

# SLUG News - 2009

30 December 2009

## A Brave New Year: Work commences on Kidderminster station.

The year 2009 has been notable for improvements to the Stourbridge Line. At first glance they may seem minor but even so; our stations have not only improved visually with London Midland-colour paint but have acquired equipment that is of practical benefit to passengers. Real time information screens and ticket vending machines have been installed at many locations as the modernisation programme has rolled out.

Granted, day to day timekeeping and reliability of trains has not always been optimum but 2010 will be the year of the 172 class train which should bring considerable improvements to the both timekeeping and timetable on our line.

As a campaigning Rail User Group, we have learned to be patient because the very nature of rail planning is lengthy and the industry is interdependent, despite being private and competitive.

It is heart-warming to see a long-standing campaign in progress and near fruition. So it is with SLUG's request for a brand new station building at Kidderminster. The plan for Kidderminster Railway Station is a £3,575,000 project to upgrade the facilities to the standards rail travelers expect in the 21st Century. The County Council is working in partnership with Network Rail, the Severn Valley Railway, Kidderminster Railway Museum, bus and rail operating companies and Wyre Forest District Council. The product of this collaboration will be not just a railway station but an interchange – a coordinated transport hub.

There are four parts to the project.

A new station building and improved passenger facilities

A new layout on the station forecourt with improved facilities for bus services

An improved walking connection from the new station building to the Severn Valley Railway station building

Changes to the entrance junction to the railway station from the A448 Comberton Hill

Work has already started on the forecourt and this work will continue until Christmas 2010. The station building itself will be constructed in 2011. The finer detail of the station was discussed in November and SLUG understands that consideration has been given to complementing the heritage appearance of the Severn Valley Railway site. The meeting in November also covered practical issues such as number of ticket vending points required.

SLUG will monitor progress of the new station and the travelling public can see for themselves through the website link <http://www.worcestershire.gov.uk/cms/transport-and-streets/transport/rail/kidderminster-station.aspx>

17 October 2009  
Green and Black

SLUG has already submitted its official response to the West Midlands Region Rail Development Plan produced by Centro in conjunction with Worcestershire County Council. (Our response can be found in the form of a downloadable document on the right hand side of this web page). There is a certain amount of overlap of ideas contained in the SLUG response to the WMRRDP and those of the Birmingham Friends of the Earth response. A copy of the BFoE document has been forwarded to SLUG and we have examined its content and presentation.

Birmingham Friends of the Earth is an organisation motivated by its concerns for the environment. Its approach to public transport is that this is the responsible way to travel, in order to reduce carbon emissions. SLUG is not a political group but it broadly agrees with the principle that the construction of a better public transport network must precede any campaign to discourage wasteful journeys made by one person in one car. SLUG will readily support “green” public transport (e.g. it has promoted the Parry People Mover railcar on the Stourbridge Town branch line). Thankfully, the Train Operating Companies too are keen to be environmentally-friendly and it is no coincidence that London Midland and its predecessor, Central Trains, chose a partly green livery for their fleet.

SLUG and the BFoE are aware of the vast amount of freight-only lines, diversionary lines and mothballed railways in the West Midlands and surrounding areas. These are the key to enlarging the rail network, creating better connections and making rail travel more attractive: SLUG continues to campaign for a reopened Stourbridge to Dudley line and the potential of journeys being available to Walsall, Lichfield and beyond. In some respects, the Group is at odds with Centro and its ambition to run Metro trams along the Dudley to Brierley Hill route. However, the recession and the unwillingness of government to fund the Metro scheme presents new opportunities. Centro are now evaluating tram/train track sharing, and at the same time Railfreight are lobbying for a restoration of track to divert trains via Dudley. If all of these elements come together, a passenger service is perfectly possible.

Birmingham Friends of the Earth share SLUG’s support for the Bordesley Chords and a re-opened Camp Hill line. These two schemes are essential to create capacity in the Birmingham area.

Also within the BFoE response is an interesting idea – the Benson Road Curve, which could form a Birmingham to Walsall link via Handsworth. This is not a new idea but has resurfaced in light of other “fashionable” schemes. BFoE have set out a well-reasoned argument for the curve and researched the route and engineering involved (all fully illustrated). The creation of such a link would require the diversion of Midland Metro on-street to make available the track bed for heavy rail. The cost of diversion would have to be weighed against the benefit of freeing up platforms in Birmingham New Street. To put this into context, the Birmingham “Gateway” project, which will cost millions of pounds, will not free up a single platform or create room for more train services into New Street. The planners have to look at Birmingham Snow Hill and Moor Street to resolve the issues of catering for growing demand.

SLUG has never denied that that it is ambitious. Birmingham Friends of the Earth may be even more so. The UK may be in a recession but rail travel is defying the trend. Do we need to wait until the country is in the “black” before we invest? “Green” solutions should override short-term economy measures. Wouldn’t it be nice to see our green and black trains taking us to new destinations?