

Campaign for Rail Briefing Paper

A Rail Service to the National Memorial Arboretum

Location: The northern boundary of the site is close to a freight line [the former South Staffordshire Railway] from Lichfield to the Birmingham to Derby main line at Wichnor Junction. The latter marks the eastern boundary of the NMA and has four passenger trains an hour in each direction.

Possible station sites: Option 1. The only point with road access on the Birmingham – Derby line with road access is between Croxall and Chetwynd Bridge, where the main line crosses over the A513. The railway is on an embankment, a difficult and expensive location for a station. It is a double track line and would therefore require two platforms, plus a DDA compliant footbridge or subway. It is more than a kilometre to the NMA entrance.

Option 2. Alrewas, on the freight line, lost its passenger service on 18 January 1965, and the 2 km from here to Wichnor Junction was later singled to reduce costs. The station was alongside the level crossing of the A513. This is still controlled by a manual signal box, staffed on three shifts, although the road is no longer the main route to King's Bromley and Tamworth, merely access to premises alongside the A38. The railway, being at level with the landscape, would present few problems for station building and there is sufficient land. 60 metres north of the level crossing the single track section begins. A station here would only require a single platform and avoid the considerable cost of a footbridge. With selective door opening, only a short platform need be provided initially. The NMA entrance is less than 500 metres away and a safe, dedicated path would not be difficult to provide.

Rail service provision: Option 1. Although the Birmingham – Derby line has frequent passenger trains passing, the railway industry is highly unlikely to support stopping any of them at Croxall. Two of the four an hour are long distance CrossCountry services [Plymouth – Edinburgh, Reading – Newcastle], which would need to decelerate from 125 mph. The other two are regional services [Cardiff – Nottingham and Birmingham – Nottingham] which pass at 100 mph. There is also a sizeable freight flow, which is likely to increase in volume. As a result, route utilisation is close to capacity. The section from Wichnor Junction south to Water Orton is currently being equipped with four aspect colour light signalling to help cope with close headways, but adding a station stop would probably require three non stop train paths for each train that stopped.

Option 2: Extending the existing CrossCity service north from Lichfield to a new station at Alrewas is unrealistic as it would require route electrification. Running a diesel service to Alrewas from Birmingham would duplicate CrossCity for all but 6 kilometres, would be poorly timed within the existing 10 minute interval service, unlikely to be the best use of scarce platform resources at Birmingham New Street, and only offer access from one direction.

Option 3: A service from Derby to Lichfield City is proposed, calling at a new station at or near Alrewas. Timetable modelling produces a journey time of 16¹/₂ minutes to Alrewas, with a further 8 minutes to Lichfield City. Although it is a freight route, it is approved for use by passenger trains and the line speed south of Alrewas is 60 mph. Visitors from and via Birmingham would connect at Lichfield City with the train returning to Derby to reach Alrewas, and in this direction, a call would be made at Lichfield Trent Valley High Level to collect visitors using West Coast Main Line semi fast

services between Euston and Crewe. Only the platform alongside the northbound track here was reinstated when CrossCity was extended from Lichfield City to Trent Valley, so in the other direction, a double back journey via City would be needed. Operational constraints exist at both Lichfield stations, presenting risk to punctuality of the CrossCity service. Two trains an hour turn back at City and two at Trent Valley High Level, which restricts platform availability, but it is possible to path Derby trains and, at the south end of Lichfield City, the former line to Walsall can provide a layover siding.

Train provision for Option 3: Rolling stock is a scarce resource on Britain's railways and hiring is expensive, but there is a possibility of sourcing a set from Derby. East Midlands Trains runs a service from Corby that arrives at Derby at 10.40. It is booked to run to Etches Park Sidings at 10.54, where it stables until its next working at 16.34. CfR suggests it could work to Lichfield at 10.46, 12.46 and 14.46. There is also an untapped market for charter trains, which could reach the new station from all parts of the country in attractive times for a day out.

Service cost: The major fixed cost would be the provision of a platform at Alrewas. The section of single line nearest to the level crossing, so avoiding footbridge costs, is on a curve, which has safety implications. It may be necessary to site it a little further east. When floods cut road access to Workington, a temporary station was provided at Workington North at very low cost [and remarkably quickly], setting a precedent. It may be possible to seek sponsorship to meet this cost. In similar vein, East Midlands Trains may be willing to carry the financial risk of running the train for a season to assess service viability.

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