

8 December 2015

Midland Metro extended To Bull Street



Sunday 6 December saw trams run in service on Birmingham City Centre streets for the first time since 1953 when Midland Metro line 1 was extended from St Paul's tram stop to Bull Street. The service now runs alongside Snow Hill station before crossing Colmore Circus to its new terminus in Upper Bull Street.

A new Snow Hill stop, close to Great Charles Street Queensway is currently being constructed and will open in early 2016. However, a connection with the Livery Street subway entrance to the main line station that was originally proposed has not materialised, meaning that the Snow Hill tram stop is for the benefit of people accessing Snow Hill Queensway rather than the railway station. The most convenient stop for Snow Hill station will be Bull Street.

The extension of the line from Bull Street to New Street Station and Grand Central Shopping Centre is expected to take place in early 2016 (probably February). The line will travel along Corporation Street with a stop close to Temple Street before continuing into Stephenson Street where the line will terminate.

A further extension will see the line continue via Pinfold Street and Victoria Square to Centenary Square and this is scheduled to open in 2019, with a further extension along Broad Street to Edgbaston via Five Ways scheduled to open in 2021.



25 October 2015

Latest News - October 2015



Since the Stourbridge Line User Group quarterly magazine *Platform* went to press, there have been a number of developments along the Stourbridge line.

(1) Direct Chiltern services to and from London Marylebone

From 25 October 2015, a number of changes have been made to the direct services to Marylebone in conjunction with the introduction of through services between London Marylebone and Oxford Parkway. The main change is that a new service departs Marylebone at 1615, stopping at Banbury, Leamington Spa, Warwick Parkway and Solihull and arriving at Birmingham Moor Street at 1754, Birmingham Snow Hill at 1759, Rowley Regis at 1815, Stourbridge Junction at 1827 and Kidderminster at 1842. Unfortunately, the 1847 service from Marylebone to Kidderminster now terminates at Birmingham Moor Street. In addition, the 2015 and 2115 services from Marylebone now depart 5 minutes earlier at 2010 and 2110.

Towards London, the service times remain unchanged, although stopping patterns between Birmingham and London have been changed on some services. SLUG has published updated timetables under the "Timetables" tab on this website.

(2) Midland Metro's Birmingham Snow Hill stop

From 25 October, the Snow Hill stop will close to enable the Metro track to be connected to the Birmingham City Centre extension. Trams will start and finish at St Paul's, where a replacement shuttle bus service will transport passengers to Snow Hill Queensway.

This arrangement is expected to last for up to six weeks while engineers install a new junction on the track between Snow Hill and St Paul's, along with new signalling equipment and overhead electrification to tie the line in to the new extension. Once work is complete services will run to the new Bull Street stop in the city centre. Centro say that the rest of the extension down Corporation Street to New Street Station is scheduled to open by the end of the year - although they haven't specified which year! It will be very interesting to see if they achieve this target.

(3) Dudley Ultra Light Rail Development

Despite claims from Centro that the Dudley Ultra Light Rail proposals would be subject to change to enable the Metro line from Wednesbury to Brierley Hill to be built by 2026 if funding is agreed, Dudley Council submitted a planning application on 8 October to build the Innovation Centre at the Dudley station site.

It would appear that, rather than presenting a united front to Government as the councils of Greater Manchester have, the West Midlands councils seem bent on "doing their own thing" to the detriment of passengers in the region. It probably explains why Manchester has a superb tram network while the West Midlands lurches from one plan to another and achieves nothing.

10 October 2015

Ticket Checks On Trains



In issue 1 (Autumn 2015) of Platform, SLUG officer Roger Davis described how he set up an Excel spreadsheet of every railway journey made from 2002 to the present day. If you don't have a copy of Platform, the article is reproduced under the Newsletter tab.

As a companion to this article, the full statistics produced are published on the SLUG website and may be viewed by viewing the Revenue Protection page under the "Campaigns" tab.



Class 139 services on the Stourbridge Town branch had the highest percentage of on-board ticket checks (74.61%), while London Midland Class 150 journeys between Cradley Heath and Birmingham Moor Street had the lowest percentage (12.5%).



27 July 2015

Cradley Heath Interchange Opens



The new £1.9 million modern bus interchange at Cradley Heath station with improved facilities opened to passengers on Sunday 26 July. The new interchange contains a new waiting area with toilet facilities, seating, CCTV cameras, improved access to train services and electronic information to tell them when their next bus or train is due.

Within the main building there are four connected bus stands. A glazed roof will make the area feel open and light. At each stand there will be a passenger information totem to show when buses are due and automatic doors that only open when the bus arrives.

Changing between bus and rail services is also easier and more convenient. A new design has enabled all bus services to be able to use the interchange. There is an additional two stands on a newly constructed island instead of the existing stop on Forge Lane. These stands have shelters and passenger information totems. A zebra crossing through the heart of the interchange connects the six stands together.



13 May 2015

Stourbridge Line User Group Public Meeting News



The 2015 Public Meeting, organised by the Stourbridge Line User Group, was held at Kidderminster SVR station on 12 May. Representatives from London Midland, Worcestershire County Council and Centro gave informative talks on current developments along the Stourbridge line and their hopes for further improvements in the future. Chiltern Railways, who were unable to attend the meeting, sent a written report which was presented to the audience. The audience heard details on many subjects, the major items being the redevelopment of Kidderminster station and the proposed devolution of the West Midlands rail franchise from DfT to West Midlands Rail, a consortium of 14 local authorities in the Midlands.

The presentations were followed by a question and answer session, where members of the audience expressed their concerns on a number of subjects - such as, the provision of through services from the Stourbridge line to the new Worcestershire Parkway station, the provision of earlier Sunday services to Birmingham and the aspirations of the speakers for the next five years. One major concern was that no progress had been made on providing a rail link between Stourbridge and Walsall even though the trackbed still existed and had been unused as a passenger route for 50 years. There was concern that the proposals of Dudley Council to use the trackbed from Dudley to Dudley Port as a testing ground for an ultra light rail service would be detrimental to the reintroduction of services over the whole route.

A full account of the meeting will be published in the next edition of the Newsletter, and we will keep you up to date with any progress on the above issues on this website and on our Facebook page.

12 May 2015

Rail Timetable Changes from 17 May



A new rail timetable comes into effect from Sunday 17 May.

For Stourbridge line users, there are no major changes on the Birmingham to Worcester line. However, for Stourbridge line users travelling onwards from Worcester towards Oxford, improvements have been made to the services on the North Cotswolds line.

The new timetable will run until 12 December 2015, although Chiltern Railways will be making changes to the Kidderminster to London Marylebone service on 26 October to coincide with the introduction of the new services from Oxford Parkway to Marylebone. Existing Kidderminster to Marylebone services will have different stopping patterns from 26 October and we will provide details of these changes closer to the date. The good news is that there will be an additional Silver Set service on Mondays to Fridays at 1615 hrs from London Marylebone to Kidderminster from 26 October, which should provide an extra commuter service from Birmingham at about 1800 hrs.

Updated timetables can be found under the Timetables tab or departure and destination boards for any station from Jewellery Quarter to Worcester Foregate Street can be viewed from the appropriate station page under the Stations tab.

26 March 2015

Stourbridge Line User Group AGM and Public Meeting



The 2015 Annual General Meeting of the Stourbridge Line User Group will take place on Tuesday 12 May 2015 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.

As per custom, the AGM will be preceded by a Public Meeting, which is open to members and non-members alike.

The last few years have seen new trains on both the Stourbridge main line and the Stourbridge Town branch, improved trains services at Hartlebury and improved facilities at many of our stations. In the past year, through off-peak services have been reinstated between Hagley and Worcester. Recently, it has been announced that funding has finally been secured to rebuild Kidderminster station and its environs. However, proposals for a rail based service through Dudley have stalled but an alternative proposal for an ultra-light rail service from Dudley to Dudley Port has been embraced by Dudley Council, although its effect on other proposals (heavy rail, tram-train or Metro) have yet to be revealed.

In the future, there are plans for the local rail franchise, currently operated by London Midland, to be devolved with control passing from DfT to West Midlands Rail, a partnership of the region's 14 local authorities. In addition, a new Worcestershire Parkway station, east of Worcester where the Birmingham to Bristol and Worcester to Oxford lines cross, will be built and, although not directly on our line, could affect the pattern of our services in the future, especially if the track infrastructure in Worcester City Centre is brought up to standard.

You, the travelling public will be able to listen to guest speakers from the rail industry and county travel planning departments. 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 at the meeting are :-

Brenda Lawrence Head of Route (Snow Hill Lines) - London Midland

Babs Coombes Black Country Manager (currently seconded as Rail Partnerships Manager) - Centro

David Balme Transport Planning Officer (Rail) - Worcestershire County Council

A written presentation is also expected to be submitted by Chiltern Railways.

25 March 2015

Stourbridge Junction Car Park Extension to open on 30 March



The Stourbridge Junction car park extension will open on Monday 30 March 2015.

The extension is at the far end of the Rufford Road car park, close to the junction between the lines to Cradley Heath and Round Oak.

The new car park will create an additional 223 car parking spaces, bringing the total free parking spaces at the station to 1,020.

The only question now is how long it will take before the car park is completely filled up again and, when that happens, what can be done to provide even more spaces.

14 March 2015

Chiltern Line Closed on 21/22 March



The Chiltern line will be closed south of Banbury over the weekend of 21 and 22 March to undertake major resignalling of the line to enable trains to use the newly built curve from Bicester to Oxford. This line will open to passengers in September enabling trains from London Marylebone to travel via a rebuilt station at Bicester Village (renamed from Bicester Town to the chagrin of the natives) and Islip to a new station at Oxford Parkway (north of the city). Trains will then be extended into Oxford station next year and possibly extended to Cowley (south of the city) in about 2020.

Therefore, on 21 and 22 March, Chiltern Railways trains from the West Midlands will be diverted to Oxford for onward connections to London Paddington on First Great Western services. On these dates, your ticket will be accepted on First Great Western between Oxford and London Paddington and on the Bakerloo London Underground between London Marylebone and London Paddington. Your ticket will also be accepted on CrossCountry services between Birmingham New Street and Reading.

On 21 March before 1320 hrs, Marylebone station will be closed. Replacement bus services will be available between Banbury and Hillingdon (connecting to a tube train to Baker Street) or London Marylebone.

After 1320 on 21 March and all day on 22 March, replacement bus services will be available between Banbury and High Wycombe, with trains running from High Wycombe to London Marylebone.

13 March 2015

Chiltern Line Reopens between Leamington Spa and Banbury



Chiltern Railways services are back to normal today (13 March) after several weeks of disruption following the landslip at Harbury, between Banbury and Leamington Spa. Through trains have recommenced between Kidderminster, Stourbridge, Birmingham and London Marylebone. During the blockade, Chiltern offered the incentive to West Midlands rail users of buying tickets to London at the Banbury to Marylebone fare. This offer is to continue for a limited period – and includes season tickets. So for an annual ticket, a saving of about £2,000 is available!

However, whilst trains may be running, the work at Harbury has not yet concluded. Network Rail engineers will be on site for several weeks to come, to remove spoil and to ensure there is no risk of further landslips. This means that the temporary speed restrictions that were in place before the landslip will continue for the foreseeable future.

Regular passengers who commute between the West Midlands and London will be pleased that services are now back to normal. The line has also reopened in time for what will be a busy weekend for leisure travel; thousands of Walsall FC fans will be travelling to Wembley for the Johnstone's Paint Trophy whilst the annual St. Patrick's Day parade takes place in Birmingham city centre.

Through Cross Country services between the South Coast, Midlands and North are also back to normal.

One development that has been delayed by the landslip has been the introduction into service of the new Class 68 diesels, which will displace the older Class 67 diesels that power the Chiltern Silver Sets. One of the services from Kidderminster has been hauled by a Class 68 diesel for the past few weeks, but the introduction into squadron service will now not take place until the summer as Chiltern need to complete driver training.

11 March 2015

Stourbridge Line - Latest Developments



A number of improvements are currently taking place, or are due to start shortly along the Stourbridge line.

Kidderminster : The full funding to redevelop Kidderminster station has been secured (see News story dated 4 February) and work could start in summer 2016.

Stourbridge Junction : The extension to the car park is scheduled to be completed by the end of March and will create another 223 parking spaces. This new car park, which is a continuation of the existing overspill car park, will enable an extra 25 disabled parking spaces to be provided on the main car park in place of 60 existing parking spaces. In addition, funding has been obtained to undertake some improvement works including the re-cladding of the station subway.

Cradley Heath : Work on the new Interchange at Cradley Heath is progressing and still work is starting to be assembled. Work is due for completion in the Spring.

Rowley Regis : All work at Rowley Regis is now complete with the 360-space extension to the car park and the new secure bicycle hub now open.

Birmingham Snow Hill : Work is continuing to divert the Midland Metro through Birmingham City Centre to a new terminus outside New Street station in Stephenson Street. The extension should open in the autumn.

Meanwhile, our friends at National Express West Midlands have been busy with a couple of changes along the line - one good and one bad.

The good news is that service 9, which parallels our line from Stourbridge to Birmingham, has been upgraded to use brand-new buses in a completely new livery. The bad news is that they have used roadworks in Solihull Town Centre, as part of the Solihull Gateway project, to move another 6 bus routes away from the railway station (services 6, 49, 70, 71, 72 and 76). This change is scheduled to last until October or November. SLUG will be monitoring the situation at the end of this period and will press Centro, London Midland and Chiltern to put pressure on National Express to ensure that not only are these 6 routes reinstated at the station but the 966 route to the Airport and NEC is also reinstated as this is an essential link.

5 March 2015

Devolution of rail powers to West Midlands Rail continues to make progress



Proposals to give the West Midlands greater control over its local rail services are progressing. Secretary of State for Transport Patrick McLoughlin met representatives from a consortium of 14 metropolitan, shire and unitary authorities during a visit to Wolverhampton on 2 March and told them that good progress was being made towards putting more responsibility for local rail services in local hands.

The consortium, known as West Midlands Rail (WMR), will work with the Department for Transport on the development and introduction of a new rail franchise for the region in 2017.

The next stage is to agree the basis for collaborative working which outlines the roles and responsibilities of both the DfT and WMR going forward. Work on this will begin straight away.

The Secretary of State's visit follows a proposition for rail devolution submitted by WMR last autumn after the DfT asked English regions for their thoughts on having a greater role in the commissioning and management of local rail services.

5 February 2015

Groundhog Day ?



Exactly one year ago today, the main line to the far west was severed when the sea wall at Dawlish collapsed during severe storms, splitting the First Great Western network into two self-contained sections. First Great Western services were severely disrupted as trains were trapped “on the wrong side of the breach”. This was obviously a problem as short-sighted closures in the 1960’s had seen alternative routes to Plymouth and Cornwall closed leaving the Dawlish route as the only remaining rail route. First Great Western responded by moving trainsets in and out of Laira shed by road to keep a reasonable service running, despite the appalling weather also causing temporary closures on other parts of their network, including the Somerset Levels, The Thames Valley and Cornwall.

If we fast forward a year, the main line between Leamington Spa and Banbury is blocked at Harbury Cutting due to a landslide, splitting the Chiltern Railways network into two self-contained units. It is now five days since the landslide occurred and Chiltern Railways are severely disrupted as trains are trapped “on the wrong side of the landslide”. The Chiltern Railways website sums up the situation.

Q. Does this disruption affect trains between Kidderminster, Solihull and Birmingham?

Yes. We do not have sufficient trains trapped on the north side of the landslide to run our normal Monday train service between Kidderminster and Leamington Spa via Birmingham, therefore there will be a thinned out service. Please check the timetable that will be on our website for details of which trains will run.

The effect on the Stourbridge line at present is that three of the five Monday to Friday morning rush-hour services towards Birmingham are cancelled - 0638 from Stourbridge Junction to Birmingham Moor St, 0705 from Kidderminster to Birmingham Moor St and 0809 from Kidderminster to Birmingham Moor St, meaning that about 16 less carriages are available for commuters in the morning rush hour. This has caused consternation for obvious reasons - as one commuter posted on a web forum *“The cancellation of the 0705 Chiltern ex Kidderminster is having a massive effect on the London Midland all stop trains that run either side. The 4 carriage 172 LM trains are full usually without the 6 carriage load of passengers off the 0705 too. There’s some pretty awful crowding going on at the moment.”*

In the evening, there are two trains cancelled, although the Chiltern website chooses not to advertise this. These are the 1855 Birmingham Snow Hill to Kidderminster and 2315 Birmingham Snow Hill to Stourbridge Junction, the latter being particularly inconvenient as it is the last service of the evening from Birmingham.

On Saturday, just one of the four normal services will be operating - the 0637 service from Kidderminster.

This year’s situation is different from last year’s in one respect - the trains are NOT trapped on the wrong side of the landslide. There are numerous routes that could be used to transfer Chiltern trainsets from Wembley to either Tyseley or Stourbridge Junction, and it is known that one Silver Set has made the journey north from Wembley to the West Midlands via the West Coast Main Line. The fact that this has not resulted in the restoration of any of the cancelled services on the Stourbridge line after 5 days of disruption demonstrates just how committed Chiltern Railways is to providing a train service north of Birmingham.

4 February 2015

Funding secured for Kidderminster Station Redevelopment



Worcestershire County Council has received an extra £1.8 million to get the long-awaited redevelopment of Kidderminster Railway Station under way.

Worcestershire Local Enterprise Partnership secured £2.5million in summer 2014 and the additional funding now allocated to the Greater Birmingham and Solihull Local Enterprise Partnership means the full funding is now available and planning towards delivering the scheme can now start.

Now that all the funding for the railway station redevelopment is in place it is anticipated that construction work will start by next summer (2016) after the design, planning and tendering processes have been completed.

Worcestershire County Council will appoint contractors and be responsible for delivering the project which is expected to take around 18 months once building starts.

The revamp at Kidderminster will provide new railway station buildings, improved passenger facilities, a new forecourt layout, and better access and facilities for pedestrians, people with disabilities, cyclists, taxi and bus operators and their passengers.

Access to the station from the A448 Comberton Hill will be improved by the installation of traffic lights at the junction with Lea Street.

4 January 2015

The SLUG Christmas Quiz Answers

All you had to do in the Christmas Quiz was to name the 30 locations in the photos below.

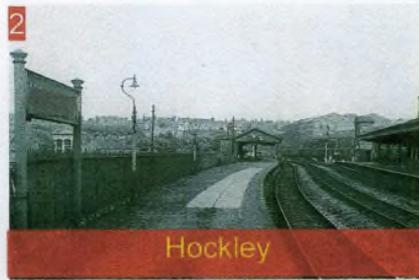
Every location is either on the Stourbridge line from Worcester to Birmingham, or on branch lines that diverged from the Stourbridge line at Old Hill, Stourbridge, Kidderminster and Hartlebury.

The answer to each photo may be found by clicking on it to reveal a larger photograph with the answer.

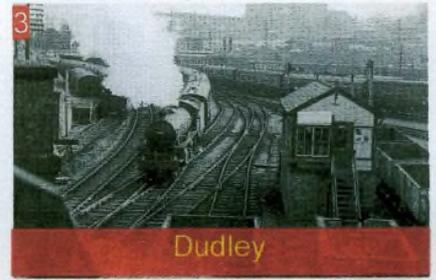
Congratulations to anybody who managed to identify all 30 locations.



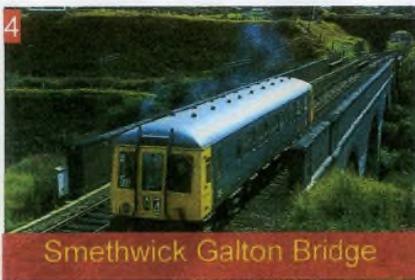
(N D Mundy)



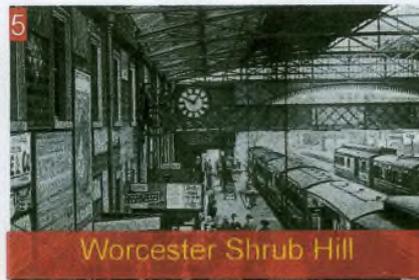
(Lens of Sutton)



(John Edgington)



(Michael Mensing)



(Bob Pixton Collection)



(Peter Shoesmith Collection)



(National Rail Museum)



(H C Casserley)



(Lens of Sutton)



(John Edgington)



(R S Carpenter Collection)



(Stephenson Locomotive Society)



13

Old Hill

(Michael Mensing)



14

Fernhill Heath

(R G Nelson / T Walsh Collection)



15

Dudley Port (Low Level)

(Stations UK)



16

Stourbridge Town

(J W Gibbs)



17

Smethwick Rolfe Street

(Michael Mensing)



18

Great Bridge South

(John Edgington)



19

Cradley Heath & Cradley

(R G Nelson / T Walsh Collection)



20

Cutnall Green Halt

(Bob Pixton Collection)



21

Stourport-on-Severn

(Stations UK)



22

Oldbury & Langley Green

(R G Nelson / T Walsh Collection)



23

Wolverhampton Low Level

(Stephenson Locomotive Society)



24

Wednesbury Town

(John Edgington)



25

Smethwick West

(Douglas Thompson)



26

Stourbridge Jct (First station)

(Stourbridge Library)



27

Windmill End

(Stephenson Locomotive Society)



28

Soho & Winson Green

(Michael Mensing)



29

Parkhead Viaduct

(John Whitehouse)



30

Birmingham Snow Hill

(R M Casserley)

3 January 2015

New £20m rail link between Sandwell and Dudley ?



A light rail service taking train passengers between Dudley and Sandwell could be opened within five years, under a £20 million flagship project.

It would be the first time that train services would come back to Dudley town centre in 50 years.

The tram train would transport thousands of visitors from Dudley Port station, in Tipton, to the site of Dudley's former station at the bottom of Castle Hill, close to Dudley Zoo, Black Country Living Museum and Dudley Canal Trust.

There are also plans in the pipeline to then extend the line further to a stop near Dudley bus station.

The scheme has been unveiled following a deal struck between Dudley Council and Warwick Manufacturing Group, which wants to use it as a pilot to trial the next generation of tram trains.

The group will open a multi-storey National Centre for Development of Very Light Rail Technology at the new station. Around 45 people will work at the site, overseeing the pilot service to Dudley Port and developing the technology.

Two new tracks will be laid down on a disused freight line from Dudley Port to the town. One will be used for the passenger service, the second will be used by the group to develop their tram trains.

The group and council have secured support from Centro. The Black Country Living Museum and Dudley Zoo have also backed the plan.

1 January 2015

SLUG calls for more Destinations



A local rail campaigning group is aiming its New Year message at train operators and county transport planners. The Stourbridge Line User Group (SLUG) is calling for more destinations and journey opportunities to be made available from the Stourbridge Line. At present, train operator London Midland covers stations between Stratford upon Avon and Great Malvern and Chiltern Railways services extend even to London but the Group believes there is more scope for development.

SLUG Chairman, Rob Hebron was quoted as saying:-

"This is a wonderful railway, offering through journeys beyond Birmingham and even to London but the Worcester end of the line has not been exploited at all. I believe that Evesham should have through trains to Birmingham because the commuter belt is continuing to extend southwards and people want an alternative to the motor car."

He continued:-

"Worcestershire Parkway station is a project which will go ahead, sooner, rather than later. SLUG needs a commitment from the planners to include a platform for Stourbridge Line trains."

SLUG spokesman, Bob Randle added,-

"It is ridiculous that passengers wishing to travel to the South West of the country have to travel northwards to catch Bristol bound trains from Birmingham New Street which is not even on this line. Many of our trains only go as far as Worcester. Some should be extended to Cheltenham and Gloucester."

SLUG is aware that timetable planning is already advanced for the summer months and new ideas take a long time to come to fruition. It is using its New Year message to kick start the campaign.

