

# *CfR* NEWS ARCHIVE 2020

**1 January 2020**  
**Cross City Gets New 'Leaves On The Line' Treatment**



For years, the West Midlands' busiest local line has suffered a poor service through the Autumn as leaves fall. We have suffered temporary timetables that have cut out stops with poor logic - and still not run to time. Part of the problem has been the light weight of the Class 323s. New trains are coming which ought to cope better.

Now from 14 October for seven weeks to 29 November, Cross City has this year's leaf fall timetable. It only applies on Mondays to Fridays. Up until 09.30, trains will call at all stations into New Street and for all trains out of New Street after 16.00 to give commuters the best service. There will be some easing of schedules by up to three minutes.

From the depot at Kings Norton, Railhead Treatment Trains are touring the West Midlands network, spraying water at high pressure to wash leaf debris off the top of the rails. They expect to cover 121,884 miles in our region, equal to going around the world almost five times. The cost last year was £4.5 million. There are also 118 gel applicators at key points, spraying a sand like gel to help train wheels get a grip.

New this year is a trial of spraying sand directly under a train's wheels when needed. We are hosting this experiment on each Sunday in October between Barnt Green and Redditch. It means Alvechurch and Redditch rail users will be bus substituted on those Sundays.

*Words and photo: Keith Flinders*

**17 February 2020**  
**A Victory for Common Sense**



Campaign for Rail, along with other transport groups, is celebrating after a planning application, which would have threatened a major new rail link, was thrown out by Birmingham City Council Planning and Development Committee on Thursday 13 February. The application involved building a mixed housing, hotel and commercial development on the site of the old Sulzer factory in Camp Hill on land adjacent to the Moor Street to Tyseley line at Bordesley station and close to where the Camp Hill railway line crosses this line. If built, it would have encroached on the alignment of the proposed Camp Hill chords which will connect the two railway lines and enable a frequent service to operate to the new stations at Moseley, King's Heath and Hazelwell and the proposed future station at Balsall Heath.

Campaign for Rail was alerted to the planning application on 6 February 2019 and only had 12 days to respond before the consultation period closed on 18 February 2019. However, it did so vigorously on three fronts – by issuing a press release, by writing to every Birmingham city councillor and by formally objecting to the planning application. Of course, Campaign for Rail was certainly not alone in objecting with transport authorities West Midlands Combined Authority (WMCA), West Midlands Rail Executive (WMRE), Transport for West Midlands (TfWM), Metro Mayor Andy Street and Midlands Connect providing considerable weight along with fellow transport pressure groups Confederation of Passenger Transport UK, Campaign for Better Transport (CBT), Shakespeare Line Protection Group (SLPG) and Solihull and Leamington Rail Users Association (SALRUA).

As a result of the initial objections, the developers made minor changes to their plans to move the building closest to the line further from the alignment, but objectors considered that this revision still threatened the building of the Camp Hill chords.

On 5 December 2019, the Planning Officer's report recommended approving the application subject to a Section 106 legal agreement. The report stated that Network Rail (NR) had welcomed the amendments to the application and had raised no objections to the scheme and that the rail bodies that had raised objections (WMRE, WMCA, TfWM, Midlands Connect) were not statutory consultees. That status was held by Network Rail. A cynic might say that, if you want to avoid doing something, you throw as many obstacles as you can in the way.

The Planning Officer concluded "To reiterate there is a lack of certainty regarding the implementation of the Camp Hill chords due to absence of committed funding, no safeguarded land within the BDP and no definitive route alignment or information relating to land take for construction or operating purposes. Hence Network Rail have not objected to the scheme. The applicants have revised the layout of the plans to potentially provide less conflict with the route if and when Chords come forward. As such there is little evidence to indicate that the current proposals for development would definitely prejudice their delivery and on this basis there is no robust reason to refuse or defer determining the current application."

Thankfully, common sense has prevailed and the application was rejected on 13 February on the grounds that "the proposed development may prejudice the delivery, in terms of its construction and operation, the South West Camp Hill Chord; a proposal to enhance the City's rail network and part of the wider Midlands Rail Hub project".

Thus, Campaign for Rail is pleased that they were able to contribute to this decision while another national rail pressure group was conspicuous by its absence from the list of objectors. With subscription charges a lot less than some other groups at just £10 per year, CfR does exactly what it says on the tin – it campaigns for rail. By doing so in this case, it has ensured that a very important new Rail link still has a future.



**25 May 2020**  
**Successful Bids for Restoring Your Railway Round 1 Announced**



On 14 November 2019, the Government pledged £500 million towards reversing the Beeching cuts of the 1960s. Three rounds of applications were to be submitted, the first by March 2020.

To launch the reversal fund, the Government announced on 28 January 2020 that funding had been allocated to develop proposals for re-opening two lines in the near future. This comprised £1.5 million to the Ashington-Blyth-Tyne Line in Northumberland and £100,000 to the Fleetwood line in Lancashire.

The first round saw 62 applications for funds made and, on 23 May 2020, the Secretary of State for Transport, Grant Shapps, announced the 10 bids that had been successful and would receive funding to further develop their proposals.

- reopening Meir Railway Station between Stoke-On-Trent and North Staffordshire
- passenger services on the Barrow Hill line between Sheffield and Chesterfield
- passenger services on the Leicester to Burton (Ivanhoe) line (via Ashby-de-la-Zouch, above left)
- reinstatement of branch lines on the Isle of Wight (to Newport and Ventnor, above right)
- reinstatement of passing loop between St Albans Abbey and Watford Junction (Abbey Line)
- reopening of Wellington and Cullompton stations
- passengers services on the Bury-Heywood-Rochdale lines
- regular passenger services on the Clitheroe to Hellifield railway line
- reinstatement of rail access to Devizes via a new station at Lydeway
- passenger services on the Totton-Fawley (Waterside) line

Campaign for Rail welcomes any initiative that supports the restoration of rail services. However, it is unfortunate that the Department for Transport failed to make public the 52 schemes that were turned down in round 1 as it is impossible to say whether any of the rejected schemes would have been more beneficial than those accepted. Campaign for Rail knows of two schemes within the West Midlands that were rejected in round 1, although both have been asked to submit further information in either round 2 or round 3.

However, two of the schemes that have received funding are in the Midlands area - the restoration of passenger services on the Ivanhoe line and the reopening of Meir station in Stoke-on-Trent - and Campaign for Rail wishes both promoting groups every success in their quest to see these Beeching cuts reversed.

**23 June 2020**  
**Kidderminster Station Building Opened**



The new station building at Kidderminster opened on 7 June, replacing the inadequate building that had served the station for 50 years. The new building is the fifth at the station. The first was a temporary structure that opened with the station in 1852. It was replaced in 1859 by a building that only survived 3 years before it was destroyed by fire. The third building was the iconic mock-Tudor structure that served the station for over a century until it succumbed to dry rot in the late 1960s and was replaced by the “functional” brick portacabin. This survived until last year when it was demolished and replaced by a building more suited to a station with a footfall (pre-Covid) of over 1.6 million per year.

Campaign for Rail was able to visit Kidderminster station twice. The first occasion was on Monday 25 May, a fortnight before the station opened and our photographer was pleasantly surprised to witness a Transport for Wales Class 230 unit passing through while on a test run from Long Marston to Stourbridge Junction via Honeybourne and Worcester.

These test runs have become a regular occurrence with the units operating additional runs between Stourbridge Junction and Worcester before returning to the Vivarail base in Long Marston in the evening.



**1 July 2020**  
**Restoring Your Railway Round 2 Bids Announced**



On 30 June 2020, the Department for Transport announced that 50 bids had been submitted in round 2 of the Restore Your Railways fund.

The disappointing aspect of the schemes named is that, of the 50 submitted, only 4 are in the Midlands and 3 of these are in the East Midlands. This is in contrast to the South West which has 18 schemes submitted, although it could be said that the South West rail network was decimated by the Beeching Report. This leaves the reinstatement of the Stratford-upon-Avon to Honeybourne line as the only scheme in the West Midlands area.

Campaign for Rail fully supports this reopening as the reinstatement of just 6 miles of track would significantly improve rail connectivity between the South Midlands, West Midlands, the Thames Valley, London, South Wales and the South West. The distance by rail between the two major tourist centres of Stratford and Oxford (not connected by regular direct services since Chiltern Railways took over London to Stratford services from GWR) would be reduced from 58½ miles to 45¾ miles, while the distance by rail between Stratford and Worcester would be dramatically cut from 58¾ miles to 27¼ miles. In addition, the proposed Garden Village at Long Marston should make a Long Marston Parkway rail station viable if the line was reopened. The Shakespeare Line Promotion Group, a member of Campaign for Rail, is one of the driving forces behind this proposal and a link to its website page is available via the button below.

The successful schemes will be announced by the end of summer 2020.

**27 August 2020**  
**A Safe Day Out**



There has been a great deal of comment in the railway press lately, about the prospects for a recovery of passenger railways, and, to read some articles, it is all doom and gloom. Therefore, members of your committee decided to test the waters by making rail journeys specifically to check out the current situation, for example about observance of social distancing, and to see if things are as black as they are painted.

So, 4 of us launched ourselves from Moor Street on a stormy Tuesday, and headed for Coventry, via Leamington. The Class 168 unit had been suitably treated for Covid, in that at least 75% had been taped with the logo 'Keep this seat free to maintain social distancing where possible'. Unfortunately, even though the train was only around 25% full, it meant that there were not enough seats available, and people were sat in them anyway. Everyone on the train, please note, wore a mask, including the conductor, who sat in our compartment 3 rows away. I think we all felt quite safe.

Having arrived at Leamington on time, we bought tickets to Coventry, waited on the platform for the 12.01 to Nuneaton, to be told that there was a tree on the line and our service was likely to be cancelled. So, back to the ticket office, where our purchases were refunded without question. Back we went then, on the 8 car Voyager to New Street, diverted now via Solihull. We were keen to see how the alleged CrossCountry policy of 'booked tickets only' would work. Surprisingly, perhaps, no seats were taped or blocked in any way, though there were 'Reserved' images on the overhead panels.

In fairness, the 8-car was about 25% full at our end, so there was no problem. The train continued to Manchester, and it was noticed that, as far as Wolverhampton, it got to about 40% patronage.

To summarise, then, it has been shown that it appears to be safe to travel off-peak for leisure purposes on trains in our region. Tickets were not inspected on any journey, which is a dodgers' charter. Many travellers were families and young people.

So, we urge the Railway Companies to cease telling people not to travel, and to get back to business (safely) as soon as possible. Our railway system was going from strength to strength until Covid struck, and we need to counteract the negativity which seems to pervade the media and carry on our Campaign to develop and improve our rail operations.

*Ian Jenkins, Chair.*



**1 September 2020**  
**A Look Back to 2010**



Every edition of West Midlands Rail User (the Campaign for Rail Newsletter, published three times a year) includes a look back at the rail events of years ago. This was a decade ago.

- Birmingham Moor Street's platforms 3 and 4 (the bay platforms) were brought back into use in November
- The cement works at Rugby went over to burning biomass, ending coal trains from Immingham
- Tipton road tunnel opened, replacing Owen Street level crossing, which had been closed to vehicles for up to 45 minutes in an hour
- The route of the first phase of HS2 was announced in March



27 November 2020

## Stratford to Honeybourne successful in bid for "Restoring Your Railway" funding



The scheme to reopen the railway line from Stratford-upon-Avon to Honeybourne took a step forward this week when the Government announced that it was one of the schemes accepted to receive funding under the "Restoring Your Railway" scheme.

Funding will enable [an Economic Impact Study \(EIS\) to be progressed which, hopefully, will lead to a full business case that will support the reopening of the line.](#)

The proposal to reopen Stratford to Honeybourne is supported by the North Cotswolds Line Taskforce, who have proposed two services:-

- an hourly service from Stratford-upon-Avon to Didcot Parkway via Oxford
- an hourly service from Stratford-upon-Avon to Worcester, extending to Kidderminster, Stourbridge Junction and Birmingham Snow Hill and possibly forming a circular service back to Stratford-upon-Avon via Henley-in-Arden or Dorridge.

Of the 50 schemes submitted for stage 2 of the scheme, 15 were accepted for further funding. In addition to Stratford-upon-Avon to Honeybourne, the successful schemes were as follows :-

- Reopened lines and new passenger services, Melton Mowbray - Nottingham
- Reopened lines and new passenger services, Alfreton - Ashfield (Maid Marian Line)
- Reopened lines and new passenger services, Consett-Newcastle
- New Station at Ferryhill, Ferryhill - Stockton-on-Tees
- Enhanced existing passenger services, Preston - Blackpool South
- Reopened lines and new passenger services, Bolton-Radcliffe / Bolton-Bury
- New station at Beeston Castle and Tarporley, Crewe - Chester
- New Station at St Anne's Park, Bristol Temple Meads - Bath Spa
- Enhanced existing passenger services, Truro - Falmouth
- New Station at Langport and Somerton, Castle Cary - Taunton
- Reopened lines and new passenger services, Kemble - Cirencester
- Reopened lines and new passenger services, Wareham - Swanage
- Reopened lines and new passenger services, Gainsborough - Barton
- New Station at Waverley, Sheffield - Chesterfield

In addition, a separate new stations fund will see new stations built at Edginswell on the outskirts of Torquay, Thanet Parkway in Kent, and St Clears in Carmarthenshire.