

SLUG News - 2010

14 November 2010

New Bay Platforms for Birmingham Moor Street

The Stourbridge Line User Group is pleased to report that the long-awaited Birmingham Moor Street bay platforms are to open in the forthcoming weeks.

Constructed primarily for the fast trains from Birmingham to London Marylebone, these platforms will give greater flexibility of operation. Although the service from Birmingham Snow Hill to Marylebone will be reduced, the Stourbridge Line will lose none of its through services to the Capital City. The use of Snow Hill platforms for terminating trains was always a wasteful use of capacity and a hindrance to other local through trains.

Coupled with the restoration of "Wing Yip" viaduct which was an impressive engineering accomplishment, the new platforms will enable a faster train service to run between the two cities. Chiltern Railways has aspirations to build branch lines such as Bicester to Oxford but their core business will always be the soon-to-be branded "Chiltern Mainline". Chiltern have targeted the route for a 20% reduction in journey time, in essence, a 100 minute outward trip.

Birmingham Snow Hill station is an exceptionally busy station and probably outstrips Birmingham New Street when comparing number of trains per platform per hour. It is perhaps, ironic that the Metro extension which will take tram lines out of the central concourse, will free up platform four which would have been a good bay platform for Chiltern trains. However, platform four is unlikely to remain idle and will enable Chiltern and London Midland to redesign their timetables to build in greater reliability.

24 March 2010 Bite size chunks?

The Midland Metro light railway which follows the route of the Stourbridge line from The Hawthorns to Birmingham Snow Hill, is set to be extended. Transport Minister Chris Mole on a visit to Snow Hill (18th March) announced the go-ahead for a link to New Street Station. A funding bid for the £81million project has been approved by the Government and works should be completed by 2014.

The new extension will add another half mile to the Metro tram system which was opened in 1999 to link Wolverhampton and Birmingham by the old Great Western Railway route. From a new bridge over Great Charles Street Queensway, at the north end of Snow Hill station, the new line will use a viaduct which is already built, to rise up to Bull Street where there will be a new tram stop. There it will proceed, still on-street to the reconstructed, re-modelled New Street station. If a further Metro funding bid is approved, another £30m extension of the line at Wolverhampton, would enable trams to make a loop of its city centre, connecting St Georges with the soon-to-be-constructed Wolverhampton bus/rail interchange facility. A further £46m bid has been made to the Government for 19 new, longer trams and platform extensions.

The Stourbridge Line Use group welcomes the Birmingham City extension which will aid Stourbridge Line passengers who want to catch a New Street-departing train. The diversion of the line at Snow Hill will free up platform four and add precious capacity to the station. However, the Group is disappointed that no announcement has been made of funding approval for the Stourbridge to Wednesbury tram project.

If the Metro is to be delivered in “bite size chunks”, so be it. If that is the case, then it is time that Stourbridge had a bite of the cake.

(Source of story- Express and Star)

1 February 2010 The Key

The Stourbridge Line User Group is pleased to report that the Stourbridge Line (or at least a section of it) has been chosen to test a new type of electronic ticket. Generically known as a “smart card” and officially branded as “The Key”, this ticket is being trialled between four railway stations, Worcester Foregate Street, Worcester Shrub Hill, Droitwich Spa and Kidderminster

London Midland claim to be the first train operating company to embrace this technology and are providing a small group of season ticket holders with “The Key” which can be charged and recharged repeatedly with credit. “The Key” will be available for purchase online and can be collected at manned stations. It can also be topped up on the home computer and replaces the various paper tickets.

To quote Rachel Webster, Head of Communications with London Midland:-

“Other benefits are extra security for passengers, as tickets can be quickly cancelled if lost or stolen, it will save time at stations with passengers quickly ‘swiping’ themselves through ticket gates.

“In future, users of The Key will quickly benefit from new products and the opportunity to use integrated transport...”

The last statement is interesting because it alludes to a universal travel card which is already in use in London. The “Oyster Card” which is popular with commuters in the Capital is even more customer-friendly because all bus and train operators are subscribed to the scheme. In one swoop, the disadvantages of the private, competitive element in public transport could be eliminated. As SLUG understands it, the fares structure within the “Oyster Card” has been fashioned to allow unlimited extra journeys once a contracted level has been reached. This makes it excellent value for money and more versatile than what is being trialled.

SLUG will be following trials in Worcestershire with interest and will press for the additional benefits built into the London version of smart card.

For more information on The Key, please e-mail comms@londonmidland.com, or write to them – c/o The Communications Department, London Midland, PO Box 4323, Birmingham, B2 4JB.

Alternatively, there is more information on the London Midland website at www.londonmidland.com/tickets-and-fares/the-key/

27 January 2010 Welsh Bargain Fares from Smethwick Galton Bridge

If you are 55 or older, take a Stourbridge Line train to Smethwick Galton Bridge. You can then take the Arriva Trains Wales service from platform 3 at about 30 minutes past the hour to any station in Wales for just £15 return. If you have a Senior Railcard, it's only £13.

It's a CLUB 55 ticket, available until 19 March. You can buy it at the station, or in advance on the web [arrivatrainswales.co.uk] or ring 0870 9000 773. If you buy in advance, you can reserve your seat for free.

Trains go directly from Galton Bridge in alternate hours to Aberystwyth/Pwllheli and to Holyhead, but change of train is permitted to reach other stations. So if you want to go Betws-y-Coed, leave Galton Bridge at 07.28, change at Llandudno Junction and arrive at 11.00, for example. [Return at 15.19 and arrive back at Smethwick Galton Bridge at 19.20.]

If you live near the Worcester end of our line, you could start your CLUB 55 journey from Cheltenham and explore south and west Wales. It can be used on other train companies' trains along ATW routes, such as First Great Western in South Wales and Virgin in North Wales too.

It does not just allow day trips. Return can be up to a month, providing you are back by 19 March. If you use it, let us know at SLUG how you fared!