



## STOURBRIDGE LINE USER GROUP

### Response to the Consultation on the West Midlands Rail Executive Rail Investment Strategy

The Stourbridge Line User Group (hereinafter referred to as SLUG) represents passengers on the rail route between Worcester (both Foregate Street and Shrub Hill) and Birmingham (Snow Hill and Moor Street) via Kidderminster and Stourbridge Junction and the branch line from Stourbridge Junction to Stourbridge Town.

Has the Strategy identified the key drivers for change on the rail network and reflected the main growth areas in our service plans?

SLUG considers that the Strategy broadly reflects and responds to the economic situation of the West Midlands. However, SLUG feels that the strategy has failed to recognise the importance of a rail link from Stourbridge Junction to serve the proposed DY5 enterprise zone development in Brierley Hill and has detailed its concerns later in this document.

Is the 6-4-2 trains per hour frequency aspiration an appropriate approach for improving services across the network?

SLUG supports the concept of clockface services on all lines but feels that there are certain lines and/or stations that warrant 3 trains per hour. Therefore, it should be a 6-4-3-2 approach.

Does the Strategy respond appropriately to the opportunity that HS2 will bring to the West Midlands region?

The opportunity presented by HS2 should be spread as widely as possible across the West Midlands. The Stourbridge Line is in a privileged position in this respect as Birmingham Moor Street station will be adjacent to the new HS2 Curzon Street station. Ease of connection must be prioritised in order that the opportunity for areas served by the Snow Hill lines are maximised. Equally, the chance to bring other areas into the "HS2 opportunity zone" should not be missed, and here again the low priority given to serving Brierley Hill via Stourbridge Junction is a failure to provide a high-quality transport system for the region.

Does the Strategy appropriately identify the economic benefits to the region that rail can deliver?

SLUG considers that the Strategy broadly identifies the economic benefits that rail can deliver in the West Midlands.

Does the Strategy effectively identify the long-term development needs for the network in order to support both passenger and freight services?

SLUG fully supports the long-term aspiration for the Stourbridge-Wednesbury-Walsall route to be reopened for freight traffic alongside a passenger service along the full length of the line. However, it feels that more detail is needed on how the two services will operate alongside each other and what form the passenger service will take (heavy rail, tram-train or Metro).

## Are there any other key issues that you think the Strategy needs to address?

SLUG welcomes the opportunity to make the following specific comments on the sections of the WMRE Rail Investment Strategy that relate directly to Stourbridge line services.

### **Train Lengthening.**

SLUG supports any initiative to lengthen trains. It is deeply concerned about the current overcrowding levels on Stourbridge line services, not only at rush hours but at weekends as well. Extra units are needed immediately to strengthen services. In particular, 2-car units should not be employed on the Stourbridge line at any time. There are also overcrowding issues on the Stourbridge Town branch where the popularity of the Class 139 service has seen passenger numbers soar and SLUG believes that the replacement of these units by larger vehicles should be considered.

### **Improved Evening and Sunday service.**

SLUG fully supports the improvements planned for May 2019 and May 2021. However, improved frequencies must be accompanied by earlier and later services, particularly at weekends, and extended operating hours should be introduced in the same timescale.

### **The proposed extension to Brierley Hill.**

SLUG fully supports the aspiration to provide a service from Stourbridge Junction to Brierley Hill Canal Street as part of the HS2 connectivity package. It accepts that infrastructure changes at Stourbridge Junction will make reversal of the current Stourbridge Junction terminators more expensive than originally planned. It feels that a two trains per hour service could be provided, initially as a 2-car shuttle service from Stourbridge Junction or Kidderminster without significant infrastructure changes. It strongly disagrees in the argument made in section 4.6.2 of the WMR Rail Wider Economic Impacts Modelling document that reads “in the case of the Brierley Hill service it relates to the relatively unattractive (in terms of journey times to Birmingham) service that would be provided resulting in very small catchment for the stations, with it remaining quicker in many cases for passengers to drive to Cradley Heath station to access the rail network” for the following reasons.

- (1) The proposed station at Brierley Hill Canal Street would be built alongside the new DY5 enterprise zone, thus giving the line greater importance as a means of getting workers from Stourbridge and North Worcestershire to their place of employment.
- (2) Brierley Hill Canal Street would be built alongside the Metro stop on the line from Brierley Hill to Wednesbury and would provide an interchange for passengers from the Stourbridge area and Worcestershire wishing to travel to Dudley, Sandwell and Wolverhampton. In addition, a connection onto the Metro would also provide main line connections at Wolverhampton and Dudley Port as an alternative to Smethwick Galton Bridge.
- (3) Cradley Heath station car park has 243 parking spaces and is normally full by 08:00 hrs. Because of this, many commuters in the Cradley Heath commuting area prefer to drive to Rowley Regis station where the car park is three times larger with 742 parking spaces. Even with 1,020 spaces, the car park at Stourbridge Junction is also full by about 08:00 hrs. A car park at Brierley Hill Town would provide much needed additional station car parking for the area.
- (4) Any road user driving from Brierley Hill to Cradley Heath needs to go past the huge Merry Hill Shopping Centre which is responsible for major traffic delays in the area. In addition, traffic levels around Brierley Hill can be atrocious throughout the day due to the failure of the recently built bypass to reduce traffic levels in the town. At rush hours, traffic can stretch back from the traffic lights at the top of Quarry Bank High Street almost to Cradley Heath station and it is not unknown for the journey from Cradley Heath to Brierley Hill to take over 20 minutes.
- (5) Many passengers access the rail network by bus as the footfall figure of 575,000 at Stourbridge Town proves. It is not easy to travel via bus from the Brierley Hill area to Cradley Heath station, with any journey requiring a change of bus at Merry Hill. While a nominal 10 minute service operates between Cradley Heath and Merry Hill on the principle services (4M and X10), these services are very unreliable given that these are long distance services starting at Walsall and Birmingham. Experience has shown that a journey from Cradley Heath station to Brierley Hill by bus can take as much as 45 minutes.

### **The proposed extension to West Midlands Safari Park.**

SLUG feels that a park and ride station serving Stourport-on-Severn and Bewdley is needed, given that Kidderminster station is to the east of the town and difficult to reach from these two towns. However, it is concerned about the feasibility of operating a clockface (two per hour) national network service alongside a heritage railway service that is not clockface and varies from day to day. It is also concerned about the logistics of operating such a service given that the signal boxes along the line are operated by volunteers.

It feels that a park and ride railhead could be better provided by a station south of Kidderminster on the main line to Worcester close to the A449, probably as an upgrade to the current Hartlebury station.

### **Snow Hill Station Regeneration.**

SLUG fully supports initiatives to improve Snow Hill station's ability to perform its role as a significant gateway to Birmingham (and hence the West Midlands) for large numbers of rail passengers.

The current station is inadequate for passenger flow both at concourse (ticket gate) level and at platform level, where the proliferation of buildings and pillars supporting the over-station car park severely impede the movement of passengers. Furthermore, the station should provide additional entrance/exit points in order to maximise convenience of movement to and from the surrounding areas. Not least, the aesthetics of the existing station at both platform and concourse level are extremely poor and do not present a positive image of arrival in the West Midlands.

SLUG strongly believes that the additional capacity and operation flexibility that will be offered by the reinstatement of Platform 4 will be of high value and that the reinstatement should proceed at the earliest opportunity as soon as funds are available.

### **Rowley Regis Service Improvements.**

SLUG fully supports the proposals to build a turnback at Rowley Regis to increase the number of services to/from Rowley Regis from 6 trains per hour to 8 trains per hour.

In the morning peak a large number of passengers board trains at Rowley Regis to travel to Birmingham, resulting in overcrowding (for example, it can then be difficult for passengers to leave the train at Smethwick Galton Bridge for interchange, while passengers attempting to board at Langley Green can find they are unable to); the reverse occurs in the evening peak. The prime benefit of the Rowley Regis turnback facility will be additional peak time trains originating from/terminating at Rowley Regis and therefore partially separating the conflicting passenger flows, which will go a long way to resolving these issues.

### **Service Level Aspirations for Stourbridge Line Services by 2034.**

SLUG notes that the current service level and 2034 aspirational level at Hagley is shown as 2 trains per hour. The current level is actually 3 trains per hour and this level should be maintained or increased by 2034. It also feels that consideration should be given to increasing the aspirational level at Hartlebury from 1 to 2 trains per hour.

SLUG supports the proposed doubling of service levels at Langley Green (current footfall 188,000) from 2 to 4 trains per hour as a result of the Rowley Regis turnback. It feels that consideration should also be given to increasing service levels at Old Hill (current footfall 193,000).

SLUG supports the proposal to remove the 2-hourly Birmingham Moor Street to Leamington Spa service currently operated by Chiltern Railways and replace it by extending one Dorridge terminator per hour to Leamington Spa as this would provide additional through journey opportunities from the Stourbridge line. It feels that this change should take place as part of the Chiltern franchise change in 2021.

SLUG supports the proposed introduction of an extra through train per hour to Stratford-upon-Avon especially as this train will run semi-fast east of Birmingham, thus speeding up journey times.

### Service Level Aspirations for Services in the Worcester area by 2034.

SLUG fully supports the proposal for infrastructure improvements in the Worcester area and along the North Cotswold line, and feels that pressure should be applied to ensure that Network Rail treats these improvements as a priority.

It fully supports the aspiration to provide an hourly service from Stourbridge Junction to London Paddington via Worcester and Worcestershire Parkway. It notes that there is also an aspiration for one train per hour on the Manchester/Edinburgh to Bristol/Plymouth corridor to stop at Worcestershire Parkway which would provide an hourly connection from Stourbridge, Kidderminster and Droitwich Spa to the West Country. However, SLUG feels that a better solution needs to be found in a much shorter timescale to provide such a connection. SLUG believes that this could be achieved in one of two ways –

- (1) the extension of one West Midlands Railway service per hour from Worcester Shrub Hill to Gloucester.
- (2) the extension of all GWR Westbury to Gloucester services to Worcester Shrub Hill and Stourbridge Junction.

SLUG also believes that, once infrastructure improvements have allowed the reversal of trains at Worcester Foregate Street, Snow Hill line services to Worcester should operate as follows -

- 1 train per hour to Worcester Foregate Street (possibly extended to Great Malvern)
- 1 train per hour to Worcester Shrub Hill via Worcester Foregate Street (ideally extended to Gloucester)

### Service Level Aspirations for Stourbridge Line Connecting Services by 2034.

SLUG fully supports the aspiration to replace the current 2 tph all-stations service from Wolverhampton to Walsall with a 4 tph service from Wolverhampton to Birmingham International as this will greatly increase the number of connecting services to Birmingham Airport and the National Exhibition Centre.

SLUG is concerned that the number of connections with long distance services at Smethwick Galton Bridge would reduce from 3 per hour in 2019 to 2 per hour in 2034.

#### 2019 Smethwick Galton Bridge

- 1 Aberystwyth/Pwllheli or Holyhead – Shrewsbury – Birmingham International (TfW Rail)
- 1 Liverpool Lime Street – Wolverhampton – Birmingham New Street – Northampton – London Euston
- 1 Crewe – Stoke - Wolverhampton – Birmingham New Street – Northampton – London Euston

#### 2034 Smethwick Galton Bridge

- 1 Aberystwyth/Pwllheli or Holyhead – Shrewsbury – Birmingham International (TfW Rail)
- 1 Liverpool Lime Street – Wolverhampton – Birmingham New Street – Northampton – London Euston

At the same time, there is an aspiration for 4 long distance services per hour to connect with the Midland Metro at Dudley Port.

#### 2019 Dudley Port

No long distance services

#### 2034 Dudley Port

- 1 Shrewsbury – Wolverhampton – Birmingham
- 1 Liverpool Lime Street – Wolverhampton – Birmingham New Street – Northampton – London Euston
- 1 Crewe – Stoke - Wolverhampton – Birmingham New Street – Northampton
- 1 Crewe – Stoke - Wolverhampton – Birmingham New Street – Leamington Spa

While improved services at Dudley Port must be applauded, SLUG is concerned that there will be more calls by long distance services at Dudley Port than at Smethwick Galton Bridge. SLUG suggests the following alternatives –

- (1) one of the two services from Crewe via Stoke should call at Galton Bridge instead of Dudley Port
- (2) consideration should be given to the 2 CrossCountry services per hour to/from Manchester Piccadilly calling alternately at Smethwick Galton Bridge and Dudley Port.