

10 August 2018

Major Changes To Bus Services At Stourbridge Line Stations



On 2 September, nearly all National Express West Midlands bus services serving Stourbridge line stations will be changed, with new services introduced, existing services withdrawn and many services revised and/or renumbered. In addition, some changes will be made to tendered services to support the changes to NXWM commercial services.

The National Express services that serve Stourbridge line stations which are due for revision are as follows :-

- 9** will operate every 10 minutes rather than every 8 to 9 minutes as at present.
- 24** will be rerouted between Cradley Heath and Blackheath to serve that part of the withdrawn 129 route
- 120** will be renumbered to service 12.
- 120A** will be withdrawn between Oldbury and Blackheath and rerouted from Oldbury to Dudley via the old 121 route. It will be renumbered to service 12A
- 126** will operate every 15 minutes between Dudley and Birmingham only
- 127** will be revised to operate between Blackheath and Birmingham only, and no longer serves the stops directly outside Rowley Regis station. It has been renumbered to service 13A.
- 128** will be renumbered to service 13. It will operate every 20 minutes rather than every 30 minutes
- 129** will be revised to operate between Blackheath and Birmingham only. It has been renumbered to service 13B.
- 140** will be replaced by new, limited stop, service X8 operating every 20 minutes from Wolverhampton to Birmingham via the old 126 route from Wolverhampton to Dudley and the old 140 route from Dudley to Birmingham.
- 241** will be renumbered to service 14 and rerouted via Whiteheath.
- 244** will be renumbered to service 19.
- 246** will be renumbered to service 6.
- 256** will be renumbered to service 16.
- 257** will be renumbered to service 17.
- 276** will be renumbered to service 7. The journeys on service 276 operated by Diamond will be withdrawn.
- 318** will be operated by Kev's Cars and Coaches rather than by Diamond.
- X7** is a new, limited stop, service X7 will serve the station every 20 minutes on Mondays to Saturdays until about 1900 hrs. It will operate from Wolverhampton to Dudley via the old 126 route, then via Birmingham New Road, Oldbury, Galton Bridge, Heath Street and Dudley Road to Birmingham.
- X10** will be rerouted via Brierley Hill Town Centre between Merry Hill and Pensnett Trading Estate and will be extended to Gornal Wood. The timetable will be revised.
- X96** will be renumbered to service 8.

The following Diamond services in Kidderminster will be revised :- 1, 2, 3, 4, 4A, 9C, 9S, 10 and 303

First Worcestershire services in the Worcester area will see cuts, particularly in the early morning and evening. Services to towns and villages outside Worcester will be savagely cut by First.

1 August 2018

Consultation on the Cross Country Franchise Now Open



The Department for Transport are currently consulting stakeholders and passengers on the specification of the next Cross Country franchise, due to start in October 2019.

SLUG will be responding to the parts of the consultation that deals with services in this area and our response will be available on this website once it has been submitted.

However, SLUG thinks that it is important that regular Cross Country passengers have their say on how the franchise is improved over the next few years. Therefore, we are asking any members who regularly travel on Cross Country trains to consider responding to the consultation as an individual passenger. You never know – your proposals may be taken seriously.

2 August 2018

Chiltern Railways Service Changes Due To Closure of Euston Station



London Euston station will be closed on three successive weekends later this month to enable engineering work to take place. The dates of the closure are **18-19 August, 25-27 August and 1-2 September**.

For Stourbridge line passengers, this means some good news and some bad news.

First, the good news. On the three Sundays in question, through trains from Kidderminster to London Marylebone will not be affected with through trains departing from Kidderminster at 0940 and 1113 and returning from London Marylebone at 1810 and 1940. In addition, on Monday 27 August (the later summer bank holiday), a revised timetable will see four through journeys in each direction - from Kidderminster at 0629, 0712, 0809 and 0912 with return journeys from London Marylebone at 1710, 1810, 2010 and 2110.

Now, the bad news. On the three Saturdays in question, the Chiltern website states that "In accordance with the partial closure of the Euston to Birmingham route due to engineering works, Chiltern Railways services between Marylebone and Birmingham will convey additional carriages. No Chiltern Railways services will serve Birmingham Snow Hill and stations to/from Kidderminster; Marylebone/Birmingham services will serve Birmingham Moor Street ONLY."

The timetable for these three Saturdays shows that the stock that resides overnight in Chiltern's Stourbridge depot and which normally runs in service from Kidderminster in the morning and back to Kidderminster in the evening will instead run as empty coaching stock to and from Birmingham Moor Street. It means that 4 of the first 10 trains of the day from Kidderminster will be cancelled, meaning inconvenience to passengers and overcrowding on the remaining West Midlands Railway services.

This is not the first time that this has happened - Chiltern did exactly the same thing over the Spring Bank Holiday. What made it worse was that there were a lot of passengers along the Stourbridge line who turned up on a Bank Holiday to catch one of these trains only to find that it wasn't running. There was no announcement in the local press, nor notices at Stourbridge line stations. It appears that everybody uses the Internet! However to add to the confusion, the National Rail Enquiries website on 2 August stated that no Chiltern trains would run between Snow Hill and Moor Street but showed the four Chiltern services from Kidderminster as actually running. You couldn't make it up. The National Rail Enquiries page may be viewed by clicking the link below.

SLUG will be bringing this matter up with Chiltern for their comments. SLUG will also raise the matter with the West Midlands Railway Executive to find out what they can do. Euston closures are going to be a common occurrence over the next few years as the station is remodelled for HS2. It is not right that Stourbridge line passengers should be the losers because of engineering work over 100 miles away.

22 April 2018

Chaos as Charter Train Blocks Old Hill Bank



The Stourbridge line suffered a day of cancellations and delays after a charter service from Newport to Scarborough broke down on Old Hill Bank on 21 April. The train had picked up passengers at Stourbridge Junction at 07:51 but was struggling when it passed Cradley Heath station at 07:59 before grinding to a halt between Cradley Heath and Old Hill. What made the situation worse was that it took 3½ hours for a rescue engine to arrive and move the stricken train. As a result, no trains ran from Stourbridge Junction to Birmingham from 07:35 until 11:57, a gap of 4 hours and 22 minutes. In the opposite direction, only 3 trains operated south of Stourbridge Junction to Kidderminster and Worcester between 08:00 and 12:00.

This was on a warm, sunny Saturday when many people probably intended to spend the day in Birmingham or Worcester, or have a day trip to Stratford-upon-Avon (top left) or the Severn Valley Railway (top right). In addition, West Bromwich Albion kicked off against Liverpool at 12:30, with fans from the Stourbridge direction unable to get to the ground by train as only three trains from that direction (2 from Langley Green and 1 from Rowley Regis) stopped at The Hawthorns. Things were only slightly better from Birmingham with 7 services stopping at the station during the morning. In fact, football fans were at Stourbridge Bus Station as early as 09:00 and were completely lost with no idea on how they would get to the ground by bus.

Much of the blame must be placed on whoever was responsible for moving the broken down train. SLUG understands that the replacement locomotive came from Lawley Street in Birmingham, so for it to take 3½ hours is unacceptable, and somebody's head should be on the chopping block for that. Questions have also been asked by passengers as to whether West Midlands Railway and Network Rail could have done more to reduce the misery and inconvenience that they suffered. However, words of praise must go to the Pre Metro Operations staff who man the Stourbridge Town car. They correctly told would be passengers at Stourbridge Town that no trains were moving from Stourbridge Junction and that their rail tickets were acceptable on local bus services.

SLUG has collated the data of cancelled and altered train services and will be presenting this data to West Midlands Railway (as the train operator) and West Midlands Rail (as the joint owner of the franchise) and asking them to liaise with Network Rail and provide answers that will ensure that any future blockage does not affect Stourbridge line passengers as significantly as the one did on 21 April.

7 January 2018

A Force To Be Reckoned With



The following is a press release issued by Stourbridge Line User Group.

A local rail campaign group is reflecting on its success in 2017. The Stourbridge Line User Group (SLUG) is celebrating the fruition of long standing ambitions for the railway which it represents. The Group has established a good working relationship with the new franchise holder, West Midlands Trains (who operate under the brand name West Midlands Railway) and the policy maker, West Midlands Rail.

SLUG Chairman, William Whiting was quoted as saying:-

"There have been dramatic developments such as West Midlands Railway and West Midlands Rail making a commitment to a passenger rail link from Stourbridge to Brierley Hill. Also Chiltern Railways have introduced weekend services to and from London Marylebone. However, as a campaign group, we must not be complacent when so much more is needed by the new generation of passengers."

He added:-

"We must put pressure on West Midlands Rail and West Midlands Railway to see the draft December 2018 timetable as soon as possible to ensure Sunday trains at Hartlebury are included. Hartlebury, another SLUG success story, has had an annual footfall growth averaging 17.8% over the last five years, which is probably the highest of any West Midlands station."

"We must also prompt the train operator to commit the new GOBLIN 172 train units to the Stourbridge Line to strengthen popular services."

"Furthermore, Stourbridge Line stations are badly in need of a makeover and we must push for West Midlands Railways' commitment to repaint and deep clean every one of its stations to be ordered by need, pointing out the tiredness of some of ours such as Galton Bridge - and attention to the canopy ends at Stourbridge Junction."

He concluded:-

"SLUG has recently received a national award for "Best Website" from the Rail Development Society, now known as Railfuture. This demonstrates that we are effective in getting our messages across: We highlight the problems with the rail network and sort them out with the authorities. The past year has seen a steady increase in new members. It is no coincidence that successful campaigns have influenced recruitment and with growing membership numbers, the Stourbridge Line User Group will be a force to be reckoned with in 2018."