

# **Rail & Bus for Herefordshire Newsletter Winter 2018-19**



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**Hon. President: Professor John Whitelegg  
Newsletter Editor & Chairman: Gareth Calan Davies**

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## Best Wishes for the New Year



### *DRMBus service 476 to Hereford at Ledbury Memorial*

Best Wishes to you all for the New Year. Let us hope that 2019 will herald some glimmers of light for the future of the country and in particular improvements in the coordination of our transport system. To the man in the street I am sure inland transport in Britain, roads, buses, trains, appears in a state of un-coordinated chaos. Perhaps I am too much of an optimist, but in the words of the philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche.... *'Out of chaos comes order'*.

**The Message remains clear. Trains and buses are important to Herefordshire and its future. Support for them in all ways is important. Please pass the message on.**

**The more members the more effective the support.**

## Our Railways - the Future

December's copy of The Railway Observer noted that *'The Government support for the rail in industry in 2017-18 is set to reach £6.4bn. However, £2.1bn of this was for HS2 work. The train operator contributions fell sharply to £223m having been £776m in 2016-17, including the Network Rail grant'*.

It does not take much arithmetic to deduce that the gap between government rail expenditure and government rail revenue is increasing. Such figures must add to the growing feeling that there is something very wrong with our rail franchising system. This was echoed earlier in the year by the findings of the Parliamentary Committee of Public Accounts investigation into rail franchising in the aftermath of the East Coast Main Line and Thameslink-Southern and Great Northern franchises. The report concluded that 'Rail franchising needs significant reform' and 'MPs on the Transport Committee say there are serious shortcomings in the Department for Transport's capability and capacity to manage rail franchising'.

Interestingly the Committee's comments on the East Coast Main Line franchise included the following:

*'The Department and Stagecoach agreed that in contracting with the private sector to deliver public services, it was important to make sure that the risks sit with the organisation which is best able to manage them. The Department told us that it wants bidders to be ambitious about what they offer passengers. However, Stagecoach was clear that bidders would only put forward ambitious proposals if the risk transfer was acceptable.*

*It asserted that on the East Coast franchise, all of the risk sat with Virgin Trains East Coast as operator, including risks they were not best placed to manage, such as the risk that the economy does not perform as well as expected at the bidding stage. In 2011, the previous Committee noted that the high proportion of business and leisure travel on the East Coast franchise meant that it was particularly susceptible to changes in the economy and recommended that the*

*Department should always test franchise bids against a range of different economic conditions.*

*The Department told us that it now tests bids against ‘a very pessimistic view of the economy’ but that it only started doing this in 2015, after it let the East Coast franchise. It also told us that it has put in place a new risk sharing model intended to shelter operators from ‘the worst excesses of economic change’ It was keen to stress that it did not believe the franchising system as a whole is failing, and that passenger demand is still growing, albeit at lower rates than previously’.*

The Committee’s comments on the Thameslink-Southern, Great Northern franchise included:

*‘Passengers using the TSGN franchise have suffered a sustained period of disruption, which started almost as soon as Govia Thameslink started operating trains on the franchise. Over the first three years of the franchise, Govia Thameslink trains were the most delayed on the whole rail network.*

*Between July 2015 (when Govia Thameslink took over responsibility for Southern train services) and March 2017, 146,000 services, 7.7% of scheduled train services were either cancelled or more than 30 minutes late. This does not include trains which were cancelled in advance because Govia Thameslink expected significant disruption. Less than two thirds of trains arrived at their destination within five minutes of their scheduled arrival time during one particularly bad four week period between November and December 2016. The Department said that it aims to balance services for passengers and a good outcome for taxpayers in the form of franchise payments. However, in the case of the TSGN franchise, the Department asserted that the franchise is on course to deliver for the taxpayer even though passengers have experienced serious disruption’.*

Can we expect a fundamental reform of the franchise model in 2019?

## **Transport for Wales A Brave New Rail Transport Model?**

2019 will be documented as a milestone for the Wales. Devolution saw the transfer of responsibility for the Wales & Borders rail franchise from the Department for Transport (DfT) to the Welsh Government. The administration and monitoring of the franchise is now undertaken by Transport for Wales Ltd (TfW), an arms-length Welsh government company. Some years ago when the rail devolution negotiations began, the Welsh Government made it clear it did not want a repeat of the DfT franchise model where Arriva Trains Wales (ATW) ran the system, as best it could within a no improvement framework. The strict application of this constraint by ATW often led to friction with the Welsh Government.

Initially the Welsh Government's approach was to consider using a business model based on Welsh Water Ltd whereby the Welsh government is the major shareholder, all profits being ploughed back into the business. This of course was anathema to the DfT. The communications lines between Cardiff and Westminster were getting hot. After many, at time acrimonious exchanges, a compromise was reached. The new system would be one of a partnership between TfW and a train operator whose profit would not be eliminated but would be capped. However, if the operator is allowed to make only a limited profit will the network and its necessary improvements be of any interest to potential bidders?

The answer appears to be a sweetener as part of the deal. The sweetener is the proposed South Wales Metro, a self-contained system which would be financed, built and run by the operator. ATW pulled out of the bidding process because the new partnership arrangement was not to their liking. Abellio, another bidder, pulled out following the collapse of its partnership with Carillion rail. That left two bidders, Keolis Amey and MTR both with extensive experience in Metro construction and operation. Eventually the job went to Keolis Amey and the razzmatazz accompanying the exciting future for rail service in

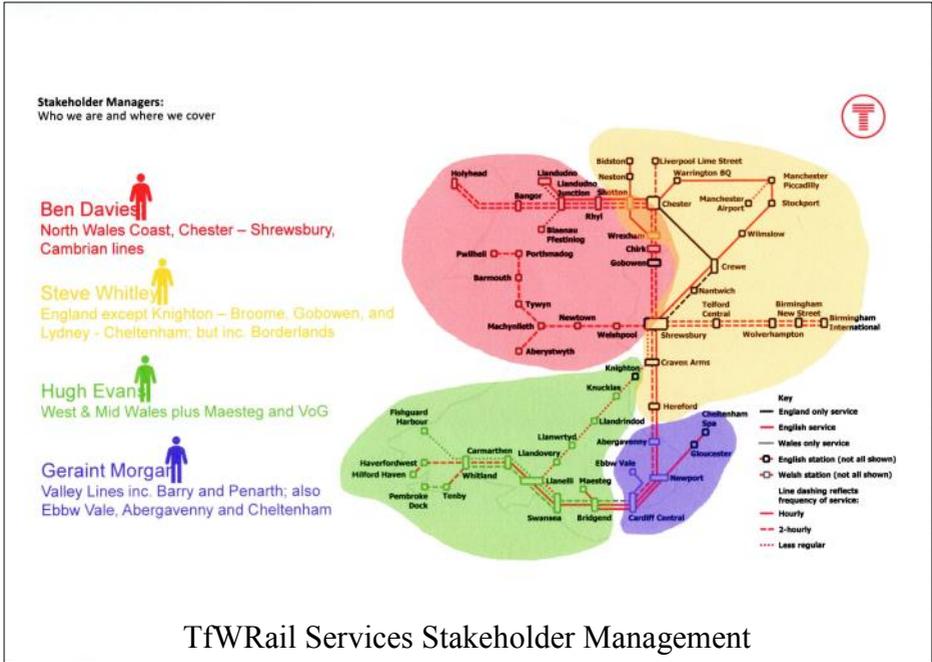
Wales and the Borders began to roll out of Cardiff. The plans for a transformed Wales & Borders Network are shown on the RBfH website news section as ‘The Welsh Government’s Brave New Railway’ [www.rbfh.org.uk](http://www.rbfh.org.uk).

Interestingly, trains and stations will be branded Transport for Wales and Keolis Amey will be operating under the heading of Transport for Wales Rail Services. This amounts to a nice little bit of Welsh patriotism. October 14 saw the change from Arriva Trains Wales to Transport for Wales Rail Services. As reported on the RBfH website it was unfortunate that this coincided with a planned closure of the line between Newport and Shrewsbury for engineering works! If this was not enough November and December have been marred by a rolling stock shortage with 37 out of a total ageing fleet of 127 under repair. Nature added its bit to the disruption with exceptionally bad storms affecting operations across the network.

Some consider all this a baptism of fire. Others ask why 29% of the fleet was out of action? Yet others perhaps get nearer the truth in that TfW Rail inherited a fleet and its maintenance system which had been run down to the bare minimum to save costs by the previous operator knowing that they would be pulling out. As one South Walian said... *‘you do not spend money on a car if you know you are going to sell it!’*

Whatever the causes it is very early days in the new partnership. Hopefully, lessons will have been learnt, especially in respect of the need for good customer information. A phased programme of new rolling stock has been announced and stations are to be cleaned and updated. New management structures are being introduced and a number of stakeholder managers have been appointed by area to liaise and work with user groups.

As we go to press we have been informed that Steve Whitley, the stakeholder manager covering the Marches is returning to Keolis London. We await the new appointment with interest.



## West Midlands Rail Executive Rail Investment Strategy

The West Midlands Rail Executive (WMR Executive) is a consortium of West Midlands local authorities comprising:

Full Members: Birmingham; Coventry; Dudley; **Herefordshire**; Northamptonshire; Sandwell; Solihull; Shropshire; Staffordshire; Telford and Wrekin; Walsall; Warwickshire; Wolverhampton; Worcestershire.

Affiliate Members: Cheshire East and Stoke-on-Trent.

In October the WMR Executive published a consultation document on its 30 Year Rail Investment Strategy 2018 – 2047. Understandably the strategy concentrates on the core busy metropolitan services. Of interest to Herefordshire, however, is the aim of setting minimum standards of 6 - 4 – 2 trains per hour (depending on traffic density) throughout the network during the plan period. Also of interest is the

inclusion of Herefordshire in the development of rail services and connectivity in high growth corridors. This all looks promising but cannot be achieved without increasing train capacity between Great Malvern and Shelwick Junction, Hereford.

Looking further into the strategy document we find that Hereford has slipped way down the line with service enhancements and capacity works between Hereford & Great Malvern having fallen to the long term (post 2034) period (see extract from report).

Extract from WMR Executive Investment Strategy document

<b>Short-Term Strategy (2018 / 2025)</b>	<b>CORRIDOR GVA UPLIFT: £9.5m p.a</b>
<b>Principal Service Changes</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Train lengthening</li> <li>• Introduction of passenger services via new Camp Hill stations</li> <li>• Calls at Worcestershire Parkway for regional services (2019)</li> <li>• Improved evening services (May 19) and Sunday services (May 21)</li> </ul>	<b>Principal Infrastructure Enhancements</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Completion of Worcestershire Parkway station (2019)</li> <li>• New stations: Hazelwell, Kings Heath and Moseley</li> </ul>
<b>Indicative Medium-Term Strategy (2025 - 2034)</b>	<b>CORRIDOR GVA UPLIFT: £12.6m p.a</b>
<b>Principal Service Enhancements</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• London / Oxford to Worcester frequency increases, including extensions to Great Malvern and Stourbridge (via Kidderminster)</li> <li>• Camp Hill line frequency increases</li> </ul>	<b>Principal Infrastructure Enhancements</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Capacity works in the Worcester area</li> <li>• North Cotswold Line capacity</li> <li>• Birmingham area capacity improvements (currently known as Midlands Rail Hub) to facilitate higher frequencies</li> <li>• New station at Balsall Heath</li> </ul>
<b>Long-Term Strategy Aspirations (post 2034)</b>	<b>CORRIDOR GVA UPLIFT: £20.9m p.a</b>
<b>Aspirational Service Enhancements</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Hereford to Birmingham frequency increases</li> <li>• Development of regular Hereford to London service (currently limited services)</li> <li>• Camp Hill line frequency increases</li> <li>• Bristol /Gloucester/Cheltenham / Ashchurch/ Worcester/Bromsgrove to West Midlands new regional services</li> </ul>	<b>Principal Infrastructure Enhancements</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Capacity works between Hereford and Great Malvern</li> <li>• Capacity works on the approaches to Birmingham</li> <li>• New Worcester suburban stations</li> </ul>

This analysis of the strategy document formed the basis of the RBfH response to the consultation. RBfH also noted that in May 2016 the Marches Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP), which includes Herefordshire, published a document entitled ‘Investing in Strategic

Transport Corridors in the Marches’. The LEP considered that redoubling of the Malvern – Hereford line was a key priority in improving connectivity with the West Midlands as part of the economic and social development of Herefordshire.

Herefordshire has board members on both the LEP and WMR Executive. It will be interesting to see how effective they are in securing a better deal for the improvement of Herefordshire’s rail services.

## **Rural Bus Services**

The erosion of our rural bus services continues. The 411 service between Whitchurch and Hereford was withdrawn following the last journey on 19 December 2018. The council note on their website reads

### ***411 Whitchurch - Hereford***

*We regret to inform passengers that after Wednesday 19 December 2018 the bus service 411 between Whitchurch and Hereford will be withdrawn. This is due to a recent retendering process that failed to establish any contract bidders meeting the council's subsidy limit. Therefore the new cost of the contract would unfortunately have been financially unsustainable.’*

The interesting point here is that tenders exceeded the subsidy cost per passenger limit set by the council. If tender prices rise it is likely that more services will fail the cost per passenger criteria thus providing an economic reason for withdrawal, irrespective of passenger numbers. To judge a rural bus service purely on its economic performance against a set subsidy cost per passenger measure is flawed.

But it is not only subsidised services that are under threat. From 9 January 2019 the DRMBus 476 commercial journeys on Friday evening will be withdrawn. This forms part of the Council’s core bus network as identified in the Local Transport Plan. However, in the present climate the journeys are unlikely to be replaced.

## **The Rural Transport Problem (Part 1)**

The fact that there was a rural transport problem first came to the attention of government in 1960. Growth in car ownership was seriously eroding the finances of bus companies, most of whom were part of British Electric Traction Ltd and the Tilling Group. The ability to support a large network of routes from the fare box was becoming problematic, especially as within that network there was a considerable element of cross subsidy, i.e. profitable urban and inter urban routes being used to financially sustain rural routes.

Rural bus service withdrawals had started in the late 1950's and showed signs of accelerating. The role of direct public financial support for rural bus services was first mooted in the Jack Committee Report of 1961 (Ministry of Transport). Most of the Committee's suggestions for public financial support came to fruition in the 1968 Transport Act. Section 34 of the Act laid down the conditions under which financial aid could be paid. It stated that local authorities '*may, on such conditions, if any, as they think fit, afford assistance to any other person, by way of grant, loan or both, for the purpose of securing the provision, improvement or continuation, of any bus service or ferry service, if in the opinion of the council or councils in question that the service is or will be for the benefit of persons residing in rural areas*'. So the stated rationale for financial support was firmly seated in the idea of satisfying the social needs of the rural population.

The 1968 Act also saw the creation of the National Bus Company, a nationalised company that took over all bus services except those operated as municipal concerns. Finding that the finances of both the BET and Tilling Group companies were in an appalling state, the NBC set about a rationalisation and restructuring plan. The result was the identification of a profitable business core in urban and interurban operation and proposed widespread abandonment of loss making rural services. The onus for the continuation of rural services was firmly thrown onto the local authorities with increasing requests for financial support. Such support was forthcoming in variable quantities in

different geographical areas with different political agendas.

During the 1970's and 1980's subsidy to bus companies progressively increased. This alarmed the local authorities and at times led to acrimonious exchanges between local authorities and the NBC management. By the mid 1970's the alarm had spread to the now conservative central government. In 1977 the DfT drew the attention of local authorities throughout Britain to the following

*'I am directed by the Secretary of State for Transport to draw the attention of your authority to the Passenger Vehicles (Experimental Areas) act which received Royal Assent on 22 July.'*

The Experimental Areas Act was designed to give local authorities a chance to set up a designated area where bus service licencing was abolished, i.e. bus services were de-regulated. Within the 'Trial Area' a Road Service Licence to operate a local bus service was no longer needed. Operators Licences, Public Service Vehicle Licences (similar to MOT's) and PSV driver's licences were still required. The idea behind the trial was to encourage competition in the industry which it was hoped would lead to better service provision, lower fares and less demand on the public purse for subsidy.

At that time Hereford & Worcester County Council were at loggerheads with Midland Red West, an NBC company. The subject of dispute was of course the level of subsidy being paid to the bus company. The council seized the opportunity and the majority of the area of the old county of Herefordshire was designated a 'Trial Area' for the purposes of the act.

The bus company acted immediately by withdrawing virtually all their country bus services, retaining Hereford City services. Thankfully Herefordshire was blessed with a large number of small independent country operators who were able to fill the gaps. Where services or journeys were deemed to be socially necessary, the local authority was empowered to finance them by means of competitive tender. The scene was set and by the early 1980's the Herefordshire Trail Area was deemed a success. This led to the famous 1985 deregulation Act

and the privatisation of NBC (for an account of the Trial Area see the Hereford Bus War by GHAL Productions £3.00 email [ghal@btinternet.com](mailto:ghal@btinternet.com))

Part 2 of the Rural Bus Problem: Rural Services Since De-regulation will follow in the Spring RBfH Newsletter.

## **The End of Postbuses**

With the closure of the last postbus route, Talamine-Tongue-Lairg, after service on Saturday 19 August 2017, Postbus operation in the British Isles came to an end after exactly fifty and a half years (February 1967 to August 2017).

It was in the early 1960's that the government commissioned a study into possible development of rural bus services. The Committee on Rural Bus Services chaired by D T Jack (see previous article on The Rural Bus Problem) carried out studies of British and some European rural bus services for the Ministry of Transport between 1959 and 1961. Although it ruled out a Swiss style long distance postbus network for Britain, one proposal to arise from the Jack Report was for the General Post Office to investigate the possibility of carrying passengers with the mail in rural areas where this could be arranged without competing with existing bus operators or detriment to the mail collections and deliveries.

The first Postbus service commenced operation on 20 February 1967 in a very rural part of mid-Wales, and the bus called at isolated hill farms. The bus was based at the Post Office in the small town of Llanidloes and served Llangurig some five miles away. The total number of routes eventually reached around 220. For fifty years, postbuses offered a successfully alternative to the conventional bus in sparse rural areas. It was one of a number of innovative transport measures tried during the 1960's and 1970's. It is now time to come up with some other new ideas!



7P

**Diwrnod Gwerthu Cyntaf : First Day of Sale**

**Cardiau Llun**  
**Picture Postcards**  
**W.M.P.B. 9-14**  
**10 January 1979**



**CARDIFF**

## Where is Hereford's Promised Transport Hub?

2006 saw the creation of ESG Herefordshire Ltd to oversee the redevelopment of the large run down brownfield site between the inner ring road (Blueschool St/Newmarket St/Edgar St) and the railway line at Barrs Court. The plan included a link road between Edgar St and Commercial Road and a new modern transport hub (interchange) at Barrs Court railway station.

On the transport hub, ESG Ltd stated: *'Providing a sense of arrival for visitors and a central connectivity point for all modes of transport, the hub will provide transfer opportunities for trains, buses, taxis, private cars, hire cars, cyclists and mobility vehicles. The safety of pedestrian is a priority and people on foot will benefit from wide and well drained pavements, with benches and other rest and shelter facilities readily available'*.

It is now 2018. The ESG new retail centre and the new link road have been built. However, the promises of better pedestrian and cycling access to the station and better connectivity with the city centre seem to have evaporated. The proposed transport hub remains an area of derelict land with no indication of a design, if it is ever to materialise in the near future. So where is the Transport Hub? Nobody in the Council or in Balfour Beatty can give an answer. It seems to have got lost in the growing mess that the city finds itself in.

Even Aberystwyth can manage a low cost transport hub at their railway station, with modern well-lit shelters, seating areas, toilet facilities and information systems.

Why can't Hereford? Has the ESG vision become a shattered dream? Has the Council lost all track of sensible planning to make Hereford a historic and healthy city in which to work, live, study and visit? Anyone arriving by train at the present would take one look at the station environment, turn around and take the next departing train!



*New Transport Interchange at Aberystwyth station*

In October 2017 the Urban Panel from Historic England visited Hereford. In their review of what has happened in the Edgar Street Redevelopment Plan since their last visit ten year ago, they were quite outspoken:

*'First impressions are very important in determining people's perceptions about a place. The sense of arrival at Hereford Station is quite awful. A decade ago, when the Panel last visited, there were plans under consideration to create a new high-quality public space in front of this rather attractive mid-nineteenth century railway building. However, nothing has happened. Just what impression the large expanses of car parking, the uninspiring buildings opposite, and the prospect of crossing a busy inner-relief road might have upon people's perceptions of Hereford one can but imagine. The Panel fully accepts that this new road is absolutely necessary to reduce the severance caused by the A438 between the historic core of the settlement and the Edgar Street Grid. However, lessons should be learned from the*

*success of the works undertaken at Newmarket Street/Blue School Street and Members earnestly hoped that Herefordshire Council would strive to create an environment between the railway station and the City Centre through which pedestrians will pass with ease and pleasure.*

*There is an urgent need to reassess the creation of a welcoming environment, especially for pedestrians and cyclists, in the foreground of Hereford's historic Victorian railway station together with the vital matter of connectivity between the station, transport hub and the city centre.'*

## **From the Archives**



Martin Perry, one of Herefordshire's colourful busmen, founded the Bromyard Omnibus Co in the 1970's. His operation was noted for the use of classic buses such as this Leyland Leopard with characteristic Alexander Scottish bodywork. Parked at the Country Bus Station on service 37 it is in company with one of Yeoman's Bedfords on service 412, and a Dennis Pointer of Midland Red West on service 192 to Kidderminster for Birmingham via Ludlow.



14 June 1975: Great Western Society Vintage Train: 7808 Cookham Manor and 6998 Burton Agnes Hall exiting the tunnel at Ledbury and heading towards Hereford. (photo courtesy of GWR magazine 1975)



Not on the Marches Line, but Mostyn signal box, between Rhyl and Chester is on the Transport for Wales service from Llandudno to Manchester and from Cardiff to Holyhead via Hereford. The 1902 box is of London and North Western Railway design and interestingly is positioned between the up and down main running lines. The box was made redundant during the Network Rail North Wales main line signalling upgrade. The signal box is a Grade II listed structure.

*Join Rail & Bus for Herefordshire and help protect and secure the development of our rail and bus services*

Herefordshire stations handle in excess of 1.5 million passengers per annum and the number is growing. Herefordshire buses account for in excess of 36,000 passenger journeys per week. **RAIL AND BUS SERVICES ARE IMPORTANT.**

- ◇ *Help in the development and future of rail and bus services in Herefordshire*
- ◇ *Help get improvements at your local station*
- ◇ *Help give rail and bus services a fair chance against an over emphasis on roads*
- ◇ *Help develop new innovative ways of providing rural and urban public transport*

**Please remember that subscriptions are due on 1st February 2019. Your prompt renewal is vital to keeping the work of RBfH going. If you have not already done so, please consider paying by standing order. Details available from our Treasurer, Peter Gwatkin (contact details on back page)**

**The RBfH AGM this year will be held on 5th March at the Quakers Hall, King Street, Hereford - 14.00 for 14.30 start, followed by an entertaining talk from David Robert Morris, Managing Director of DRMBus**

## **The RBfH Committee**

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RBfH website: [www.rbfh.org.uk](http://www.rbfh.org.uk)

## **RBfH Connections**

RBfH is a member of the Marches Rail Users Alliance which includes user groups from Church Stretton, Craven Arms, Ludlow, Leominster and the Heart of Wales Line Travellers Association. MRUA is very active in liaison with Transport for Wales (the Wales & Borders Franchise overseer) as well as forging positive links with the new train operator. Development of the Marches line train service and stations is long overdue.

RBfH is a member of Rail Future: members can access Rail Future publication 'Railwatch' on [www.railwatch.org.uk](http://www.railwatch.org.uk) and newsletter 'Rail User Express' on [ruglink@railfuture.org.uk](mailto:ruglink@railfuture.org.uk)

RBfH is a member of Bus Users UK: members can access Bus Users and its newsletters/publications on [www.bususers.org/england](http://www.bususers.org/england)

# **Rail & Bus for Herefordshire**

## **Membership Application Form**

Name.....

Address.....

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Tel:.....

Email:.....

Date.....

Membership is £8.00 for a year payable on 1st February. For those joining after October 1st membership is free until the following February.

Please make a cheque for £8.00 payable to Rail For Herefordshire and send to:

**The Treasurer, Rail & Bus for Herefordshire, 60 Broomy Hill, Hereford, HR4 0LQ**

You can also pay by Standing Order or Bank Transfer. For details contact the Treasurer Peter Gwatkin at 60 Broomy Hill, Hereford, HR4 0LQ email: [pmgaccountancy@gmail.com](mailto:pmgaccountancy@gmail.com)