

SLUG News - 2012

16 December 2012
A small victory

Despite the current bad news for commuters who are experiencing disruptions to their journeys, there is some good news in the new London Midland timetable. As a result of changing timetable slots with Chiltern Railways, an extra journey opportunity from Hartlebury station has been created from a new Worcester to Kidderminster extension. Outward morning services to Birmingham now total four instead of three, comprising of 0627, 0650, 0705 and 0730 departures. The Stourbridge Line User Group has campaigned for years for an improved service for this North Worcestershire station and this development could be considered a small victory.

Hartlebury is a neglected station with lots of potential as a hub for the village itself and the nearby town of Stourport on Severn. Until now, London Midland has provided only the basic service for Hartlebury as stipulated by the franchise agreement. This means that the village and district are deprived of a credible daytime service to the city of Worcester which is the natural shopping location. Evening entertainment in Worcester or Birmingham is prohibited because last trains do not call at Hartlebury, despite no perceived disadvantage caused to passengers if they did stop.

Footfall figures for Hartlebury measured against the meagre service are impressive. Passenger numbers using Hartlebury station compare favourably with request stop stations on the Birmingham to Stratford upon Avon line. These request stops have a theoretical hourly service and in practice, trains slow down anyway.

Our new Class 172 trains have the capability to accommodate stations with short length platforms by virtue of selective door opening. Much improved acceleration/deceleration compared with the old Class 150 trains, strengthens the argument to stop more trains at Hartlebury to test the market and grow it.

We urge London Midland to further improve the Hartlebury service in the next timetable. As well as providing new revenue for the company, there are other benefits: An enhanced timetable would mean car parking problems at Kidderminster could be alleviated because Stourport-based commuters might choose to drive to Hartlebury to obtain a seat in the carriage of their choice.

Two viaducts, Stambermill and Park Head

One still used infrequently and one in a state of disrepair. What a waste!



For over twenty years, the Stourbridge Line User Group has called for passenger trains to be restored to the railway from Stourbridge Junction to Dudley. These structures and new stations could facilitate a rapid transport link which could take thousands of motor vehicles off the road and ease congestion.

The Group is not alone in the desire to re-open the line but the means of implementation is not generally agreed between all parties. If Midland Metro Line Two had been approved, Stourbridge would have been deprived of the link. If the freight companies regain their route to Walsall, there is opportunity for a passenger train service on those rails - but on their terms.

The Group believes that the travelling public in Dudley will not wait another twenty years for a link to the national rail network. This is 2013. This is the time to set wheels in motion.

This is our position and our official statement:-

“SLUG supports any scheme to provide passenger services on the Stourbridge to Dudley Line, providing implementation does not destroy the course or apparatus needed for a heavy rail service (either now or in the future)”.

If you agree that action should take place now, please show your support by contacting SLUG, Centro, your local MP or anyone who can help.

25 September 2012
Rail Users' Group condemns station staff cuts
(Extract from a Press Release by the Stourbridge Line User Group)

A local rail passenger representative group has reacted angrily to news of forthcoming booking office closures and reduced staffing. The Stourbridge Line User Group (SLUG) has been presented with a list of stations which are affected and has great concerns for the implications. Amongst the measures is the complete closure of Lye booking office.

SLUG Chairman, Rob Hebron was quoted as saying:-

“London Midland pre-warned us that they wanted the Government to allow them to reduce staffing at their stations. We presented a strong case for maintaining staffing but the Department for Transport has ignored the passengers' organisations. We expected a compromise not a rubber stamp.

He continued:-

“We have always maintained that booking office staff do more than just sell tickets. They do valuable research for customers by planning their journeys for them and finding the best offers. SLUG does not dispute the increase in tickets obtained on-line and remote from stations but there is no substitute for face to face contact. Station staff provides reassurance for passengers

The Group is particularly annoyed about the de-staffing of Lye station. Lye is a community that relies on night time trade from customers who arrive from outside the area. The lack of visible security at the station will deter passengers who need to make a return journey late at night”.

Even busy Stourbridge Junction will have its ticket office close at 8 pm on Mondays to Thursdays, 10 pm on Fridays, 9 pm on Saturdays and 7 pm on Sundays. At present, it is open until the last train of the day, just before midnight. Stourbridge Town will only be staffed until 6 pm.

SLUG is not alone in objecting to the cuts. Both Passenger Focus and Centro have made representations to London Midland. Centro chairman Cllr John McNicholas has gone on record, pointing out that London Midland have ignored 18,000 passengers and disabled groups who objected. At one point, it was suggested London Midland would save £1.25 million to boost their profits. Now they say there will be no saving. So the Stourbridge Line User Group is asking what possible benefits are there to the train operator, the Department for Transport, or, most importantly, the passengers in driving through these changes.

The Group has invited a London Midland manager to its next meeting. SLUG officers will use this opportunity to drive home the concerns of the passengers that they represent.

22 August 2012
Rail User Group attacks inflation busting fare increases.
(Extract from a press release by SLUG published 16th August 2012)

A local train passenger support group has reacted angrily to news that train fares are likely to rise by 3% above inflation in the New Year. The Stourbridge Line User Group (SLUG) has seized on the recent publication of the Retail Price Index (R.P.I.), which indicates that the annual percentage increment will be on top of an unexpectedly high base figure. Due to a complicated inter-regional fare structure, the likely average hike in ticket prices could be 6.2%. The Group which represents passengers using the Worcester-Stourbridge-Birmingham railway line feels that commuters are having a bad deal, at a time when most fare payers can least afford an increase. SLUG is particularly apprehensive about Stourbridge Line fares because they are predominantly day returns and peak hour factors could potentially result in an 11.2% rise.

SLUG Chairman, Rob Hebron was quoted as saying:-

“The increase is unjustified and the formula is completely wrong. The notion that the extra income will be reinvested in the West Midlands railway network is laughable. Yes, there has been investment in the new Class 172 trains, but any additional passengers who have been attracted to the service by the trains, will now be driven away.

He added:-

SLUG is a non political organisation and I wish we could separate public transport and politics. I can understand the government targeting the work-shy element of society, but why attack the genuine worker and job-seeker by limiting the area in which they can afford to commute to employment? There has to be a safety net or a ring fencing device. A fare rise which keeps up with inflation is acceptable, but one which fuels inflation is counter productive. How would the government feel about commuters asking for a wage rise which was 3% above inflation?

He concluded by saying:-

This is potentially a “shoot yourselves in the foot” situation. Rail patronage is increasing and so is the new revenue stream. Higher fares on top of poorer service and de-staffed stations, is a step too far. The only people to gain will be the owners of petrol stations. If we are not careful, the local railways will become the elitist way to travel.”

The Group will make representations to the train operators to moderate fare increase and is urging passengers to write to their members of Parliament.

29 April 2012
Councillor Angus Adams

At our meeting on 24 April, our Committee collected their thoughts on an outstanding Chairman of the ITA and a thoroughly nice individual. Those of us who had discussions and dealings with Councillor Angus Adams were impressed with his enthusiasm and dedication. Angus was a top notch ambassador to the Centro organisation and a precious asset to any political party. He will be sorely missed.

It is a sad twist of fate that Angus did not see the opening of Stourbridge Interchange, a project which he pioneered and on which he devoted much time.

The Group proposes that an engraved plaque, bearing Angus's name and his achievement would be a suitable tribute to the "Passengers' Friend". Stourbridge Interchange would be a suitable and ideally appropriate location.

Although Angus has departed from the world of transport, we hope that his vision will live on. The Officers of the Stourbridge Line User Group convey their sympathy to his partner, relatives, friends and colleagues.

22 April 2012 The Great Debate

The 2012 Annual General Meeting of the Stourbridge Line User Group will take place on Wednesday May 16th at the Severn Valley Railway Station at Kidderminster. The event will be held in the Refreshment Room (at the rear of the King and Castle Public Bar) and will commence at 7:30pm.

As per custom, the AGM will be preceded by a Public Meeting, which is open to members and non-members alike. You, the travelling public will be able to listen to guest speakers from the rail industry and county travel planning departments. Whether you have praise or criticism of the rail service on our line or you have a suggestion to make, you are most welcome to take part.

Many of you will have read articles in the press about schemes to re-open the Stourbridge to Brierley Hill railway line. SLUG has consistently promoted the re-opening of the whole Stourbridge to Walsall link. What is realistic? What is futuristic? What is imaginative? What is speculative? If you want to find out, please consider attending on the night. Make it affirmative!

12 February 2012
“Campaign for Rail: the West Midlands Region”

The Stourbridge Line User Group is pleased to announce the arrival of a new partner. The Group is now an associate member of “Campaign for Rail”. This is a new organisation formed by former members of RailFuture West Midlands. SLUG did not desire to be placed in a position of choosing between the new campaign group and the still existent national body. However, as two SLUG officers have prominent roles in Campaign for Rail, it would be illogical to lose the invaluable liaison and research work which we enjoy and employ. In fact, Don Barton and Keith Flinders will be able to contribute more to SLUG through meetings with stakeholders at regional level.

Campaign for Rail aims to represent rail passengers within the five counties of the region plus the conurbation and to act as an umbrella for all user groups therein. Not only that, Campaign for Rail wants to encourage the formation of new Rail User Groups (RUGs) on railway lines where there is no representation. Members of SLUG who receive a postal copy of SLUG Newsletter will find enclosed a free copy of ‘West Midlands Rail User’, CfR’s magazine, later this month. Online members of SLUG can request a copy of “West Midlands Rail User” by sending an email giving their name and postal address, to Tony Woodward.

Membership of CfR is £8 per annum which is astounding value for money, considering the pool of experience and talent which it has inherited and the magazine, full of news and features. The Stourbridge Line User Group highly recommends membership of CfR to strengthen the link it has forged.

4 January 2012 Few Surprises

There are few surprises for train passengers as we enter the New Year. Fare rises in January have become as traditional as turkey at Christmas. The Chancellor has capped some percentage rises but on the whole, commuters will pay more for season cards provided by all train operators. The market dictates the hike in fares, just as the world economy has driven fuel prices up and caused car owners to switch to rail travel.

The Association of Train Operating Companies (ATOC) defends the increase in fares which averages 5.9%. Michael Roberts, Chief Executive of ATOC, is quoted as saying: "Money raised through fares helps pay for new trains, faster services and better stations". This is true in the case of new Class 172 trains provided by London Midland for the Snow Hill Lines. Our principal train operator has gone one step further by strengthening early morning services to cope with demand. However, demand is being exploited by other train companies because alternatives are not always available.

The casual traveler can still pick up bargains by booking up well ahead of their journey. For instance, Chiltern Railways' Super Off-Peak ticket is available from any station between Kidderminster and Banbury inclusive for return travel to London Marylebone.

It costs £25 and is valid every day on trains scheduled to arrive into London Marylebone after 1130, leaving Marylebone anytime before 1600, and after 1900.

For group travel, the best buy in the West Midlands is a "Family and Friends" railcard. Available in the DY postcode area, the card which costs £28 per year, allows up to four adults and four children/minors to make a journey together with a discount of 1/3 on adult fare and 60% on child fare.

Bus fares are also rising in the West Midlands County and Worcestershire. Passengers who arrive at their railway station by bus are faced with a double whammy. However, the Plus Bus ticket still offers good value for money, allowing the passenger to buy tickets from the station for the entire journey. For example, Bewdley to Birmingham by bus and train would cost an adult (on top of train fare) £8 for seven days, £27 for a month, £74 for 3 months, and £290 for a year. The numbers of journeys permitted by bus per day are unlimited and unrestricted by peak time barriers.

If fare rises are inevitable, then it is only fair that passengers get good value for money. The Stourbridge Line User Group will monitor service provision and will lobby train and bus operators to provide the best timetables for optimum journey opportunity.

The Stourbridge Line Users' Group Christmas Quiz 2011 ANSWERS

Fifty years ago, the 7.56 p.m. from Hartlebury to Kidderminster had a name. What was it?
The Cathedrals Express

Where was Rifle Range Halt?
Between Kidderminster and Bewdley

In the days of steam, 'Fast to Stourbridge' usually meant just one station served between Birmingham Snow Hill and Stourbridge Junction. Which station?
Smethwick West

The 869 yards tunnel between Old Hill and Rowley Regis has the same name as a 1681 yards tunnel. Where?
Blackheath [South London]

What halt was between Hartlebury and Droitwich Spa?
Cutnall Green

Hagley, Lye and Victoria Bridge on the Severn Valley Railway are all within half a mile of Milepost 140. How is this possible?
The Great Western measured from Paddington via Oxford, Worcester and Kidderminster to Hagley, via Stourport to the Severn Valley Railway, and via Oxford and Birmingham to Lye.

What Stourbridge Line name links a station which closed in 1885, 12th Century monks and brewing?
Rood End, the rusty sidings north of Langley Green. Rood means 'holy cross'. The pure spring here was considered holy water, the destination of pilgrimages. It ceased to flow when it was all being used for brewing. [Health warning: don't drink it now!]

A Class 67 visits Kidderminster each evening with the 18.07 from Marylebone, our new trains are Class 172s and the Parry People Mover is Class 139. Class 99 never came to our line. What was it?
When the TOPS classification began, Class 99 was British Rail's ships.