

Rail & Bus for Herefordshire Newsletter Summer 2018



Pontrilas Signal Box



Scania Double Deck
Demonstrator at Bromyard

Latest News

Reminder call for subscriptions

The Virgin on Stagecoach Gives In

Update on Railway Franchises

West Midlands Railway...What is it?

A New Station for Pontrilas

Focus On Ledbury

Bus News

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Newsletter Editor & Chairman: Gareth Calan Davies**

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Subscriptions

Subscriptions for 2018/19 were due on 1st February. If you have not already done so please forward £8.00 to our Treasurer Peter Gwatkin at 60 Broomy Hill, Hereford, HR4 0LQ.

Alternatively please consider setting up a standing order which helps us keep admin costs down and releases more funds for publicity, bus and rail campaigns and research.

Please spread the word around about Rail & Bus for Herefordshire (RBfH) and the work that it does to protect and secure the development of our vital public transport services. There is much to be done.

Editor's Comment

The Virgin on Stagecoach gives in and Meltdown Monday

In the forty eight years that I have been involved with the transport industry I have never known such a mess with the nations railways. The blame cannot be laid at any specific door, it is the result of creating a huge railway melting pot into which has been thrown political dogma, warped economic theory, inept management, misunderstanding of railway operation and finance, the desire to over maximise profits and the worship of greed.

So the East Coast Main Line (ECML) is to be returned to public ownership, yet again! If those paragons of private enterprise, Messrs Richard Branson of Virgin and Brian Souter of Stagecoach cannot make this railway work then who can. It is not that the railway does not make a profit, it is that the railway does not make enough profit to satisfy the modern economic system that rules. Accusations fly and the fingers of blame point in all directions whilst the passenger does not get a say in things. But above all it is a huge pointer that there is something fundamentally wrong with the rail operating franchising system.

The ECML passes back into public ownership for two years until 2020 during which a reassessment of the franchise will be undertaken by the Department for Transport (DfT). It is the third time this has happened since 2006! The hints are already there that this time the DfT may well come up with some revolutionary ideas such as operations and track being combined in a private/public partnership. Wow, that is mind blowing! But do not hold your breath. The DfT is not the quickest or indeed the brainiest of animals. So there is the distinct possibility that by 2020, for the third time in fourteen years, the current franchise system may suffice. And who will have the chance to bid for it....Messrs Branson and Souter of course, unless they have started arguing amongst themselves!

Hot foot on the ECML fiasco comes Meltdown Monday. The newspapers are having a field day. Very rarely out of the news these days the train operating

company GoVia which manages the Thameslink/Great Northern/Southern franchise, some of the busiest railways in the country makes the headlines with their bold reorganisation and retiming of all train services in the franchise...to improve efficiency and give the passenger a better service. A bold move, spoilt by one fundamental flaw, the company is run by accountants with a penchant for playing with train sets, and derailing them. The result, Monday morning chaos with a huge number of cancellations, trains in the wrong places at the wrong times and most fundamentally a shortage of drivers. Still in dispute over the introduction of driver only trains it is quite obvious that this chaos is a shrewd move by the company's board of directors to make all their trains driverless as well. Make what you want of it the long suffering passenger remains the longer suffering passenger. The GoVia board want to be thankful for the staid English temperament and that in built English inertia of 'grin and bear it'. If it was on the continent, there would have been riots by now.

Even before Meltdown Monday, Railfuture commented in its May edition: ‘

‘The Public Accounts Committee is also concerned that the DfT’s inadequate management of two of its most important franchises calls into question its contract management capability. Regarding the Thameslink, Southern and Great Northern franchise, it cites a catalogue of failures by the DfT, NR and Govia Thameslink. On the East Coast franchise, the DfT has failed to learn the lessons from previous failures of the franchise, and has again allowed the operator to promise more than it could deliver. The issues with the East Coast and TSGN, and the small pool of potential bidders in the market, highlight the broken model of franchising’.

As committee member Michael Sullivan puts it, ‘our railway system appears to have gone maggoty’, an implication that it is becoming moribund. He may well be right for the disease has spread to the Northern Franchise in the hands of Arriva (Deutsh Bahn).

The Great Western Railway: An Update

We in Herefordshire are not escaping the train service malaise either. Mark Hopwood, the managing director of Great Western Railway, has written a veritable tome of a letter to the Cotswold Line Promotion Group apologising

for the appalling service on the North Cotswold Line with cancellations at an all-time high and at times the ancient two car suburban turbo units being substituted for the new Hitachi trains due to teething problems. It is worth noting that teething problems with the HST trains of British Rail were sorted at Derby and York works long before the units went into service in 1976. We await substantial improvements from this operator.

West Midlands Trains: An Update

You cannot expect a train operator to work miracles overnight when it is successful in obtaining a franchise. West Midlands Railway is a case in point. They took over the West Midlands franchise from London Midland at the very end of 2017 and immediately ran into bad weather. In response to Michael Sullivan, Francis Thomas the Head of corporate Affairs at West Midlands Trains Ltd wrote:

'From the start of the West Midlands Trains franchise (on 10 December 2017) we have had to run services with the rolling stock we inherited from London Midland. However we knew, in bidding for the franchise, that what the region needed desperately was more carriages. That is why we have placed orders worth £700 million for new trains that will add over 400 carriages to our network over the next three years starting at the end of 2018. Before then we will see the extension of electric services from Birmingham to Bromsgrove this summer. This will add three extra trains per hour on this section of the line which will take passengers away from the New St to Hereford services.'

Certainly the electric service to Bromsgrove and the injection of more carriages and trains will help the current chronic overcrowding of trains on the Hereford service. But the nasty habit of turning trains from Birmingham at Great Malvern or at times Ledbury as practised by London Midland appears to be perpetuated by West Midlands Trains. This is not a matter of more carriages, it is a question of reliability which is in turn a question of good rolling stock diagramming and driver/conductor rostering. Your chairman has taken this matter up with Francis Thomas:

'Dear Francis

Many thanks for the prompt replies to Mr Michael Sullivan. We note your encouraging remarks about additional rolling stock coming into operation

starting at the end of 2018. However, there is no indication that the Hereford Line service will benefit from this and the verdict we are getting is that additional carriages will primarily be for the benefit of the conurbation (West Midlands Combined Authority and West Midlands Rail Ltd).

From the Hereford end there is a marked increase in the number of complaints re both reliability of trains and gross overcrowding on specific services. In particular there are comments that the incidence of cancellations (trains not running through to Hereford and being turned at either Great Malvern or Ledbury) is now running at the rate of three to four a week.

Clearly this is developing into a most unacceptable situation and is possibly indicative that there is something seriously wrong with the WMR train scheduling and diagramming of rolling stock which even the input of new carriages will not remedy.

I am sure West Midlands Railway has a good monitoring system, especially for reliability and cancellations. Rail & Bus for Herefordshire would be appreciative of the chance to view the reliability and punctuality results for the Hereford service for the last four week period which should give the WMR definitive version of the service's performance.

Your considered reply is requested'.

Regards

Gareth Calan Davies (Chairman RBfH)

We await the considered reply.

West Midlands Trains: The Business Setup

West Midlands Trains Ltd. is a consortium of Abellio (Netherlands Rail), Japanese Railways East and Mitsui. It successfully obtained the West Midlands Franchise which it operates with two subsidiaries: London Northwestern Railway and West Midlands. London Northwestern comprises those services from Birmingham to London via Northampton, Birmingham to Liverpool via Stoke-on-Trent and services on the West Coast Main Line through Lichfield Trent Valley. It also includes the Bedford-Bletchley and Watford Jcn-St. Albans Abbey branches in the south east.

West Midlands Railway covers the West Midlands suburban services out of Birmingham. It also manages the Hereford service via Bromsgrove, and Worcester, the Shrewsbury service via Wolverhampton and Telford, the Stourbridge Town Branch (operated by Pre Metro Ltd), the Coventry-Nuneaton and Coventry-Leamington services.

Not to be confused with the train operating company is West Midlands Rail Ltd, a consortium of West Midlands local authorities which includes a Herefordshire representative. It will be taking over the franchise from the Department for Transport at some point and is charged with developing a West Midlands Rail Development Strategy (see next article).

Wales & Borders Franchise: A Decision at Long Last

The Welsh Government has come alive and made a decision. You will recall that we have constantly reported on this franchise as it affects the Marches Line through Herefordshire. It started with four bidders; then Arriva pulled out and then Abellio Wales Rail was forced to pull out due to its involvement with the ill-fated Carillion. The Welsh were left with two bidders; 1. MTR an international rail operating and infrastructure company whose roots were in the Hong Kong Metro and 2. A consortium of Keolis rail operating and rail infrastructure company Amey. It is understood both companies put in strong bids which exceeded the Welsh Government expectations. The franchise has been duly awarded to Keolis/Amey. An interesting comment received about the consortium is *'Good on trams but an unknown quantity as regards the rural railway'*. This leads one to think that the award is biased towards the creation of new metro systems in both South and North East Wales

Being magnanimous we must give them the benefit of the doubt and now start the busy process of building a relationship with them that we hope will lead to a progressive development of the Marches Line and its stations as a major long distance and local rail line. Chris Clarke and David Aston of the Marches Rail Users Alliance (MRUA) are on the case and are now awaiting a meeting with Transport for Wales at which we hope they will be introduced to the management of the new train company. RBfH is a member of MRUA which includes the Church Stretton, Craven Arms, Ludlow, Leominster groups as well a representative from the Heart of Wales Line.

West Midlands Station Development Programme

A presentation summary of this programme by West Midlands Rail Ltd has been received from the Worcestershire Rail User Group Alliance. The programme is ambitious with eight new stations and significant development at University, Perry Barr and Birmingham Snow Hill. Noticeable is the fact that all these developments are located in the West Midlands conurbation area, undoubtedly pushed by the new West Midlands Combined Transport Authority.

Herefordshire is a member of West Midlands Rail Ltd and Herefordshire Council has representatives on the board. So where are station developments in Herefordshire. £100 million to be spent on stations in the conurbation and we do not even have disabled access at Ledbury. A huge imbalance here!

A Welcome Bit of Optimism

Spotted in the bulletin of the Railway and Canal Historical Society is the following:

PETITION TO REBUILD THE ‘HEREFORD, HAY AND BRECON’ AND ‘MID WALES’ RAILWAYS

‘The Beeching cuts of the 1960’s closed a significant number of lines in the Marches and mid-Wales, the return of which would boost the economy and vitality of the area. There would also be potential reduction in road traffic and therefore of carbon emissions. Members are invited to sign, if they so wish, a petition can be found at: <https://petition.parliament.uk/petitions/211666>’



Moorhampton station on the Hereford-Hay on Wye-Brecon line in the 1950's.

A New Station for Pontrilas

The Neighbourhood Development Plan for the Ewyas Group of Parishes has now been adopted and includes a project to reinstate a station at Pontrilas. Will Frecknall and myself met Dr Clive Stainton, a local councillor who is heading the project. Much has happened since a 1998 report by the Railway Consultancy Ltd was prepared for the then Golden Valley Pro-Rail Partnership. Since then there has been increased housing development in the area with a subsequent increase in population, with more planned. There is now a wider catchment area partly caused by difficulties in getting to the nearest railheads of Abergavenny and Hereford, together with the lack of adequate parking at those stations and further afield at Newport on the South Wales main line.



A busy scene at Pontrilas in the early twentieth century. Note the Golden Valley branch train to Hay-on-Wye in the bay platform. The signal box at top right together with a siding and an up goods loop remain in situ today. The station buildings are in private ownership.



The layout at Pontrilas today. It is anticipated that the new station will be approximately 1 mile north east of the old station where the line straightens out beyond Pontrilas Timber works at the top right of the picture. The line at that point runs parallel with the A465 main road.

RBfH is supportive of the move made via the Neighbourhood Plan and feels that there is a definite case for a re-examination of the feasibility of a station at Pontrilas located north of the old station with adequate parking. RBfH has already made comments and positive suggestion on the information needed to present a new case and is willing to help in its formulation. The Marches Line comes under the Wales & Borders franchise which is overseen by Transport for Wales. The infrastructure at Pontrilas is managed by Network Rail and the new company to operate the franchise has just been announced as a consortium of Keolis/Amey. Consultation with these bodies as well as Herefordshire Council is essential to the scheme Further meetings are planned with Dr Stainton and other parish and county representatives.

Focus on Ledbury

Ledbury is one of the fastest growing towns in Herefordshire. Housing growth is set to exceed Herefordshire's Core Strategy forecasts. However, such growth is bound to put pressure on local services including transport. As market towns go Ledbury is lucky in regards to its public transport services with through trains to both London and Birmingham and daily bus services to Hereford, Gloucester, Malvern and Worcester.

But there should be room to improve public transport provision in line with the growth of the town. The railway station in particular needs urgent attention both in respect of provision for disabled passengers and the increased pressure on station parking facilities. This latter issue is leading to parking overspill onto the main road and into adjacent residential side streets. During 2017 the Herefordshire contractors Balfour Beatty held a workshop in Ledbury aimed at providing a transport plan for the town. RBfH was represented and made a strong case for a detailed examination of redundant Network Rail land at the station for additional car parking, together with better provision for cyclists and pedestrians.



Ledbury station in the 1950's with the Gloucester Branch service via Dymock and Newent waiting to depart.

Since then there has been silence and so it is time to make some enquiries, especially as we now have a new train operator, West Midlands Railway who also manage the station in conjunction with Network Rail.

Whilst Ledbury's bus services are good compared with elsewhere it is obvious that increased housing will lead to increased traffic and hence pressure on parking in the town centre, together with traffic congestion. There is also the matter of an increased deterioration of air quality in the town centre. With the new estates established on the periphery of the town the case for a reinvestigation of a town bus service is emerging.

A town service was previously introduced in 2000 with grant from the then Countryside Agency. The service ran for a number of years until the grant ceased and parts of the service were incorporated into other routes. Significant housing development could well now provide a more robust economic case, especially if medium sized electric buses were used under the government's green bus fund. The route would link new developments at Leadon Way off the bypass, New Mills and housing and industrial development off the Bromyard Road with the town centre. RBfH is to begin a study of the new possibilities for an environmentally friendly and frequent Ledbury town bus service.



For the launch of the 2000 town service, the operator DRMBus arranged for a horse drawn omnibus to be present! The service was operated with a new Volvo saloon bus with East Lancashire Coachworks body.

We need a Voice for Ledbury and Colwall

Rail & Bus for Herefordshire are looking to set up a Ledbury & Colwall sub-group to work on maintaining and developing the existing public transport services for Ledbury and its surrounding villages. It is now becoming a realised fact that good public transport services are important to the economic and social viability of market towns such as Ledbury. At a time of almost constant threat, especially to rural bus services, RBfH has an important role to play in championing the cause of both the train and bus.

We are looking for volunteers in the Ledbury, Colwall and surrounding villages to help set up such a sub-group. If you are interested do please contact

Gareth Calan Davies (RBfH Chairman) on 01531 633594 or
ghal@btinternet.com

or

Will Frecknall (Buses Sub Group) at will@clarach.wyenet.co.uk

Bus News

Changes to bus times and routes were made on 15 April and full details are included in Update No 3 to the Herefordshire timetable book. This is essential if you plan to travel by bus within Herefordshire and the cross-county border services to Gloucester, Abergavenny, Brecon, Ludlow, Llandrindod Wells and Worcester. Herefordshire is still comparatively lucky that it retains good links with adjacent counties.

Of main note are the following:

Changes to the Hereford City services with revised timetables for the 77A/81 and 81A services operated by Yeomans.

The introduction of new services by FirstWorcester, which results from a better utilisation of one of the buses used on the County contracts in the east of the county. There is a new Summer Saturdays only service 418 on the Worcester-Ledbury route; the revised Wednesday service 405 will start from Ledbury; a new Monday shopping service 481 will run Ledbury-Tewkesbury-Cheltenham; the Friday service 482 will now start from Ledbury as Ledbury

-Bromyard-Leominster; a new Tuesday service 671 Bromyard-Canon Frome -Ledbury; a new Tuesdays and Thursdays service 673 Ledbury-Bromyard. All these new market day services are indicative of what can be achieved by a progressive operator working off the back of a local authority contact. A good lesson for some of our rather staid local operators.

Services under Threat

At the present time services 405 Cradley-Bromyard-Pencombe-Hereford and 498 Bucknall-Leintwardine-MortimersCross-Kingsland-Dilwyn-Canon Pyon -Hereford remain under threat. The RBfH buses sub-group has been active in advising passengers on these services about the threat together with what they can do to try prevent their withdrawal by contacting their local councillors and the cabinet member for transport.

Dear Passenger

In the last review of passenger transport (2017) the report noted that a service would be supported up to £4 per passenger. Unfortunately, the subsidy per passenger for the 498 is over this amount and therefore it is likely that Herefordshire Council will seek to withdraw it in the annual review of services in late summer. That is why there have been surveyors on your service in the past months.

Rail and Bus for Herefordshire has worked hard over the years to maintain a public transport network and we would be reluctant to see the 498 be withdrawn as it is one of the last bus services operating in Mortimer Ward and will cut off a vital market day link with Hereford.

Both these services are traditional market day services and for villages in the Mortimer Ward (498) and Pencombe, Fromes Hill, Ullingswick, Westhide (405) they are the only country bus service connecting with the county town.

Whilst we have been out on the 498 service, it was decided that campaigning on the 405 should be delayed now that a revised timetable has been brought into operation which may affect the services financial standing. However, it is interesting that both services are well used but still do not meet the Council's criteria of a subsidy per passenger of up to £4. It can be argued that this figure is arbitrary and that each service should be examined not just on

its financial performance but also by passenger numbers as an index of its important social value to the communities served.

Other services may well fall into the at risk category as the Council prepares for a 2018 annual budget review of bus service support. It should be noted that the Cabinet are having another chew at Libraries in a similar financial review situation.

The message continues to remain loud and clear. Rural public transport services, especially bus services are under a state of threat and uncertainty for the future. Make your voice known. Use the services and question your councillors & MPs about their future.

Buses and Air Quality

Earlier this year the following emerged from the Department for Transport:

'Funding will be awarded to 20 local authorities as part of the Clean Bus Technology Fund, which was launched in 2017 and is run by the Joint Air Quality Unit.

Speaking at the UK Bus Summit at London's QEII Centre on 8 February 2018, Transport Minister Nusrat Ghani set out how the money will enable older vehicles to meet minimum emissions standards, and contribute to better air quality.

Transport Minister Nusrat Ghani said: Buses and coaches are hugely important to those who rely on them and to the communities in which these people live and work.

Road transport is going to change dramatically over the next couple of decades – and we have to make sure that the bus industry is ready to benefit from those changes.

We have to move away from nose-to-tail car traffic at peak times, endless

engine idling, stop-start travel and rising pollution and carbon emissions. Rather than contributing to the problem – buses and coaches very much form part of the solution.

The money will allow councils to retrofit vehicles with technology to reduce tailpipe emissions of nitrogen dioxide, as part of a drive to help ensure that more buses and coaches can contribute to improving air quality in UK cities.

Environment Minister Theresa Coffey said: Poor air quality affects public health, the economy and the environment, which is why we are determined to do more.

I am delighted to see so many high quality applications to the Clean Bus Technology Fund and, as a result, the government has decided to bring forward funding meaning that we will award nearly £40 million to retrofit more than 2,700 buses.

This is another way which the government is delivering on its commitment to improving the environment within a generation and leave it in a better state than we found it.

Alongside this, the Department for Transport will use the [Bus Services Act](#) as a way of encouraging councils and bus companies to look at measures to encourage the public to use buses.

In 2016, government invested £30 million through the [Low Emission Bus Scheme](#), which helped put over 300 new low emission buses on the roads, with a further £11 million and 150 buses being announced in 2017.'

We are all becoming increasingly and alarmingly aware that air quality in Hereford is deteriorating rapidly. So where is our Council? The government is providing the mechanisms and helping to finance green transport schemes, chief amongst them better use of low emission buses. The answer from our Cabinet and the council's contractors is...nothing can be done until the by pass is built. That is still a long way off, if ever. Meanwhile, air quality deteriorates and movement within the city becomes even worse. Is this what they call progressive transport and environment planning?

From the Archives



Anyone know what the above is? If not, it was a piece of Great Western Railway history at Ledbury station. That railway company never threw much away, everything was recycled as best it could, even corrugated iron sheets, a building material which the GWR used a great deal at its rural outposts. This example is the lamp hut at Ledbury. Inside there was a barrel of oil with a tap positioned on a trestle plus a bench where the signal lamp wicks could be primed or changed as necessary. The signal lamps were looked after by a lampman whose job it was to inspect them and remove and replace them when required for filling and wick priming. This had to be done in all weathers or when called out by the signaller because a signal lamp had failed. A great job in summer but precarious in winter having to climb narrow signal ladders in wind, rain, snow and ice to access the lamps. Some signal posts were quite high to give drivers a long view of the signal. In its heyday there would have been upwards of thirty to forty semaphore signals and ground discs to service. Today there just four.

The RBfH Annual General Meeting

Although attendance was down on last year, the AGM was a lively and friendly occasion. Following a resumé of the years activities and news from the chairman, treasurer and head of buses group, the accounts were agreed and the existing committee was re-elected without any additional nominations having being made. An internal change in your committee is that Will Frecknall has become Vice Chair and Sue Warren has taken on the role of Events and Meetings Co-ordinator.

It was agreed the constitution be changed to incorporate the official title of Rail & Bus for Herefordshire and also include the requirements of the new Data Protection Law

Those present were then treated to a showing of the 1950's Ealing Studios film 'The Titfield Thunderbolt' a period comedy based on community reaction to the proposed closure of their rural branch railway line.

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***

The RBfH Committee

Chairman and Newsletter Editor: Gareth Calan Davies

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Committee Members

Michael Sullivan; Philip Baeur; John Thorne;

Naomi Bell; Andrew Pearson

RBfH email: railfh@aol.com

RBfH website: 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 and newsletter 'Rail User Express' on 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

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