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15<sup>th</sup> March 2016

## A Response to the West Midlands Rail Franchise Consultation

### INTRODUCTION

This document is the Stourbridge Line User Group's response to the consultation on the new West Midlands franchise. Our Group exists to represent the views of passengers using the train services along the Birmingham (Moor Street and Snow Hill)-Stourbridge-Kidderminster-Worcester (Shrub Hill and Foregate Street) route and its intermediate stations, including the Stourbridge Town branch line.

At least 95% of train services on the Stourbridge line are currently operated by London Midland and are expected to transfer to the West Midlands franchise in 2017, so the significance of this consultation to Stourbridge line users is clear.

This consultation response is unashamedly, and obviously, centred on enhancing the travel experience and opportunities for users of this line, including potential new users who can be attracted to the railway by improving its offering. Since rail users do not restrict themselves to single routes, our interest and comments naturally extend to the convenience of using connecting routes and rail links to significant destinations elsewhere.

The role of the Stourbridge Line User Group is to promote the interests of users of a particular stretch of line while taking consideration of the benefits of this railway to the economic well-being of the areas it serves. Our proposals and ideas represent our vision of how the Stourbridge line can achieve its full potential under the new West Midlands franchise. We appreciate that resources must be spread fairly, but our obligation is to emphasise how the Stourbridge line can be improved.

Our response takes into account the assumptions and objectives of current public policy, including those set out in "Movement for Growth", the West Midlands regional transport strategy, and by Midlands Connect. Elements of our response demonstrate where we feel that the current passenger services available to Stourbridge line users is inconsistent with these objectives, or with other factors such as existing development plans.

We also recognise the extent to which we are in a position of ignorance. To cite a glaring example, "Movement for Growth" includes intent for "Snow Hill lines improvements", encompassing the entire Stourbridge line, as one of its priority actions. Yet at the present time and despite requests for information to the relevant authorities, we are unaware both of the intended scope of the planned changes and of the timescales for implementation; indeed, since the only specific target in "Movement for Growth" is for high priority investments to be implemented before the opening of HS2 Phase 1 in 2026, we do not even know if the "Snow Hill lines improvements" are likely to be made before the end of the new franchise. A second example, impinging on services connecting with the Stourbridge line, is the possibility for some services to be transferred from the Wales & Borders franchise to the West Midlands franchise; again, no details are currently in the public domain but in this case a future consultation is promised.

We further note that the January 2016 papers for the West Midlands Integrated Transport Authority (agenda item number 9 "Reviews into Network Rail and HS2 Phase 2 Command Paper Update") record concern that Snow Hill lines developments, including some or all of those described in "Movement for Growth" as well as electrification, are threatened with delay to the previously-understood timescales. Naturally the Stourbridge Line User Group is concerned about these emerging worries.

We trust that our consultation response will be of value to the development of the new West Midlands franchise, and hope that our suggestions will be considered and implemented. The West Midlands franchise is vital for the Stourbridge line, and equally we believe that the Stourbridge line can become an even more vibrant and important component of the West Midlands franchise than it is today as part of London Midland.

### QUESTION 3

*Please list, in priority order, the facilities you would like improved or introduced at the station(s) you use or could use?*

*For each point that you raise, please provide the name of the station(s) that you are referring to and why you think these improvements are needed*

#### RESPONSE TO QUESTION 3

i Priorities for station facilities

*Key observation: There are currently many examples of bad practice in station facility/information provision which need to be replaced with best practice.*

Unless otherwise stated, our response relates to all stations on the Stourbridge line (including the Stourbridge Town branch) and we call for a consistent approach to provision across all stations. Our priorities in descending order are:

1. Accurate and useful train service information. *To include up to date service details including diagrammatic maps, timetables and real-time audio and visual displays.*
2. Staff presence (not necessarily traditional booking office staff) at all stations during the hours of train operation. *We note that this is normal practice where station management is specified by Transport for London, which is a clear indication of the value of station staffing even when the vast majority of tickets are not purchased from a staffed booking office.*
3. Useful and accurate inter-modal public transport information. *To include up to date maps of local bus services, bus stop locations and bus route destinations.*
4. Improved access to toilet facilities at principal and interchange stations (at the very least: Birmingham Moor Street, Birmingham Snow Hill, Smethwick Galton Bridge, Rowley Regis, Cradley Heath, Stourbridge Junction, Kidderminster, Droitwich Spa, Worcester Foregate Street and Worcester Shrub Hill). *Ideally, toilets should be fully accessible, located on platforms or on interchange routes, and accessible without the need to find a member of staff with a key. It goes without saying that they should be clean, well maintained and secure.*

There are unfortunately many instances of bad practice in station facility/information provision at the current time.

Examples (non-exhaustive) include:

- Generally, staffing hours that have been reduced during the London Midland franchise
- Generally, but especially noticeable at Birmingham Snow Hill in the evening peak, very poor information provision at times of disruption (see our response to Question 10)
- At Smethwick Galton Bridge, a prime interchange station with other National Rail services where it is unpleasant to wait for connecting trains especially after dark due to lack of staff, lack of toilet facilities and a general feeling of lack of security
- At Stourbridge Junction, a West Midlands rail network map in the subway which dates from 2006 and as a result shows at least two services that no longer exist (inexplicably it is next to a London & South East map which is regularly updated)
- At Stourbridge Town/bus station interchange, an electronic display of departures from Stourbridge Junction (accessible by the Stourbridge Town branch shuttle service) which pointlessly shows imminent departures which cannot be reached, and departures *from* Junction *to* Town
- Also at Stourbridge Town, a public address system which has been faulty (distorted audio messages) for a period which can be measured in years

#### QUESTION 4

*Thinking of the train journeys you make, how important are the following on board passenger facilities to you on short distance and long distance train services (1= very important; 15 = not important).  
If you do not make one of these kinds of journeys please leave blank.*

RESPONSE TO QUESTION 4 (first part)		
<i>Facility on board train</i>	<i>Importance on short distance train services (1–40 minutes)</i>	<i>Importance on long distance train services (over 40 minutes)</i>
Luggage space	7	1
Cycle storage	7	1
Audio passenger information e.g. announcements	1	1
Visual passenger information e.g. next stop information	1	1
First class areas	15	7
Catering	15	7
Tables	7	1
Seat trays	15	7
Staff presence	1	1
Plug sockets	1	1
USB sockets to charge USB devices	15	7
Pushchair/wheelchair space	1	1
Baby changing facilities	7	1
Suitable toilets	1	1
Free Wi-Fi	1	1

*Please also identify any other on board passenger facilities not listed above that you deem very important and you think should be improved or introduced. This can include any comments you have about the presentation or cleanliness of your train.*

#### RESPONSE TO QUESTION 4 (second part)

*Key observation: Basic on-train information is not provided.*

Linear maps of the Snow Hill lines routes should be displayed in each carriage of the Class 172 fleet. This information was shown in the old trains that were displaced by the Class 172 units.

Visual and audio information should be expanded where necessary to provide inter-modal interchange information, for instance making reference to onward bus services to Merry Hill from Cradley Heath.

## QUESTION 5

*We are looking carefully to see what opportunities there are to either extend or provide additional trains to deliver more space/standard class seating for passengers to help reduce overcrowding.*

*If we cannot create all the additional capacity we need in this way, how do you think we could enable more people to travel and improve the railway's ability to cater for passenger growth (e.g. altering carriages, removing/ reducing on board facilities or introducing innovative solutions)?*

*Where possible, please provide reasons for your answer.*

### RESPONSE TO QUESTION 5

i. Main Line (Birmingham-Stourbridge Junction-Kidderminster-Worcester)

*Key observation: The main Stourbridge line suffers from insufficient rolling stock.*

We see little opportunity for increasing capacity as needed on the Birmingham-Stourbridge Junction-Kidderminster-Worcester line without requiring new rolling stock. We oppose any reduction in seating capacity or provision of toilet facilities as both would represent significant disbenefits to rail passengers.

The Stourbridge Line currently suffers from under-provision of capacity at times of high usage, not only during weekday morning and evening peaks but also during other periods of high demand (e.g. Birmingham Christmas market, sports events) and when capacity is limited, including when short trains are run at weekends and notably on the first trains on Sundays which are oversubscribed because the service starts too late, resulting in passengers who would travel earlier being forced to travel at later times once the trains start running. Standing for more than twenty minutes is routine at these periods of high demand and so reducing seating in order to accommodate more standing passengers would exacerbate this existing unacceptable situation.

The Stourbridge Line User Group notes that the Class 172 fleet, originally obtained to provide the Snow Hill Lines service, has never been sufficient as it is augmented both by Chiltern services and by other London Midland rolling stock every weekday. Furthermore, the change from Class 150 to Class 172 on the bulk of the Stourbridge Line service has already brought about a change from "3+2" to "2+2" seating (allowing additional standing space).

Furthermore, as our response to Question 6 makes clear, the Stourbridge line has untapped potential for attracting additional patronage by improvements to its connectivity to other parts of the rail network and as a result contributing to transport, environmental and economic policy objectives by increasing the proportion of journeys made by public transport, particularly rail.

The above points demonstrate that the real and current transport needs of the Stourbridge line can only really be met by the allocation of additional rolling stock to its services.

We emphasise that non-toilet fitted trains are not suitable for indiscriminate general use on Stourbridge line services as currently operated.

If new rolling stock were deployed, a means of increasing seated capacity could be for trains to be formed of a single unit (which would need to be of at least five carriages to match existing capacity provision) with cabs at the outer ends only, two wheelchair spaces, one wheelchair-accessible toilet and one standard toilet. Currently trains of four or more carriages are formed of two independent units coupled together and hence have intermediate cabs, two wheelchair accessible toilets and four wheelchair spaces, occupying space that would be used for seating if single-unit trains were operated.

Should the "Snow Hill lines improvements" foreseen by the regional transport strategy "Movement for Growth" be implemented during the West Midlands franchise, it may be acceptable for services using the future turnback platform at Rowley Regis (and hence used overwhelmingly for journeys of limited duration) to be formed of non-toilet fitted rolling stock dedicated to short-distance shuttle operation, but any such stock should not be used on longer-distance services.

ii. Branch line (Stourbridge Junction-Stourbridge Town)

*Key observation: The Stourbridge Town branch line currently suffers from insufficient passenger capacity.*

Under the London Midland franchise, shuttle services on the branch line between Stourbridge Junction and Stourbridge Town have undergone a transformation, from an irregular (approximately 4 trains per hour per direction) using unsuitable main line diesel rolling stock with no service on Sunday, to a largely even-interval 6 trains per hour service, less frequent on Sundays, using unique “Parry People Movers” vehicles.

This welcome change has however resulted in a marked increase in patronage, with the unwelcome outcome that passengers are routinely unable to board the first departure during the peak periods.

The Stourbridge Line User Group calls for the Stourbridge Town branch to be operated by rail vehicles with higher passenger capacity.

## QUESTION 6

*Thinking about stations served by the West Midlands franchise, are there any particular locations where you feel that connections between rail services could be improved?*

*If relevant please provide specific details about the services, times and locations where train times are not coordinated as well as they could be.*

*Please also provide information on any other factors at stations or on trains that would make changing between services easier and more attractive for you, including your reasons where possible.*

### RESPONSE TO QUESTION 6

*Key observation: Single-change journeys to or from the Stourbridge line are unnecessarily limited*

As a principle, the Stourbridge Line User Group believes that attractive public transport is offered by single-change journeys between stations along the Stourbridge line and principal destinations around the country. It is accepted that in many cases the concept of a “single change” can be extended to include transfers between Birmingham’s Snow Hill/Moor Street stations (on the Stourbridge Line) and Birmingham New Street station.

It is particularly noted that Smethwick Galton Bridge station has never lived up to its potential as a significant interchange station between the Stourbridge line and the Birmingham New Street-Wolverhampton line. We make the following points:

- The layout, facilities and low level of staffing at Smethwick Galton Bridge currently makes it an unattractive interchange location – we call for this to be improved under the new franchise
- Even with the acknowledged congestion on the Birmingham-Wolverhampton line, there is scope of improving the range of destinations that can be accessed, such as direct trains to Birmingham International
- We are also concerned that the range of single-change destinations via Smethwick Galton Bridge is threatened if Wales & Borders franchise services were to be curtailed nearer to the Welsh border and so direct trains to central and north Wales were lost

The Stourbridge Line suffers from three particular examples of poor connections to other passenger rail services which contradict regional connectivity policy.

#### i. Worcester

*Key observation: Current rail services between Stourbridge line stations and central Worcester are inadequate.*

The first relates to the southern end of the Stourbridge line, at Worcester. There are two stations at Worcester: Shrub Hill and Foregate Street. However, only Foregate Street is convenient for the city centre. Current infrastructure limitations mean that trains can reverse at Shrub Hill to reach Foregate Street but not vice versa, while operational factors appear to favour Shrub Hill to the detriment of passengers’ needs. Stourbridge line services to and from Worcester do not follow a regular service pattern to in serving two stations, so the train times are unmemorable and hence off-putting for potential passengers. The Stourbridge Line User Group calls for a regular, memorable service pattern for Worcester and a half-hourly service from intermediate stations to and from Worcester Foregate Street, via a reversal at Shrub Hill where necessary.

#### ii Birmingham Airport

*Key observation: Current rail connections from Stourbridge line stations to Birmingham Airport do not meet the standard envisaged in the regional transport strategy.*

The second example of poor connectivity concerns connections to Birmingham Airport (and Coventry). The regional strategy “Movement for Growth” identifies easy access to and from Birmingham Airport as a highly important factor. If a frequent through service from Smethwick Galton Bridge to Birmingham International existed, then a convenient single-change link would be established. However, the only service that completes this link is hourly, formed of rolling stock unsuited to a metropolitan airport link and is operated (at least for the time being) not by the London Midland but by Arriva Trains Wales. Airport connections are an exception to our acceptance of transfer to Birmingham New Street station because of the likelihood that airport users will have large amounts of luggage and/or be unfamiliar with the transfer across central Birmingham. The Stourbridge Line User Group calls for the reinstatement of frequent local services between Smethwick Galton Bridge, Birmingham International and Coventry so that the opportunities offered by convenient links with the airport are available to those served by the Stourbridge Line.

*Key observation: Current rail connections from Stourbridge line stations to destinations south of Worcester are very poor and as a result contradict regional transport strategy.*

The third example relates to journeys between stations on the Stourbridge Line and south west England and south Wales. The corridors between the West Midlands conurbation and these two regions are designated as priorities (“Intensive Growth Corridors”) by Midlands Connect.

However, the only existing option for single-change journeys from Stourbridge line stations to the south is a two-hourly Great Western service which links Worcester with stations to Bristol and beyond but no other major destinations. Otherwise, to reach the south west or south Wales from Stourbridge Line stations in a single-change journey requires first travelling in the *reverse* direction to Birmingham (and then a change of station). This is clearly not competitive with road transport along the M5 motorway and does not meet the regional strategic aspirations for public transport.

A new service formed from a train extended from the Stourbridge line via Worcester Shrub Hill to Cheltenham Spa (perhaps continuing to Gloucester) would provide single-change connections to destinations including Bristol, Cardiff, Exeter, Plymouth, Swindon and Reading. A service presently terminating in Kidderminster is the obvious choice to develop. By making this the sole Worcester Shrub Hill link, the existing Birmingham to Worcester services could be aligned to Worcester Foregate Street, creating a consistent, clockface service.

The Group would also expect the train operator to maximise connectivity with non-Stourbridge line trains at Droitwich Spa by means of creative and comprehensive timetables.

The Group would expect the train operator to evaluate the benefits of direct services from the Stourbridge line to Worcestershire Parkway station, but it is our current understanding that trains to Bristol and beyond are not planned to stop there, and so this would not provide the inter-regional connectivity which is in line with current policy.

The Stourbridge Line User Group calls for a direct service from Stourbridge line stations via Worcester Shrub Hill to Cheltenham Spa to provide new opportunities for single-change journeys between the Stourbridge line and a wide range of major destination/origin points.

## QUESTION 7

*In order to make improvements to the network, we would like your views on how specific train services could be changed to better meet demand with a focus on the following areas:*

*Where demand merits it, increasing service frequency:*

- *In the peak and/or off peak period*
- *During evenings, Saturdays and Sundays*
- *In the early morning (i.e. before the peak period)*
- *Over the Christmas and New Year period*

*Where demand is low and resources/funding could be better used in areas that need it more, decreasing service frequency:*

- *In the peak and/or off peak period*
- *During evenings, Saturdays and Sundays*
- *In the early morning (i.e. before the peak period)*
- *Over the Christmas and New Year period*
- *Increasing or decreasing service levels on a seasonal basis to better match travel patterns during these times*
- *Reducing the number of stops at stations used by few people to provide quicker services for through passengers*
- *Increasing the number of stops at stations where demand is higher than the current train frequency merits*
- *Adjusting the times of first and/or last services where this better meets today's travel patterns*
- *Introducing new routes or services and providing new links to stations including those not currently served by the franchise e.g. to other regions*
- *Reopening railway lines currently not used by passenger services*

*Considering the areas set out above, are you aware of any opportunities to improve, reduce or change rail services to make better use of resource and meet the needs of existing and prospective passengers?*

*Please provide reasons and evidence to support your views where possible*

### RESPONSE TO QUESTION 7

i Developing the Existing Service

*Key observation: The Stourbridge line currently suffers from poor train services on Sundays and in the evenings which is limiting the value of the rail link.*

The Stourbridge Line User Group has consistently called for earlier trains on Sundays in the direction of both Birmingham and Worcester. This is particularly necessary for residents of Kidderminster where no alternative bus or tram services are available to make connections with long distance trains. It is notable that the first trains on Sundays are busy, indicating that a proportion of passengers would like to travel earlier but are currently unable to do so. The Stourbridge Town branch should connect with all mainline Sunday services (currently the branch services start time is co-ordinated with the (late) start of the mainline service, but finishes early in the evening).

The following is a list of services that **cannot** be used by Stourbridge line users on Sunday mornings as trains do not reach the interchange point in time:

- Six Chiltern Railways services to London Marylebone from Birmingham Snow Hill/Moor Street

- Eighteen long distance services from Birmingham New Street (including two to the south west of England, see also our comments below)
- Two connections via Worcester (one to Hereford and one to Oxford, Reading and London Paddington)

Once started, the Sunday service is far less frequent than other days of the week and this does not reflect present-day demands for travel. It is our view that an enhanced Sunday service which continues into the evening would reflect current needs and bring the Stourbridge Line into line with other routes.

The Sunday service level at Kidderminster (annual footfall 1.5million) is a quarter of weekday levels, while at Stourbridge Junction (annual footfall 1.3million) it is a third. This is not sufficient for today's levels of commercial, social and leisure activity on Sundays.

The Group calls for a minimum clockface half hourly West Midlands franchise service on the Stourbridge line during the evening seven days a week. We would suggest that Monday-Saturday evenings should include three trains per hour (Birmingham-Worcester/Great Malvern, Birmingham-Kidderminster and Birmingham-Stourbridge Junction), while Sunday evenings should see at least two trains per hour (Birmingham-Worcester/Great Malvern and Birmingham-Kidderminster). Furthermore, the current poor co-ordination of London Midland and Chiltern services on weekday evenings should be improved so that service intervals are as even as possible.

Worcestershire stations have no other public transport links to Birmingham on Sundays and in the evenings and this should be taken into account in the planning of Stourbridge line services.

## ii Developing Connections

*Key observation: the usefulness of the Stourbridge line to its surrounding areas can be enhanced by improving connectivity in a number of ways.*

The Group seeks to strengthen connections to the south west and south Wales. This could be achieved most effectively by the introduction of a direct Stourbridge line to Cheltenham service (see our response to Question 6).

The Group is campaigning for the upgrade of Hartlebury station as an alternative rail head for Stourport and the surrounding area. Fundamental to this objective is the enlargement of the car park at Hartlebury station and a seven day train service. This is a low-cost partial solution to the problem of the oversubscribed car park at Kidderminster.

The Group supports the re-opening of the Stourbridge to Walsall route. The West Midlands regional transport strategy "Movement for Growth" promotes light rail between Wednesbury and Brierley Hill at some point before the end of 2026 and therefore this leaves a missing link in the public transport network between Brierley Hill and Stourbridge Junction. This missing link should be filled as soon as possible, particularly because development plans exist for the Brierley Hill and Dudley areas (see "Movement for Growth") which should therefore be easily accessible from the areas of Worcestershire and the Black Country served by the Stourbridge line, requiring appropriate transport arrangements which may involve the West Midlands franchise.

## iii Developing the Whole Line

*Key observation: There is a risk that "improvements" will in actually worsen the service on the Stourbridge line.*

We are pleased that a "Snow Hill Lines Improvement" package is planned (see "Movement for Growth"), but since the full details and timescales of these changes have not been made public, we cannot judge whether it will be beneficial for Stourbridge Line users. We hope that the outcome will see services made better for all users.

For example, it has been announced that the improvement package includes the reopening of Birmingham Snow Hill station Platform 4 and the turnback platform at Rowley Regis and some form of improved frequency, but it has not been stated what the service pattern after these alterations would be. We remain concerned that the end result may be a reduced service frequency at the line's important transport interchange stations of Cradley Heath and Stourbridge Junction. We are strongly of the view that the existing standard service pattern of six trains per hour per direction at these (and other) stations has contributed significantly to the success of rail transport, and thus that reducing this frequency would represent a major retrograde step.

## QUESTION 8

Considering the information outlined above (see original document), and assuming the same amount of seats would be provided per hour, in principle would you prefer either:

- A service that operates to an evenly spaced timetable so that gaps between trains are regular (with potentially fewer trains/longer journey times); or
- A service that operates at irregular times with more trains per hour, however there may be a mixture of long and small gaps between services at some stations.

Please explain your reasons. If you are aware of any routes or locations where you feel that a more evenly spaced timetable can or should be operated please provide details

### RESPONSE TO QUESTION 8

*Key observation: The Stourbridge line has benefited from a frequent, near-clockface off-peak service over much of its length and this should be expanded.*

The off-peak service on the Stourbridge line between Kidderminster and Birmingham is generally characterised by a good, although somewhat irregular, peak service with some gaps and a frequent (six trains per hour in each direction between Birmingham and Stourbridge Junction) and regular (every ten minutes at Birmingham, although affected elsewhere by different stopping patterns) off-peak service. The off-peak service in particular has brought about significant increases in use of the line but this does not currently extend to the evening (see our response to Question 7), when an additional factor is the dove-tailing of the Chiltern Railways services extending along the Stourbridge line with West Midlands franchise trains to provide an even-interval service.

The Stourbridge Line User Group favours a memorable, evenly spaced clockface timetable during the off-peak hours. An irregular early morning peak service is acceptable to accommodate longer distance trains to/from London, provided passenger needs for capacity and time of arrival at commuter destinations are met.

Worcester stations do not currently have a regular, memorable service pattern and this should be implemented (see our response to Question 6).

The stopping patterns should be re-examined to construct a timetable that ensures:

- Interchanges with other rail services and other modes continue to be served
- Train frequency at Langley Green (footfall 170,000), Old Hill (185,000) and Lye (82,000) is improved from its current level if there is evidence that the currently infrequent service is suppressing demand

## QUESTION 10

*During railway disruption, what information would you like to know, and when and how would you like to receive it during:*

- *Known disruption such as engineering works*
- *Unplanned disruption such as signalling issues?*

*Please provide your reasons and examples of where this works well either by the existing train company or elsewhere on the wider rail/public transport network.*

### RESPONSE TO QUESTION 10

*Key observation: Unplanned disruption to Stourbridge line services results frequently results in inaccurate information and this needs to be addressed.*

Information is required for both regular, informed passengers and occasional, uninformed travellers.

In good service conditions, real time train running information provision on the Stourbridge line is good, with up-to-date information being provided at stations and on trains.

However, current experience is that information during service disruption is erratic and unreliable.

Birmingham Snow Hill is notorious among Stourbridge line users for the poor quality of information provided by both visual and audible means at times of disruption, with information provision apparently unable to keep up with change. Examples include automatic audio and visual information continuing on the basis of a good service even when trains are being cancelled, and trains disappearing and reappearing on information displays. This type of poor information provision is a routine occurrence during service disruption and this situation should not be tolerated.

During disruption, users expect on-board announcements and platform screen information that is, above all, accurate. It is not acceptable that this is frequently not the case.

The Stourbridge Line User Group calls for the provision of accurate information when services are disrupted to be a condition of the new West Midlands franchise, which we believe requires greater staff presence than is currently the case.

See also our response to the second part of Question 4, which identifies an obvious case of non-provision of useful information on board Stourbridge line trains.

## QUESTION 11

*In what ways can the franchise operator provide better services, ticketing and information for passengers to serve major events?*

*Please provide details of any specific events, the reasons why services need improving and any examples of best practice you are aware of.*

### RESPONSE TO QUESTION 11

*Key observation: The Stourbridge line is affected by predictable major events throughout the year and arrangements to cope with resulting increased patronage can be improved.*

The major events which bring increased patronage to the Stourbridge line include the Christmas German Market in Birmingham, West Bromwich Albion and Birmingham City football matches, public events in central Birmingham and (via connections) events at the National Exhibition Centre complex.

We believe that such major events should be factored into the appropriate seasonal timetable. Planning for additional patronage should involve ensuring availability of rolling stock and staff.

Trains to The Hawthorns and Bordesley when football teams are playing at home should be strengthened to accommodate football supporters.

The Group also identifies the need for easier connections between Stourbridge line stations and the National Exhibition Centre complex, including returning passengers in the evenings, requiring easy links with Birmingham International (see also our comments about Birmingham Airport connectivity in our response to Question 6).

### QUESTION 13

*We want to make it easier for passengers to pay for their journey and reduce the number of people travelling without tickets. Some of the potential options to help achieve this, subject to affordability and deliverability, could include:*

*a) Providing suitable, working ticket machines at more/all stations, including unstaffed stations, to ensure that passengers always have the ability to purchase a ticket before they travel, including when booking offices are closed;*

*b) Promoting and developing new and innovative options for how people pay for their journey, such as the wider roll out of smart ticketing (where journeys are paid for with an electronic card), bank card or mobile phone payments and working with other retailers to sell tickets;*

*c) Removing the Permit to Travel machines, encouraging passengers to use the ticket machines at stations to ensure they have a valid ticket to travel;*

*d) Promoting and looking at options to increase the range of services available from the booking office – for example some areas such as Merseyside use rail station ticket offices to provide attraction tickets and tourist information at key locations;*

*e) Undertaking a review of ticket office opening hours so that they offer a consistent and easy-to-use option for passengers;*

*f) Further roll out of ticket barriers;*

*g) Ensuring that ticket barriers, where provided, are in use consistently;*

*h) Looking at options to provide better visibility of staff and ticket checking on-train, in particular to ensure that passengers undertaking intermediate journeys away from major stations are likely to have their ticket checked; and*

*i) Continuing and developing arrangements to prevent and deter ticketless travel to ensure that passengers are strongly encouraged to purchase a ticket, with staff available to support the process.*

*Considering the options above and any other ideas you may have, in order of importance please list what you think are the priorities for the new operator to focus on to:*

*a) ensure it is as easy as possible to pay for your journey; and*

*b) deter people from travelling without a valid ticket?*

*Please provide your reasons and state if you are aware of any specific locations where it is difficult to buy tickets or where people travel without a valid*

### RESPONSE TO QUESTION 13

*Key observation: Neither the availability of ticket purchasing facilities nor the frequency of ticket checking by gate or staff is adequate on the Stourbridge line.*

Members and correspondents of the Stourbridge Line User Group regularly note both a lack of on-train ticket checks and the absence of ticket checks at principal stations, where ticket gates are frequently left unstaffed and open even at busy times of the day.

It is essential that ticket issuing machines are available at all stations. This is not the case at all locations so passengers are effectively expected not to hold tickets when they board trains.

It is equally essential that passengers have the experience, and hence the expectation, that their tickets will be checked sufficiently frequently that avoiding payment is not worthwhile. This is not currently the experience of regular travellers on the Stourbridge line.

This experience of ticket checking includes the operation of ticket gates at principal stations. We are well aware that the ticket gates at Birmingham Snow Hill are frequently open and unstaffed even during peak times.

The staff on board the Stourbridge Town shuttle should be able to issue tickets. They do not currently have this capability with the perverse outcome that passengers entering the rail system at Stourbridge Town without tickets cannot be sold a ticket on the service where they are most likely to be checked (the Town shuttle) and are then free to continue their journeys on services on which tickets are less likely to be checked (“mainline” Stourbridge line train calling at Stourbridge Junction).

The Stourbridge Line User Group believes that on-train ticket-checking should be the expected norm for all passengers (whether travelling to Birmingham or not); our understanding and experience is that this is not currently the case even for travel to and from Birmingham.

We call for ticket checks to be a routine expectation on Stourbridge line journeys (including journeys that do not pass through central Birmingham, for ticket gates at all central Birmingham stations to be in operation and manned at all times, and for the opportunity to purchase tickets in advance of joining the first train to be available to all passengers.

Furthermore, we believe that through-tickets should be available enabling rail passengers to use the Midland Metro system, e.g. for reaching Birmingham New Street for onward train connections. It is anomalous if this were not available when through-tickets can be purchased to Bridgnorth on the heritage Severn Valley Railway right now!

## SNOW HILL STATION REDEVELOPMENT

*Birmingham City Council and Network Rail are currently working together alongside a private developer (Ballymore) and Centro on a proposal for a major redevelopment for Snow Hill station and its surrounding area. The Draft Masterplan includes the following proposals, over a 20-year period from 2015:*

- *The reconfiguration of Snow Hill Station through the removal of the multi storey car park and its replacement with a new office development. A new concourse area will be created and new walking routes provided through the station;*
- *The reconfiguration and revitalisation of adjacent streets and land to create new connections and development land;*
- *Extending the amount of high-quality office space around the station; and*
- *Major improvements to the public realm, cycling provision and integrated transport.*

### COMMENTS ON THE BIRMINGHAM SNOW HILL STATION REDEVELOPMENT

*Key observation: Birmingham Snow Hill station in its current form is not fit for purpose in the medium term; redevelopment can and should make passenger amenity significantly better.*

The Stourbridge Line User Group supports the redevelopment of Birmingham Snow Hill in order to improve the experience of rail users at this important station.

The existing Snow Hill station suffers from a number of shortcomings, including:

- A poor environment for passengers entering the station by its main entrance on Colmore Row
- Poor access to the station from Livery Street
- Inadequate concourse area and facilities
- Inadequate stair/escalator/lift provision between the principal concourse area and the platforms for the numbers using the station at peak times
- Very poor platform level environment for passengers with little natural light and unattractive architecture, made significantly worse by the fact that the buildings on the platforms combined with the pillars for the multi-storey car park leave very little space for movement along the platforms and therefore hinder access to and from trains
- Overcrowding at the ticket gate line when two trains arrive simultaneously during the morning peak
- Unnecessarily limited flexibility by the continued closure of Platform 4 (despite the Midland Metro having been diverted away from it)

The exterior of the station needs to be far more prominent near all entrances, and street signage needs to be improved to give an indication of the station location.

Suitable emphasis should be given to the prime function of the station as a transport hub offering convenient access to and from the surrounding areas and other transport links; the office development should not negatively impact the experience of rail passengers either visually or as a physical obstruction.