

## WEST MIDLANDS RAIL FRANCHISE CONSULTATION COMMENTS OF WEST MIDLANDS CAMPAIGN FOR BETTER TRANSPORT

The Campaign for Better Transport is a national organisation promoting the use of sustainable transport such as walking, cycling and the use of public transport such as buses, rail and Metro. We want to see the creation of a transport system that is a real alternative to the private car. Campaign for Better Transport has a network of local groups around the country, including one for the West Midlands conurbation and the writer is chair of the West Midlands group.

We are pleased that the DfT are undertaking this public consultation exercise on the future West Midlands rail franchise, and we trust that the feedback provided by users and stakeholders will be taken into consideration.

### **Devolution**

Firstly, we support the proposal to devolve the management of local and regional services in the West Midlands area to the West Midlands Rail consortium of local authorities. The West Midlands has had a mixed deal under the London Midland franchise. Yes, new trains and customer information systems have been provided - but this probably would have happened had the previous co-signatory arrangements of the 1997-2007 Central Trains franchise continued. The performance of the London Midland franchise has improved, but has been less than sparkling owing to the shortage of drivers and traincrew to deliver the timetabled service<sup>1</sup>, with West Midlands services bearing the brunt of cancellations. Given that the West Midlands franchise has the second highest subsidy paid of all the English franchises (p35, 5.9) one would have expected that the DfT would deal with poor performance robustly, in the interest of the rail user and taxpayer. Instead, the impression is that the incumbent operator has not done as well as it could have done, but been rewarded with a franchise extension. One wonders how much passengers would have to suffer and how badly an operator would have to perform before a franchise is terminated early.

The current arrangements do not work and the Department should expedite the full transfer of franchise specification and management responsibility for regional services in the Midlands to West Midlands Rail in Birmingham.

Devolved arrangements have delivered high quality services in London and Liverpool and that is the standard we wish to see in the West Midlands. However, as well as devolution there needs to be sufficient funding provided to ensure that high quality services are delivered and passenger expectations are met. Passing the responsibility down to the regional level, but failing to provide the resources needed would be unacceptable.

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<sup>1</sup> London Midland train driver shortage still 'affecting services' - BBC website 27th November 2013

## **Theme A: Responsive to passengers needs and aspirations**

We would agree with the DfT/WMR priority that the railway should be "accessible to all members of society" and "be easy to use" (4.1 p25). There have been improvements made to a number of stations in recent years (such as Warwick and Acocks Green) through the DfT "Access for All" initiative and we would like to see this continue.

However, one thing passengers with disabilities will not welcome is the suggestion that toilets be removed from trains to provide extra capacity (4.22 p31). We presume that this is being proposed as part of the refurbishment of the class 323 trains, which are used on the Cross City line in Birmingham, as well as the Wolverhampton - Birmingham - Walsall service and locals from Birmingham to Coventry. We understand the toilets on the 323's do not meet the PRISM-TSI standards and need upgrading. Removing them would be a mistake - whilst some journeys made by passengers on Cross City are short for those travelling from say Birmingham to Lichfield or Sutton Coldfield to Northfield spending 30 minutes or more on a train without a toilet is not a pleasant experience for those with medical problems.

Should the successful bidder be permitted to remove the toilets from the 323's we trust that replacement toilet facilities will be provided at the stations on the Cross City line for the use of rail passengers.

There is no demand on West Midlands local services for first class accommodation and this often lies empty whilst standard class is crowded (4.22 p31). We would support the replacement of first class with standard class seating to provide extra capacity, and in the short term the first class compartments on the class 350's used on some West Midlands local services should be declassified.

The urban West Midlands does indeed have an extensive bus, tram and rail network (4.9 p27) and established partnerships between operators, co-ordinated by Centro. Information is high quality and the metropolitan area has a high quality service. However, once you go into the wider region, (that outside the 1974 West Midlands county) which is the "travel to work" area, matters are much poorer. Compare bus stops in the West Midlands, which will have flags detailing services using it and full timetables, with those in Staffordshire where just putting a bus stop pole with no information whatsoever on it is considered sufficient. Or that it is possible to get a joint bus/rail pass to enable travel throughout the Centro area-but it is not possible for those living in the wider region to get a pass to allow regular use of the bus service to their origin station.

The former Central Trains franchise provided posters on trains giving details of connecting bus services from each station on the route. Central Trains also provided bus timetables and information at stations. London Midlands first act was to remove these and the impression is of a disjointed network of rail services and bus services with no joined up working. This is also demonstrated by the decision to allow LM to have its "Key" smartcard, which is not compatible with the "SWIFT" card promoted by Centro - although we understand arrangements are being put in place to allow SWIFT card holders to use local rail services shortly.

The incoming franchisee must improve integration between transport modes and work with Centro and other local authorities to co-ordinate services.

The new franchise must look at making improvements to the following stations:

- **Five Ways and University.** These two stations on the Cross City line have a huge footfall; University the biggest in the area outside of the Central Birmingham stations. Both however are too small for current demand - the concourse at University is now too small, whilst the platforms at Five Ways need widening. University will see increased footfall in the next few years as it is proposed to relocate the Birmingham Childrens Hospital to the Queen Elizabeth Hospital campus, whilst Five Ways is seeing redevelopment and new offices and apartment complexes are planned.
- **Perry Barr.** Of all the stations in the Centro area this is the poorest quality and presents an appalling impression of local rail and of the city of Birmingham. Now New Street has been renewed, upgrading this 1960's carbuncle with something more appropriate for modern needs should be a priority. Perry Barr is planned to have major redevelopment over the next few years - the Birmingham City University campus is earmarked for residential development and a new school is proposed for the site. It would also be appropriate for direct access to be provided to the station from the BCU side of Birchfield Road.
- **Cannock.** This station, along with others on the Chase Line will be receiving an enhanced service once electrification is completed in 2017. It is currently unstaffed. It would now be appropriate, given current footfall and the likely increase from the "sparks effect" to provide an upgraded station with a staff presence.

The comments regarding the quality of trains on the Birmingham - Liverpool corridor provided to Transport Focus are noted. This would in BR days have been considered an "InterCity" route and appropriate stock would have been provided. It compares very poorly to other inter-regional services - for example there is no catering provision while staff have been known to be invisible. We understand this service will be part of the "West Coast Connect" franchise (along with the London Euston - Crewe services along the Trent Valley) and the new franchisee should make improving the passenger experience on this service a priority.

In response to Q5 (p32), during the franchise a decision will have to be taken regarding the future of the class 323 units, which are now over 20 years and compare poorly with other stock used by LM such as the class 172 fleet on the Snow Hill lines. Given the issues with crowding it may be appropriate to consider replacement of the 323's with four car units which would provide extra capacity, and cascade the 323 fleet to newly electrified routes.

In addition to Rugby and Stafford, the local lines radiating from Birmingham cross the West Coast mainline at Nuneaton, Tamworth, Lichfield Trent Valley and Rugeley Trent Valley. Passengers can change between local services and the hourly Euston - Crewe service at these stations.

Connections at Lichfield Trent Valley are important for passengers from as far south as Sutton Coldfield who wish to travel to Stafford, Liverpool, Manchester, Lancashire and Scotland, providing an alternative to changing trains at Birmingham New Street. 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 attending the Crown Court in Stafford. 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 - 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 Arriva Trains Wales 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 local service to Birmingham was provided by the West Midlands franchise.

## **Theme B: Services that cater for competitive growing economies**

It is clear that demand for rail services into Birmingham has grown, the peak hour modal share of the commuter market has soared from 17.1% in 2011 to over 30% in 2011 (and this was despite the economic downturn between 2008 and 2011).<sup>2</sup> Growth has been way over and above that predicted in the West Midlands and Chilterns Route Utilisation Study, of 2.2% per annum. A key challenge for the new franchise will be continuing to meet this rising demand, especially given that commuters are travelling further into work each day and most new affordable housing is being located in the wider "travel to work" area as opposed to the West Midlands county.

Services within the Centro area are generally high frequency, for example there is a train every 10 minutes during the peaks between Longbridge and Four Oaks whilst there is a six train per hour service between Stourbridge and Birmingham. However, frequencies reduce outside of the Centro area. The Birmingham - Wolverhampton - Shrewsbury local service is the only one in the region with an hourly service; given recent developments such as the growth of Telford and the designation of Cosford as a major army base this route justifies at least two trains per hour. We suggest the new West Midlands franchise should offer a half-hourly service as soon as possible. In the medium term, the route is also a candidate for electrification and would enable DMU's to be released for services elsewhere.

When the Central Trains franchise was broken up in 1997, the Birmingham - Leicester and Birmingham - Derby services were re-mapped into Cross Country. This has created an anomaly where the local stations on the routes are managed by either London Midland or East Midlands Trains, but the service is provided by Cross Country. Water Orton, Coleshill Parkway and Wilnecote are also outside of the West Midlands zonal fare structure.

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<sup>2</sup> <http://www.wmita.org.uk/media/2942/item-8-appendix-wm-rail-vision-autumn-2014.pdf>

We suggest that plans should be put in place to transfer the local services from Birmingham to Derby and 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 RUS, potentially saving a unit and providing an additional inter-regional service.

We support the plans to extend the Birmingham - Walsall local service, which was proposed in the ATOC "Connecting Communities" report of 2009, to a new station at Aldridge as soon as wiring can be erected.

The completion of phase one of NUCKLE is welcome, though we are disappointed that it has been completed behind schedule and that the service is being operated by a single car unit. We would like to see the development of phase 2 during the life of the franchise with services southwards to the new station at Kenilworth and Leamington Spa, so there is a cross Warwickshire service. Electrification of the Leamington - Nuneaton route will be needed as part of the electric spine project and doing this work as an early phase would allow the service to be provided with EMU's. As a short term measure, the service between Coventry and Nuneaton could be provided using the class 230 units which would provide more capacity for commuters and for events at the Coventry Arena, and which would be a cheaper solution than locomotive hauled sets.

The consultation document (Q7 p36) refers to services between Christmas and New Year. At one point Central Trains offered a full weekday service in the West Midlands area on Christmas Eve (albeit with last trains earlier than usual) and on the business days in the interregnum between the Christmas Bank Holidays and New Years Day - unless there was major engineering work. Under London Midland auspices this service has declined and Cross City for example offers just two trains per hour in this period. The cynic suspects this is to enable London Midland to avoid cancelling services due to lack of train-crew. People do work during this period and demand has increased owing to the growth of Birmingham as a retail centre and the January sales. The new franchise should look at the service offered over this period and look towards offering a normal weekday service on the "working days" in late December.

Both Birmingham Airport and the NEC have grown, the airport are providing services to more destinations and the NEC now includes the Resort World leisure complex. The rail service has not however kept pace; it is not possible to use rail to meet the first flights of the day from Birmingham Airport which are the key ones for business travellers, whilst concert goers often find they have to leave an event early in order to get the last train home. An all-night service between Birmingham, Birmingham International and Coventry would help cater for these passengers, as well as those who work at the Airport/NEC and who need to commute for early/late shifts. One key issue is how to facilitate a 24 hour rail service and the engineering possessions required to maintain the line between Birmingham and Coventry, however a solution could be found.

Through ticketing to tie in with major events at the NEC and within the wider West Midlands should be encouraged; this is something else that has declined since British Rail/Central Trains days. In addition, thought should be given to providing additional capacity for major events.

There is the "Birmingham Half Marathon" which occurs on a Sunday during October - this results in major road closures in South Birmingham. Anyone wishing to travel by train from Redditch or Sutton Coldfield to either participate or spectator in this event would be unable to do so; the first trains do not arrive in Birmingham until after 09:00. An innovative, commercially focused train operator would have provided some earlier services on this day but London Midland have been unwilling to do so.

London Midland have a poor reputation for managing disruption, the company has consistently scored poorly for this in the Transport Focus Rail Passenger Survey and a glance at the companies Twitter feed shows how unhappy passengers are. Whilst all stations now have CIS the decision to reduce booking office hours, removing a staff presence who can assist customers particularly in an evening when services are not frequent has not helped.

We are aware London Midland have identified this as a priority and are providing staff with new equipment, have improved the information offered as well as providing additional staff to assist passengers at key stations such as Birmingham New Street. However, London Midland should be reducing delays and cancellations that are within its gift. The new franchisee should make a real effort to deliver the advertised timetable, and ensure that sufficient staff resources are available.

Mention should also be made of the Cross City leaf-fall timetable. This is not passenger friendly, particularly the skip stopping in the central core and some peak services starting at Selly Oak rather than Longbridge. A new leaf-fall timetable should be developed, to remove skip stopping. It may be preferable for a 15 minute regular interval service to be offered on the Longbridge - Four Oaks Cross City core during leaf fall, than the 10/20 minute offering that has been provided by LM in their leaf-fall timetables of 2014 and 2015.

## **Theme C: Making sure you feel valued and safe**

### ***Ticketing***

Firstly, whilst technology is improving all the time and more and more people are making transactions using smartphones and contactless payment cards there will continue to be a demand for traditional paper tickets. This is for several reasons, there are people on lower incomes who only have basic bank accounts and rely on cash for making transactions, the elderly who may not be technology literate, and there are a proportion of passengers who would prefer to have paper tickets and do not have confidence in other methods. Whilst the new franchise should develop new methods of ticketing and work with Centro to turn SWIFT into a genuine West Midlands Oystercard, the franchisee should continue to offer traditional booking offices and ticket machines.

The document talks about the historic fares policy adopted on the Chase Line, with it being included in the Centro zonal fares system. We would like to see the zonal fares system extended into the wider region, to include stations such as Kidderminster, Telford, Stafford, Nuneaton, Rugby, Leamington Spa, Stratford-upon-Avon, Redditch and Bromsgrove - all of them have strong commuter flows into Birmingham. Providing a n-Train ticket across a wider area would provide a fairer basis for fares for those passengers in the wider area. It should also be noted that commuters are now having to travel further to work than the traditional Centro area - particularly to find affordable housing.

We would expect that any changes to fares that would result in passengers paying substantially more than they would under current arrangements to be phased. Having changes resulting in above inflation increases (particularly to unregulated products) will result in users being priced off the railway. This may provide some relief to capacity (as BR found when putting up fares above inflation) but will not help the need to keep the West Midlands moving and reduce congestion on the roads, which is a hindrance to the regional economy.

Campaign for Better Transport has campaigned for part-time season tickets to be introduced<sup>3</sup>. More and more people (particularly women and those with caring responsibilities) are working part-time, however they either have to pay for a weekly or monthly season ticket which will be unused for a number of days a week, or day returns for the days they work. Likewise there are a growing amount of people in the workforce who work remotely (either from home or another location) for most of the week and may only need to go into their office a couple of days a week. If they are travelling in peak time they will be paying more for their journey per day than the traditional Monday-Friday commuter. There is a golden opportunity for the new West Midlands (and residual London Midland) franchises to introduce part-time season tickets, with a scheme that could be an exemplar for the rail network nationally. The DfT should seek for part-time season tickets to be introduced from day one of the new franchise.

The new franchise should also introduce a reduced fare pass for jobseekers, similar to that which has been provided on the Valley Lines network in South Wales for many years.

### ***Car Parking***

There is inconsistency in parking policy throughout the regional network. Centro has had for many years a policy of providing free car parking at local rail stations in the West Midlands county, to encourage "Park and Ride" and reduce congestion on the local roads. However, the car parks are often full even at 07:30 in the morning meaning those wanting to travel later in the day cannot find a space to park. There are also a number of people who park inconsiderately at stations, blocking people in and Centro have introduced a scheme to give penalties to people who park inconsiderately<sup>4</sup>. However, this does not address the issue of inconsiderate parking near rail stations which annoys local residents and causes congestion.

Outside of the Centro area most parking is charged. The cost varies wildly with those stations managed by Virgin charging around £8.50 a day, others being managed by local councils and some on former rail land being managed by London Midland. There is anecdotal evidence that commuters will choose to drive into the Centro area from places like Bromsgrove to take advantage of the free parking. Centro have continued to extend car parking but the demand is outstripping spaces.

It is no longer possible in our view to continue to provide free parking at West Midlands stations and a charging regime should be introduced in the Centro area to manage parking and provide some financial support, as the current scheme is unsustainable.

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<sup>3</sup> <http://www.bettertransport.org.uk/blogs/rail/Government-are-limbering-up-for-flexible-ticketing>

<sup>4</sup> <http://centro.org.uk/about-us/news/2014/%C2%A3100-car-parking-penalties-to-begin-at-park-and-ride-sites/>

## ***Bus Interchange***

Like car parking, there is variance with the quality of interchange with local bus services at rail stations around the region. Those in the Centro area have bus stops or interchanges nearby, with full timetables being displayed at stops, flags showing all services using the stop and real-time information at a growing number of stops. Staffordshire seem to think that providing a bus stop with no information that is no-where near a station is sufficient (Lichfield Trent Valley being an example). Worcestershire and Warwickshire are improving, but the impression in the wider region is that bus and rail services are not connected, despite PlusBus tickets being available and many bus routes running near to rail stations.

The new franchisee should work with local authorities and bus operators to improve integration, for example by having racks of local bus timetables available at stations (as they were during Central Trains days) and including bus timetables for key destinations not served by rail (such as Stourport in Worcestershire or Alcester in Warwickshire) in the relevant local rail pocket timetable. The PlusBus scheme should be promoted more widely. Consideration should be given of introducing a multi-modal bus/rail pass aimed at commuters in the wider region, allowing travel to their rail station. (It is currently possible to buy a pass in the wider region that will enable travel into the Centro area by train and the use of the bus network in the Centro area, but will it not allow bus travel to the local station.)

We are pleased that the new station at Bromsgrove will have bus services diverted to serve it, and information provided to the "Network West Midlands" standard offered in the Centro area. This should be an exemplar for the improvement of existing stations in the region as well as the provision of new ones such as Kenilworth.

## ***Active Travel***

Encouraging passengers to walk or cycle to their local station where possible will assist in promoting the health agenda, as well as reducing the demand for car parking spaces. Centro was successful in developing a "Green Travel Plan" for users at Kings Norton station<sup>5</sup> and this initiative should be rolled out to the wider regional network. Birmingham City Council has received funding as part of the "Cycle City" initiative and some of this money has been used to improve cycle parking at local stations in the city.

The new franchisee should work with local authorities to encourage active travel and promote its benefits.

## ***Station Staffing***

The cutbacks to station booking office hours introduced by London Midland in 2012 were undoubtedly negative for rail users. The impression gained is that the company has seen stations as liabilities rather than assets. Even Walsall, a busy town centre station with high footfall is unstaffed after 19:00 in the evening - meaning that when things go wrong such as evening trains on the Chase Line being cancelled there is not the physical staff presence there to assist customers with things such as arranging replacement transport or onward connections.

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<sup>5</sup> <http://www.involve-project.eu/assets/Downloads/centro2/7-GP-40-Station-Travel-Plans-Amanda-Pickard.pdf>

MerseyRail has adopted a much different attitude, converting booking offices at its busier stations into "M to Go" outlets, offering passengers convenience products and newspapers but also selling rail tickets. The incoming franchise should look at this model and apply it to stations such as Walsall, University, Sutton Coldfield, Lichfield City, Stourbridge Junction, Kidderminster and Birmingham Snow Hill. Elsewhere it should work with other organisations to utilise booking offices for other services but continue to sell rail tickets. Jewellery Quarter has a booking office that is only open between 16:00 and 18:00 on Fridays and between 11:00 - 13:00 and 15:00 - 17:00 on Saturdays. It would be an ideal base for the areas Tourist Information Centre, which would allow staffing at rather more useful times than these.

We note Chiltern have staffed their new station at Oxford Parkway, but have utilised the member of staff to assist customers in using the ticket machines at the station and to provide help and information on services, rather than having them based in a booking office behind a counter. It will be interesting to see the results of this, and it may be a model for the new franchisee to apply at quieter stations.

### ***Ticketless Travel***

The level of ticketless travel is probably much higher than the official figures collated by London Midland and the DfT suggest. Colleagues regularly note the lack of ticket inspections on London Midland services - this is not just an evening phenomenon as suggested in 6.10 (p45), conductors are not even visible on off-peak services in the day. Revenue of several hundred thousand pounds must be being lost each week, money which could be used to improve local rail services.

The incoming franchisee must address this and there must be a public target to reduce ticketless travel, as there was in the 1997-2007 Central Trains franchise. Conductors should be supported by mobile revenue protection teams doing checks on trains as well the current approach of barring a station for a random operation. The penalty fare is set too low - increasing it to £100 would provide a deterrent to the would be fare dodger as well as supporting the costs for the staff needed.

However, the system should be fair. Those passengers who have been sold the wrong ticket or who are willing to pay (for example those with learning difficulties who find the automated ticket machines difficult to use) should not be penalised - but those who think they can get a free ride from the railway should find there is no such thing as a free train trip.

### ***Safety and Security***

A key theme from the research by Transport Focus into passengers priorities is that users have concerns about safety and security on the public transport network in the West Midlands, this being a larger priority than a number of other factors. Although recorded crime is low on the bus and rail network and there has been a decline, there is a perception that crime and anti-social behaviour is prevalent on bus and rail services in the region. This is not helped by vandalism; graffiti is a major problem on the approaches into Birmingham and presents a negative image both of the railway and of the city, whilst window etching seems to be a particular problem on the class 323 units employed on the Cross City line.

The lack of staff presence is also an issue, whilst some conductors may feel uneasy about going through a train in the evening vulnerable passengers (such as single travellers or lone women) would feel assured by a staff presence, given that the more anti-social elements will take advantage if the guard hides in his cab.

Newer units have CCTV fitted as standard in order to provide evidence for court and to act as a deterrent against crime and anti-social behaviour. The class 323's and 150's (which are still used on a small handful of West Midlands services) do not have this. Should the 323's be retained in the West Midlands, CCTV should be fitted to these units as part of the refurbishment programme.

Centro has its "Safer Travel" team which has undertaken joint work with London Midland. The new franchisee should continue to support the team. In order to tackle crime and anti-social behaviour on late night trains, consideration should be given to funding PCSO's to patrol services where it is known there is a problem, such as the evening services on Cross City and those from Leamington and Solihull to Birmingham on Friday and Saturday nights. There is the question of funding, but if a PCSO presence deters ticketless travel and anti-social behaviour and results in more passengers travelling by rail of an evening, then there will be revenue gained to support this.

### ***Customer Information Systems***

We are disappointed that the opportunity was not taken to fit an improved audio-visual customer information system to the class 323 units as part of the direct award. This should be a priority for the new franchise, whether they stay in the West Midlands or not the trains should have CIS. The 323's compare poorly to newer units like the class 172's on Snow Hill services and the lack of CIS should be addressed.

Whilst London Midland have made use of social media channels such as Twitter and its smart-phone apps (and this is to be lauded) use should also be made of the at station CIS displays. They currently display real-time running information, but if there is serious disruption it would be helpful for these to display details of alternative arrangements in emergencies (such as the provision of a rail replacement bus or the acceptance of rail tickets on local bus services).

The new franchisee should continue to display posters at stations advertising planned engineering works on the network, both that which is imminent and those scheduled to take place over the next three months. The new franchisee should also be required to provide information about all operators services that may be affected by engineering disruption and the alternative arrangements being provided, to avoid nonsense like London Midland not giving information about the arrangements for Easter Sunday for Shrewsbury - Telford - Wolverhampton - Birmingham services that will be affected by engineering at Galton Junction as "another operator provides the service"! If train operators continue provide inadequate information about disrupted services then the Department or Network Rail should do the job for them - and send the TOC's the bill.

## ***Branding***

It is a pity the West Midlands rail network has not had a specific brand which has lasted. In 1986 British Rail and WMPTE coined the "Midline" brand which was used to promote services for a time (particularly on new routes) but this fell out of use in the early 1990's when WMPTE re-branded as Centro, and the provincial sector of British Rail re-branded as Regional Railways. It is notable that the ScotRail brand, which involved a major overhaul of services and stations north of the border in the 1980's has survived whilst MerseyRail had been used for many decades as the branding for local services in the Liverpool City Region.

In the West Midlands whilst the London Midland brand is established many passengers refer to Centro as being the train operator (despite the fact Centro has never run trains, though units used in the West Midlands were in a Centro livery for a time).

It would be helpful once the services are split for a new brand to be established for West Midlands regional services - perhaps Midline could be revived or "Network West Midlands" used to promote services. Large amounts of money have been spent over the years re-branding at franchise changes and this has not provided value for the customer, so the approach of Merseytravel and Transport Scotland should be adopted, in that the franchisee may change but there is no change to livery or branding, save for subtle references to the franchisee on trains and in electronic, printed and display materials.

The incoming franchisee should also be pro-active in encouraging growth in off peak services. It was disappointing when the class 172's were introduced that LM did not seek to market the new trains and the improved comfort and facilities - the impression was given by the company that "we've introduced new trains - so what" even though they were a step change to those previously used on the Snow Hill services.

London Midland have improved their marketing though and the attempts to encourage new passengers through the "Social Network" campaign are welcome. It should be made clear to the incoming franchisee that revenue generation is needed, particularly on off-peak trains and it is better that a passenger is travelling on a discounted ticket and paying some money than an empty seat.

## ***Customer Experience***

The consultation document refers to the focus group work suggesting that LM is seen as a "low frills" service and this is seen as a bad thing (6.22 p49). Certainly there are improvements that can be made and a trolley on Trent Valley and Birmingham - Liverpool services would be very welcome given the lengthy journey times. However, the London Midland Birmingham New Street - London Euston service provides a cheaper option to passengers than Virgin (where walk on fares are expensive) provided they are prepared to sacrifice speed for cheapness. We would consider that the successor London Midland operator should go for "low fares but good customer service with value added", rather than "low fares, no frills and poor customer service" like that provided by some airlines.

## **Theme D: A considerate, sustainable railway**

We would support more partnerships between the local community, local authorities and the railway such as that which has been adopted on the Marston Vale and Abbey Lines, and for the principle of CRP's to be introduced to West Midlands local services. The Shakespeare Line between Birmingham and Stratford-upon-Avon and the Stourbridge Line from Birmingham - Kidderminster via Stourbridge Junction seem obvious candidates; both have active user groups with a track record of delivering improvements, plus go through areas with strong community activity.

However, we would caution that in building CRP's and station adoption the new franchisee and West Midlands Rail should look outside of the traditional RUG's towards other community groups. For example, the residents association in Olton have been active in the upkeep of their local rail station although as far as we are aware it has not been adopted by them. Likewise, there are other groups such as local churches, community centres and voluntary organisations that may well be able to assist. The new franchise should take into account the diverse community of the West Midlands.

It is perhaps inevitable that a large amount of litter will always be collected on stations and in trains. It can prevent a negative image of the railway and there should be an effort to keep stations and trains clean and litter-free. Whilst the franchise operator is responsible for clearing this we would welcome activity to encourage users to keep trains and stations tidy, together with environmental reports showing the proportion of waste that is recycled.

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 use public transport, such as rail to work. A progressive extension of electrification in the region and consequent replacement of diesel sets with modern Electric Multiple Units is clearly part of this campaign.

### **Are there any additional areas that you think we should consider?**

Air quality is rising in importance as an environmental concern. The recent publication of the report "Every breath we take: The lifelong impact of air pollution" by the Royal College of Physicians and the Royal College of Paediatrics and Child Health suggests that air pollution has a substantial impact on many long term chronic health conditions, increasing the risks of heart attacks and strokes in susceptible individuals. The stench of diesel fumes and the prattle of diesel engines in the underground New Street station is a very uncomfortable experience for passengers and must not be doing their health much good. With an ever tightening regulatory framework on air quality the railway industry should beware, and not wait for the law to force an improvement in a situation that is not sustainable in the medium to long term.

Looking to increase the number of electrified routes around the Midlands region will help to address this issue, by reducing the number of diesel operated services into 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.

Services on the routes through Birmingham Snow Hill are currently operated by class 172 Turbostar units. These are relatively modern. Developing a programme for the electrification of the Snow Hill lines in the medium term (perhaps coupled with the electrification of the Chiltern Main Line from London Marylebone) will release the 172's for use elsewhere, allowing the withdrawal of the class 150 Sprinter Units which are now 30 years old.

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 New Street, which is expected to be the ultimate 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 approximately 25 chains south to its original location, which is nearer to the town centre. This would also provide much better connectivity with local bus services than that at present.

Although the initial service might be provided by East Midlands Trains, the incoming West Midlands franchise should be aware that Staffordshire County Council's would like to open a new station 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 diesel units for use elsewhere on the network.

**Kevin Chapman**  
**West Midlands Campaign for Better Transport**  
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