

The RBfH Newsletter

Rail & Bus for Herefordshire

Early Spring 2021



West Midlands Railway class 170 units passing at Ledbury

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From the Editor

The lockdown continues but hope is rising as the vaccine programme rolls out. We also have Spring in front of us and I do detect the mornings getting lighter. In this frame of mind I have decided on an Early Spring Newsletter. But first an important note from our Chairman, Will Frecknall.

From the Chairman: AGM Postponed

Last year we held our AGM on 10 March, only days before start of the first Covid lockdown.

This year we are still heavily constrained by the pandemic. But fortunately most members will be offered a vaccination before the end of February. Hopefully that massive programme will enable a gradual return to a new normality.

We have decided to postpone the 2021 AGM until June, by which time we hope that real gatherings will again be possible. Your committee endures, and indeed positive things are happening in Ledbury and Hereford as you'll read elsewhere in the newsletter.

I wish you all reasonable health in both mind and body. Let us hope we may be able to resume social meetings later in the year.

Best Wishes: Will Frecknall (Chairman)

From Our Treasurer: Subscriptions

Even though 2020 has dragged as a result of the pandemic and lockdowns, yet again we are at that time when RBfH subscriptions are coming up for renewal. The date is 1st February and we hope that you will continue to support us in our work for public transport. Such work is going to be even

more important in order to get public transport back into form post-pandemic.

Subscriptions are unchanged at £8.00. To those who already pay by standing order, many thanks. But in order to keep down the administrative work, especially having to send out reminders, if paying by cheque we would be extremely grateful if you could send the payment during February.

Peter Gwatkin (Treasurer)

A Reminder of Our Committee

Chairman: Will Frecknall

Secretary: Andrew Pearson

Treasurer & Membership: Peter Gwatkin

Newsletter Editor: Gareth Calan Davies

Professor Les Lumsdon

Michael Sullivan

Philip Bauer

John Thorne

John Eden

Professor John Whitelegg remains our Honorary President.

A Reminder of the RBfH Aims

- *To promote the interests of passengers using rail and bus services within Herefordshire and between Herefordshire and regional/national destinations.*
- *To actively assist in the promotion and development of public transport services and associated infrastructure such as rail and bus stations.*

- *To develop a cooperative relationship with train operating companies, Network Rail, bus companies, Herefordshire Council, Members of Parliament, parish councils and other rail user organisations.*

Lockdown Update

Yet again the country finds itself in a necessary lockdown and once again bus and train services are affected. Service levels are being reduced across the country. The advice is stay at home unless for essential travel and if you do need to use buses and trains it is essential to check before on the status of the service and frequencies. Useful contact numbers are:

Transport for Wales for the Marches Line rail service:

www.tfwrail.wales>help-and-contact

Telephone: 0333 321 202

West Midlands Railway for the Hereford-Worcester-Birmingham rail service:

www.westmidlandsrailway.co.uk-coronavirus-travel-advice

Telephone 0333 311 0039

Great Western Railway Hereford-Oxford-London rail service:

www.gwr.com>travel-update

Telephone: 0345 700 0125

Yeomans/Lugg Valley bus services

www.yeomanscoachholidays.com

Telephone: 01432 356201

DRMBus services

www.drmbus.com email: drm@drmbus.com

Telephone: 01885 483219

Sargeants Bros bus services

www.sargeantsbros.com email: dave@sargeantsbros.com

Telephone: 01544 230418

Stagecoach South West bus services

www.stagecoachbus.com/about/west

email: west.enquiries@stagecoachbus.com

Telephone: 01452 783540

Stagecoach South Wales bus services

www.stagecoachbus.com/about/south-wales

email: south.wales@stagecoachbus.com

Telephone: 01633 485118

First Worcester bus services

www.firstgroup.com/worcestershire

Telephone: 0345 646 0707

Celtic Travel bus services

www.celtic-travel.co.uk

Telephone 01686 412231

Nick Maddy Coaches bus services

nickmaddy@aol.com

Telephone 01981 240888

Other contacts are:

www.herefordshire.gov.uk/public.transport-/bus-travel

www.nationalrail.co.uk

www.travelinemidlands.co.uk

www.traveline.cymru

www.travelinesw.com

Decarbonising the Railways

The government's recent announcement on the banning of new petrol and diesel cars by 2030 is a welcome boost to the move to zero carbon emissions from transport. This is hot foot on the government's clean growth strategy. We are going in the right direction but a huge amount of acceleration is needed. Take the issue of decarbonisation of our rail services for a start.

The Regulator of the Office of Rail and Road (ORR) has published statistics on rail emissions and Rail Infrastructure and Assets 2019-20, which states that 6,049 km (38%) of the mainline railway route (15,904 km) is now electrified. In 2019-

20, 251km of new electrified track was added to the network. This was related to the Lee Valley Rail Programme, and Great Western Electrification plan. Four new mainline stations opened in 2019-20: Meridian Water; Robroyston; Warrington West; and Worcestershire Parkway. This brings the total number of stations on the network to 2,567.

However, with only 38% of the network electrified the British railway system is still heavily dependent on diesel with its implications for carbon emissions. The amount of diesel consumed by freight trains in 2019-20 increased by 12.5% to 172 million litres. Officials said this is the highest figure since 2015-16, and the first time that diesel use increased year on year since 2015-16. Modern diesel passenger trains take advantage of developments in emission reductions with the new breed of enviro engines. But this can only go so far and the average age of rolling stock in Britain is 17.3 years, albeit a reduction from 2018-19.

Paul Tuohy, chief executive of Campaign for Better Transport, said: "It's great to see rail lines being electrified and new stations opened, but now we need **to step up our game**. Only 38% of the railway is electrified: we need a rolling programme of electrification to meet the Government's net zero targets. And too many communities are unable to access the rail network: new or reopened rail lines and stations could transform these places."

Can we look forward to an acceleration of a rail electrification programme? This is the billions of pounds question and with the recent history of government cancellations of electrification projects, especially in the north and the GWR through to Swansea still in our minds, we wait with baited breath for a decarbonising Britain's railways plan.

Not a bit of wonder that many people remain sceptical and scathing about mega investment in one new rail line when there is much to be done with our existing system. The pandemic and the post Brexit situation does seem to weaken the case for HS2.

Can we Expect Electrification of Herefordshire's Railways?

The answer in all probability is no, certainly not in the next three or four decades. So is there an alternative to diesel power? In his speech on the planned economic recovery, the prime minister said 'hydrogen technology is an area where the UK leads the world'.

The first hydrogen powered train has just been rolled out for trials. It has been developed at Quinton Rail Research Centre in Warwickshire by fitting a hydrogen pack to an existing Class 319 train that was built by British Rail Engineering in 1987.

The University of Birmingham's Centre for Railway Research and Education (BCRRE) and rolling stock solutions provider Porterbrook are responsible for the implementation of the HydroFlex project.

The project is expected to decarbonise the British railway network, which currently accommodates diesel and electric trains, by replacing diesel-only trains with HydroFlex until 2040. The project also supports the UK Government's commitment to reduce carbon emissions by 80% before 2050.

For those interested in the technology the following has been taken from articles on the internet

HydroFLEX Train Technology

The class 319001 train is converted into HydroFLEX by

integrating a hydrogen system into it. The hydrogen fuel tank, fuel cells, batteries, electric motors, and control system form the basic units of the HydroFLEX.

A total of 20kg of hydrogen is stored in four high-pressure hydrogen fuel tanks whose pressure is regulated and maintained at 8.5 bar by the pressure drop regulator.

“The project is expected to decarbonise the British railway network by replacing diesel-only trains with HydroFLEX until 2040.”

The fuel cell unit is powered by hydrogen from the tanks, while oxygen is sourced from ambient air. The fuel cell converts the mixture and generates pure water and electricity up to 100kW. Electricity generated by the fuel cell will be sent to the lithium-ion battery pack.

The flex traction system is connected to Class 319 traction equipment and is powered by the fuel cell and battery. Electric motors fitted under the car will propel the train.

A control system is installed to oversee the management of power supply and functioning of the system.

HydroFLEX can also be operated using power from a 750V DC third rail or a 25kV overhead supply without a change in its operating system, offering a smooth transition.

This hydrogen revolution is also accelerating in the bus industry. This press release from Wrightbus of Northern Ireland is certainly upbeat.

Leading bus manufacturing company Wrightbus is looking to a positive year ahead with the creation of more than 40 new jobs at its Ballymena headquarters. Wrightbus, which launched the world’s first zero-emission hydrogen double decker bus in 2020, has created the roles in preparation for increasing production of

the vehicle this year to assist global net zero ambitions and support the PM's pledge for at least 4,000 new Zero Emission Buses to be produced during this parliament.

With interest for the hydrogen double-deckers from UK cities and from around the world, Wrightbus CEO Jo Bamford said the new jobs would allow production to keep up with demand "We have made huge strides in 2020, despite the year being paralysed by the coronavirus pandemic, yet 2021 is going to be the year hydrogen really makes its mark.

At Wrightbus we have already launched the world's first zero-emission hydrogen double decker bus and this year will see us deliver significant orders into London, Birmingham, Belfast and other cities across the UK, including in Northern Ireland."

The hydrogen double deckers created an impact across the UK last year when they were first launched in Aberdeen in October. Speaking at the time of the launch, Aberdeen City Council Co-Leader Councillor Douglas Lumsden had said it was fantastic to see its arrival.

Belfast quickly followed, when Northern Ireland's first hydrogen double deckers were launched in the city in December. Speaking at the launch, Infrastructure Minister Nichola Mallon said it was part of an ambitious vision for low-emission public transport.

"Cleaner, greener, sustainable transport is key to protecting our environment and fighting the climate crisis," she said. "I am delighted to see these new buses enter service. They will be transformative for communities here as we seek to deliver more sustainable low carbon public transport."

Zero-emission hydrogen buses were also announced in 2020 for Birmingham and London - both cities should see vehicles on the road this year. Mr Bamford added: "We are proud to be playing a pivotal role in the world's net zero ambitions and this green

future - the vision we all have of a zero emission planet - will only be achieved if we all work together.

Hydrogen's time is now and Wrightbus is excited to be at the vanguard of this revolution."

Heart of Wales Line looks to the future

Committee member Les Lumsden gives an update on the Heart of Wales Line.

Late one August evening in 2020 the Milford Haven to Theale (near Reading) tanker train derailed north of Llangennech as it crossed the points for the Swansea District line. Several tanker wagons spilt gallons of diesel and a major fire meant that residents had to be evacuated in the middle of the night. The result is that Heart of Wales Line is still not open south of Llanwrtyd.

There's good reason for the delay as Network Rail and a wide range of organisations including Natural Resources Wales are grappling with the remediation of the site. At the time, it was clear that gas oil had seeped into the protected Loughor Estuary; the initial concern related to the impact on wildlife so the first main task was containment. But now it is down to cleaning and replacing 12000 cubic metres of damaged soil beneath and alongside the trackbed, a painstaking task which will take months to complete. However, it is gratifying to see that Network Rail is working to ensure that there are not long term impacts as a result of this unfortunate incident.

The line has suffered badly as a result of flood damage in the north end of the line too, especially between Knucklas and Llangynllo. Add to this the dire impact of Covid 19 and you can imagine the worries of regular passengers for the future of the line.

However, the Heart of Wales Line Development Company is not daunted by this series of blows and has recently launched a plan to bring life back to this scenic route much loved by many RBfH members. The plan sets out how the company and partners can increase passengers by making wellbeing a key element but especially encouraging walking and cycling activities from stations. This follows the major success of the Heart of Wales Line Trail which several members have kindly supported in the past. The plan can be checked out at:

www.heart-of-wales-co-uk/2021-23-plan.

Upgraded trains and a much improved timetable have been promised by Transport for Wales to be introduced in 2022 and 2023. This bodes well for a line which holds real promise for days out and short stays in the post-pandemic period.

Editor's Note

The Rail Accident Investigation Branch preliminary report indicated the accident was caused by a distorted wheel profile on a tank wagon where the brakes had locked on. The wheel fouled the points and derailed the train (see photo). Incidentally, the Llanelli area seems fated with regard to tanker train fires. When I worked at Llanelli for BR it became quite common to see a tanker train approach with flames coming from the underframe! This was caused by sparks from the engine brakes igniting brake dust on the wagon frame that had become impregnated with oil.



Electric Buses Coming to Town?

Our Chairman, Will Frecknall, gives us an insight to an exciting bus project for Hereford City.

In September 2019, Hereford was named as one of 100 places in the UK to receive a share in the Government's £3.6 billion Towns Fund which supports economic growth in towns and cities. The fund's aim is to drive sustainable economic regeneration and deliver long term growth - boosting productivity, skills and living standards. Up to £25 million will be available for regeneration projects in Hereford which will create new jobs, help train local people and boost growth. In November 2020 Rail and Bus was invited, through Hereford Green Networks, to contribute a 'Connectivity' element to Hereford's Stronger Towns Fund Investment Plan. An independent Towns Fund Board, backed by Herefordshire Council and comprising representatives from the public, private and voluntary sectors, has been established to lead this work locally.

A small team put together a scheme for an electric bus service connecting Hereford's four bus 'stations' with its key cultural, retail and hospitality venues as well as the city's principal health facilities. The service, to be known as Hereford City Zipper, aims to showcase quality zero-emission public transport. Through its accessibility and convenience it will encourage people not to use their cars when accessing the core of the city. A frequent 'turn up and go' service will minimise the need for users to consult a timetable.

The route will include the Station Medical Centre, Hereford Transport Hub and Railway Station, Student Accommodation, County Hospital, the Country and CityBus Stations, the Town Hall, St Owen Street (for Castle Green and Riverside), Maylord Shopping Centre, High Town, Broad Street (for Cathedral and

Library), Hereford Swimming Baths and Old Market retail complex.

We worked closely with the City Council in preparing the bid. The City Council has agreed to make a generous contribution to initial running costs and the bid is made jointly with them.

Just before Christmas we were pleased to learn that our £1.8M bid had cleared its first hurdle and would definitely form part of the Hereford Towns Fund Investment Plan. Provided the plan is accepted by government (reckoned to be a formality!) then detailed planning of all aspects will begin after Easter. This will include the appointment of a bus company operating locally as a development partner.

We are very pleased to be involved in this exciting project and we look forward to delivering another positive report in the Spring.

Is Demand Responsive Transport the solution?

Committee member Les Lumsden asks the question and gives Herefordshire Council something to think about.

As you might expect, the answer is it depends. Baroness Vere, Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for the Department for Transport had something to say about it at the Confederation of Passenger Transport conference earlier this month. There had been about 50 applications for the Department's Rural Mobility Fund and of these 17 bids had been accepted; most sought funding for Demand Responsive Transport (DRT for short). These bids will now have to build a business case, but the Baroness pointed out that only a 'light touch' was required so it looks as if all 17 contenders will get a slice of the £20 million on the table.

Evidently, Herefordshire Council is looking at DRT too so what

is the evidence to date about the effectiveness of this type of public transport? DRT is best described as a cross between a taxi and a bus. Taxi buses or minibuses are used to cover a given area rather than the scheduled bus and it is adopted when demand for public transport is low. There are no fixed routes and the customer has to phone or book using an app to schedule a point to point journey. They have to register in advance and often pay a fee for membership entitling use of the system. In some cases the DRT minibus collects at the front door to take the person to another location, but this is not the case everywhere; it is more common to have pick-up points in villages and hamlets.

It is not a new concept. DRT has been around in one shape or form for five decades. In rural areas local authorities have been keen to adopt it because of dwindling budgets and when there's a government grant going. It is fair to say that DRT is seen as provision of last resort in sparsely populated areas for people who do not have a car. In Herefordshire that is about 18% of households but this is almost certainly an underestimate of people without access to a car. Transport researchers from Leeds University conclude that the imagery of demand responsive services has become ingrained in public perception over the years, i.e., that demand responsive is for 'other' people namely the poor, elderly and infirm .

Sad to say it, but the approach adopted by local authorities and community transport organisations has not widened the market. It hardly provides opportunities to enjoy evening entertainment, for young people to meet up, and those on later shifts are rarely catered for. However, in recent years DRT services have been introduced in urban areas with a much wider appeal. Services in suburbs are one way of warding off competition from the taxi market, the word Uber comes to mind. Examples include Arriva Click, Stagecoach Tees Flex,

ViaVan in Milton Keynes, and Fflecsi in South Wales.

They use modern vehicles, much improved scheduling software, and for the most part expect customers to use an app to book. This 'tech' driven approach is coupled with strong customer service as well as incentives to encourage people to try out a service; the aim is to challenge perceived costs and levels of convenience of the car. Despite these innovative approaches several have failed to reach commercialisation, notably Arriva Click in South Liverpool and Pick Me Up in Oxford. Other suburban services have been developed in partnership with transport authorities hence spreading the risk, for example in Middlesbrough, North Lincolnshire and Milton Keynes. These urban demand response services shine a light on the quality required to attract car users; the use of state of the art software for scheduling, good customer care training, modern minibuses and a 15-18 hour span every day. However, they are not flawless. Commentators note that there are sometimes long waits for buses, and rural DRT is daytime only and often not at weekends (see <http://www.busandtrainuser.com> for a series of practical customer tests by a seasoned professional).

Here's the rub. A study by Leeds University reported that 50% of past DRT projects have failed, including a previous version in Shropshire which was summarily withdrawn with councillors saying that an average subsidy of £21.66 per passenger was just too much to stomach. Many schemes collapse when government grants are withdrawn as cost recovery is so low. The major challenge continues to be the high cost of provision.

There are, however, some examples of on-demand services which have stood the test of time. Lincolnshire is probably the best example; like Herefordshire it has a sparse population. The success of 'Lincsbus' is down to a number of factors - it forms part of an integrated network with conventional buses, is

well marketed and operates 12 hours Mondays to Saturdays. Even Covid-19 has not dampened the enthusiasm of its regular users. Having lived through the removal of all supported market day buses and some inter urban rural routes in Shropshire to make way for DRT only to see it disbanded after two years I am somewhat biased. Too many people were left high and dry. Perhaps state of the art buses, higher frequencies, with taxi buses linking in from deeper rural areas might just do the trick for the same money. Anyway, here are six key DRT points identified by other researchers to sum up:

□ When conventional bus services are replaced by DRT there is a significant reduction in the number of passengers.

□ People welcome any form of alternative public transport when their bus is withdrawn.

□ Core users are mainly elderly people who have limited or no access to other forms of transport.

□ Fares on DRT services tend to be similar to conventional bus fares...not much incentive for the young

□ Passengers enjoy the convenience of DRT and rate the drivers (but they also like drivers on rural buses too).

□ Booking can be a barrier as sometimes people are expected to book two days in advance and older customers are less familiar with apps.

There's plenty to think about if Herefordshire Council goes down this road.

The Hereford Transport Hub

RBfH member Nick Jones puts forward some interesting points.

For the best part of two years there has been a Herefordshire

Council signboard identifying the location of the proposed Transport Hub, on a brown field site mid-way between the new Hereford Medical Centre on Station Approach and the unlovely student accommodation block nearing completion at the Link Road's junction with Commercial Road. Just a pipe dream, or a Plough Lane PR initiative to make us think our Council is up to speed when it comes to 21st century transportation initiatives?

To be fair to the present independent-led administration, the sign was erected by its predecessors. My money is on the pipe dream theory, despite the fact that the creation of a multi-modal transport hub was deemed a priority as far back as 2016, when the council commissioned planning report Hereford City Centre Transport Package, identified a transport hub as one of the city's six key priorities. In the intervening five years, neighbouring Worcestershire has managed to plan, build, fund and open its £22 million Worcestershire Parkway at Norton, three miles south east of the city centre. Herefordshire Council has yet to begin the hub's official consultation process.

I have long argued that the best solution for creating a state of the art transport hub for Hereford would be an architectural design competition, run along the lines which produced The Courtyard Arts Centre. Competitions (as its opponents are always quick to point out) don't come cheap. But then Paris would never have got its iconic Pompidou Centre and the Palace of Westminster wouldn't be in the form you see it in today. I also believe strongly that the competition's conditions should require Hereford's new hub to be physically and harmoniously integrated alongside the fabric of its Grade II listed railway station, which the distinguished architectural critic Simon Jenkins singled out for inclusion in his definitive study *Britain's 100 Best Railway Stations*.

The proximity of the halls of residence poses an interesting problem for the new NMITE University's administration vis-à-

vis students' library research facilities. Initially, the Folly Lane campus library will probably have to be used, with backup provided by the City Library in Broad Street. But with financial help from the likes of the Heritage Lottery Fund and the Railway Heritage Trust, the first-floor space in the station complex could be converted into a state of the art university study centre, complete with computer workstations. The space is vast (it once housed two railway management offices and their associated boardrooms), there is a lift connection and its only occupants are pigeons!

Apart from Norton Parkway, are there other exemplars that Herefordshire's transport planners might usefully study? Sadly, most are to be found in continental Europe. They abound in Germany (5), with other outstanding examples in Lisbon, Rotterdam and Zurich. In the Estonian capital of Tallin, work is underway on a futuristic €26 million interchange which will provide Baltic Rail with a high-speed electric connection to the European network. In the Chinese province of Shenzhen, British architects Foster & Partners are to build the futuristic Guangming Hub which looks like something from Blade Runner: driverless vehicles crossing sky bridges and 30 storey residential towers - many with 'sky gardens' straddling the high-speed lines linking the Pearl Delta with Hong Kong.

On the home front, Old Oak Common in West London will be our biggest, providing smooth traveller interchange between HS2, Heathrow Express services and the Elizabeth Line (Crossrail), handling as many passenger movements as London's Victoria Station. It will have 52 lifts, 44 escalators and 6 subterranean platforms. But architecturally, this £1bn interchange (no, that wasn't a typographical error) is about as inspiring as Birmingham New Street's makeover; the creation of a committee dominated by rail managers and engineering consultants. One architectural element which has survived is

the idea of a large tree-lined piazza in front of the HS2 hub. At the time of the planning of Hereford's Link Road, the London architects CZWG put forward to Herefordshire Council the idea of a formal paved piazza in front of the Victorian station (roughly where the council's sign forlornly stands today). What a pity it came to nothing.

Tales from the Embankment: Mike Hart's Observations

RBfH Member Mike Hart lives on the north side of Ledbury with a good view of passing trains. Since September 2020 he has been providing interesting information on train movements which has now been compiled into a new series for the RBfH Newsletter entitled 'Tales from the Embankment'. I hope you enjoy the series.

Tales from the Embankment

I moved to Ledbury in 2016 and now live below the railway embankment between the station and the viaduct. This provides a good observation point for train movements on this Herefordshire line. The two tunnels and single track between Great Malvern and Hereford help to instil a remoteness between Hereford, Ledbury, Colwall and the rest of the network, so diesel engine propulsion is likely to prevail here for some time although developments with battery and hydrogen powered trains is accelerating.

Train services at Ledbury are operated by West Midlands Railway (WMR) on the Birmingham route and Great Western Railway (GWR) on the Oxford and London Paddington route. The Birmingham service of WMR is in the hands of mostly class 170 Bombardier 'Turbostar' units dating from 1999/2000. Sometimes these are coupled to a class 153 single car BR Sprinter unit to provide extra capacity. The 153s are one of the

oldest class of trains on the railway system dating from 1987/8. New trains are expected on this service during 2021. The London service of GWR is operated by new Hitachi bi-mode IT units of five or nine car length.

Viewing train movements at different times of the day (and night), these do not always go according to plan and so you look for a reason. Lockdown and travelling advice have reduced passenger numbers significantly and late running and cancellations are currently unusual and timetable reductions have been/are being introduced. Late running from Birmingham has at times been caused by that of through services, e.g. Cross-Country, formerly Virgin Trains & latterly Welsh Trains. I am basing this on my own observations of the crowded platforms at New Street when waiting to depart to Sutton Coldfield or Ledbury, e.g., through WMR electric trains between Bournville and Lichfield Trent Valley run at 10-minute intervals so it doesn't take much delay elsewhere to cause them to back up. During lockdowns I can only comment on local movements such as late running or 'turning' movements.

The Observations

To avoid confusion, down means towards Hereford and up means towards Worcester. Times given are for Ledbury station, not Birmingham or Hereford unless stated.

Friday 04 Sept 2020 at 09.09

Service was interrupted in last 24 hours between Hereford & Worcester after train reportedly hit a tree! 09.06 WMR train has just crawled up the slope so back on now. Heard saws going yesterday immediately adjacent, so that would be the culprit tree, I guess.

Tuesday 20 October 2020 at 09.01

A WM train made its way slowly down the embankment at 08.50 today and reappeared at 08.55 climbing to the station for presumably the 09.06 departure. What lies behind this late appearance of the 08.13 from Ledbury to Hereford due to arrive 08.29? Are there any passengers for or at Hereford?

Monday 26 October 2020 at 11.31

Assume this is the 10.59 arrival from Birmingham. It has just reversed and climbed back to Ledbury station for presumably the 11.58. But, tree work is going on audibly and so it may be a line works change. There is a nightly diesel loco running to Hereford at about 02.00-02.30 for some purpose, possibly rail checks. I haven't yet managed to see it properly but the trees are thinning daily. It is not, obviously, a frost/de-icing setup.

Mon 26 October 2020 at 12.09

Wrong about that! The Birmingham up arrived here at 11.46 - for 11.58 departure and the Hereford down at 11.58, on time, so the earlier train may not have reversed but come from Hereford for driver training or following a breakdown or other incident. The Ledbury ticket office told me about a year ago that their computer is not connected with the rest of the WMR as they are not their employees, I understand. So they cannot share any incidents on the line by that means and may be completely unaware of them if they occur in the Malvern-Birmingham section. Ledbury' station is privately run as an agency printing its own public timetable in normal times.

Sat 31 October 2020 at 14.34

Just to say, all WMR trains seen recently have been 4-car and all GWR have been 6-car, not the 9-car London faster timed journeys. This could mean that the customer base is no longer large enough to justify the longer trains throughout.

Tues 3 November 2020 at 15.59

The 6-car GWR rakes are actually 5-cars long. The 15.47 hrs on Sunday was a 9-car rake; they continue to make an impressive sight crossing the viaduct. This is the new Hitachi stock.

Sunday, 8 Nov, 2020 At 13:33

The 12.41 GWR Hereford- bound is a 9-coach train from London (Paddington).

Sun 15 November 2020 at 1435

Just after the up 14.19 to Birmingham 3-Coach train passed, a louder sound heralded the down movement of 2 diesel locos carrying between them 4 black & non-sign written short tankers. I have seen this train before on a Sunday but not for some time and don't know where it is bound for. I have not seen it returning but it may have done. Other movements are the circa 0200 hrs diesel which I think is track checking after a recent tree incident and occasional visits by the yellow survey train.

Tuesday, 24 Nov, 2020 At 12:51

The clean yellow inspection train went down at 11.29 and back up at 12.30 today comprising 4 coaches and 2 Colas liveried diesel locos (orange & light yellow). Colas are a French subsidiary of Shell and were becoming a common sight on road maintenance and rail projects in the UK. It would be interesting to access one of these inspection reports of this single line. And what is the 02.00 diesel role; is it just a 'feeler' run for wayward trees? Frost protection as well perhaps.

Tues 1 December 2020 at 12:32:36 GMT

The 'Thunder Machine' stormed past at 23.50 last night instead of the more customary 02.00-02.30 hrs. Lights flash at the curtains so it's inspecting the tracking & embankment visually I guess.

Tues 22 December 2020 at 1039 *New Timetable to May '21*

Inspection train passed down about 10 mins ago, immaculate! (The Fat Controller has seen to that!)

Tues 22 December 2020 at 12.23

Today, a Colas locomotive was leading and 37025 pushing - 4 yellow coaches in total.

Mon 28 December 2020 at 1100

Seems they are running a sort of daily service today, not a Sunday service as I thought. Some early trains did not run and/or I missed. Snowing steadily now but not settling.

Wednesday, 30 December 2020 at 15.18

The 11.58 up today caught me preparing a sandwich, not an iPad. It was a purply red and brass coloured 4- Coach set which could have been new stock but had passed before I took in more. I calculated a return at 1500 which indeed there was but by the yellow & brass normal class 170, so it was substituted at half-time I guess. One can but hope that it was new stock trial running.

Thurs 31 December 2020 at 09.08

The 09.07 down from Birmingham reversed to become 09.06 up just now. Appears liveried as in yesterday's tale, but line is in heavy shadow so difficult to tell.

We end the year with some encouragement in so far as the new WMR class 196 CAV 'Civity' units are starting to make an appearance as I noted. These units are built in Spain and then assembled at a new factory at Llanwern just outside Newport in South Wales. Units of this type are also destined for Transport for Wales to be operated on the Marches Line through Hereford.

More observations for later RBfH newsletters.

© MikeHart



New CAV 'Civity' diesel unit on trial at Worcester during 2020. Note the new WMR livery. (photo WMR)

**THE ENVIRONMENT IS IMPORTANT
OUR HEALTH IS IMPORTANT
PUBLIC TRANSPORT HAS A MAJOR PART TO PLAY IN THE FUTURE
OF HEREFORDSHIRE
SUPPORT BUSES & TRAINS AND HELP:
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Please contribute to your newsletter. Members can send articles, photographs old and new, current and past experiences of public transport in Herefordshire and the Borders or anything else of transport interest to the editor. (email: ghal@btinternet.com)

Articles, if possible should be sent in word format or in handwriting. Photographs and images should be sent as a jpeg or otherwise the original can be sent to the Editor at 5 Biddulph Way, Ledbury, Herefordshire, HR8 2HP.

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