

CfR NEWS ARCHIVE 2016

2 February 2016
Nuckle Stations Open At Last



After much waiting and months of delays, the new stations at Coventry Arena and Bermuda Park on the Nuneaton - Coventry line have opened to passengers. However, while commuters in the north of Coventry have shiny new stations and can catch the train without having to drive or take the bus to Coventry City Centre, the rail service is still only hourly, operated by a single carriage class 153 unit with capacity for just 75 passengers. The result is that passengers wishing to travel to Coventry Arena to watch Coventry City FC, or Wasps, or concerts have been advised not to take the train owing to safety concerns.

There is however the ideal solution at Long Marston in Warwickshire, in the shape of the former London Underground "D" class trains. These were speculatively acquired by VivaRail, with the company thinking they would be a possible replacement for the Pacer trains used on regional services in the North of England. The new franchisee, Arriva Trains North, has decided to procure brand new trains to replace the Pacers rather than use the "D" stock.

So, could the "D" stock not be refurbished, and used as a solution for the NUCKLE service? The "D" class trains have been used on the most heavily used urban rail network in Western Europe, so providing crowd shifting capacity for events at the Arena or home going commuters from Coventry should be a piece of cake. And the cost of using the "D" class units would be much less than brand new DMUs.

The Department of Transport should grasp the nettle and order a fleet of "D" stock trains for the NUCKLE service, so that Coventry and Warwickshire get the rail link it deserves.

17 April 2016 Rail Chaos



It has been an appalling couple of weeks for rail passengers in the Midlands.

On the 5th April services which normally go through Birmingham International were disrupted owing to power line problems. Virgin and London Midland had given up on running services between Birmingham New Street and London Euston, with services starting from or terminating at Coventry, with Birmingham passengers being advised to go to Moor Street and use Chiltern instead despite Chiltern not being able to strengthen every train on the Moor Street to Marylebone route.

The plan for disruption that day appears to have been non-existent. Any blockage of the Birmingham - Coventry line for more than a day would result in a shambles if the experience was anything to go by, with passengers struggling to find out what was going on, rail replacement buses being drafted in without rail staff available to tell them where to go, Chiltern not strengthening some trains on the Moor St - Marylebone route, crowding and discomfort. A Voyager could have been diagrammed to a Birmingham - Nuneaton shuttle, with WCML services to Liverpool and Manchester making a call at Nuneaton for Birmingham passengers. Not ideal; but another option to the Chiltern Line or a slow bus to Coventry to connect with trains there - which would have helped disabled travellers. The fact this option did not happen suggests a number of Virgin drivers have lost route knowledge of the Birmingham - Nuneaton line.

On the 8th April there was a signalling and points failure at Proof House; a key junction on the approach to New Street station. Cancellations were to be expected - it is one of the worst locations for a problem on a network. However London Midland decided not just to cancel services on the northern part of the Cross City line through Proof House junction, but services on the southern part of the route from Birmingham to Redditch with trains replaced by buses. This is bizarre, why on earth could they have not run a Birmingham - Redditch rail service?

The following Monday, 11th April saw more peak time misery. The delays were caused by vandalism to cabling at Proof House Junction. To be fair to the rail industry vandalism is a huge problem; in the West Midlands alone it has cost over £1 million in the last twelve months. What was not acceptable was the message that went out to passengers that morning telling them "not to travel by train". Ticket acceptance is normally agreed with the local bus operators, so why was that not publicised instead? The result was predictable - chaos on the roads as commuters took to their cars. How many of them, after a fortnight of misery have now abandoned using the train?

All of these incidents have cost the regional economy money, as well as causing misery for thousands of commuters. An inquiry was recently held in public regarding the closure of the M6 through the Midlands, and a number of issues emerged. No doubt the rail industry will have its own internal investigation, but it should be held in public so the region's elected representatives can ask what on earth happened rather than being behind closed doors. Rail users deserve answers. A last hurrah for Centro to arrange, before it is subsumed into the combined authority later this year.

18 April 2016
***Campaign for Rail* Annual General Meeting on 7 May**



Campaign for Rail's Annual General Meeting will be on **Saturday 7 May 2016** starting at 10.30 am and finishing at 12.30 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, Richard Dugdale, Commercial Schemes Sponsor for Network Rail Midlands Region. His presentation is entitled, 'Delivering Improvements to Rail in the West Midlands'.

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.

6 May 2016
Bromsgrove Progress



Work is progressing on the new station at Bromsgrove. The projected timeline for the project is as follows:-

Spring 2016:

The new re-located Bromsgrove station to open, with the existing service timetable replicated using the inside mainline faces of the new island platforms (numbers 2 and 3).

October 2016:

An 11 to 12 day total line possession, to enable;

- The demolition of the existing station infrastructure.
- The formation of the proposed loop into platform 4 (an alignment cutting through the southern end of the now vacated existing Down platform).
- Completion of all necessary track modifications, involving the lifting of various sections of existing track and subsequent installation of revised track alignments, including the installation of some eight revised turnouts.
- Bromsgrove area re-signalling, the full extent of which, is yet to be fully established from Network Rail.
- Electrification of the Lickey Incline, from the existing overhead wiring at Barnt Green, to just south of Newton Bridge, which is situated just beyond the new Bromsgrove station.

May 2017:

The whole project completion, with the introduction of the 3tph Cross City Line service (Class 323's), extended down to Bromsgrove from Longbridge and exclusively using Platform 3 at the new station. All other traffic, both southbound stopper services (Class 170 Worcester/Great Malvern/Herefords and existing, two Cross Country Cardiff timings) and all through passenger and freight movements, will be pathed through the looped, Platform 4.

CfR Officers Tony Woodward and Mike Ponsonby have photographed work as it progresses and thumbnails of their photographs are displayed on the following page.



31/12/2014



17/01/2015



15/02/2015



17/02/2015



17/02/2015



18/02/2015



15/06/2015



15/06/2015



15/06/2015



15/06/2015



22/10/2015



27/10/2015



27/10/2015



31/10/2015



31/10/2015



31/10/2015



1/11/2015



09/12/2015



09/12/2015



25/12/2015



27/01/2016



28/01/2016



28/01/2016



12/04/2016



12/04/2016



12/04/2016



03/05/2016



03/05/2016



03/05/2016

28 May 2016
Metro Slow Slow Not Go Go

Sunday 22 May was the day that the extension of Midland Metro from Snow Hill to New Street, part of a £128 million upgrade should have fully opened to passengers. But there are no trams running to New Street as the extension needs "track alignment work". Centro have said the need for this work to take place is down to checks following test runs of the trams conducted last month.

The latest delays are frustrating, but they are the latest chapter in a long running saga of dithering, delay and disappointment. The extension of Midland Metro through Birmingham City Centre was originally proposed back in 1999 just after Line One from Snow Hill to Wolverhampton was opened, with a route from Snow Hill via Corporation Street and New Street Station to terminate at Five Ways. Centro undertook a public consultation in 2001, applied for a Transport and Works Act Order in 2003 and obtained powers to build the line back in 2004, subject to work being undertaken to divert bus routes from Corporation Street and Bull Street to other termini. The line was scheduled to open to trams in 2009.

Then delay number one happened; the election of a new administration on Birmingham City Council which decided to initiate a feasibility study costing £150,000 into diverting the Metro underground. This concluded that it was technically "feasible", but building the route underground would push up the cost considerably.

Further delays came from the Department of Transport dithering over providing funding for the scheme, thanks to the mixed messages being sent from Birmingham. A funding package was only agreed in early 2010, prior to the General Election of that year; but the package would only allow construction of the Metro as far as New Street Station. The extension onwards to Five Ways would have to wait.

Having received the cash, one would have expected Centro to have put in place a programme to enable rapid construction and instruct its contractors to work safely but speedily. Progress has been glacially slow, not helped by deciding to suspend works during the annual German Christmas Market (even though a sensible planner would have concentrated works in this period on parts of the route not affected by the Yuletide event).

In 2014 contractors were moved to Wolverhampton to undertake track replacement work on the route there. This particular project was scheduled to take sixteen weeks. The discovery of an old mineshaft under the Metro tracks did not help progress, although one wonders why this was not picked up by surveys when the original Metro Line One was built in the late 1990's. The Metro line between Priestfield and Wolverhampton St. Georges end up being closed for nearly six months - meaning no trams into Wolverhampton during the busy Christmas Shopping period in 2014. Thousands of commuters and leisure travellers were lost - how many have gone back to using the trams?

The Birmingham Extension should have opened to New Street in April 2015. Then it was delayed to September 2015, to tie in with the opening of the expanded New Street Station concourse and Grand Central Shopping Centre. The opening day of New Street came and went, but the trams were still terminating at platform 4 at Snow Hill. Work to divert the Metro line to the new formation was scheduled in October 2015, but with yet another closure and trams terminating at St. Pauls some distance from the city centre. Again, the sensible planner would have scheduled this phase of work for the summer holiday period where the nights were lighter and people would have felt happier walking through the back streets of Birmingham - not in autumn as the clocks were going back.

Once again, work was completed late and the new temporary terminus at Bull Street opened on the 6th December 2015, the first time trams had run on-street in Birmingham since 1953. It was announced the extension to New Street would be completed in early 2016, then April 2016, then would open on the 22nd May 2016, but now it looks as if the extension will not open until Centro has been subsumed into the new West Midlands Combined Authority which is to commence operations on the 10th June.

The delays have led to huge anger from businesses along the route who've been disrupted and were hoping business would pick up with tram operations; the extension has been built at the rate of 32 inches per day since construction started in 2012. To put this into context:

- Manchester Metrolink has completed a whole network of routes across Greater Manchester since Centro planned the city centre extension in 2000. These have included lines to Oldham, Rochdale, Ashton-under-Lyne, East Didsbury and Manchester Airport. A new spur has also been provided to the MediaCity UK complex in Salford. The progress of the Manchester Airport extension should shame Centro; this Metrolink route was not delayed and opened nearly a year early.
- Phase One and Phase Two of the Nottingham Express Transit Light Rail system has been built in the fifteen years it has taken to get the tram from Snow Hill to New Street.
- Blackpool Tramway, the oldest operating tram system in the UK has undertaken a modernisation programme. A scheme to replace worn out track and power supplies and introduce Flexity 2 trams to provide the regular day to day service took just four years from funding being secured from the DfT to completion in 2012.

Councillor Victoria Quinn of Birmingham City Council has said the Birmingham City Centre project should be scrutinised following its snail like progress. We agree - but the Metro failures are not just confined to Birmingham, or Wolverhampton.

At least Birmingham City Centre will see trams - eventually. At the same time as proposing the extension in Birmingham Centro obtained powers to build a Midland Metro line from Wednesbury, via Dudley Town Centre and the Merry Hill Shopping Centre to Brierley Hill. This was supposed to have opened in 2010 and there has been some construction work.....an extension to the car park at Dudley Port station (which was to have been a heavy rail interchange).

There has been no other work and this abandoned railway rots away, with the ongoing damage to the formation and structures likely to push up costs further when work does start.

The failure of Centro to deliver has led to a complete collapse of public support for further extensions - whilst the improvements in Manchester have had backing from businesses and the wider community with calls for extensions elsewhere in the area. In Nottingham a group has been set up calling for an extension of trams to Kimberley, Eastwood and Amber Valley.

Having failed to deliver the Metro network the West Midlands needs and deserves, Centro are now promoting its latest "pet project", the Sprint "bus that thinks it's a tram". It was claimed delivery of Sprint would be quicker, but the first route has not yet been built and development seems as slow as that of Metro. We do not support Sprint, we think it is a white elephant and the money that is being sucked into this scheme could be much better spent on the conventional bus network instead. It is notable that one area that tried a project similar to Sprint, Swansea, has gone back to using conventional buses. Instead of pursuing Sprint, Centro should do what its counterparts in Manchester have done, get a package in place to complete the Metro network and get on with it; not saddle the second city with a second best public transport network.

The Government wants the Combined Authority to have an elected mayor. Whoever takes on this role should expect their transport planners to deliver and get improvements on the ground, not continually generate studies, consultations and bits of paper. It is an absolute disgrace that Birmingham and the West Midlands conurbation does not have the high quality light rail network offered elsewhere in the UK and a small scheme in the city centre has taken so long to build. We thought the City of Birmingham's motto was "Forward".

1 June 2016 Big Events By Rail



As the weather warms up, so the calendar fills up with big social and sporting events - from the Chelsea Flower Show to Wimbledon, music festivals, cricket matches, and rugby internationals. The league season is now in full swing and a number of rugby union internationals were held at the weekend, prior to the various home teams going on their summer tours.

One such match was at Twickenham on Sunday. To their credit South West Trains organised some additional train services between London Waterloo and Twickenham extra to the normal timetable. But, despite making an attempt to provide some additional capacity, a CfR member reported things did not go to plan.

"Five extra 8-car trains were provided to Waterloo starting from Twickenham at 1715, 1721, 1738, 1743 and 1817. The 1715 arrived at platform 3, filled up and departed. People were then allowed onto platform 3 for the 1721 service, which was re-platformed at the last minute onto platform 4. However, crowd control staff were there to stop anybody from using the station footbridge and would not allow the passengers on platform 3 to use the bridge to cross over to platform 4 to board the train. **As a result, an 8-car train left Twickenham for Waterloo one minute late at 1722 with precisely nobody on board.**"

Oops!!!

At least South West Trains made an effort. Each October, Birmingham hosts a half-marathon. You would think that London Midland would organise some additional trains to allow participants and spectators to get to the event prior to the start at 09:30 a.m. especially given a large part of the city road network is closed to allow the event to take place safely. Every year, LM makes no effort to run any extra trains, so the earliest one can get into Birmingham for on most of the local routes is 9 a.m. - meaning if you were taking part, you'd have to run half-way across the city centre to make the starting gun on time!

Of course, football fans get frustrated with Network Rail. The dates of the big fixtures such as the FA Cup and League Cup Finals are set months in advance, but how often do supporters find they can't get there, owing to "weekend engineering work" (which is also planned months in advance).

Big events are big opportunities for the railway. Get it right and hundreds of additional passengers can be attracted, bringing in extra revenue and goodwill plus the opportunity of repeat trips.

1 June 2016
Southern Rail Misery



It has not been a good few weeks for users of the services operated by Southern Railway. Cancellations have rocketed, partially due to an "unprecedented level of staff sickness" according to the company. The operator is apparently introducing a "remedial plan" including new timetables, allowing them to reduce services and reduce the number of cancellations. Cynics would say that this is simply a way of improving performance by massaging figures, rather like how police forces claimed a reduction in crime by changing the way some offences were recorded.

Commuters in the region are fed up. Croydon MP Chris Philip has said Go-Via Thameslink should lose the Southern franchise.

For West Midlands rail passengers, the saga sounds awfully familiar. London Midland cancelled scores of services in 2012 following staff shortages caused by sickness and drivers leaving the company for pastures new. An MP called the cancellations "unacceptable". Did London Midland lose its franchise?

No - instead it got its wings clipped by the DfT, was ordered to run a special promotion to "compensate" passengers and eventually got an extension to its franchise. To be fair much work has been done by the operator to recruit new drivers and train them up. But it says a lot about attitude of the DfT and ministers that they are willing to tolerate such appalling performance and not publicly summons a contractor to Marham Street in the glare of TV cameras for a "tea without biscuits meeting", or take the keys back. In the days of British Rail if they failed to perform satisfactorily one regularly saw the Chairman or senior managers being hauled over the coals by the politicians.

Maybe if the department was a bit more ruthless and stripped a TOC or two of its franchise if they failed to deliver, it might focus some minds in the industry to deliver a service that is better for the passenger, and better value for the taxpayer.

For West Midlands passengers, the devolution of services backed with a strong authority expecting high performance cannot come soon enough.

12 July 2016
Welcome To New Bromsgrove Station



RAIL CAMPAIGNERS have welcomed the opening of the new railway station at Bromsgrove today. The first train to use the new station will be the 06:20 London Midland service from Bromsgrove to Birmingham New Street.

The new station has been delivered as a joint project between Worcestershire County Council, the now defunct Centro which has been subsumed into the West Midlands Combined Authority, and Network Rail. The station will include a new bus interchange to offer better connections to services in the surrounding area, a booking office (Bromsgrove previously being an unstaffed station) and an extended car park with space for 350 cars plus better security, lighting and customer facilities including a charging point for electric vehicles.

Ian Jenkins of *Campaign for Rail* said that *"Bromsgrove now has a modern station fit for the future and which is appropriate for a growing town. The new station though is only a first phase of improvements, with plans in place to extend the electric Cross City service down to Bromsgrove which will dramatically improve the commuter service to Birmingham from Bromsgrove and the surrounding district."*

Mr. Jenkins added that *CfR* wanted to see more long distance services stop at Bromsgrove. *"At present only one token Cross Country service from Birmingham - Cardiff stops at the station and the vast majority of long-distance passengers have to travel to Birmingham New Street and change trains there. Now the new station is here we would like Cross Country Trains to show some commitment and arrange for more services to call at Bromsgrove"*.

5 October 2016
Not Much Change For CrossCountry



The Department for Transport (DfT) have announced an extension to the Arriva Cross Country franchise until October 2019. "Better journeys for passengers" have been promised, with the pledges including 39,000 more seats at peak times and cuts of 9 minutes on weekdays on Birmingham to Manchester services.

However, rail users should not get too excited. No new trains are being added, so passengers will continue to enjoy the delights of Voyagers and 40 year old Inter-City 125s on the network. A 9 minute cut to Manchester is nice, but a business traveller from Birmingham would have appreciated a reduction in journey time on their return trip and maybe a better deal on their fare, as Cross Country have some of the highest in the UK. This is the also the only train operator that charges customers for collecting web-booked tickets from ticket machines!

For commuters using Cross Country services in the West Midlands, there are no improvements to shout about at all. There is nothing in the blurb from the DfT saying what passengers using the services between Birmingham and Stansted Airport, or Nottingham and Cardiff will gain from the "direct award" to Arriva. These services are used by the growing market of passengers needing to travel between the West and East Midlands as well as long-distance travellers. The average speed of a Birmingham – Nottingham service is a miserable 47 mph, more "slow-coach" than Inter-City. Three more years of crowded class 170s with no respite on the horizon seems to be the immediate future for these services.

Also disappointing is that the opportunity has not been seized to stop more of the Nottingham – Cardiffs at Bromsgrove, now the new station is open. Instead, the token one train per day in each direction remains the Cross Country service, with passengers from the town being forced to travel to Birmingham on the Worcester – New Street London Midland trains if they want to make connections with other Cross Country services to the North or the South West.

To be fair, three years is not a long time and does not offer a train operator much chance to make a return. However, *Campaign for Rail* will be working hard to ensure the new franchise, commencing in 2019 is rather more ambitious and gives passengers a much better deal.