

SLOW TRAIN TO BIRMINGHAM

News that Reading to London's fastest trains average 93 mph prompted a look at how West Midlands' services compare between our towns and cities. Most of our trains run non stop for only short distances; some take circuitous routes; some journeys involve changing trains or even changing stations. Distances were measured as straight lines between the centres of places and journey times were for the fastest regular trains.

From	To	Speed
Coventry	Birmingham	48.3 mph
Birmingham	Nottingham	39.0 mph
Lichfield	Birmingham	25.8 mph
Kidderminster	Birmingham	23.6 mph
Worcester	Wolverhampton	22.4 mph
Redditch	Birmingham	20.5 mph
Coventry	Leicester	19.6 mph
Solihull	Walsall	13.4 mph
West Bromwich	Stourbridge	10.1 mph
Wolverhampton	Walsall	7.0 mph

Of the sample, Coventry to Birmingham by Cross Country, marginally faster than Virgin, came top, but at less than 50 mph. Our slowest three journeys average less than 15 mph, including either walking from Moor Street to New Street, or starting by tram and having two changes - The Hawthorns and Stourbridge Junction - or a rail distance of 23.5 miles to reach Walsall, all of 6.9 miles direct from Wolverhampton.

If the alternative is to go by road, consider that the bus journey from West Bromwich to Stourbridge takes 12 minutes more than tram/train/train. From Wolverhampton, Walsall is a 38 minute bus ride away according to the timetable, but congestion at the M6 junction can make a nonsense of that. There is a direct rail route which has one train a week [06.38 on Saturdays] taking 13 minutes from Wolverhampton to Walsall, which also happens to be about as long as the twice hourly through trains sit in Birmingham New Street during most journeys. Campaign for Rail is campaigning for a direct service, with new stations at Willenhall and James Bridge. The latter is to help regenerate the area but is not to be built until some years after the service starts, which we think is a wrong decision.

All these places would benefit if businesses could attract a better range of job applicants because the journey to work was fast and easy. That's the Mayor's challenge!

Keith Flinders