

# *CfR* NEWS ARCHIVE 2014

**22 January 2014**  
**More Delay for Shrewsbury to London Direct Rail Service**



Plans to re-introduce direct rail; services between Shrewsbury and Telford to London appear to have hit the buffers again. Local MP Daniel Kawczynski has condemned both Network Rail and Virgin Trains over their "... inability to engage with one another." Virgin Trains is continuing to negotiate with Network Rail regarding paths and is hopeful of commencing a service in December after negotiation.

Campaign for Rail however considers the proposed services to be offered from May would have been unviable. Two trains were proposed, an 11.33 from London Euston arriving at Shrewsbury at 13:50, with a return to London departing Shrewsbury at 16:03. These would have been completely useless for business travellers. For the service to work, there needs to be an early morning departure from Shrewsbury and an evening return from London, with the same applying in the other direction, to enable passengers on business to have a full day in the capital or in Shropshire. Of course, one of the key reasons why the service is needed is to improve links and benefit the economy of Shropshire, which is the only English county without a direct rail service to London.

It is understood lobbying by Shropshire and Telford MP's has led to Patrick McLoughlin, the Secretary of State for Transport becoming involved in the matter. Hopefully, this will lead to some rapid progress being made so that a viable Shrewsbury - London service will commence operation within the next 12 months.

## 6 February 2014 Rail Resilience

Storms have once again thrashed the South West of England and the Great Western Main Line along the coast through Dawlish has been undermined by the sea, with the sea wall breached and some of the trackwork literally hanging by a thread. It is likely the route will be closed for some months to come while substantial rebuilding takes place and that Torbay, Plymouth and Cornwall will be cut off from the network for some time. Whilst the storms and destruction will devastate many individuals and businesses we should be thankful that a serious rail accident has not occurred as a result of the extreme conditions.

However, the scenes this week, together with the damage sustained by the network following the severe weather over Christmas does give rise to the question: "How resilient is the modern railway?"

Clearly the issue of restoring an inland link between Exeter and Plymouth should be revisited as a matter of urgency. The rail journey along the South Devon coast is one of the most picturesque in the country on a summer's day, but the route is being battered more frequently by extreme winds, storms and waves. Who can forget how Cross Country Voyager trains were engulfed by waves throwing sea water on their roofs during storms at high tide, resulting in their electrical equipment failing. The South West, one of the most deprived regions of the UK, must be rueing Doctor Beeching's decision to shut the old Southern Railway inland main-line between Exeter and Plymouth, save for a withered stretch from Bere Alston to Plymouth.

In the West Midlands, there are diversionary routes available that regularly prove their worth during operational difficulties and major engineering works, although these are often running at capacity with their normal timetabled services. For trains to be diverted though it is necessary for crews to be trained up with the knowledge of all possible routes. In the fragmented, privatised railway of today some of that knowledge has been lost, resulting in operators "bustituting" services as there are no crew signed off on the diversion.

Even in the West Midlands, stormy weather is an ever present threat to our rail network. The "tornados" of 2005 left a trail of upturned trees and damaged buildings across South Birmingham, but also resulted in rail lines across the region being flooded and signalling being knocked out of action. Network Rail is looking at running the railway using a network of regional control centres, however would they be able to respond speedily to an incident caused by bad weather 50 or 60 miles away? Would the staff have access to the local knowledge and the expertise of staff in the existing power boxes at places such as Stafford and Coventry? If extreme weather becomes more and more regular, will it be as easy for the rail network to be shut down while the storms pass, or will commercial demands to "keep the trains running" take precedence in control?

The railways have met many challenges before - long winters, storms, armed conflict, massive holiday crowds. But these were different times, when the railway had more resources and manpower available.

Today's railway is a smaller, leaner, fitter and more technologically advanced system, but one which is facing rising demand. How will the railway meet the twin pressures of growing passenger numbers and a variable, extreme climate threatening infrastructure? It is something the politicians and the industry will need to ponder over the months ahead as the Great Western Main Line is rebuilt.

Network Rail are due to produce a report to be handed to Transport Secretary Patrick McLoughlin by July on at least five lines to "complement" the fragile coastal train path. Additionally, Network Rail have announced that the line through Dawlish is due to be re-opened on 4 April. Progress on the repairs can be viewed at <http://www.networkrail.co.uk/timetables-and-travel/storm-damage/dawlish/>.

12 March 2014  
All Together for Two Together

Two Together Railcard



NEW

# 1/3 OFF Rail Fares

INTRODUCING THE TWO TOGETHER RAILCARD

The first new national railcard has been launched since the privatisation of the railways 20 years ago, following a successful trial in the West Midlands. A "Two Together" railcard is now available which allows two passengers travelling together a discount of a third on fares, except between the weekday morning peak from 0430 to 0930. The card costs £30.00 per year and can be purchased either online from the website <http://www.twotogether-railcard.co.uk/> or from a staffed rail station. A 10% discount is available if the card is purchased online.

However, CfR hopes that other railcards will be offered suitable for regular rail travellers, building on the current range which includes a Young Persons Railcard (for those aged between 16 and 25), the Senior Railcard (for those aged over 60), the Disabled Persons Railcard and the HM Forces Card. The Two Together railcard is not much use if you are a singleton who is middle aged! Single travellers living in the South East can buy a Network Railcard, but the boundary for these is based on the old British Rail Network SouthEast area. Surely the Network Railcard could be extended to cover the whole network?

Or a Midland version of the Network Railcard could be introduced? Could it help fill the empty seats on some off-peak local and regional trains?



**3 April 2014**  
**Chance to see New Metro Trams**



Midland Metro passengers will have the first chance to board one of the new trams on Saturday when one is displayed at Birmingham Snow Hill.

The first five of the fleet, built by Spanish firm CAF, have arrived at Metro HQ in Wednesbury. The remaining vehicles will be delivered over the next few months, with Metro planning to put the first of the new trams in service later this Summer. The fleet of new trams cost £42 million and are 100% low floor. Each new tram will carry around 200 passengers and capacity on the line will be increased by 40%.

Construction continues to progress on the extension through Birmingham City Centre to New Street Station. Work by the utilities is now complete with track laying taking place on Bull Street and the laying of a concrete base in Lower Stephenson Street by the Waterstones building. Completion of the contract for the Birmingham City Centre extension is scheduled for August 2015 with the enhanced service commencing in the autumn.

As well as exhibiting the new tram, Centro will also be holding one of its regular "Your Public Transport Matters" events between 10 a.m. and 12 p.m. on Saturday at Snow Hill. Representatives from Centro, Midland Metro, and local bus and rail operators will be present to take passengers comments and suggestions.

**22 April 2014**  
**Nectar Tastes Sweeter with First Great Western**



The loyalty scheme Nectar has tied up with TOC First Great Western. Passengers booking tickets on their website [www.firstgreatwestern.co.uk](http://www.firstgreatwestern.co.uk) can now earn points from their purchases of train tickets.

Linking a Nectar card to a First Great Western account earns 100 points, while purchasing a ticket through the FGW website earns 2 points per £1 spent. However, the company is offering a special deal until Sunday 27th April, and rail travellers can earn double Nectar points.

Season ticket holders can also get points. A passenger buying a monthly season ticket from the FGW website can earn 200 points while an annual season ticket earns 2,500 points.

Passengers can book tickets for **any** rail journey in the UK from the First Great Western site and earn points, not just those from within the FGW operating area in Wales, the South West and Thames Valley. So a passenger booking an off peak open return on a Virgin Trains service from Birmingham New Street to London Euston on the 30th April through FGW would pay £50.50 for their ticket and would earn 202 Nectar points - provided they booked before the 27th April, while someone travelling from Stafford to Carlisle on the same day booking via FGW would pay £66.90 for an off peak return and earn 267 points.

Someone collecting 5,000 points would earn a discount of £25.00, which can be used at a wide range of outlets including Sainsburys, Argos, Warwick Castle, Alton Towers and Eurostar (see [www.nectar.com/spend.points](http://www.nectar.com/spend.points)) . At present Nectar points cannot be redeemed on First Great Western.

Rail passengers who use Facebook might also be advised to "like" the First Great Western Facebook page - [www.facebook.com/FirstGreatWestern](http://www.facebook.com/FirstGreatWestern) - the firm has been running a number of prize draws which Facebook users can enter. A huge marketing effort is being made using social media as the company works to recover from the disruption caused by the Winter storms and advertise the fact the Great Western Main Line is now back open for business as usual.

And in a nod to the past, there is an "app" on First Great Western's Facebook page called "Inside Track", which users can find out tips about places to go and where to stay at destinations in the South West. It is a 21st century equivalent of the "Holiday Haunts" books, published by the steam-era and publicity savvy Great Western Railway.



**12 May 2014**  
**24 Hours in the Life of New Street Station**



**Andy Knowles**, Senior Operations Manager at Birmingham New Street, the busiest station outside London, will take us through a typical day—if such exists!

**SATURDAY 7 JUNE**

Meet at Network Rail Reception on the concourse, next to Marks and Spencer Simply Food at 10.50. There will be a safety briefing before the presentation at 11.00. This will be followed by questions and the AGM, which will include updates on Campaign for Rail's campaigns. The meeting will finish about 13.00.

Please note as capacity is limited, you **MUST** pre-register by email or phone [[campaignforrail@gmail.com](mailto:campaignforrail@gmail.com) or 0121 440 7092] by Monday 2 June.

**THIS MEETING IS STRICTLY PRE-REGISTERED MEMBERS ONLY.**

**23 July 2014**  
**Virgin bids For Family Summer Trips To London**



Virgin is hoping to attract family groups with cheap trips to London this summer. Its promotion, which runs until 31 August, is for one or two adults with at least one and up to four children. It is only available online and can be booked as late as just before midnight on the day before outward travel. The choice of train to London is fixed but return is completely flexible. It could be a day trip, or up to a month and there is, surprisingly, no peak time restriction on return trains. The only restriction is going to London on Mondays to Fridays, when arrival cannot be before 09.30. From Birmingham New Street, 08.10 is the earliest departure. The price, for the whole group, is excellent value at £50 from all Virgin Trains' stations in the West Midlands except Stafford and Stoke, which have the offer at £80. There are though no railcard discounts. It's worth noting that the West Coast Main Line is closed at weekends for re-signalling the Watford area.

How does this compare to offers by other companies? At attractive times for a day out from Birmingham with two adults and four children, London Midland offers £110, dropping to £72 well after peak times, whilst Chiltern wants £320 for the best times Virgin offers, dropping to £60 for an afternoon arrival in London and a late evening return. Since May, Groupsave has been redefined, but Chiltern now has 2Pay4Travel which includes up to four children at £1 each. The travel restrictions for Off Peak Returns apply so the journey cannot begin until after 09.30 and surprisingly, it's still not available online, only at Chiltern stations. It may suit some people but Virgin's offer looks best value and has great flexibility.



**24 July 2014**  
**Birmingham to be HS2 Headquarters**



*Campaign for Rail* welcomes today's news that HS2 Ltd. will be locating its headquarters in Birmingham. The company has signed a lease for 100,000 square feet of office space at the Two Snow Hill building in the Colmore Business District. HS2 Ltd says its new offices will house up to 1,500 employees, including engineers, designers and support staff. Many of the roles will be brand new.

The news raises the prospect that other firms in the rail technology sector may decide to locate in Birmingham and West Midlands conurbation - which is already the base for a number of leading transport engineering and planning firms including Arup, Atkins and Mott McDonald.

However, whilst the news that HS2 Ltd. will be locating its head office here is a vote of confidence for the City of Birmingham, no confirmation has yet been made for the plans for the large site at Washwood Heath, which is proposed to be the main depot and engineering centre for the HS2 fleet. This proposal has attracted opposition from a number of local landowners and the local MP Liam Byrne, who described the depot plan in the local press as a "*marshalling yard*".

The depot will need to go somewhere. The Washwood Heath site ticks so many boxes, especially given its brownfield location, the access to a source of employment and the potential for links with local colleges and universities. The HS2 fleet would be of European gauge, so it could not be maintained at a location outside of the "Y" network of HS2. There also needs to be a facility to serve HS2 that can be capable of doing everything including major heavy overhaul involving the renewal of traction equipment, wiring, wheel-sets, interiors, bodywork and cabs - effectively being able to take one of the trains to pieces and rebuild it. This will need high skilled, specialist staff.

There would also be room for other businesses and there is a strong possibility other engineering firms will take advantage of the site to locate in Birmingham to serve HS2, bringing further high skilled jobs.

If the main depot does not come to Washwood Heath, it will end up going into the Green Belt - causing more anger and upset for those living on the route and environmental damage. In the view of *Campaign for Rail*, the case for Washwood Heath is compelling and strong, and there is no alternative.



**1 September 2014**  
**Alvechurch Upgrade - Photofeature**

The following photos show work in progress to rebuild Alvechurch station and provide a passing loop through the station. Photographs courtesy of Tony Woodward.





**19 October 2014**  
**London Midland announce Cross City Line Leaf Fall Timetable**



This autumn the Cross City Line [Lichfield Trent Valley to Redditch] is to have a revised timetable for six weeks whilst tracks are liable to be slippery from the remains of fallen leaves. London Midland likens it to black ice on winter roads. Acceleration is reduced and drivers need to brake earlier for station stops to avoid sliding past red signals. Some stations will be missed out by some trains, so they will have fewer trains to and from Birmingham.

**Southbound**, the Monday - Friday timetable is every 10 minutes from Sutton Coldfield, with the xx.01 and xx.31 running nonstop to New Street. The next train [xx.11 and xx.41] runs non-stop from Selly Oak to Longbridge. So some journeys such as Erdington to Kings Norton are only half hourly! Both trains to Redditch start from Four Oaks as usual [at xx.17 and xx.47] are not skip stop, with no increase in running time and still only a 5 minute turnround at Redditch. This is where I most expect to see late running. No attempt has been made to use the Alvechurch loop to help the leaf fall timetable. Most curious though is that Sutton Coldfield to New Street takes 20 minutes all stations, 20 minutes for all except Duddeston and 20 minutes non-stop! Similarly Selly Oak to Longbridge is 11 minutes all stations and 11 minutes non-stop. This pattern runs until 20.01 from Sutton Coldfield. For most of the day, many stations have a 10 minute/20 minute frequency. An analysis of the evening peak diagrams suggests only two are planned for 6 cars, so expect overcrowding.

**Northbound** Monday - Friday, there's another curiosity: The Redditch to Lichfield Trent Valley trains are followed by a Four Oaks train beginning at Selly Oak! This must be the xx.14/xx.44 arrival at Longbridge running empty stock to Selly Oak - but why? It means Longbridge has four an hour to Birmingham but six an hour from Birmingham. The trains from Redditch run non-stop between New Street and Sutton Coldfield [in the same 19 minutes as some of the stoppers] but in this direction, the service pattern only runs until 19.05.

Saturdays are broadly similar to weekdays, but there is no skip stopping or extended timings on Sundays. It would seem leaves don't fall on Sundays!