

31 December 2017

Answers to Christmas Quiz 2017



The answers to the Christmas Quiz were :-

- 1 - The Ladykillers
- 2 - Brief Encounter
- 3 - In The Heat Of The Night
- 4 - Strangers On A Train
- 5 - From Russia With Love
- 6 - Blazing Saddles
- 7 - The Great Escape
- 8 - The 39 Steps
- 9 - North By Northwest
- 10 - The Titfield Thunderbolt
- 11 - The Railway Children
- 12 - The Lady Vanishes
- 13 - Murder On The Orient Express
- 14 - Some Like It Hot
- 15 - Von Ryan's Express
- 16 - High Noon
- 17 - Doctor Zhivago
- 18 - Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets

17 December 2017

Christmas Quiz 2017

Below are stills from 18 films which had a railway theme. All you have to do was name each film.



17 November 2017

New West Midlands Franchise – Latest News



On 10 August, the Department of Transport announced that West Midlands Trains Ltd had won the bid to operate the West Midlands franchise from 10 December 2017, taking over from Govia who had operated the franchise since 2007 under the London Midland brand.

In a document titled "Headlines and Benefits" released by West Midlands Rail the same day, the executive summary announced the following benefits for passengers.

West Midlands Trains Ltd (a joint venture between Abellio, East Japan Railway Company and Mitsui & Co Ltd) will deliver substantially more space for passengers and a fleet of brand new and refurbished trains serving the region. Improved passenger information and accessibility standards, more services at weekends and evenings, flexible ticketing for part-time workers, better compensation, free Wi-Fi, station upgrades and an innovative staff gainshare scheme will all contribute to a significantly enhanced passenger experience across the entire network.

The franchise will operate from 10 December 2017 through to March 2026.

Passengers in the West Midlands will benefit from 180 new train carriages creating more space for people, especially during rush hour. This includes an investment in 100 new carriages on the Cross City line in Birmingham, and a further 80 for the Snow Hill line. The new Cross City line carriages will offer metro-style passenger facilities, with increased space to carry more passengers and wider doors.

There will be more than 300 extra Sunday services across the franchise, with most routes operating at Saturday frequencies. There will be more evening and later Saturday services from Birmingham and a new hourly service from Birmingham and Wolverhampton to Crewe via Stafford and Stoke-on-Trent.

The document also detailed the benefits for each route, and detailed the following for the Snow Hill lines (Worcester - Kidderminster - Birmingham - Stratford-upon-Avon/Leamington Spa).

- carriages will be fully refurbished and supported by an investment in 80 brand new diesel carriages introduced from 2020 dedicated to operating services in and around Birmingham
- additional rush hour services between Stratford-upon-Avon and Dorridge, creating a regular hourly service in both directions between Stratford-upon-Avon and Birmingham via Solihull from May 2021
- an additional early morning service between Dorridge and Birmingham via Solihull Monday to Friday from December 2018
- enhanced evening frequencies between Birmingham and Kidderminster, Birmingham and Solihull, and Birmingham and Shirley in each direction Monday to Friday by December 2018
- enhanced frequencies by May 2021 on the Snow Hill lines on a Sunday with services from Birmingham increasing to 2 trains per hour to Stratford-upon-Avon, 3 trains per hour to Shirley, 3 trains per hour to Solihull, 6 trains per hour to Stourbridge Junction with 4 extending to Kidderminster
- earlier first services on the Snow Hill lines by May 2021 on a Sunday
- a service quality regime to improve the quality of stations, trains and customer service for passengers

Since 11 September, more details have become available and among proposals for the new franchise are aspirations to

- extend Stourbridge Junction terminators to Brierley Hill via a reversal at Stourbridge Junction
- extend Kidderminster terminators to West Midlands Safari Park via the Severn Valley Railway

15 November 2017

Slug Website Wins National Award as the Best Rail User Group Website



The Stourbridge Line User Group received a major accolade at the annual Railfuture User Groups Awards ceremony when this website received the Gold Award as the best Rail User Group website in the country.

The award was decided by a panel of Railfuture vice-presidents - Paul Abell (former Editor of Today's Railways magazine), Ian Brown (former MD of London Rail), Roger Ford (Industry and Technology Editor of Modern Railways magazine), Chris Green (former Head of ScotRail, Network South East and InterCity in British Rail Days and former MD of Virgin Trains), Stewart Palmer (former MD of South West Trains), Lorna Slade (Editor of Rail Professional magazine), Stewart Stevenson MSP (former Minister of Transport for Scotland), plus Honorary President Christian Wolmar (a renowned writer and broadcaster on railway matters).

The panel made the following comment about our website - "The sheer volume of information is impressive, and the content is also very helpful - as was found on the Vice-Presidential visit".

The award was presented to SLUG Acting Chairman William Whiting by Christian Wolmar.



Obviously, we are absolutely taken aback by the award and the comments made by acclaimed railway professionals and we will do everything we can to improve this website even further in the future.

5 October 2017

Chiltern Railways to Operate More Direct Services to and from London from 10 December



It has been confirmed that Chiltern Railways will operate additional through services to and from London Marylebone from 10 December 2017. There will be two through services from London Marylebone to Kidderminster on a Saturday evening - the first through services from London on a Saturday for a decade. In addition, Chiltern will operate two through services from Kidderminster to London Marylebone on a Sunday morning, with three return journeys on Sunday evenings - the first Sunday through services ever.

Stourbridge Line User Group has campaigned for the provision of through services on Saturday evenings and on Sundays for many years and is thrilled that Chiltern have listened to our arguments and are now providing these services. We hope that Stourbridge line passengers will support this initiative and make regular use of the new services.

19 September 2017

Disruptions Due To Velo Birmingham On Sunday 24 September



Sunday 24 September will see the first staging of Velo Birmingham, a 100 mile bike ride which is a complete misnomer given that the majority of the ride takes place outside of Birmingham. Perhaps next year, if they wish to repeat inconveniencing travellers in the wider West Midlands, they will have the grace to acknowledge this by calling it Velo West Midlands.

As far as the Stourbridge line is concerned, the ride passes through Quinton, Halesowen, Lye, Oldswinford, Stourton, Kinver, Swindon, Bobbington, Enville, Wolverley, Bewdley, Little Witley, Ombersley, Droitwich Spa, Belbroughton and Clent, which means that, if you live in any of these areas, getting to a local railway station by road may prove difficult.

The route passes two of our stations which means that access to them will be restricted.

At Stourbridge Junction, the route is along Grange Road and Glasshouse Hill and London Midland have advised that it will only be accessible to pedestrians from 06.30 – 11.00. The booking office staff will be looking to make alternative arrangements for parking.

In addition, the route also passes close to Droitwich Spa station but it appears that access to the station by road will not be affected from the south.

For passengers wishing to get to railway stations by bus, Network West Midlands have listed bus routes that will be affected (some severely) and these include many that serve Stourbridge line stations - 4H, 9, X10, 120, 120A, 127, 128, 140, 142, 241, 256 and 276.

Full details of the Velo Birmingham event and the advice from London Midland and Network West Midlands can be obtained by clicking on the appropriate button below.

23 August 2017

Engineering Disruptions For Passengers In August, September And October



Stourbridge line passengers are warned that, due to engineering work that will close London Euston station over the August Bank Holiday weekend, the Stourbridge line will lose all through trains to London Marylebone on Saturday 26 August. This is because Chiltern Railways have decided to concentrate all its West Midlands services to operate between Birmingham Moor Street and London Marylebone only to cater for the huge increase in passengers unable to use Virgin Trains or London Midland services to directly reach London Euston. This means that, of the first 10 services operating from Kidderminster to Birmingham, only 6 will operate, while only 10 of the first 14 services from Stourbridge Junction to Birmingham will operate. The services that will not operate on 26 August are the 0637, 0712, 0813 and 0910 departures from Kidderminster (0645, 0722, 0824 and 0920 from Stourbridge Junction). While the reason for these cancellations has to be accepted, it seems that no contingency plan has been formulated to ensure that service levels on the Stourbridge line are not severely reduced when Chiltern decide to withdraw its services due to issues at the London end of their line.

In addition, there are two other blockades that may affect any Stourbridge line passengers who are travelling further afield.

From Saturday 2 September to Friday 15 September, Bristol Parkway station and the line that passes through it will be completely closed to enable the station platforms to be lengthened and a additional platform constructed. CrossCountry Trains will continue to operate through services from Birmingham to the South West but these will be hourly rather than half-hourly and will take an hour extra as trains will be diverted via Gloucester and Newport. However, the two-hourly GWR service that operates from Great Malvern and Worcester to Bristol, Westbury and beyond will be terminated to run to Yate only. A replacement bus service will convey passengers from Yate to Filton Abbey Wood to rejoin trains to Bristol Temple Meads and beyond.

Finally, Liverpool Lime Street will be completely closed from Saturday 30 September until Sunday 22 October to enable two additional platforms to be constructed and the lengths of existing problems changed. The Birmingham New Street to Liverpool Lime Street services, which many Stourbridge line passengers use by changing at Smethwick Galton Bridge, will terminate at Liverpool South Parkway, where a connecting Merseyrail service will take passengers into central Liverpool at either Liverpool Central or Moorfields stations.

10 August 2017

Hagley Station Car Park To Close For A Month



Hagley Station car park will be closed from 14 August to 14 September due to water works by Severn Trent Water. This is part of a six month improvement project on the sewerage system around Hagley.

During the month starting on 14 August, the work will centre on the area around Hagley station and will mean that it will be impossible for cars to access the car park.

London Midland is advising rail users to use alternative car parks at Kidderminster or Stourbridge Junction stations. Trains will continue to serve Hagley as normal during this time.

14 July 2017

Worcestershire Draft Rail Investment Strategy



Worcestershire County Council have just published their Draft Rail Investment Strategy and have put it out for public consultation. The deadline for replies to the consultation is 5 pm on Friday 11 August 2017.

The four major enhancements that the strategy proposes are :-

- Two trains per hour on the Worcester-Oxford-London Paddington line
- One train per hour from Kidderminster and Droitwich Spa to London Paddington via Worcester
- All Bristol Temple Meads/Exeter St David's to Manchester Piccadilly and Plymouth to Newcastle/Edinburgh services to stop at Worcestershire Parkway
- A regional service between Birmingham and Bristol Temple Meads either via Kidderminster and Shrub Hill or via Bromsgrove and Worcestershire Parkway

To support these enhancements, the strategy proposes

- upgrading the North Cotswold (Worcester-Oxford) and the Droitwich to Stoke Works lines to double track throughout
- enhancing trackwork in Worcester to eliminate the two parallel single tracks through Foregate Street station
- regenerating Shrub Hill station
- building new car parks and/or stations
- electrifying both the Bristol to Birmingham and Snow Hill lines.

While these are admirable enhancements, SLUG would like to see Stourbridge Junction as the terminus for the Paddington services rather than Kidderminster, as it is extensively used by North Worcestershire residents due to the size and price of its car park (i.e. free!). In addition, the strategy has aspirations to speed up Kidderminster to Birmingham services and SLUG hopes that this will be achieved without any reduction in the current level of service from Kidderminster and Stourbridge Junction.

4 June 2017

Stourbridge Line Service Diversions on Sundays 25 June and 2 July 2017



On Sundays 25 June and 2 July, the lines through Worcester Foregate Street, Malvern Link and Great Malvern stations will be closed for engineering works to be undertaken to allow for future service improvements.

As a result, all Stourbridge line trains that operate from/to Worcester Foregate Street or Great Malvern on these days will start from or terminate at Worcester Shrub Hill.

Rail replacement buses will operate between Worcester Shrub Hill and Hereford, calling at all intermediate stations.

12 May 2017

Chiltern Railways Propose More Through Trains To Kidderminster From December



At the Stourbridge Line User Group Annual Public Meeting on 9 May, attendees were thrilled to hear that Chiltern Railways propose to provide additional through weekend services to and from Kidderminster from the December 2017 timetable change. These proposals are subject to approval at a Timetable Change Conference which will take place shortly.

If the proposals go ahead, the additional services are detailed in the box below. The changes would provide us with a later Saturday morning service from Kidderminster at about 1010 and Stourbridge Junction at about 1020, and an earlier first train of the day into Birmingham on Sundays from Kidderminster at about 0935 and Stourbridge Junction at about 0945. Actual times and stopping patterns west of Birmingham are not known but, if this proposal gets the go ahead by Network Rail, we will publish them as soon as they become available.

SLUG have campaigned for better weekend services ever since Chiltern withdrew northbound Saturday evening through services, and SLUG officers have kept the item on the agenda at Chiltern Railways Passenger Board meetings. When Stourbridge Depot opened, SLUG Officer Keith Flinders identified the services that were running as empty coaching stock (ecs) between Birmingham and Stourbridge and pressed Chiltern to consider running at least one of these in passenger service. SLUG also identified that connection times in Birmingham between Chiltern services and Stourbridge line services were sometimes poor, especially on Sundays, and produced statistics which it presented to Chiltern.

Therefore, SLUG are thrilled that Chiltern have aspirations to operate every service that is currently ecs as a passenger service to and from Kidderminster. This exceeds our expectations and Chiltern must be commended for this.

There is still some work to do. Worcestershire County Council have aspirations for an hourly service from Kidderminster to London in the future and SLUG supports that aim. In addition, although the plans include a slightly earlier first train of the day on Sundays, SLUG will continue to campaign for pressure to be applied to Network Rail to make the line available for passenger Sunday services a lot earlier than they allow at present. The Train Operating Companies want earlier services; the passengers want earlier services; Network Rail should allow earlier services.

Saturdays

1710 London Marylebone to Birmingham Snow Hill extended to Kidderminster (Silver Set)
1940 London Marylebone to Birmingham Snow Hill extended to Kidderminster (Turbo Unit)

Sundays

1012 Birmingham Snow Hill to London Marylebone to start at Kidderminster (Turbo Unit)
1155 Birmingham Moor Street to London Marylebone to start at Kidderminster (Silver Set)

1810 London Marylebone to Birmingham Moor Street extended to Kidderminster (Silver Set)
1940 London Marylebone to Birmingham Snow Hill extended to Kidderminster (Turbo Unit)
2040 London Marylebone to Birmingham Snow Hill extended to Kidderminster (Turbo Unit)

14 April 2017

SLUG Public Meeting and Annual General Meeting on 9 May 2017



The 2017 Annual General Meeting of the Stourbridge Line User Group will take place on Tuesday 9 May 2017 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 7.30 pm.

The last few months has seen positive news on the opening of the proposed Metro line from Brierley Hill to Wednesbury as part of a package to improve connectivity from all parts of the West Midlands to the HS2 stations at Curzon Street and UK Central. Work has started on clearing over 20 years of vegetation from the route and the current intention is to have the Metro line open by 2023. The connectivity package was revised very recently and a "rail-based" service from Stourbridge Junction to Round Oak has been added to the package. It is too early yet to get information.

The project to redevelop Kidderminster station is progressing slower than hoped but the current plans are for the contract to be awarded in May for work to start on site in May 2018 with the upgrade completed by February 2019. For more details, please see the news item on this website dated 5 April.

2017 should also see the start of a new West Midlands Rail franchise. The minimum requirements have already been specified and these will see improved evening and Sunday services. In June, we should know which of the two bidding companies is successful in winning the right to operate the new franchise and what improvements over and above the minimum requirement they are going to implement. The new franchise should start in October.

So, there is a lot going on at present and you, the travelling public will be able to listen to guest speakers from the rail industry and county travel planning departments with the developments listed above featuring strongly in the presentations. Whether you have praise or criticism of the rail service on our line or you have a suggestion to make or a question to ask, you are most welcome to take part.

Confirmed speakers are as follows :-

Brenda Lawrence, Head of Route (Snow Hill Lines), London Midland
David Heathfield, Stakeholder Manager, Chiltern Railways
Tom Painter, Franchise Delivery Manager, West Midlands Rail
Peter Sargent, Head of Rail Development, Transport for West Midlands
Andy Baker, Integrated Transport Manager, Worcestershire County Council OR Ian Baxter, Rail Strategy and Operations Expert, SLC Rail

Hopefully, we'll see you there.

12 April 2017

How To Win Friends and Influence People ... Not !

SLUG members and Stourbridge line commuters have contacted SLUG expressing concern about discovering that their car windscreens had been leafleted while parked at Cradley Heath and Stourbridge Junction stations last Friday; with many of the leaflets having extricated themselves from the cars and littering the car park.

The Stourbridge Line User Group would like to make it clear that these leaflets were in no ways connected with the Group but were distributed, almost certainly without the permission of Transport for West Midlands who manage these car parks or London Midland who operate the stations, by a Green Party activist from Halesowen named Tim Weller.

The Stourbridge Line User Group shares Mr Weller's view that the railway lines from Round Oak to Pleck Junction (south of Walsall) and from Ryecroft Junction (north of Walsall) to Lichfield should be reinstated with the entire route from Stourbridge Junction to Burton-on-Trent upgraded to allow passenger services. However, the Group strongly disagrees with Mr Weller in a number of areas.

1. Mr Weller is strongly opposed to the use of the route by Midland Metro trams, insisting that the line must be a double track heavy rail **diesel** line - somewhat incongruous for a Green Party activist. Having spoken to railway professionals, SLUG accepts that it is possible to operate a Metro line alongside a through rail route between Stourbridge Junction and Walsall. The problem with the heavy rail route is that it does not adequately serve the town centres of Brierley Hill and Dudley nor the huge Merry Hill Centre, something that the Metro line will address. However, with a rail and Metro route running alongside each other, passengers will be able to interchange at strategic points along the line, something that happens on the Tyne and Wear Metro between Newcastle and Sunderland. In addition, with new railway stations costing in excess of £10 million (two new stations opened last week at Low Moor and Ilkeston both cost between £10 million and £11 million), the number of stations on a reinstated heavy rail line would be restricted, meaning it would be fine for long distance passengers but of little use for local passengers.
2. Many of his arguments are based on false claims.
 - He claims that the Stourbridge to Derby route was a strategic cross-country railway. It wasn't. No regular passenger service from Stourbridge Junction ever ran as far as Wednesbury let alone Derby.
 - He claims that the route was wrongly closed by Beeching. The Stourbridge Junction to Dudley section was so unsuccessful that it had already been closed to passengers the year before Beeching produced his report.
 - He claims in his flyer that the line could be reinstated at low cost as the track would not need replacing. Even in areas where the track is still intact, it will need complete replacement and resignalling before it could be used as a 75 mph passenger line.
 - He claims in his flyer that a second route from Stourbridge Junction to Snow Hill could be created via Waterfront, Dudley, Wednesbury and Bescot. That's a long way round and he hasn't explained how a train could get from Bescot to Snow Hill as no through route between the two exists.
3. Mr Weller is of the opinion that the line would form part of a major main line from the North East to Devon via Dudley and Brierley Hill. SLUG is intelligent enough to realise that this will not happen, given the need for long distance passengers to change onto other services in Birmingham, with New Street being supplemented by Curzon Street in the future. However, the route would be an important secondary route northwards through the Black Country. There are aspirations to introduce additional services from Walsall - to Shrewsbury via Willenhall and Wolverhampton, to Aldridge and to Liverpool via Rugeley. Thus the lines to Stourbridge and Lichfield would create a wide network of services through Walsall.

There is one final, very important, reason why SLUG gives Mr Weller a wide berth. He is intransigent - his opinion is right, everybody else is wrong. Therefore, he bases his campaign on insults and antagonism. He once hijacked a SLUG Public Meeting and hurled insults at our guests. He did the same at a Stakeholders Consultation on the new West Midlands Rail Franchise, even though reinstated lines were not on the agenda. At the end of that meeting, he insisted that the SLUG officer at the consultation sign a letter he had written to the Secretary of State for Transport - a letter that contained personal insults and was borderline libellous. When the SLUG officer refused to sign on the grounds that he found the tone of the letter disgusting, he lambasted SLUG and the SLUG officer was forced to tell him to go away (4,3). He has also bombarded two area Rail Campaign groups - Railfuture and Campaign for Rail - with insulting correspondence which has resulted in one of the groups informing him that they will not open any correspondence they receive from him in future, and an officer of the other threatening legal action.

SLUG will continue to campaign for the reopening of the line through Dudley. We will do this by talking amicably and liaising with all other parties. We will not target passengers' cars with flyers. We will not insult railway professionals. We will behave professionally in all of our discussions. We will retain the respect of local authorities and train operating companies. We will not behave as Tim Weller does.

16 February 2017

Dudley Line Latest News



News has reached us that the West Midlands Combined Authority's HS2 Connectivity Package, which lists the projects that need to be implemented by 2026 to enable West Midlands passengers to access HS2 quickly (either at Curzon Street or UK Central), has been revised with a few projects removed because they would be impossible to complete in the timescale and a few new projects added.

One of the new projects added is a passenger rail service from Stourbridge to Canal Street (Harts Hill) where a station would provide interchange with the new Metro line from Brierley Hill to Wednesbury. At present, there is no detail about this proposal - the proposed opening date, whether it would be heavy rail or tram/train and where (if at all) intermediate stations/stops would be situated. However, it is good news that this project is now proposed in the shorter term, rather than the original timescale of well after 2029. SLUG will keep you updated as it receives further details.

Work has also started to clear the route of the Metro line between Wednesbury and Pedmore Road. The Walsall Line tab now shows the changes that have taken place at locations along the line.

1 January 2017

A Year of Development, A New Year of Change



Passengers' group looks back over 2016

The Stourbridge Line User Group, which represents train passengers on the Worcester-Kidderminster-Stourbridge-Birmingham route, is looking both back on a busy year and forward to major changes in 2017 as a new rail franchise takes over.

The London Midland franchise is up for grabs next year, with Abellio and Govia (owners of the current London Midland operation) having submitted bids to run the trains from October. However, the new franchise will be different in an important way: local West Midlands trains - including almost all Stourbridge line services - will be principally overseen by West Midlands Rail, which is made up of the region's local authorities, both metropolitan and in the shire counties.

"Local authorities are now getting much more input to the specification and the management of West Midlands rail services," said William Whiting, the group's deputy chairman. "The Stourbridge Line User Group has long developed positive working relationships with the various local authorities and this puts us in a good position for the future. We have already seen changes in line with some of our campaigns, and hopefully we can make passengers' views heard more clearly with this devolution."

Earlier this year the Group submitted its response to the franchise consultation including calls for better evening and weekend services, and was delighted when these were included in the specification for the new franchise. The group previously campaigned for a better service at Hartlebury station; this has already happened under London Midland, with further improvements being put in the timetable this month, and there has been a dramatic increase in passengers at the station as a result.

However, there are several other improvements that the Group believes are necessary but are not in pipeline... yet.

"Unfortunately it's not all positive," continued William. "It's obvious that the Stourbridge line needs an earlier start to Sunday services, but this is not part of the franchise specification. And in these last few weeks we have seen unacceptable overcrowding on trains taking people to and from Birmingham for shopping and the Christmas market. We have also made it clear that the Stourbridge line needs improved connections to other rail services to realise its potential, including giving better access to Birmingham airport, central Worcester, south Wales and the south west in line with the regional transport strategy."

This year's extension of Midland Metro tram services, which connect with the Stourbridge line at The Hawthorns and Jewellery Quarter, through central Birmingham to the entrance of New Street station, has made some journeys easier and further Metro extensions are planned.

"Metro should reach Brierley Hill from Wednesbury in the early 2020s", added William. "But that will leave a missing link which will prevent rail travel between Stourbridge, Brierley Hill and Dudley. That gap needs to be closed to provide a decent transport network."

The Stourbridge Line User Group will be looking to build on its 2016 achievements into the new year, including a highly successful public meeting in May where members were able to hear from, and put questions to, representatives of train operators and local authorities. A similar event will be held in May 2017 and new members, in addition to our currently solid membership base, would be welcome to strengthen our position in future discussions.