

MISSION IMPOSSIBLE by John Warren

My mission, if I accepted it, was to find a quicker way to travel from Stourbridge Junction to Plymouth without the need to travel into Birmingham and then change direction to travel south-westerly. Instead, I would set out heading in the right direction and, by shaving nearly 20 miles off of my journey, I would successfully accomplish my mission.

The problem is that even Peter Graves would have failed miserably because connections between services at Worcester are poor, the service between Worcester and Cheltenham Spa is infrequent and connections at Cheltenham Spa are also poor. This is even more evident on the return journey when the word “poor” should be replaced by “appalling”. The following tables demonstrate how long journeys take at present travelling via Worcester and Birmingham. For passengers unwilling to walk between the two Birmingham City Centre stations, times are also shown for passengers who prefer to change at Smethwick Galton Bridge.

To arrive at Plymouth at the following times								
		1144	1247	1338	1443	1543	1645	1742
You would have to depart from Stourbridge Junction at the following times								
via Worcester (Shrub Hill or Foregate Street) and Cheltenham Spa	215¾ miles	None	0752 F St	0752 F St	1009 F St	1009 F St	1209 Sh H	1209 Sh H
via Birmingham Moor Street and Birmingham New Street	235½ miles	0714	0823	0918	1018	1118	1218	1318
via Smethwick Galton Bridge and Birmingham New Street	234¾ miles	0714	0815	0918	1018	1118	1218	1318

If you depart from Plymouth at the following times								
		0925	1025	1125	1150	1225	1325	1425
You would arrive at Stourbridge Junction at the following times								
via Cheltenham Spa and Worcester (Shrub Hill or Foregate Street)	215¾ miles	1518 Sh H	1518 Sh H	1709 Sh H	1709 Sh H	1709 Sh H	1906 Sh H	1906 Sh H
via Birmingham New Street and Birmingham Moor Street	235½ miles	1338	1438	1538	1608	1638	1738	1852
via Birmingham New Street and Smethwick Galton Bridge	234¾ miles	1338	1438	1538	1608	1638	1738	1852



The 1325 service at Plymouth. Travelling 20 miles extra via Birmingham New Street gets you back to Stourbridge 1½ hours earlier than travelling via Worcester.

Looking at the above table, it can be seen that, on two southbound services, there is only a 9 minute difference between journey times via Worcester and Birmingham. However, the same cannot be said of northbound journeys where only the last arrival via Worcester is within 15 minutes of the arrival via Birmingham, the others differing by between 30 and 100 minutes.

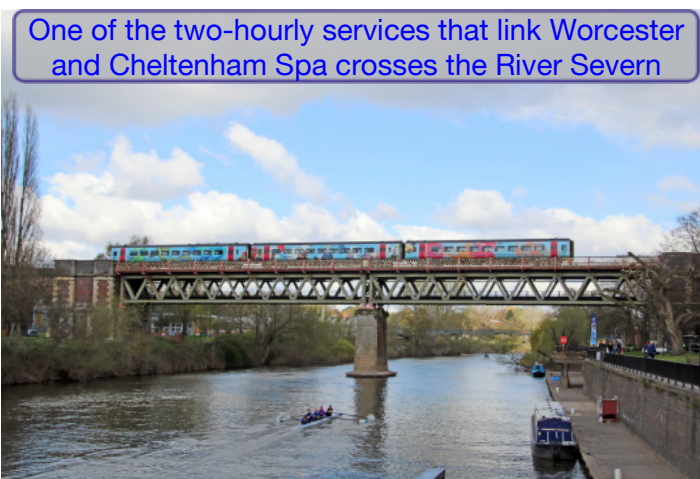
A lot of people would say that it is acceptable for Stourbridge Junction passengers to travel via Birmingham. However, the same could not be said about Kidderminster passengers, who face an unnecessary 19½ mile northeasterly journey before turning 180° for the rest of the trip to the South West. The travel times for Kidderminster passengers are as follows :

To arrive at Plymouth at the following times								
		1144	1247	1338	1443	1543	1645	1742
You would have to depart from Kidderminster at the following times								
via Worcester (Shrub Hill or Foregate Street) and Cheltenham Spa	208¾ miles	None	0804 F St	0804 F St	1018 F St	1018 F St	1218 Sh H	1218 Sh H
via Birmingham Moor Street and Birmingham New Street	242½ miles	0705	0809	0906	1010	1110	1210	1310
via Smethwick Galton Bridge and Birmingham New Street	241¾ miles	0705	0754	0906	1010	1110	1210	1310

If you depart from Plymouth at the following times								
		0925	1025	1125	1150	1225	1325	1425
You would arrive at Kidderminster at the following times								
via Cheltenham Spa and Worcester (Shrub Hill or Foregate Street)	208¾ miles	1510 Sh H	1510 Sh H	1701 Sh H	1701 Sh H	1701 Sh H	1855 Sh H	1855 Sh H
via Birmingham New Street and Birmingham Moor Street	242½ miles	1347	1447	1547	1620	1647	1752	1905
via Birmingham New Street and Smethwick Galton Bridge	241¾ miles	1347	1447	1547	1620	1647	1752	1905

As can be seen, there are two southbound services (highlighted in red) where you can actually leave Kidderminster later via Worcester. However, in both cases, the saving is only 8 minutes for a journey which is 33 miles shorter. Added to this, a potentially cheaper off-peak return ticket would probably necessitate a return journey via the same route, and the longer journey times that this would entail.

SLUG has always maintained that connections between the Stourbridge line and Cheltenham Spa (for connections to the South West) are inadequate. There is an hourly service from Westbury to Gloucester via Bristol, but this only extends to Worcester and Great Malvern every 2 hours. A public consultation on the next GWR franchise has just closed, and SLUG has responded and requested that all



journeys should run through to Worcester with some extended as far as Stourbridge Junction. The SLUG response can be found under the Consultations tab on the SLUG website. In addition, we will be making representations to West Midlands Rail and West Midlands Railways for one Stourbridge line journey per hour that currently terminates at Worcester to be extended to Gloucester to provided better connections. The above tables show that the current situation is not acceptable.