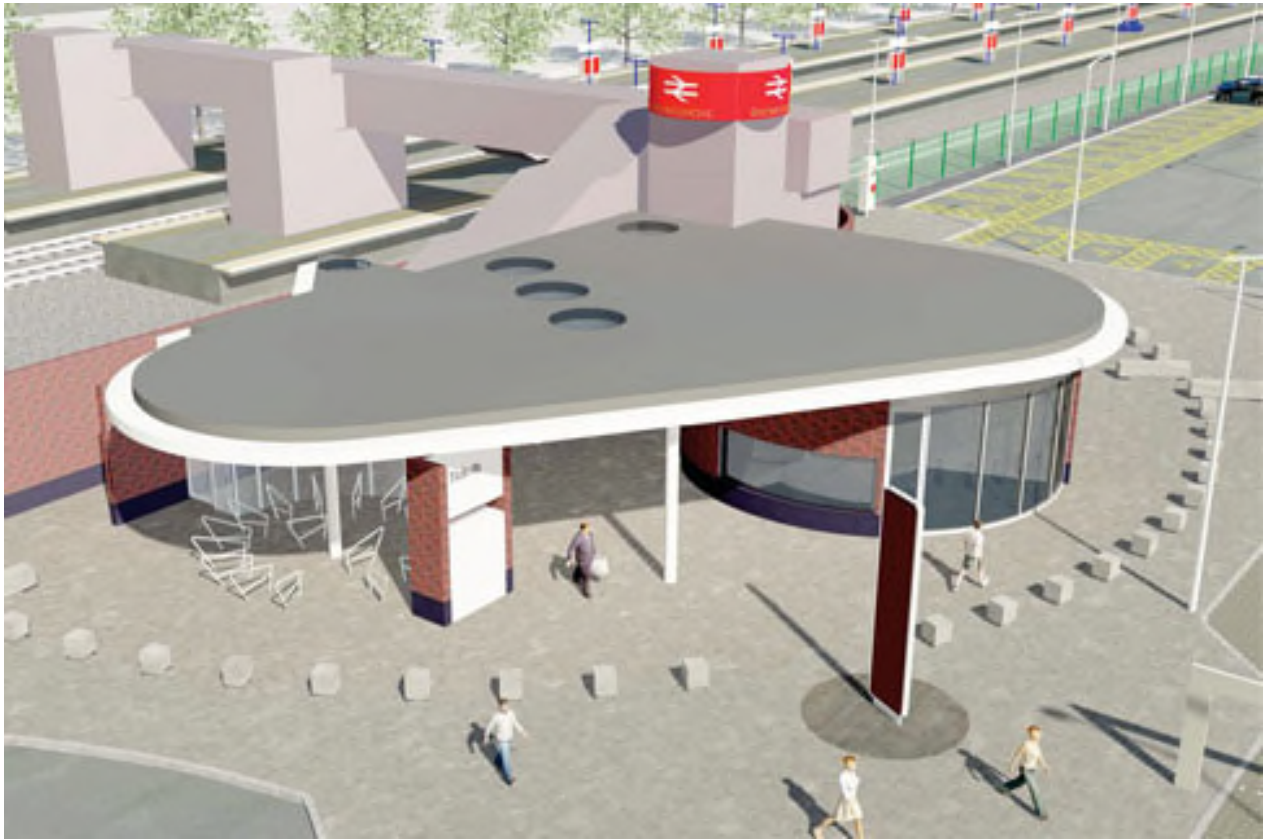
This offer is also available for journeys from London Marylebone to Birmingham Moor Street.

14 March 2013
Birmingham New Street Station Redevelopment reaches half-way



The redevelopment of Birmingham New Street station will reach the half-way stage on 28 April when the current entrance and concourse will be closed and replaced by new entrances and a new concourse at the west end of the station.

1 January 2013
New Station planned for Bromsgrove



Residents, businesses and key stakeholders are being asked to have their say on plans for Bromsgrove Rail Station.

Centro and Worcestershire County Council are jointly funding a new railway interchange in Bromsgrove to replace the existing station, in partnership with the Department for Transport and Network Rail. The current proposal would see the station moved further south to allow Network Rail to electrify the line from Barnt Green to Bromsgrove.

This strategic project will also allow the train companies to increase the frequency of the rail service between Bromsgrove and Birmingham.

Improved facilities and better integration with local bus services will make it more attractive for people to use the train to travel between Bromsgrove and Birmingham and Worcester, reducing congestion, carbon emissions and making it easier to access the town.

Local people are being encouraged to have their say on the plans from January 7 up until March 17, 2013.