

CONSULTATION: WEST MIDLANDS RAIL FRANCHISE COMMENTS OF CAMPAIGN FOR RAIL

Introduction

Campaign for Rail is an organisation based in the West Midlands that advocates railway interests and the best interests of all rail passengers and groups, including (but not limited to) Rail User Groups, Freight Development, and re-opening of lines and services. We also lobby for and promote rail interests with the relevant statutory bodies. Our website is www.campaignforrail.org.uk

We welcome the Department's consultation on the future West Midlands Rail Franchise to commence operation from 2017 and for seeking comments and suggestions from passengers, stakeholders and public transport user groups.

Devolution

We note the improvements seen in other parts of the UK such as Merseyside and London where specification and monitoring of local and regional rail services has been devolved from the auspices of the Department for Transport. We are supportive of the plans for the devolution of the London Midland West Midlands local and regional services centred on Birmingham to the West Midlands Rail Consortium. However, whilst devolution is welcome, it must be matched by sufficient funding to enable the current timetabled service to be delivered and to allow for the improvements that stakeholders in the region want to see. Devolution of the power but not the financial resources is *not* devolution.

Whilst London Midland have delivered some improvements over the last eight years there have been a number of issues which has led to performance not being as good as it should have been, chiefly the shortage of drivers which led to a disappointing period of above average cancellations and poor reliability between 2012 - 2014. Poor performance should be dealt with robustly, either by getting the provider to deliver increments for the benefit of passengers or if performance is unacceptable the early termination of the franchise.

Q1: Thinking of the journeys you make by train, or journeys you could make by train but where you decide to use an alternative transport mode instead: what specific changes...

This question appears to be aimed more at individual passengers rather than stakeholder groups. However, it is possible to consider the different types of passengers served and their needs. Different considerations will apply for commuters, and for business and leisure travellers making a longer journey.

The issues that will be considered by commuters will include: ease of access; frequency of service; the ability to find a seat on outbound and return journey; a car parking space or connections with local bus services; the cleanliness of stations and trains and safety and security (particularly on evening services running in the autumn and winter months).

The issues considered by passengers planning a longer journey will include: ease of access to the station, including level access to all platforms for those travelling with luggage or with pushchairs; ease and security of parking; availability of on-board catering; and, for the return journey, the hours when the service operates.

The lack of a safe cycling or pedestrian route to the station and local traffic congestion on the roads can restrict access to some West Midlands stations in the peak-hours but this is clearly an issue which should be addressed by the Local Authority, working in partnership with the TOC and Network Rail.

**Q2: a. Do you use your nearest railway station?
b. How could we improve your experience of...**

Outside the West Midlands Metropolitan (Centro) area the catchment of many stations can often extend for up to 15 miles into rural areas where bus services are, at best, infrequent. Many passengers using the station will therefore need to use a car. But, owing to the shortage of parking space at their nearest station they will often need to drive further than necessary to use one of the few stations in the region with a large car park. We note that the car parks at most of the Trent Valley stations - for example Lichfield Trent Valley and Tamworth - are heavily used by passengers heading for London which means that there are few spaces left for local commuters and leisure passengers. Investment is needed.

Additional parking spaces are urgently needed, or will soon be needed at Rugeley Trent Valley, Lichfield Trent Valley, Tamworth and Nuneaton. There is in addition a disincentive for local commuters to use these stations because of the high cost of daily parking compared to the free parking available at nearby Centro stations - and people travelling to Centro area stations from outside their catchment is leading to pressure at those. Off peak users within the catchment of stations such as Wylde Green or Four Oaks often find the car park full. West Midlands Rail should review its parking strategy for rail, and look at encouraging alternative modes of access to local stations.

Q3: Please list in priority order the facilities you would like to be improved or introduced at the station(s) you use or could use?

Although station facilities on the 'towards Birmingham' platforms have been improved at many stations in recent years, facilities on the 'away from Birmingham' platforms are often very sparse.

We note that many passengers commute from Sutton Coldfield to Lichfield but, although there is a waiting shelter, the 'Down' platform lost its overall awning following damage many years ago. Passengers alighting at Lichfield City, where there is an awning spanning both platforms, find that northbound trains now stop at the north end of platform out in the open. We suggest that the Down platform should be restored to its former full length.

On Cross City (South) the busy Up platforms at University and Selly Oak are very narrow. Widening these to modern standards would improve safety and encourage passengers to spread more evenly along the platform rather than bunching near the entrance.

The station at Cannock on the Chase Line is totally inadequate for the number of passengers now regularly using the station. It should be a staffed station with passenger facilities to the same standard of those with a similar footfall. The electrification of the Chase Line and the enhanced services planned will stimulate additional growth at Cannock.

There are plans for the redevelopment of the Birmingham City University Campus at Perry Barr; the institution will vacate the site towards the end of 2016 and new housing, offices and a school are proposed. Birmingham City Council is beginning some public realm improvement works in the area but the station is a poor quality facility and interchange with local bus services is poor. The development and potential funding from the LEP offers an opportunity to replace a tatty, 1960's concrete station with a more modern, higher quality facility.

Q4: Thinking of the train journeys you make, how important are the following on board passenger facilities to you on short distance and long distance train services?

Again, this question is aimed more at users rather than stakeholder groups but we offer some observations based on the experience of our members.

Audio passenger announcements are useful, particularly for those customers who are sight impaired or for those travelling in the hours of darkness. But the repetitive generic reminders about not leaving luggage behind, or minding the gap, or CCTV being provided, are annoying and offer no value to the customer. Concentrating simply on service information, what the next station will be and connection information (e.g. change at Wolverhampton for services to Shrewsbury and Aberystwyth) is sufficient.

It was disappointing that the DfT did not direct that a Customer Information System be provided to the class 323 electric units as part of the London Midland direct award. The 323's compare poorly with units of similar vintage in terms of CIS. This should be an early priority for the incoming franchisee.

Staff presence on services is something which we feel London Midland have not prioritised; there seems to be a culture amongst conductors that it is fine just to sit in the back cab. The next franchise must include a clause expecting that conductors spend all of the journey within the passenger accommodation and be visible. Safety and security has been identified as a concern for passengers using the West Midlands public transport network by Centro and Transport Focus research and the incoming franchise must get to grips with this.

It would be misleading to think that local journeys are typically only about 20 minutes. Lichfield City to University is 44 minutes, Northampton to Birmingham New Street is an hour, Shrewsbury to Birmingham is 70 minutes. There is an absence of toilet facilities at most local stations, and where there are toilets they will be locked out of use during periods when the station is unstaffed to deter vandalism and anti-social behaviour. We believe the removal of toilets from the rolling stock used on local services would be a retrograde move and is not acceptable.

Where stock is/can be captive to a service or group of services, there should be route maps inside carriages (perhaps over the doors), with interchange information to bus and tram that is kept up to date.

Adequate space for pushchairs and wheelchairs should be retained.

One of the advantages of rail travel is the ability to work on the move. More and more people are using electronic devices to do productive work on their journeys such as responding to E-Mails or preparing presentations or doing tasks like booking accommodation. Having a functioning reliable Wi-Fi system is an important need for these business travellers.

Q5: We are looking carefully to see what opportunities there are either to extend or provide additional trains...

The Class 323 fleet is now over 20 years old and services on the Cross City line are often very crowded on the approach to New Street station in the morning peak. The 323 units will need refurbishment during the life of the franchise. We suggest that changing the interior seating from a 3+2 to a 2+2 layout would significantly improve the comfort of passengers and reduce station dwell times. The inter-carriage doors on these trains are heavy and stiff to use; changing these to a modern, wider, gangway would encourage passengers to spread along the train and provide a safer environment for passengers in the evenings.

If the recent growth in passenger numbers on the Chase Line continues more of the peak-hour trains will need to be lengthened. It seems unlikely that 3-car Class 323s will have sufficient capacity for these services in future and new 4-car units may soon be needed.

On other routes trains will need to be lengthened in order to make best use of scarce capacity where paths are limited. If growth continues at current rates then tinkering with current rolling stock will not be sufficient. There will have to be extra carriages provided, either new build or cascaded from other services. The class 230 units would be a solution for the Nuneaton - Coventry service and would allow a 153 to be released, however they will not be a solution for the vast majority of routes in the region owing to the maximum speed of 60 mph.

Q6: Thinking about stations in the West Midlands franchise, are there any particular locations where you feel that connections between rail services could be improved?

In addition to Rugby and Stafford, the local lines radiating from Birmingham cross the West Coast Main Line at Nuneaton, Tamworth, Lichfield Trent Valley and Rugeley Trent Valley. Passengers can change between local services and the hourly Euston - Crewe service at each of these stations, avoiding changing trains at Birmingham New Street.

Connections at Lichfield TV are important for passengers from as far south as Sutton Coldfield who wish to travel to Stafford, Liverpool, Manchester, Lancashire and Scotland. These connections would be improved if more Cross-City trains terminated at Lichfield Trent Valley. We suggest that changing the off-peak

service on Cross-City north to an even interval 3 trains per hour all-stations to Lichfield Trent Valley would be worth considering.

Connections at Rugeley Trent Valley are particularly important for students from Cannock and Hednesford travelling to College in Stafford as well as those working in Stafford which is the county administrative centre. Passengers from as far south as Walsall may also prefer to use the Chase Line route when travelling further north as well as for connections to London. Providing a half-hourly off-peak local service on the Chase Line to Rugeley Trent Valley would improve these connections.

Connections at Crewe from the (LM) Euston - Crewe service into Virgin's service from Birmingham to Lancashire, Cumbria and Scotland are very poor at present - a 45 minute wait northbound and a full hour southbound. Re-directing the Euston - Crewe service to run direct from Stafford to Crewe would (assuming a 20 minute earlier arrival and 20 minute later departure) solve this problem; saving a full hour in both directions for most destinations. This change would benefit passengers heading for the North West from all stations on the Trent Valley and as far east as Leicester who could then avoid changing at Birmingham New Street.

Connections at Shrewsbury out of the (ATW) Cardiff - Manchester service from stations on the Marches Line towards Telford and Birmingham are very poor - often involving a wait of over 40 minutes. These connections could be improved if a half-hourly regular interval local service to Birmingham was provided by the West Midlands franchise.

Kidderminster in the evening suffers from a lack of co-operation in timetable planning with the service shared by two TOCs. The incoming franchise should work with Chiltern Railways to address this issue.

Q7: In order to make improvements to the network, we would like your views on how specific train services could be changed better to meet demand with a focus on the following areas...

The line from Shrewsbury to Wolverhampton is one of the few in the region where there is still only an hourly local service, although Arriva Trains Wales provides a semi-fast service to Birmingham New Street and Birmingham International. We suggest that a half-hourly local service on this line should be introduced as soon as possible and note that the line is also an obvious candidate for electrification, which would release diesel units to strengthen other services.

The re-mapping of the former Central Trains franchise transferred all of the local services from Birmingham to Derby and Leicester to Cross Country's new inter-urban group. This has created an anomaly whereby although the stations on these routes are managed by London Midland (or East Midlands Trains) they remain outside the West Midlands zonal fares scheme. We suggest that plans should be put in place to transfer the local services from Birmingham to Derby, and particularly Leicester, into the West Midlands franchise at the earliest opportunity. It might then be possible to extend the Hereford / Worcester - Birmingham service through to Leicester, as suggested in Network Rail's West Midlands and Chilterns RUS of 2011, potentially saving a unit.

We support the plans to extend the Birmingham - Walsall local service to a new station at Aldridge as soon as wiring can be erected.

One challenge for the new franchise will be to find a way to provide the direct service from Walsall to Wolverhampton that will fill a major connectivity gap in the region's rail network. Given the track layout at Wolverhampton, and current platform occupancy, it will clearly be difficult to terminate another local service there. The potential arrangements at Walsall, stacking three trains in Platform 3, are not much better.

We suggest that a through service from Hednesford to Wellington would potentially avoid these problems, provide much needed peak-hour relief on both routes as well as offering connectivity between Cannock Chase and South Staffordshire with Wolverhampton. There are strong economic and social links between these areas, with Cannock and South Staffordshire residents being within the employee catchment of the Jaguar/Land Rover i54 site on the outskirts of Wolverhampton and using services at New Cross Hospital in the city.

As well as the current proposals for a Metro parts of the Walsall – Stourbridge Junction route, a through rail service is also needed, to serve a very large population and open up connectivity to the network. It would be highly significant in attracting a much bigger pool of workers to places like Waterfront in Brierley Hill,

where the enormous sums spent on regeneration are presently a poor investment because of inadequate accessibility for the labour pool in the wider region.

The late evening, Fridays Only, service from Worcester to Gloucester appears to have been introduced into Central Trains' timetable shortly after Ashchurch station was opened in June 1997. If there is sufficient demand for this service to continue then it should be transferred to the Great Western franchise that now runs all the other services that link these two cities.

Q8: If you are aware of any routes or locations where you feel that a more evenly spaced timetable can or should be operated please provide details.

Within the franchise area, 1 train per hour does not meet passengers' needs and is not justified. Demand from intermediate stations between Wolverhampton and Shrewsbury is suppressed by this, and it was one of the reasons that the direct Walsall – Wolverhampton service failed. It is accepted that capacity is scarce between Birmingham and Wolverhampton, but the current timetable does not make best use of it, post resignalling and the abolition of Owen Street level crossing. Between Wolverhampton and Birmingham, a way to increase the frequency at Dudley Port must be investigated. This rather than Sandwell and Dudley is the station for Dudley, and the planned ultra light rail scheme and subsequent Metro reinforce this. It is also necessary on safety grounds at Dudley Port to clear the narrow platforms of passengers as often as possible.

A small but poorly planned example of careless timetabling has Sandwell and Dudley enjoying 4 trains per hour to New Street, with locals at xx.02 and xx.32, but the other two services are both within the second half hour at xx.46 from Shrewsbury and xx.55 from Scotland. So the service interval is 30, 14, 9 and 7 minutes. A previous suggestion that rethinking Coseley's third train per hour would address this and have one stop in each half hour between all stations services produced the response that it was difficult to do. It is hoped that the new West Midlands franchise will be more dynamic.

The northern section of the Cross City service currently runs as an uneven 4 trains per hour, split equally between Lichfield City and Trent Valley stations. Only the Lichfield City trains normally stop at Shenstone. We suggest that changing to a 20 minute interval, all stations to Lichfield Trent Valley, service would provide sufficient off-peak capacity and a better service to both Shenstone and Lichfield Trent Valley. The timetable could also be simplified with a single southern terminus for Lichfield trains and it might also be possible to concentrate most of the 6-car units on the shorter Four Oaks diagrams.

Q9: The West Midlands franchise currently provides an hourly service from London Euston to Crewe via Stoke-on-Trent...

The success of the Trent Valley service means more diagrams should be 8 car. Diverting the Euston - Crewe service to run directly from Stafford to Crewe offers significant connectivity benefits for passengers from all of the Trent Valley station who are travelling to Cumbria, Lancashire or Scotland. Connections from the London Midland service into Virgin's Birmingham - Scotland service at Crewe currently require a 45 minute wait (northbound) and a full hour southbound. Assuming a 20 minute earlier arrival at Crewe, and 20 minute later departure to pick up the current paths along the Trent Valley a full hour will potentially be saved on journeys in both directions.

There may also be an opportunity to extend the diverted West Midlands service north to Wigan or Preston, which would also allow a direct service to be provided from Hartford and Winsford to Warrington.

The proposed new service from Birmingham to Stafford, Stoke-on-Trent and Crewe would solve the problems that commuters from Stone to Birmingham currently face when changing trains at Stafford where connections, particularly in the evening, are often missed. The new diagram may also result in a more even balance of departures from Crewe towards Kidsgrove which are currently very closely spaced, London Midland at xx:02; East Midlands Trains at xx:07.

There is also a large gap in connectivity between Birmingham, Stoke-on-Trent, Newcastle-under-Lyme and Manchester Airport which could possibly be addressed by extending this new service to Sandbach, Wilmslow and the Airport.

Q10: During railway disruption what information would you like to know, and when and how would you like to receive it...

Planned alterations to services should be promulgated by posters at stations. A QR code should be printed on the poster. These posters usually cover a calendar month so for the first weekend of the month, they only appear a few days before the alterations apply when the previous month's poster is removed. Alterations for the last weekend of the month however, are on display for almost a whole month. It is suggested that posters also show the first weekend of the following month and that this information is repeated at the start of the next poster to give an extra week's lead time for that weekend. For major work such as at bank holidays, booklets should be produced as well as posters and they should combine the service alterations for **ALL** the TOCs affected. It is not acceptable that London Midland issue engineering information saying they are not providing any train service between certain points, but fail to point out that Virgin are providing a train every hour! LM's policy is to ask passengers not to travel, quietly forgetting their franchise obligation to provide a service.

Information about service changes during perturbation is often the railway industry at its worst. First priority is to get information to staff rapidly and develop a culture of honest information sharing with passengers. It is not good enough to provide platform Help Points linked to a south Asian voice from National Rail Enquiries which asks you where the station is as she has not heard of it, then only tells you that services in your area are disrupted – which you already know! It is not good enough to tell you that your ticket will be accepted on local buses without saying which bus service goes to the place that the train should have taken you to, and where to find the bus stop.

It is not good enough to be told to take the next local train for the first part of your journey because the through train behind it is not stopping today – whilst the CIS is showing that it is stopping. Best practice, from experience, is usually from Chiltern, including the appearance of managers to explain and reassure.

The new franchise should redirect all help points at West Midlands stations from NRE to the controls for the West Midlands services in Birmingham, so that local knowledge and information can be given to customers when there are problems and perturbations. Staff should be aware of local bus services during periods of major disruption, and should be able to assist passengers with where to go.

Q11: In what ways can the franchise operator provide better services, ticketing and information for passengers to serve major events?

This is an area where London Midland could do much better. There have been many examples over the years of the operator not providing sufficient capacity during major events or providing additional resource, making the journey experience so miserable that passengers decide in future to take the car rather than the train, losing revenue and goodwill.

A classic example is the Sunday service on the Snow Hill lines when the Birmingham Christmas Market is in operation. We accept that it may not be possible to run extra services for this given restrictions on train-crew hours, but surely longer trains can be run to cater for the additional demand? When there are one off events such as the Birmingham Half Marathon surely extra services could be offered in the early morning, to allow participants and spectators to take the train there.

In British Rail and Central Trains days there used to be joint rail/admission tickets for major events at the NEC, such as the Motor Show and Crufts. These appear to have fallen by the wayside in recent years so we would suggest the new franchise looks at re-establishing these products.

There are also many evening events at the NEC that should be attractive business to TOCs but the paucity of late evening services means visitors cannot be confident of a return train, so drive instead. The new West Midlands franchise should look at offering an 'end of performance' train from International to New Street at least. This would be crewed and ready, but not depart until, say 15 minutes after the event finished.

**Q12: a. What are your views on the value for money you receive...
b. Does the range of ticket types available meet your demands...**

It often seems that there is a step change in the cost of local travel at the former West Midlands County boundary with passengers travelling from the shire counties and wider travel to work area paying significantly more, per mile, than those in the Centro area. This situation is exacerbated by the high cost of parking at many shire-county stations, particularly those on the West Coast Main Line. This is clearly a disincentive for shoppers and other off-peak passengers who are considering using the train to visit Birmingham.

The next West Midlands franchise will provide an opportunity to revise and expand the present West Midlands Zonal Fares scheme, potentially extending this scheme out to Kidderminster, Telford, Stafford, Lichfield, Tamworth, Nuneaton, Redditch and Bromsgrove. Currently the stations on the former Midland lines that are only served by Cross Country are outside the scheme. This anomaly should be corrected at the earliest opportunity and Coleshill, Water Orton and Wilnecote brought into the zonal scheme, with adjustments to walk-on fares where appropriate.

The present West Midlands Day Ranger ticket offers good value for money within the area covered, but does NOT cover the whole of the West Midlands Region. The ticket's validity should be extended to include all stations between Crewe, Shrewsbury and Hereford, all but two of which are in Shropshire or Herefordshire.

There are missed opportunities for families and small groups, where taking the car or a taxi costs less than the combined rail fare of the members of the group. Building on the GroupSave products a special family fare should be considered for off-peak services.

The next franchise should consider introducing a reduced fare pass for Job Seekers similar to that which has been operating in the South Wales valleys for several years.

Q13: We want to make it easier for passengers to pay for their journey and to reduce the number of people travelling without tickets...

It should be acknowledged that some people cannot cope with ticket machines, for example, those with poor vision, those who may have a mobility impairment those who may not have English as a first language and those too young or too poor to have a credit or debit card, when plastic is the only payment the ticket machine will accept. The franchisee must not bar or deter sections of the community. It must be seen to be actively inclusive.

Where ticket issuing is convenient for one direction of travel only, there must be equal provision made for the other direction. For example, stations which have their sole ticket machine on the Birmingham bound platform and a long walk using a road bridge and pavements to the other platform (Coseley, Rowley Regis, Tame Bridge Parkway) effectively deter ticket purchase. There may be a case for deploying Permit to Travel machines here.

Before more investment in ticket barriers is made, staffing them where they are already should be increased from first to last train. The policy at London Liverpool Street has reduced ticketless travel enormously and more than paid for the extra staffing.

The role of the conductor/guard needs to be redefined. There should be no riding in the back cab. There should be a physical presence in the passenger accommodation at all times, checking tickets. Door opening at stations should be done by the driver, though for safety reasons, it should still be the guard's responsibility to close the doors after checking the platform is clear. This would also reduce dwell times, which we observe to be a common cause of accumulated lateness.

Sadly a culture of attempting to travel without paying for a ticket has developed on some lines in the West Midlands in recent years. Changing this will inevitably take time. We can only hope that a combination of regular ticket inspections at major stations - such as Walsall and Sutton Coldfield - combined with frequent on-train ticket checks, and robust prosecution will eventually prove successful.

Q14: What could be done to improve security ... and to encourage more people to use rail services?

Passenger security is a particular issue in the late evenings when trains are formed of two units coupled together without a through corridor connection. The new franchise should plan their train diagrams so that

any trains formed of double units during the day without corridor connections can be separated after the evening peak.

We note that it is often difficult in the winter evenings, owing to poorly spaced or inadequate lighting, coupled with poor signage for passengers to see at which station the train has stopped. (The use of black backgrounds and white lettering by London Midland has not helped). We suggest that the next franchise should conduct a review of lighting and signage at all stations and, where appropriate, upgrade the older installations to modern standards.

The role of the guard should be retained. Given that there are a number of stations where the platforms are narrow or sharply curved we do not think one man operation using combinations of cameras and mirrors would be safe or appropriate. However, the guard should be visible. The new franchisee should also work with the British Transport Police and the Centro "Safer Travel Team" to ensure there is a visible police presence on the services it operates, to deter crime and anti-social behaviour.

There have in recent years been too many occasions when station booking offices have been closed during the advertised opening hours as a result of staff shortages. We suggest that compliance with advertised opening hours should be monitored and reported in the same way as train service punctuality.

Q15: What represents good service on your rail journey...

The incoming franchise should be a "good value, good customer service" operation that exceeds passenger expectations (as Chiltern have done). The franchise should look to encourage staff to be visible and willing to answer questions, empower them with the right tools for the job, and provide staff at key stations to give assistance at ticket machines, or with a passenger with heavy luggage, or a customer with a mobility problem not just for a few busy hours a day, but when their presence is most needed to reassure, such as in the evening.

It is also worth reminding ourselves that those businesses that have succeeded in the public transport sector have done so through offering their passengers a good customer experience, not the "low frills and low service" that some rail operators have provided.

Q16: How could the provision of information on rail services be improved and what additional information would be of use to you...

The new franchise should be required to continue displaying weekend timetable information posters in roughly the same, generally successful, two monthly, format as at present (but with the modifications suggested in our response to question 9).

The franchise should also be required to publish disaggregated, line by line, performance statistics at their principal stations. It is regrettable that this requirement has been omitted in some current franchise contracts.

Q17: Should the railway have its own identity representing the areas it serves, rather than the train company which operates the service?

Yes - there should be a distinguishable brand that covers all local and regional services in the West Midlands region, including those operated by the new West Midlands rail franchise and those provided by other TOC's such as the peak hour services operated by Chiltern and the inter-urban CrossCountry services to Tamworth and Nuneaton. (There was one at one time a Midline branding, which was used to promote a number of enhanced and new services in the late 1980's.) The new brand should complement Centro's "Network West Midlands" branding and replace the black London Midland station signage. This branding should also survive any changes to operator as those adopted by Transport Scotland for Scotrail and Merseyside PTE for MerseyRail have.

Q18: How could communities, businesses and/or other organisations within the public, private and voluntary sector be encouraged to play an active part in running the railway stations in their area?

The North Staffordshire Community Rail Partnership covers seven stations on the Crewe - Derby line that are managed by East Midlands Trains. London Midland's Euston - Crewe service also calls at two of these

stations, Alsager and Kidsgrove. We have followed the work of the CRP volunteers for many years in improving the environment at these stations and been very impressed by their achievements.

Opportunities for creating new partnerships certainly exist on routes elsewhere in the West Midlands, notably on the Shakespeare Line where preliminary discussions were held with the Local Authorities several years ago. Station Adoption does not seem to have been actively encouraged in the current franchise, despite interest at some stations in the region. However, there are active Station Adoption groups at several stations on the Marches Line which is currently managed by the Wales & Borders franchise.

Station adoption groups and line rail user groups should be given active support, including some finance if appropriate. The best TOCs already have engendered a sense of trust and of listening to their passengers.

Q19: Based on your experience or knowledge of the railway, how do you think train services, railway stations and supporting services should be delivered so that they consider and support the environment...

It is perhaps inevitable that a large amount of litter will always be collected on stations and in trains. Whilst the franchise operator is responsible for clearing this we would welcome occasional reports on the proportion that has either been recycled or perhaps burnt to generate electricity.

Perhaps the greatest contribution to air quality in the region will eventually come from the decisions of more commuters to leave their car at home and take the train to work. A progressive extension of electrification in the region and consequent replacement of DMUs with modern EMUs is clearly part of this campaign. This would also improve air quality at Birmingham New Street station, which despite the recent redevelopment remains an underground station and where passengers are exposed to diesel fumes at platform level. It would be desirable for there to be a situation where the vast majority of diesel services are eliminated from New Street.

Q20: Are there any additional areas that you think we should consider?

The service to Birmingham International has failed to keep up with the expansion of flights from Birmingham Airport. Recent years have seen many more early morning flights. With the increase in time that must be allowed for security checks, it is now not possible to use trains for the first 19 flights of the day from the Wolverhampton and Birmingham New Street direction, or for the first 23 flights of the day from the Northampton and Coventry direction. *[These figures are for March. Numbers are much higher in summer with holiday flights included.]* Similarly, flight arrivals continue until late in the night and the train service does not reflect this. Add to this that the airport is a major employer, with all its facilities fully active by 06.00, yet almost all workers are forced to rely on road transport because of the paucity of the rail service.

Also, events at the NEC cannot be guaranteed to finish in time for suitable trains home, so rail is not catering for a significant market and the opening of the "Resort World" complex there has increased the need to improve services between International and New Street.

There are a number of routes in the region which merit an early decision on electrification:

The most significant of these is the line from Wolverhampton to Shrewsbury which, if operated by electric units, could potentially be upgraded to a 2 trains per hour local service releasing a number of modern Class 170 DMUs to strengthen services elsewhere.

A new station is being built at Kenilworth on the line between Coventry and Leamington Spa. Wiring this line would allow local services to run through to Birmingham, which is expected to be the destination for the majority of passengers.

Extension of wiring over the 3 miles from Walsall is essential to plans to re-open the station at Aldridge.

Bidders for the new franchise should be aware of plans to re-locate Bloxwich station approx 25 chains south to its original location which is nearer to the Town centre.

Although the initial service might be provided by East Midlands Trains, the incoming West Midlands franchise should be aware that Staffordshire County Council would like a new station to be opened at Alrewas, 4 miles north of Lichfield, to serve the National Memorial Arboretum.

Finally, we note that there may soon be an opportunity to use some of the new Class 230 (D78) trains on the Bedford - Bletchley service. This route is largely separate from the main line and the change would release 2 valuable DMUs for use elsewhere.

***Peter Cousins, Keith Flinders and Kevin Chapman
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