

Rail & Bus for Herefordshire Spring 2021 Newsletter



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Editor's Piece

Hopefully the strange times of the past year will soon diminish. But until then I thought we would have a little competition of 'Guess the Signal Box'. No prizes but just a little something in case it has slipped your mind that there are railways out there. So, where is the signal box on the cover? Answers to ghal@btinternet.com

Covid 19 and the associated lockdown restriction have certainly drawn the country up short. Undoubtedly some of the biggest impact has fallen on our public transport and hospitality sectors. As a result, it is unlikely that both these industries will return to the normality we knew before the pandemic. How many public houses and restaurants will reopen is anyone's guess at the moment. But in the public transport industry, which has been kept going by massive injections of public money, the main challenge is going to be getting people back onto buses and trains. But what happens when government financial support ceases or is scaled down?

It all points to the possibilities for a radical shake up of how our public transport is provided and importantly who pays for it. For too long buses and trains have been provided in a disintegrated fashion, both being financed by a chaotic mixture of private and public money. That there should be a coordinated approach and a sustainable long term financial package for the industry is now becoming paramount.

In a recent very lucid article Laura Shoaf, MD for Transport for West Midlands emphasised the fact that *the future of the bus - and a fairer, more socially equitable economic recovery to which it can contribute - is deeply uncertain*. How our train services of the future are going to be financed appears to be in the lap of the gods. What is patently obvious is that, whatever the future structure of the rail and bus industries **Public Transport Needs Secure Finance**.

A Strategy for Sustainable Passenger Transport in Herefordshire

Will Frecknall and Les Lumsdon have put together a strategy.

Introduction

In February 2021 Herefordshire Council voted in favour of prioritising the improvement of public transport and active travel. This document summarises Rail and Bus for Herefordshire's vision of how public transport could be re-invigorated throughout the county

The Council's decision to promote sustainable modes of travel is driven by a pressing need to address its declared Climate Emergency through a reduction in CO2 emissions from transport in general and private cars in particular.

Our vision is that residents and visitors have access to a modern, attractive and affordable integrated public transport network extending throughout Herefordshire. Such a network would facilitate a significant reduction in journeys currently made by private car

In order to optimise the reduction in CO2 emissions public transport must offer:

- ◆ An attractive environment before, during and after the journey
- ◆ Reach, reliability and integration
- ◆ Clock-face timetables with good coverage every day

- ◆ Real time information on and off the bus
- ◆ Value for money fares and multi-operator tickets
- ◆ Journey planning that is both accessible and easily understandable
- ◆ Low carbon vehicles powered directly or indirectly by renewable electricity
- ◆ Demand management driven by reduced car parking in Hereford City

How can we attract people back to public transport?

The Covid pandemic has undoubtedly dented perceptions of public transport. As vaccination becomes universal we need to work hard to reverse those perceptions and create a positive post-Covid image for a carbon-conscious world. There are useful lessons to be learned from other local authorities. A first and fundamental step is to create a positive vision around sustainable travel.

Herefordshire Council, bus and train operators and user groups all need to communicate effectively with residents around the need to change our transport habits. This needs to be matched by a shift in resources towards public transport. Herefordshire's next Local Transport Plan (LTP) must drive a transfer of resources from highways to sustainable public transport and active modes.

This approach has been successfully implemented by progressive rural authorities in Cornwall, Derbyshire, and Lincolnshire as well as districts such as Bath & North East Somerset, North Somerset and South Gloucestershire. In all these cases integration is the core principle driving a renewal of the public transport system.

Integration is about planning and delivering a transport system which brings together different modes, sectors, operators and institutions for the benefit of its users and wider society. As a result both congestion and CO2 emissions are reduced. There are different levels of integration but we are concentrating here on short term measures that will promote increased use of public transport.

Integration of Public Transport Services

The creation of an integrated network will require Herefordshire Council to work in partnership with bus operators and user groups. The key elements of integration are Communication, Infrastructure, Funding and Staff.

Four levels of service provision are proposed in Herefordshire:

1 Principal Bus Network

The level of service on principal routes will need to be improved to encourage wider use. This means re-introducing evening, Sunday and Bank Holiday services at an hourly frequency. The core factors which encourage use of a bus network are well researched:

- frequency
- reliability
- attractive journey times
- value for money fares

Emotional factors are very important in motivating people to use public transport. The Harrogate Bus Company provides an excellent example of how a quality bus service combined with smart marketing can result in a high ridership; 55% of their passengers have a car available on the day of travel.

Clockface services aim to integrate buses and trains in regular patterns throughout the day. The characteristics of such a system are:

- Quick and convenient transfers
- Integrated ticketing
- Local people involved in design
- Building customer loyalty
- Easy to understand timetabling
- Permanency, reliability and simplicity

2. Secondary routes

These will incorporate some school/college journeys and offer a two hourly frequency until mid-evening on weekdays and a limited Sunday service. Buses will be supplemented by Demand Responsive Transport (DRT) providing a taxi bus or minibus service within a given area or corridor where demand for public transport is very low. The service has no fixed route and passengers have to book using phone or app to schedule a point to point journey.

However over half of DRT projects set up to date have failed, mainly because per capita costs have proved too high. In the case of Bwcabus in Wales and Shropshire's DRT service the subsidy per passenger journey was around £20.

Lower cost options are therefore advocated, such as those provided by local taxi companies in the market towns. Working in partnership with the council, a bus operator or a DRT operator such as Tandem could be the route to a cost effective solution.

3. Integrating services at Mobility Hubs

The concept of mobility hubs is gaining ground across continental Europe and in the rural areas of Calderdale, Devon, Norfolk, and Staffordshire. Typically, a mobility hub is set up in a public space near a bus stop and offers a range of facilities for onward local travel. These may well include electric bike hire, e-scooters, a car club, taxi stand, secure parking for bikes and lockers for parcels. It will also include travel information and in some cases a small café.

4. Hereford City Network

Herefordshire Council has already indicated its aim to provide a network of high frequency buses in Hereford. This ambition could deliver a seven day a week service throughout the city, including cross city journeys where possible. It is envisaged that these services will operate from 0700 in the morning until 2300 at night on weekdays with a later start on Sunday mornings.

There is a pressing argument for the rejuvenation of the city bus operation, probably through a partnership with a key bus operator. This will require the design of strong brand, improved street infrastructure and bus priority measures to meet passenger expectations of improved journey times and reliability.

It is also vital to link the bus and rail network to the current bus terminals in town by way of a frequent town circular. Rail and Bus for Herefordshire has prepared a bid with Hereford City Council to deliver such a project as part of the Stronger Towns bid process. This seven day a

week electric bus service, the Hereford Zipper, will link transport hubs with medical centres, arts and cultural venues and retail areas.

Integration of fares and ticketing

Affordable fares are important, especially for short distances. A county-wide multi operator ticket, available on-line, at shops or on the bus, could help to increase longer journey-to-work trips and tourist revenue

Investment in Infrastructure

A 2018 Greener Journeys report on Bus Infrastructure Development reported that at least 20% of car users could be enticed to switch to buses provided the service was quick and reliable.

There is a need to modernise bus fleets, preferably upgrading to electric vehicles where feasible, but otherwise using Ultra Low Emission Vehicles which offer lower fuel consumption and a major reductions in emissions. Whilst buses account for only 3% of all transport emissions it is important to incentivise companies to upgrade their fleets by taking advantage of government schemes such as the Bus Services Obligation Grant. Increased passenger loadings contribute directly to a reduction of emissions per passenger journey.

Investment will improve reliability, reduce CO2 emissions and enhance service provision, all of which will all attract new markets.

Services into Hereford would terminate at a Transport Hub located beside the Railway Station. We advocate a state of the art hub sympathetic to the splendid architecture of the listed railway station, creating a key gateway to the city.

A longer version of this document has been passed to Herefordshire Council for comment. As and when we receive a formal response we will post it on the website.

Bus Back Better: National Bus Strategy for England

Les Lumsdon makes some pertinent comments.

This sizeable document was rolled out to the media on the third week of March and has been lauded by the Campaign for Better Transport as a 'hugely ambitious strategy'. If you have yet to dip into the strategy report and have simply looked at the proposed outcomes posted by the media, it looks rather like the vision we have just crafted and summarised elsewhere in this bulletin.

There's a call for capped fares, simpler fares, bus maps and marketing, priorities for buses such as bus lanes, Demand Responsive Services for deep rural areas, higher frequency bus services and lo and behold the return of evening and Sunday services. Finally, there will be funds for 4000 zero emission buses.

This would be marvellous, but am I dreaming?

Perhaps so, as the £3 billion to make this happen was actually announced last year. There are many smarter, geared up authorities mopping up government funds for active travel and public transport as we speak (Electric bus towns, Rural Mobility, etcetera) so how can an authority like Herefordshire get a share. The £ 3 billion is set aside for five-year period, and it is not axiomatic that this sum will be spread evenly across local authorities. No, there are a few hurdles before anyone gets a penny. Firstly, authorities will have to engage in an enhanced partnership or franchise with bus operators in order to be eligible for funding. The deadline for this is July 1st 2021. That is literally a few weeks away.

Secondly, Herefordshire Council will have to produce a Bus Service Improvement Plan, again a reasonable request, but this has to be complete by the end of October 2021. There will need to be consultation with

bus operators, stakeholders and hopefully, people who actually use buses. It is a tight deadline and Herefordshire Council is short of staff in the passenger transport section.

Admittedly, Herefordshire Council's current administration might find that the government's conditions are to its liking. The Portfolio Holder, Councillor John Harrington is keen to get on with the job of making public transport much better. The snag is that there's seemingly a lack of capacity at officer level. Still, there's money in the kitty for authorities to buy in consultants to help them as the strategy has £25 million in the pot for them. There's always a kitty for consultants.

Rail & Bus for Herefordshire has a strategy (see previous article) which sets out what needs to be done to make Herefordshire's bus network thrive, but public transport is at its lowest ebb. It will take time. Let's hope that Bus Back Better kickstarts the process.

Transport Deserts

In 2020 the Council for the Protection of Rural England and the Campaign for Better Transport published an important report on Transport Deserts. Its main finding demonstrated that some areas of England are already, or are at risk of becoming 'transport deserts', with wildly insufficient local transport provision. The CPRE is set to release a follow up report entitled 'Every Village Every Hour'

The Herefordshire Sustainable Transport Group (HSTG) has had a summary look at the situation in Herefordshire. The county has 42% of its population located in rural villages and dispersed locations (source Herefordshire Council population statistics). Outside of Hereford and the five market towns we find that of the rural parishes:

15% had a daily frequent bus service of every one to two hours

29% had an infrequent daily bus service of between 2 and 5 journeys per day

19% had a one or two days a week bus service

37% had no service

Correlating the above with population we find that:

27% of the parish population had a daily frequent bus service

42% of the parish population had a daily infrequent bus service

15% of the parish population had a one or two days a week service

16% of the parish population had no service.

These statistics present an appalling situation at a time when government and local authorities are calling on the population to heed the climate emergency, take real stock of carbon emissions from transport and 'choose how you travel' in order to reduce trips by car. As colleagues who live in the country say to us....*'how can you choose how you travel when you haven't got a choice. The only bus we have goes early in the morning and that disappears when the students are not at college'*.

We strongly support the CPRE in their campaign to highlight the parlous state of rural bus services and the linked facts of rural deprivation and isolation.

The English Concessionary Pass Scheme

Andrew Pearson delves into the intricacies of concessionary fares

There are two types of concessionary pass, one based on age and one for disabled people where no age limits apply. The current age for an age based pass is 66 but this is constantly under review as the state pension age rises. Please note that different rules apply for Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland. It was first introduced in 2001 and extended in 2008 to give off peak travel, generally 9.30am - 11pm Monday - Friday and at any time on weekends and Bank Holidays but it can be varied, for instance under lockdown 1 it was available at any time in Herefordshire.

The passes are available on local bus services in England but are not available on:

Services where seats can be reserved in advance such as coaches

Services intended to run for fewer than 6 weeks

Services running for tourism or historical interest of the vehicle

Rail Replacement services

Services with a special amenity element.

Cross border services to say Wales depend on whether the local authority has made a reciprocal agreement with the Welsh local authority. For instance Herefordshire residents with passes can travel free on X3 Hereford to Abergavenny and Cardiff or 41 Kington - Knighton (and return) but if you used 461/2 Hereford - Llandrindod Wells with an English pass other than from Herefordshire you would have to pay on return from Llandrindod - Kington (where it enters England).

Operators obviously have to be reimbursed for the acceptance of concessionary passes and this is incredibly complex. For services subsidised by the local authority where the operator runs the service and hands any revenue to the local authority this is not a problem but where the service is commercial the principle is that the operator should be no worse or better off than if the passenger paid the full fare. The calculation is therefore based on what would have happened in the hypothetical absence of the scheme and without wishing to bore you with mathematical details it boils down to an agreement made between the operator and the local authority for a fixed amount for that service irrespective of the length of the passenger's journey.

Each local authority determines their own rules but some pay as little as 35% of the adult fare - is that operator really no better or no worse off?

The latest available figures show that in 2018/19 861 million journeys were made using concessionary passes and the average reimbursement in rural areas was £1.18 per journey. The obvious question is are you benefitting your local bus service by using your concessionary pass and the answer is that if it is a subsidised service any patronage decreases the amount per passenger that the Local Authority has to underwrite it. If it is a commercial service it increases the revenue for the operator. However if your local bus service is poorly patronised you may wish to consider paying the full fare to ensure its survival - which rather goes against the spirit of the scheme in the first place!

This article is based on one of the excellent features included in the Omnibus Society Midland Branch Bulletin which is issued on a monthly basis.

Editor's Note: Concessionary bus passes arouse a great deal of interest, especially in government and local government circles. The Local Government Association is currently concerned that local

authorities are being penalised by having to continue to pay pre Covid levels of reimbursement to operators when very few pass holders are travelling. At the same time there is a growing feeling that the scheme is inappropriate, especially in rural areas. This is born out by the fact that in Herefordshire, 31% of the parish population has a very basic service or no service. What use is a bus pass if there is no bus or it only goes during college days. Some people consider that for rural areas the earlier scheme of travel tokens, which could also be used on taxis and some rural rail services is a fairer system. The debate is open.

Hereford: The Poor Relation of the West Midlands

Gareth Calan Davies examines the way Herefordshire is forgotten.

When it comes to railways, Herefordshire is the poor relation of the West Midlands. Described as some obscure place in the south west of the region or even thought by some in Birmingham that it is part of Wales, the train service leaves much to be desired. The organisation Midlands Connect is currently undertaking a refresh of its Transport Strategy. Midlands Connect researches, develops and progresses transport projects which will provide the biggest possible environmental, economic and social benefits for the Midlands and the rest of the UK. As part of this refresh it has been inviting responses from stakeholders throughout the region.

In a blunt response, the Herefordshire Sustainable Transport Group points to the need for development of the Hereford-Birmingham rail service to improve connectivity between Herefordshire and the rest of the West Midlands. Such improvement is dependent on the re-dualling of the track between Malvern and Hereford.

Whilst the line through the two tunnels has always been single, the sections either side of Ledbury were once double track. The section between Ledbury and Shelwick Junction was singled as an economy measure during the 1980s. The reinstatement of double track or even a dynamic loop (as on the Shrewsbury-Aberystwyth line) will enable an increase in the frequency of the service and improve reliability. However, whilst Wolverhampton-Shrewsbury gets an upgrade in the Midlands Connect Transport Strategy, poor Herefordshire is forgotten and the necessary doubling has been lost in the mists of time.

The doubling project scored high ranking in the Marches Local Enterprise Partnership report on Marches Rail Service of 2016 as a scheme that would open up the area to inward investment and development. A summary of the HSTG report is reproduced here.

HSTG Summary of Response to Midlands Connect Transport Strategy

- ◆ Economic growth in Herefordshire is identified in the high technology and engineering sector as well as agricultural diversification.
- ◆ However, Herefordshire is often described as the forgotten county of the West Midlands.
- ◆ Sustainable transport is a key feature in overcoming this.
- ◆ It is imperative that improvements in transport and hence connectivity take due account of climate emergency and carbon emissions.
- ◆ It is impossible to improve west-east road communication between Herefordshire and the West Midlands without considerable infrastructure investment which is contrary Herefordshire Council's climate change and sustainable transport policies.
- ◆ At a time when Economic Growth, Levelling Up and Climate Change & Carbon are major features of the Midlands Connect transport strategy, it is bitterly disappointing that there

is no mention of the Herefordshire rail corridor, its potential and subsequent improvement. We notice with alarm that the Shrewsbury rail route is included but not poor Herefordshire's.

- ◆ **That no action has been taken on including a vital Herefordshire track dualling scheme in either the Midlands Connect strategy or the West Midlands Rail investment programme is a travesty of biased transport planning in favour of roads. It is also symptomatic of the fact that Herefordshire remains a forgotten part of the West Midlands.**
- ◆ **There is an urgent need to maximise the development of freight by rail, especially in the context of inter-modal rail transit, the development of freight concentration hubs (ref: HSTG report *The Role of Railways in Herefordshire's Future*). A post-Covid readjustment of rail services can provide the opportunity for more freight train paths on the network.**
- ◆ We are pleased to see a small but significant section on the future of rural mobility in the refresh document.

The Hereford Transport Hub

Chairman Will Frecknall gives us a positive update.

In February 2021 Herefordshire Council voted in favour of prioritising the improvement of public transport and active travel. This decision to promote sustainable modes of travel is driven by a pressing need to address the Council's declared Climate Emergency through a reduction in CO2 emissions from transport in general and private cars in particular.

The construction of a Transport Hub adjacent to Hereford's railway station has been on the council's agenda for many years. We have been given numerous promises of action but nothing has ever happened. We have made the point to senior members that this administration needs to make significant progress in delivering sustainable transport projects on the ground within the next two years if it is to have any expectation of re-election in May 2023.

To this end we have given some thought to the layout and services we expect at the Hub. We envisage a hub building parallel with and backing onto the bay platform to the north of the station buildings. It would accommodate a café/waiting room, toilets, an information desk, a mobility hub and a drivers' mess room. Real time information screens for both buses and trains would abound. Abutting the building would be ten parallel bus bays partially covered by a canopy. Bus access would be off Station Approach (via a new junction) while exit would be via the existing junction. The area in front of the station building would thus be uncluttered by shelters or stationary buses. Facilities for pedestrians crossing Station Approach would be improved.

We have had a site meeting with a senior Cabinet member to discuss these proposals and they were well received. We will do all we can to build the case for the delivery of a quality Transport Hub as rapidly as possible. We are expecting a public consultation on the proposal to be announced in the summer. Watch this space!

Herefordshire: Ignored Again!

Our Honorary President Professor John Whitelegg asks
'Why is Herefordshire not on the list?'

The 17 successful **mobility fund applications** and their bid values have been announced.

Additional funding was provided to local authorities to support them with the development of their business cases and will be made available to deliver programme-wide monitoring and evaluation.

Local authority (area)	Size of bid
1 Buckinghamshire Council (Aylesbury)	£ 1,114,000
2 Buckinghamshire Council (High Wycombe)	£ 736,000
3 Cheshire East Council	£ 1,260,000
4 Cheshire West and Chester Council	£ 1,075,000
5 Cumbria County Council	£ 1,500,000
6 Essex County Council (Central Essex)	£ 1,493,000
7 Essex County Council (South Braintree)	£ 1,082,000
8 Gloucestershire County Council	£ 1,352,000
9 Hertfordshire County Council (North East)	£ 1,472,000
10 Leicestershire County Council	£ 1,300,000
11 Norfolk County Council	£ 700,000
12 North Lincolnshire Council	£ 912,232
13 Nottinghamshire County Council	£ 1,497,000
14 Staffordshire County Council	£ 1,038,091
15 Surrey County Council	£ 660,200
16 Warwickshire County Council	£ 1,020,000
17 Wiltshire Council	£ 1,200,000
18 Total	£ 19,411,523

Does anyone know the answer to Professor Whitelegg's question, Why not Herefordshire? If you have an answer then do let us know at RBfH. Perhaps the government has forgotten that Herefordshire exists. Also as the Marches Line is run by Transport for Wales perhaps the Department of Transport thinks Herefordshire is in Wales (wouldn't put it past them). Or perhaps both the Government and Department are smarting that Herefordshire Council had the audacity to throw out a bypass and concentrate on a sensible sustainable transport strategy.

Have you paid your RBfH subscription

The Ledbury Station Project

Visit Ledbury Heritage by Train

Gareth Calan Davies, RBfH project leader provides further insight.

It is amazing and exciting that this project is going ahead, despite Covid. It all started in 2019 when West Midlands Trains announced a new community fund, the Customers & Communities Investment Fund supported by the Department for Transport. Both Nina Shields of Sustainable Ledbury and myself thought we would try a bid for a slice of it on the basis that passengers arriving at Ledbury railway station found nothing to direct them to the town, or that the town contained a wealth of heritage buildings to see and visit.

A quick scheme was drawn up which comprised a new three window display cabinet at the station. This would include 1. map of the town and artwork of heritage buildings in relation to the station; 2. history of Ledbury and its buildings 3. history of the coming of the railways. In conjunction with this, a brochure advertising visit Ledbury by rail, a Jewel of a Heritage Town will be produced.

Much to our surprise the bid was accepted and the money was added to by generous grants from Ledbury Town Council and Ledbury Civic Society. A structure for the project was set up and then wham, Covid descended on us and everything ground to a halt. The project disappeared into the mists of time and we thought that was that.

However, in October 2020 I was informed by Fay Easton (Head of Community & Stakeholder at West Midlands Railway) that the Department for Transport had given the go ahead. We were back in business. However, the original project specification had to be changed. We were going to involve the schools in artwork production but with Covid and lockdown that was clearly out of the question.

The answer was to engage with local Ledbury artists and three have been commissioned to form a small team with myself as project manager. The artists are known to each other and can work well together to produce something special. Jeanette McCulloch studied at the Royal College of Art and has been making art ever since that reflects her interest in history, anthropology, the natural world, pattern, our place in an ever changing world. Caroline Owen Thomas is an accomplished calligrapher and tutor of lettering on paper, clay and cloth. Cheryl Davies BSc was trained as a botanist and is an accomplished draughtsperson and artist. All three are well known in Ledbury.

The project is now forging ahead amidst great artistic excitement. Having dealt with many transport projects in my career, I must admit this one somewhat terrifies me by having to keep three female artists under control. Coupled with this there is the infectious enthusiasm of Fay Easton at West Midlands Railway who is doing so much to make this and the many other projects she has to manage come alive and be a success. This is truly putting Ledbury on the rail map and demonstrates that rail companies and communities can work well together for the benefit of the people.



The Power of Community

Community Station Partnerships

Fay Easton (Head of Community & Stakeholder at West Midlands Railway) gives us the low down on a new exciting community railway initiative

The Year of Pandemic

This year has been a historically difficult year for the railway industry as the structure of travel changed and the country experienced devastating national loss and tragedy. During three lockdowns rail travel was restricted to key workers but despite the COVID year of social distancing and isolation; there has been much evidence of communities becoming 'closer' than ever and we saw uplifting levels of community activity helping to tackle loneliness and isolation during the year of heartache for many.

Across the country as communities were reeling from the effects of COVID-19, people pulled together to support neighbours and families and we also witnessed a surge of interest in community activities connected to the railways.

Resurgence of community rail spirit

In the West Midlands community rail activity flourished the like of which we have not seen in recent years. Based on the increased interest in all things 'local' an innovative Rail User Group in Warwickshire established a new partnership model for volunteer collaborations in the rail industry.

Community Station Partnership (CSP)

The Shakespeare Line Promotion Group launched the first Community Station Partnership in the country and 'Friends of the Shakespeare Line' (FoSL) was formed. The Shakespeare line runs from Birmingham Snow Hill to Stratford upon Avon and spans 20 stations from market towns to inner city hubs.

A not-for-profit organisation, the CSP is operated entirely by volunteers who have created a community venture to enhance their stations along the route.

Station enhancements include the installation of garden planters, station art, poetry boards and information screens that are individual to each locality. There are also plans to arrange pop-ups at the stations for local enterprise and installations that celebrate local heritage.

The broad objectives of the partnership are to encourage local people to adopt their railway stations, working with neighbours and the Train Operating Company to develop their stations as community assets, bringing people together as well as enhancing the passenger experience.

Peter Wilkinson, the Managing Director of Passenger Services at DfT is on record as saying that the rail industry needs community rail ventures to help restore confidence in the railways and bring passengers back when the time is right.

This is just what the CSP will do, and the new rail partnership concept can work for 2 to 20 stations. Pooling resources, sharing ideas and developing local destinations will help regenerate neighbourhoods and support the new wave of domestic tourism we have in sight in the UK.

Volunteers, Trustees & Patron

The organisation, which is entirely voluntary, has five trustees who give their time freely to manage the Partnership, applying for funding to enable the work of over 70 volunteers who are all 'adopters' of their local stations.

The partnership is funded by a combination of Train Operating Company investment and sponsorship from local businesses, private donations, and Local Authorities. Lord Digby Jones is Patron of the charitable organisation and recorded his delight at being involved with the "energetic group of volunteers."

The volunteers have worked throughout the year of crisis to create a local sense of pride and offer

returning passengers and visitors a welcome at the stations that is reflective of the area they are visiting. The 'power of community' has never been more important to society and the CSP founders have created a model for a partnership that supports wellbeing & localism while providing a template for communities across the region to replicate.

The founders recently launched a state-of-the-art website promoting their destinations and setting out the founding principles of the organisation. They are willing to share their experience and will happily advise new volunteer groups; such is the generosity of spirit in the world of community rail. <https://www.friendsl.org.uk>

If you would like to find out more about establishing a Community Station Partnership in the West Midlands Railway network, please contact fay.easton@wmtrains.co.uk

Bus Times

Herefordshire bus services returned to their September 2020 times on 8 March 2021 with the exception that Yeomans commercial Sunday services (Leominster, Newton Farm, Credenhill and Redhill services) remain suspended. Passengers should be aware that service 674 Bromyard-Ledbury and 802 Leintwardine-Hereford remain scholars only buses.

Easter school holiday is from 6 April to 16 April when service 447 Bredwardine-Hereford does not run and service 449 Madley-Hereford reverts to two hourly Monday-Friday, i.e. as Saturday service.

The big question that most people are asking is 'Will Herefordshire bus services return to pre Covid levels'. The answer is most probably no unless there is a successful partnership between Herefordshire Council and the operators. That implies a hefty increase in local authority support for bus services, something that the local authority cannot sustain without considerable assistance from central government. Will the Prime Minister's recent statement Bus Back Better provide this. (see also article by Les Lumsdon)

Is the Department for Transport in Chaos?

Some words from across the Border.

With conflicting reports emerging, active travel schemes appearing and then disappearing, and public money flying in all directions, it is not a bit of wonder that the English public are scratching their heads in bewildered disbelief. Take the railways for example. What is going to happen to them? Has the William's Rail Review been tucked away? It is reported that this Review held the promise to bring about much-needed change, although rumour also has it that once the potential cost of such change became apparent to the Treasury and No. 10, the Review's progress towards publication has come to a grinding halt. As recently reported in UK Rail: *Even before Coronavirus and COVID-19, only the most blinkered observer would ever argue that the UK rail industry was not uniquely dystopian and dysfunctional.*

Bold decisions, backed up by funding are needed. That such decisions will ever emerge from the DfT is getting to look very doubtful. On the other hand the devolved governments make firm decisions. The railways of Wales and the Borders have recently been nationalised by the Welsh Government and now the Scottish Government has announced that ScotRail will be nationalised in 2022. The Welsh decision was hastened by the fact that the operator, Keolis Amey refused to chip in to keep the system going during the pandemic. This provided a lever for the Welsh Government to say, *if we have to pay for it then we want control of it.* Similarly the Scottish Government has got extremely frustrated with the TOC owning company Abellio, after years of

poor performance and industrial disputes. To the man in the street it is obvious, if the public are to pay for the railway then the public sector should have a say in it and after all government is the voice of the public.

It is not a bit of wonder that the Emergency Measures were grabbed with both hands by some TOCs for whom it represented a lifeline – they would have previously bitten the hand off from anyone offering to cover their costs and chip in a guaranteed 2% for their trouble. A classic case of public money to hold up private companies. Yet franchises in England are still being extended while the men from the ministry dither at their desks. Of course there could well be logic in the prime minister’s recent announcement of a £3bn boost for buses. He likes buses but undoubtedly finds trains just a bit too difficult.

As one rail industry professional commented: *We have a real chance to transform our industry and most likely, save it from terminal decline.* But perhaps the government’s £3bn bus boost is really for rail replacement services and the conversion of rail lines into bus priority routes.

Sargeants Brothers of Kington

Les Lumsdon gives us an insight into developments at Kington

In November 2020 the new owner and MD of Sargeants Brothers Ltd, Matt Evans, started to deliver plans to update and re-badge the livery of the bus fleet. This included a new Metrodecker from Optare (now known by the less snappy name of Switch Mobility) and equipping buses to accept credit and debit cards for contactless payments. There are two new members of the team, Natalie Amos, General Manager and Jason Bush, Transport Manager and they are doing their best to develop the company in extremely variable times.

The flagship route is, of course, Hereford-Kington-Llandrindod Wells (461/462) and now fare payers will be able to jump on board without searching pockets for change. Sargeants also operate the 41 bus from Kington to Knighton and Lloyney as well as school services and a twice weekly town shuttle at Kington.



On March 8th 2021 the local media highlighted the trial of a zero emissions electric demonstrator bus. The bus interior is much the same as the ubiquitous Optare range, but the difference is that there is no engine noise, no Co2 emissions and that’s important. Observers have commented that it is also offers a smoother ride and copes well with the hills. This type of bus has been well tested over the past two years and there are now 150 in operation throughout the UK so you would expect a good performance. However, it is too soon to comment in detail about how suitable this type of bus is for the 461/2. Sargeants Brothers intend to monitor performance of the battery technology and reliability over the coming weeks so let’s hope it works out for the best. It is certainly a first trial for Herefordshire.

If you would like to ride out on the electric bus check in the coming week or two then get in touch with Sargeants. You’ll find that buses have been cleaned for Covid Protection with a hand sanitiser on board and a window open for ventilation. The team can be contacted at www.sargeantsbros.com

On a final note, our thanks go out to Mike Sargeant for his years of input into a bus company which is much loved by many a passenger in Herefordshire.

More of Mike's Observations at Ledbury

25 January

Rail services observed have been normal in the last few days except first journey from Birmingham on Sunday was 10 minutes late. Hardly surprising in the present wintry conditions.

Did I say normal! The 10.00 down just arrived at 1052, reversed at 10.54 to form the 11.00 up to Birmingham. The 11.00 down passed at 11.10.

The 11.58 up to Birmingham departed at 12.15 and the down to Hereford departed at 12.18. This was a refurbished class 172 in the new purple livery. It returned to Birmingham at 1558.

1 February

The 0800 up Birmingham passed through at 08.16 and was a class 170. The 09.00 up Birmingham was a class 172 4 coach unit. The 11.58 down Hereford was a 3 coach 172 unit.

The inspection train went down to Hereford at 10.16 and returned at 11.29. It comprised two colas locomotives, three yellow carriages and one mid blue closed van.

3 February

Activity on the line as there were blasts on the warning sirens. There has been a lot of activity in this area of late.

16 February

Another yellow inspection train passed at 10.20 comprising six coaches and one matching diesel at either end not in colas livery.

17 February

Train horns being sounded indicating track workers in vicinity of station. Class 172s running on three hourly intervals from/to Birmingham. Class 170s noted as two cars now.

19 February

At 12.15 a class 170 crawled slowly up the embankment having clearly reversed. At 12.25 a purple class 172 goes slowly down the embankment followed at 13.05 by the GWR 5 coach unit. There appears some problem up the line but by mid afternoon departures appear back on time.

22 February

The class 172s appear to be putting in more appearance on the line, replacing older class 170s.

26 February

The 16.58 down to Hereford was a silver with red doors train, very square looking with no markings. However, the regular down train passed at 1712 so the previous unidentified train was some sort of special working. Both Mike and Gareth puzzled over this one, especially as Mike was adamant it looked very square, almost like LT tube stock.

Gareth later commented it is possible this was one of the VivaRail class 230 converted tube stock. Transport for Wales have purchased a number. The units have been converted at the Long Marston (Quinton Rail Centre) and tested on the Cotswold Line before being sent to Tfw. The units first go to Cardiff Canton for pre service TFW checks before being sent to work on the Wrexham-Bidston line in North Wales.

16 March

At 10.17 a six-coach inspection train came through towards Hereford. It had a red diesel loco leading and a yellow trailing inscribed with the logo 'Looking After Your Railways. It returned up towards Worcester at 11.30. The incidence of inspection trains on this line is interesting, if not somewhat troubling. Can anyone else throw light on this subject.

From the Archives

Woofferton Junction

The Shrewsbury & Hereford Railway was opened as far as Ludlow in 1852, reaching Hereford in 1853. Two branches were added later, one from Woofferton to Tenbury Wells in 1861 and another from Ludlow to Bitterly in 1861. The line was originally worked by the West Midlands Railway which later amalgamated with the Great Western Railway. The London & North Western Railway had also secured an interest in the line in 1862 so that initially the S & H was joint between three companies, the WMR, GWR and LNWR. Joint working between the two larger companies started in 1875 and the line was operated by a joint management.

Woofferton Junction served quite a large rural hinterland. Tommy Nottingham, a mechanic at DRMBus was born at Brimfield near the station and he related stories of the junction when he used the branch train to get to school in Tenbury Wells. *'It was quite a busy place with a big goods yard and the express trains would stop there. The Tenbury train was rather an antiquated push-pull sort of thing but was later modernised by the GWR with one of their early diesel railcars. The station had a licensed refreshment room run by a friendly landlady who would allow us a pint of beer when we got off the train and before walking home. I think my parents and the local constable suspected a bit of under age drinking but turned a blind eye to it.'*



Woofferton Junction in the 1930s with a goods train being shunted. Note the platform oil lamps and the substantial station buildings and goods shed.

Woofferton Junction is one of the stations featured in a forthcoming book by GHAL Productions of Ledbury, titled 'Country Junctions in Wales & the Borders. A full list of transport titles can be obtained from ghal@btinternet.com

Archive Film

Great archive film of the last train on the Golden Valley Railway can be found on Search BFI Player. Transport colleague Alistair Durham forwarded the link.

From the Archives

Bristol Omnibus in Ledbury

I wonder now how many people can remember the Bristol Omnibus Company serving Ledbury. In the mid 1970s they still had two services running to Gloucester, one via Dymock and Newent and the other via Redmarley and Staunton. The buses were outstationed in a builders yard off Lower Road, Ledbury. They were typical Bristol buses, the one in the photograph being a Bristol MW with the green and cream livery. They were later replaced by the shorter wheel base Bristol LH in plain green. The services ran until 1981 and were withdrawn following the NBC Market Analysis Study.

In 1981 I was a transport coordinating officer with Hereford & Worcester County Council and we arranged replacement services with two Ledbury companies. Newbury coaches ran via Newent and Smiths Motors ran to Staunton where it connected with the Malvern-Gloucester service. The latter was short lived, passengers being few and far between and the connections unsatisfactory.

The Newbury Coaches service ran until 2009 when the route was taken over by Stagecoach Gloucester who continue to run it today.



(Left) Bristol Omnibus MW at Ledbury Market House in the 1960s. (Right) Today's equivalent, Stagecoach on the 132 service to Gloucester via Dymock and Newent.

The Restaurant Car

Michael Sullivan gives us an insight into good dining by train.

On a Saturday in April 2011, committee member Michael Sullivan had a day out by luxury train to Carlisle over the famous Settle & Carlisle line. The train was operated by a company called Statesman and contained a full Pullman dining car service. Michael was able to experience Pullman train dining at its best and was suitably impressed, commented on the return journey that:

On our Table for 2 reposed a 1/2 bottle of champagne, and as soon as we reboarded our train at 1520 the steward was there to open it for us. The reason for the early start was that Dinner had to be completed by the time of our first return setting down stop at 1825.

We were highly impressed by the standard of cooking, and the waiting staff were highly

experienced, everything ran like clockwork, and was most professional. (much better than 1st class on the Virgin Pendolino to Scotland and that is good.)

Truly were we savouring train travel as it was in yester year, but sadly is no more. We returned over the Settle line bathed in sun light. Truly memorable.

The company advertises its service as:

Pullman Dining

This is the ultimate travel experience - seating is in refurbished Pullman style umber & cream air conditioned wood panelled open carriages 'Apollo' & 'Sovereign' offering additional legroom, wide seats and panoramic windows with seating arranged in groups of 4 or 2 around a table laid with crisp linen and fully dressed with the finest crockery and glassware. The ticket price included a reserved seat, glass of chilled bucks fizz followed by a full English breakfast and late morning tea/coffee service with shortbread prior to the arrival at our destination. On the return journey you will be welcomed back on board with a glass of chilled champagne and a selection of tempting canapé s will be served followed by a four course diner with ¼ bottle of house wine. We choose our main course wine from the wine list. Dinner was finished with coffee with petits fours. An 'at seat' drinks service is available for purchases throughout the day.

The coaches are good well built British Rail Mk2E express stock of 1972. They have now been finished externally in the Pullman umber and cream livery and lined out in Golden Arrow styling. The interior areas are in traditional timber and marquetry effect finishes with unique designer carpeting and upholstery.

Editor's Note: Michael Sullivan's experience set me off searching into the GHAL transport archives. It is now difficult to believe that in this modern world of so called convenience the restaurant car was once a flagship of the British Railways system and held up as one of the best services in the world. When I first moved to Ledbury in 1974 it was still possible to obtain a full English breakfast on the 'Cathedrals Express'. The restaurant car staff joined at Worcester.

Many people bemoaned the disappearance of the restaurant car to be replaced by the tat and pap of privatisation. The media commented:

Back in the later British Rail years, where InterCity was making a profit, the food offering could be quite impressive too. In fact, under BR's Sectorisation - InterCity was set up in 1987, and made an operating profit of £57 million in its first year, £56 million in 1989, and £49 million in 1990. That despite a cut by the Government of 29% in the passenger grant for rail operations.

When the railways were privatised in 1995 there were nearly 250 trains a day across the UK offering everything from artichoke and parsley soup to fillet steak, accompanied by on-board cellars stocking fine wines.

By 2012 that figure had shrunk to just four trains a day as rail companies chased profits and reduced costs. The large dining tables were scrapped in favour of tightly packed airline-style seating. A trolley selling sandwiches stood where once the onboard chef in pristine whites could be found creating mouth-watering dishes like flambéed Bourbon shrimp or zesty brochette of Dijon lamb.

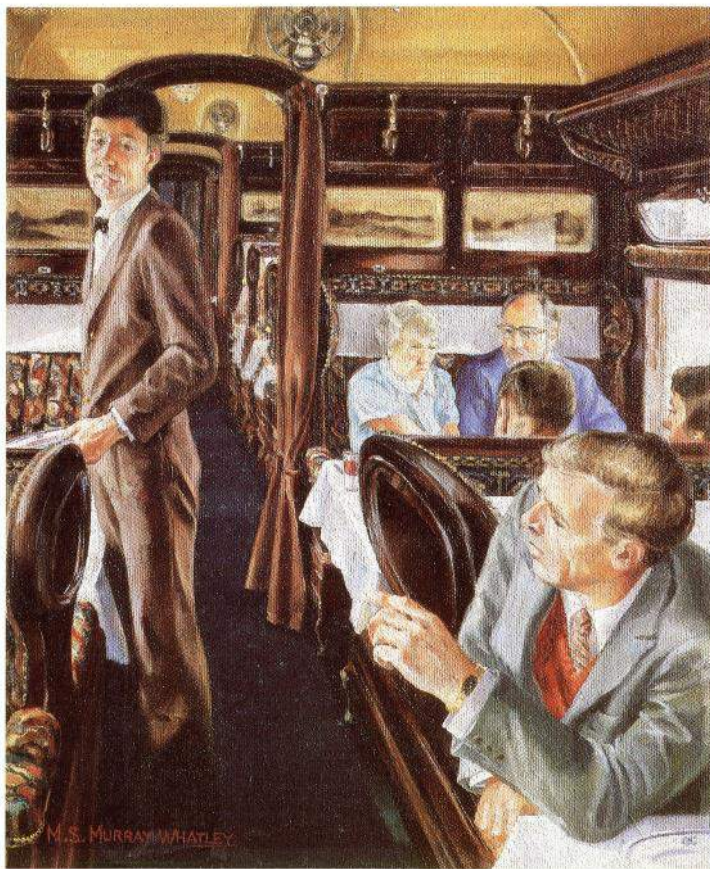
Today there are only two restaurant car trains on the British railway system. Great Western Railway operate one between Paddington and Cornwall and the Welsh Government operates *Gerald of Wales*, a named train between Cardiff and Holyhead. Hereford should be privileged that it is included in the service.

Perhaps the demise of the British restaurant car is symptomatic of the Britain's decline at the hands of the search for ever increasing profits and reduced costs. Perhaps one day the

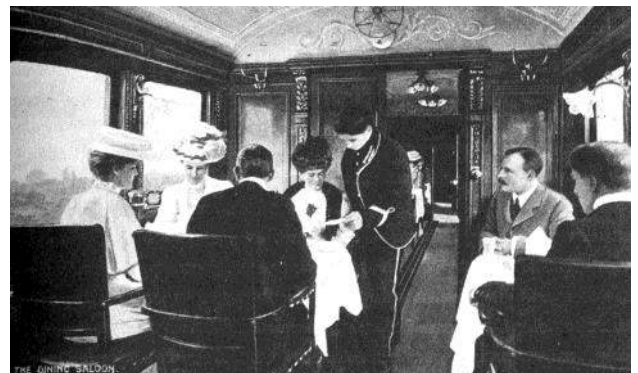
privatised rail companies will come to their senses as the change in travelling habits post Covid point at a shift to the leisure and tourist market. What better way to serve the public than give them a good quality meal whilst travelling through the scenic borders or even along the Heart of Wales line or the Cambrian coast!



Perhaps the most famous of dining car trains, the golden Arrow or Fleche D'or (left) (image copyright Getty Images). The Pullman train even visited Ledbury in 1990 (right)



'Waiter' by Mrs M.S Murray-Whatley GRA (copyright Guild of Railway artists)



Top: LNWR dining car of 1907. Bottom: BR Blue Pullman dining in the 1960s



In 2017 a Guardian newspaper columnist experienced the *Gerald of Wales* train.

The evening departure from Cardiff tempted me with a menu including Welsh braised black beef and ale pie and a patriotic drinks list that features Penderyn whisky, Brecon Welsh dry gin and even Gwynt Y Ddraig cider. But, as an unabashed artery-abusing lover of cooked breakfasts, I elected to start from the Anglesey end, and stayed the night in the charming whitewashed Trearddur Bay hotel, a 10-minute taxi ride from the station, before rising to take the 5.33am from Holyhead.

The train travels the spine of Wales, dipping coquettishly over the English border and back as we pass the dark green expanse of Chester Racecourse, the towering floodlights of the Racecourse Ground in Wrexham (the oldest international stadium in the world) and, as we enter the Welsh Marches around Shrewsbury, buttercup-smothered sidings, undulating hills and fallow fields in hues of sable, ochre and bronze. The frenetic kitchen activity at the end of my carriage slowly businessmen sleeping off the fry-up.

We skirt the eastern fringes of the Brecon Beacons national park and sprint through the valley floors and jutting peaks of Monmouthshire before the light industry and concertina'd ribbons of Victorian terraced streets signify that Cardiff is upon us. It's not even 10am and I've crossed an entire nation by train. The sense of achievement is hardly Trans Siberian in its scope; the sensation is more of delight that such a convivial sanctuary against the blandishments of modern

Michael Sullivan has also experienced breakfast between Hereford and Cardiff and also dinner on the return , *only just completed by Hereford but most satisfactory.* As the dining section of the 1st class carriage is very limited it is necessary, highly advisable, to book a seat for dinner on the return journey.

A Gentle Reminder

**If you have not paid your subscription please send your cheque to our Treasurer, Peter Gwatkin at 60 Broomy Hill, Hereford HR4 0LQ
Or arrange a standing order: contact pmgaccountancy@gmail.com**