



Platform



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GOOD SERVICE OR BAD SERVICE?

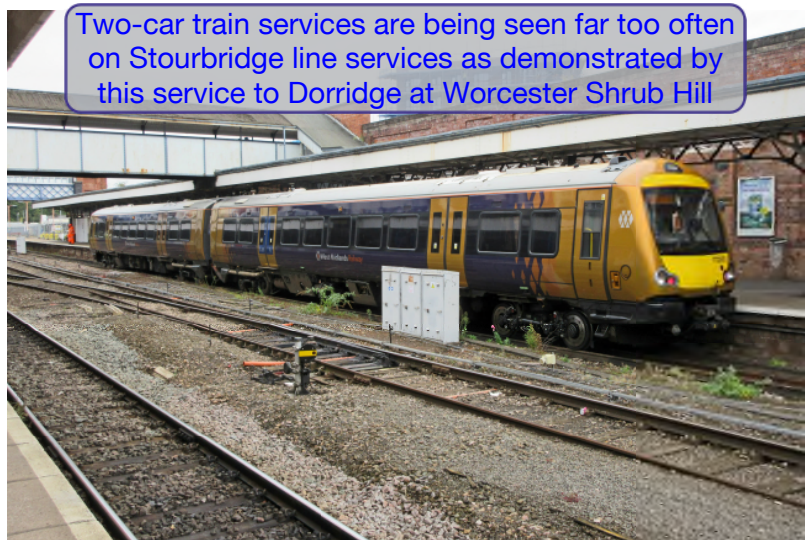
by Roger Davis

Much has been said about the standard of the train service on the Stourbridge line. Throughout 2024, there were days when the service was greatly impacted by cancellations due to staffing problems, particularly on Saturdays and during evenings and school holidays.

To ascertain for itself how good or bad the service is, SLUG compiles its own figures of cancellations, late running and short forming of trains. On Saturdays during 2024, over 20 of the 134 scheduled services were cancelled on sixteen occasions. On all but three of those Saturdays, the root problem was lack of train crew. Monday to Friday figures were not as bad with 39 days seeing over 20 cancellations, with lack of train crew being the root cause on 27 of these days.

However, since the turn of the year, performance has improved greatly. During January and February, only six days saw more than ten services affected by cancellations and these were attributable to Storms Darragh and Eowyn, points and signal failures, idiots trespassing on railway lines and the far too regular bridge strike at Cradley Road. Fifteen days saw no cancellations at all while the remaining 38 days saw an average of 3.84 cancellations per day (2.86%).

These figures must be taken in a wider context. Too many services are dependant on train crew working voluntary overtime, and crew are more likely to volunteer to work on cold, damp winter days than they are when the weather improves and they can spend time with their families. However, the figures for January and February 2025 compare favourably with those from the same months in 2024. There were nine days at the

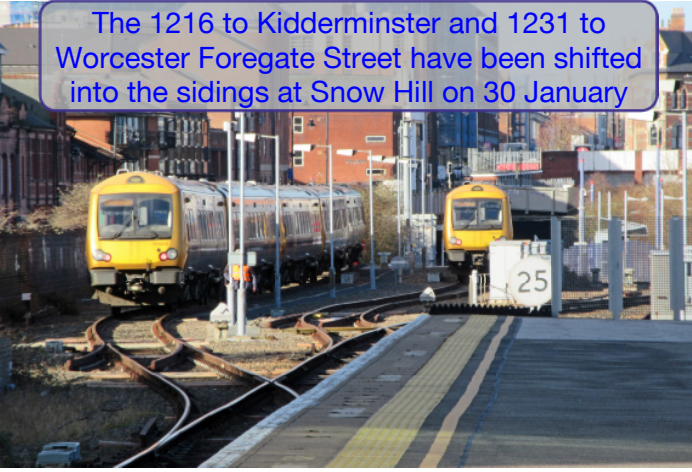


end of January 2024 when services were badly affected by a strike day and a work to rule on the other days. However, the rest of the period saw ten days with no cancellations, while the other 40 days saw an average of 8.1 cancellations per day (6.04%) with eleven of these days seeing more than ten cancellations.

These figures are encouraging so it will be interesting to see if this improvement continues throughout 2025. One thing that we can say is that SLUG will continue to monitor the level of service and hold West Midlands Railway to account if the situation deteriorates.

However, for individuals, a service is only as good as the one that they see. There could be mass cancellations but, if their train runs every day and is on time, they perceive the service to be good.

The 1216 to Kidderminster and 1231 to Worcester Foregate Street have been shifted into the sidings at Snow Hill on 30 January



The reverse is also true and this was brought home to me when I travelled from Snow Hill to Cradley Heath on 30 January. I arrived at Snow Hill in time to catch the 1231 service only to find that it had been cancelled due to lack of train crew. The platform was full of very disgruntled passengers, in some cases almost mutinous, and I discovered that this was due to the preceding 1216 service also being cancelled for the same

reason. This left a 45 minute gap between services from Snow Hill with the smaller stations seeing a one hour gap between services.

Some of the comments being made about the service throughout the journey to Cradley Heath could not be repeated in this publication without us being charged under the Obscene Publications Act. However, it was apparent that the poor level of service provided over the past few years combined with the inconvenience caused by these cancellations provided the catalyst for people to vent their spleens.

On paper, the service that day was good. There were only five services affected by cancellations that day, three on a loop (Snow Hill – Kidderminster – Whitlocks End – Kidderminster) that started at 1216, and two on a loop (Snow Hill – Foregate Street – Snow Hill) that started at 1231. The other 61 services from Snow Hill towards Kidderminster ran, all but one of them on time. Therefore, a good service for the majority was conceived as a bad service for a small minority.

However, there is one area in which the Stourbridge line service is sorely lacking at present. Since 20 January, short forming of services has become a major issue with many services seriously overcrowded. There are fifteen diagrams per day on Monday to Saturday. In the six weeks up to 1 March, an average of four diagrams per day have been short formed, with some days seeing seven short formed diagrams. What is worse is that a total of 45 diagrams have been operated using 2-car units, and twenty of these were reduced from 5-car to 2-car, thus making overcrowding inevitable.

On 21 February, West Midlands Railway announced that, from 24 February until the May timetable change, it would be introducing shorter train formations on some services on the Snow Hill Lines due to a shortage of available carriages due to delays in the supply of spare parts from its suppliers. Affected services would be highlighted in online journey planners and on digital station screens, as well as on posters at each station. As of 1 March, the posters had not appeared at stations and services were still being short formed on a random basis. SLUG has highlighted this with West Midlands Railway and has been told that this will be resolved as a matter of urgency.

Therefore the question is whether the service is good or bad. In terms of overcrowding, it is definitely bad. In terms of cancellations, it's getting better.

A MATCH AT THE ALBION by Roger Davis

You can always tell when there is a big match on at The Hawthorns as local streets are either closed to traffic or are jammed with parked cars, making the local area a no-go area before and after each match. In fact, many people park their cars west of the M5/A41 junction in order to walk to the ground. This is despite The Hawthorns Railway and Metro Station being less than 500 yards from the ground with four trains per hour in each direction and frequent tram services from Edgbaston Village to Wolverhampton Station. In addition, the frequent bus service 74 between Birmingham City Centre and Dudley passes the ground while next season will see through Metro services between The Hawthorns and Dudley.



The railway station [L] and tram stop [R] at The Hawthorns



A ¼ mile walk along Halfords Lane leads from the station and tram stop to the ground

The same can be said of the other four league grounds in the area. Molineux, Bescot Stadium, Villa Park and St. Andrew's are all relatively close to railway stations (Wolverhampton, Bescot Stadium, Aston/Witton and Bordesley respectively) which are served by regular train services before and after each match, with Bescot Stadium, Witton and Bordesley stations seeing their regular services supplemented when there is a match on. The grounds are also well served by bus services. However, the existence of Bordesley station is in doubt as it currently has a "parliamentary" regular service of one train per week and will need to be demolished if the Bordesley Chords linking the Camp Hill line to Moor Street station are built. Fortunately, Birmingham City intends to move to a new stadium within easy walking distance of Adderley Park station by the end of the decade. However, despite the availability of public transport alternatives, the private motor car continues to be the primary mode of transport for supporters attending a match.

The question that must be answered is why people are refusing to abandon their cars and use public transport instead. Using public transport gives spectators the option of having a drink before and/or after the game. However, people claim that the car is far more convenient and quicker, although that can be disputed if you are forced to park over a mile from the ground. They also say that public transport is unreliable with cancellations, delays and overcrowding a common occurrence. These issues were discussed in full on pages 2 and 3 of this issue. One other reason given is that public transport works out as far more expensive than the private car.

So, what can be done to get more people out of their cars and onto public transport?

Last September, West Bromwich Albion liaised with Transport for West Midlands to offer a free 4-Week Regional nBus ticket to season ticket holders who are over 16. It was a start, but went nowhere near far enough as it didn't incentivise spectators to travel by train or by Metro. Surely the promotion could have been extended to offer a free 4-Week Regional nNetwork ticket instead.

One club that has gone the extra mile to promote public transport is the other Albion in the top two divisions – Brighton and Hove Albion. The Amex Stadium, opened in 2011, is alongside Falmer railway station with four trains per hour between Brighton, Lewes, Newhaven, Seaford, Eastbourne and Hastings. The station is between the stadium and the A27, served by 14 buses per hour. However, to encourage use of public transport, home and away fans can travel free on buses and trains within a free travel zone on production of a matchday or season ticket. This applies for most services between 1130 and 2100 for a 1500 kick-off and between 1615 and midnight for a 1945 kick-off. The free train travel zone stretches from Worthing (14 miles away) in the west, Haywards Heath (16½ miles away) in the north and Eastbourne (20 miles away) in the east. Spectators can also travel free on all buses operated by Brighton & Hove Buses, and this includes direct services 28 and 29 to the ground from Eastbourne and Tunbridge Wells (33 miles away) respectively. Stagecoach also allows free travel from Worthing on its service 700 into Central Brighton to connect with regular Brighton & Hove Buses services to the ground.



Brighton's Amex stadium is a stone's throw from Falmer Station



Eastbourne has a direct free service to the Amex for holders of match tickets

In addition, two park and ride sites open 1½ hours before kick off with free bus transfer to and from the match. At least one wheelchair-accessible bus is provided at each site.

Of course, there are people who would insist on taking their car. Limited car parking is available at the ground and at the University of Sussex on the far side of the A27. However, parking must be pre-booked and costs £18 per match (£9 for blue badge holders). In addition, if car owners are determined enough to park for free at their own risk on the nearest council estate, they would be faced with a walk of over a mile along the busy A27 dual carriageway, much of it with no pavement. If that doesn't encourage fans to use public transport, nothing will!

SLUG believes that incentives to encourage the use of public transport to get to and from a football match should be encouraged and that the clubs and Transport for West Midlands should be liaising to come up with a scheme to make it happen.

NEWS IN BRIEF

edited by Rob Hebron

Slip Sliding Away. In late January, a catastrophic movement of embankment damaged 30 metres of track and track bed on the Severn Valley Railway rendering the line impassable north of Sterns. Intensive engineering work is taking place and the SVR is desperately seeking donations to fund it. In the meantime, round trips can only be made between Kidderminster and Hampton Loade. *(Source - BBC News)*



Teignmouth along with Dawlish, Torquay and Paignton will see direct services from Worcestershire Parkway from May

All the Right Connections. Although it doesn't directly affect our line, there is an upcoming change to travel patterns for people at the southern end of our line. From the May timetable change, CrossCountry Trains will be stopping two additional hourly trains at Worcestershire Parkway. Southbound the Manchester Piccadilly to Bristol Temple Meads or Paignton trains will stop, while northbound the Plymouth to Edinburgh

trains will stop. SLUG believes that through trains from the Stourbridge line to Worcestershire Parkway are needed to connect with these trains. *(Source - WRUGA)*

Obtaining a Grant. New WMT Stakeholder Manager, Geoff Grant, has greatly improved liaison between local user groups and WMT. His latest initiative is to travel the WMT network and to be on site for locals to air their views. You can book in a call, catch up or a chat via Teams. He will be at Wolverhampton on 25 June and at Birmingham on 28 August. *(Source:- WMT Newsletter)*

Warning – Men At Work. Work to extend the West Midlands Metro from Dudley to Merry Hill has started following confirmation of additional Government funding. Beginning in the spring, there will be disruption along Duncan Edwards Way which will be reduced to a single lane heading towards Dudley and in the Merry Hill area where preliminary work will get underway.

(Source:- Midland Metro Alliance)



Work will start soon at Merry Hill to enable the Metro to reach the terminus on this embankment

Moving House. Chiltern Railways has informed SLUG that it is intending to build permanent staff accommodation at Stourbridge depot. SLUG has a good working relationship with Chiltern and is delighted by this sign of commitment to services on the Stourbridge Line. *(Source:- Chiltern Railways)*

Touring The Nation. As part of the Railway 200 celebrations, an exhibition train named Inspiration will be touring the country from 27 June for about a year. The first two venues are in our area – at the SVR in Kidderminster from 27 June to 6 July and at Birmingham Moor Street from 8 to 10 July. *(Source:- Railway 200 Website)*

STOURBRIDGE LINE SPECIALS

by Roger Davis

After a few fallow years, special raitour trains are returning to the Stourbridge line in force this year.

On a very gloomy 21 February, the raitour heads south through Stourbridge Junction



On 21 February, UK Raitours ran a special service from Preston to Watford Junction. This service ran in two parts with the first part, hauled by a pair of Rail Adventure HST power cars, running down our line from Smethwick Junction to Kidderminster before continuing onto the Severn Valley Railway to terminate at Bewdley. A two hour break gave passengers the choice of either exploring the town or waiting at the station to watch

the two power cars removed from the train and replaced by three Class 20 locomotives at the front, with the HST power cars the rear. This formation then departed back to Kidderminster and up the Stourbridge line to Smethwick Junction and onwards to Watford Junction.

The following day, a tour from London Paddington to Oxford with an afternoon break at Stratford-upon-Avon used two Class 20s at the front and one at the rear. This train ran all the way up the Stourbridge line from Worcester Shrub Hill to Birmingham Snow Hill. Unfortunately, a planned detour up the Round Oak freight line had to be cancelled due to “faulty infrastructure”.

A Class 20 diesel propels the raitour through Cradley Heath and up Old Hill Bank on 22 February



The above trains did not pick up passengers along our line but there are five dates to look out for if you fancy a trip on a special train. Four of these dates feature steam trains to Stratford-upon-Avon on Vintage Trains’ “Shakespeare Express”. These trains are normally hauled by Great Western Railway “Castle” Class 4-6-0 express passenger locomotives and will start at Worcester Shrub Hill at 1025 on Sundays 6 April, 27 July, 17 August and 9 November. Passengers will be picked up from Droitwich Spa at 1035 and Stourbridge Junction at 1115, but unfortunately not at Kidderminster. It is also a pity that this train does not run on either 21 or 28 September to celebrate the 30th anniversary of the Jewellery Line, which reopened on 24 September 1995.

The Shakespeare Express at Stratford-upon-Avon on 24 April 2022





The final special train is scheduled to run on Wednesday 21 May and features First Class de luxe travel on the “Midland Pullman”. The train picks up from Worcester Shrub Hill (0730), Droitwich Spa (0740), Kidderminster (0755) and Stourbridge Junction (0810) before travelling via the Settle and Carlisle Railway to Carlisle. The return journey follows an alternative route via the Cumbrian Coast line to Stourbridge

Junction (2150), Kidderminster (2205), Droitwich Spa (2220) and Worcester Shrub Hill (2230). All of the timings are provisional at present.

Further details on future railtours are available from the following websites.

<https://vintagetrains.co.uk/the-shakespeare-express-worcester-to-stratford-return/>

<https://midlandpullman.com/journey/settle-to-carlisle-and-coastal-pullman-21-05-2025/>

PUBLIC MEETING AND ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

The Stourbridge Line User Group Public Meeting and Annual General Meeting will take place at the Refreshment Room, Kidderminster Town (SVR) Railway Station on Tuesday 13 May 2025 at 7.15 p.m. Please note the slightly earlier start time which is necessary due to the room being closed at 9.30 p.m.



The Public Meeting is open to members and non-members. There will be presentations from Train Operating Companies and local transport authorities.

Members are reminded that their membership renewal is due and a membership form has been included with this mailing. Membership fees remain unaltered with hardcopy membership costing £6 and on-line membership costing £3. If you are attending the meeting, you can bring your membership form with you and pay on the night.

CHRISTMAS PHOTO QUIZ - NAME THE TELEVISION SERIES - ANSWERS

The answers to the quiz set in the last issue of Platform are :-

- 1 - Hetty Wainthropp Investigates, 2 - Not The Nine o' Clock News,
- 3 - The Professionals, 4 - Shoestring, 5 - Adam Adamant Lives, 6 - Sorry!,
- 7 - The Persuaders, 8 - When The Boat Comes In, 9 - Lovejoy, 10 - Public Eye,
- 11 - Boon, 12 - Jason King, 13 - Return Of The Saint, 14 - The Fast Show,
- 15 - Grantchester, 16 - Agatha Christie's Poirot, 17 - Strike,
- 18 - Monty Python's Flying Circus