

A UNIQUE OPPORTUNITY by Rob Hebron

The Stourbridge Line User Group is pleased to continue working with London Midland to improve services on the Snow Hill lines. However, the Group is very disappointed by the lack of benefits to Stourbridge Line passengers in the package of improvements offered by the company which were conditional or optional in attaining the Direct Award.

In order to achieve a seamless transfer from the current rail franchise to the devolved structure, the Department for Transport has granted London Midland the licence to operate trains up until October 2017. This has been a missed opportunity -not by SLUG which has publicly declared its campaigns but by London Midland ignoring the potential of the Stourbridge Line.

Improvements to the West Midlands area train services outside of our line, include

- Earlier Sunday services into Birmingham for morning workers and shoppers.
- Extra evening services from London to Trent Valley.
- Later services on the Abbey Line.
- 437 more parking spaces spread over three stations
- Electrification planned for Walsall to Rugeley

The earlier Sunday services are on the lines into Birmingham Snow Hill via Tyseley. They are most likely the ones which form the existing Stourbridge return journeys. This is of no use to passengers wishing to travel from Worcestershire stations to Birmingham to make early inter-city connections.



In many cases, a backward facing journey to Birmingham is necessary to reach southern destinations because of the lack of frequent connections at Worcester in the natural direction of travel.

Poor Sunday morning services and inferior Worcestershire connections are both in need of remedial action. The chance to submit journey remedies will be through another channel. That route will be the fourteen week long

consultation which is underway for West Midlands Rail, the successor to the existing DfT controlled franchisee. As budgets and powers are devolved from Westminster to the West Midlands councils (collectively West Midlands Rail), there is a unique opportunity for the Stourbridge Line User Group to identify all that needs to be addressed to attain a train service which is efficient and fully integrated with the national rail network.

SLUG has worked on its own “wish list” and will submit requests which cover many of its outstanding campaigns:-

- Services beyond Worcester to access the south - west of England.
- Earlier Sunday services into Birmingham for morning workers and shoppers.
- Extra evening trains from Birmingham.
- A Sunday service for Hartlebury.
- A bigger car park for Hartlebury.
- Longer trains for special events.

The consultation is a unique opportunity, not only to fulfil campaigns but also to influence the planning of forthcoming projects such as Birmingham Snow Hill redevelopment. The Department for Transport is keen to devolve responsibility to the region and there will be much competition between counties for project funding. The Stourbridge Line User Group will endeavour to ensure that the Stourbridge Line has the best possible service and journey opportunities both in the West Midlands and Worcestershire.

MOVEMENT FOR GROWTH by Roger Davis

On 17 December, the West Midlands Integrated Transport Authority, in one of its last acts before metamorphosing into the West Midlands Combined Authority, authorised the publication of “Movement For Growth”, the strategic transport plan for improvements over the next twenty years.



The document details plans for all modes of transport - walking, cycling, road, buses and coaches. However, it

is the area of rail and rapid transit that is of interest to SLUG. The majority of the rapid transit network is proposed for SPRINT operation, which has been described as a bus that thinks it’s a tram. Apparently, somebody has gone off the rails recently. The first SPRINT route will operate from Birmingham City Centre to Quinton via the Hagley Road and will come into operation in 2018, so it will be interesting to see how successful this proves and how it will impact on the current service 9 from Stourbridge to Birmingham.

Rail based enhancements can be split into two parts - those that are considered a priority for implementation by 2026 when HS2 phase 1 opens, and those that are proposed for the period after 2026.

The former category includes the following enhancements of interest to the Stourbridge line :-

- The reopening of Snow Hill platform 4 and the provision of a bay platform at Rowley Regis to provide a more intense service in the inner area on the Snow Hill lines. One concern to SLUG is that this may impact on the frequency of services west of Rowley Regis and SLUG will be campaigning to ensure that the 10 minute frequency service from Stourbridge Junction is maintained.



- The extension of the Midland Metro from Wednesbury to Brierley Hill via Dudley and Merry Hill.

In the longer term, the following enhancements are proposed :-

- The reinstatement of a through rail service from Stourbridge to Walsall, running parallel to the Midland Metro extension between Harts Hill and Wednesbury. This would most likely be tram-train, although heavy rail is possible, and would extend north of Walsall to Aldridge on the Sutton Park line and to Pelsall and Brownhills on the Lichfield line. SLUG is of the opinion that a link from Stourbridge to Harts Hill to link with the Midland Metro line should be prioritised to open in the same timescale as the Midland Metro line and will campaign for this to happen.
- The reopening of the station at Fernhill Heath between Droitwich Spa and Worcester.

One interesting paragraph in the Movement For Growth document reads as follows.

4.40 The role of innovative technologies such as Monorail and Very Light rail will be explored for appropriate corridors. Very light rail could be a valuable interim solution for elements of longer term rail corridors. The Dudley Very Light Rail innovation centre and test track will be delivered so that it does not conflict with development of metro, tram-train and potential longer term rail in the Walsall – Stourbridge corridor.

This is good news as SLUG was concerned that Dudley Council's proposals for the VLR Innovation Centre seemed to be working in conflict to the ITA proposals.

The devolution deal to set up the West Midlands Combined Authority was signed by the Chancellor of the Exchequer on 17 November and, subject to parliamentary approval this coming April, will see £1 billion of government investment to kick-start the priority projects.

SLUG will keep you informed of developments as and when they occur.