

Rail & Bus for Herefordshire

Winter 2021-22 Newsletter



Winter morning at Bromyard with DRMBus Leyland Lynx (ex West Midlands Travel) waiting to depart with the 469 schools journey to Hereford via Bishops Frome. The 420 service to Hereford via the main road, Burley Gate and Withington will soon pull up behind, before both buses depart for Hereford via different routes.

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Report of the RBfH Annual General Meeting from the Secretary

Because of Covid the AGM for 2020 – 2021 had to be postponed until restrictions were eased and was attended by 13 members.

Mike Dalton from TfW gave a talk on the proposals to upgrade services and rolling stock and a question and answer session followed.

The Chairman then gave an overview of the year with updates to the present. All but 6 of the county's bus services had returned to pre-pandemic levels but they were important routes Hereford to Ledbury, Leominster, Brecon, Bromyard, Madley and Bredwardine. On the rail side there was overcrowding on TfW trains and constant cancellations (particularly in the evenings) on West Midlands Trains. The Chairman and Les Lumsdon had been involved with talks with Hereford City Council concerning their Stronger Towns Bid and had helped with the addition of Zipper buses linking the station, hospital, town and leisure centre as part of their successful bid. A brief resume was given about Herefordshire Council's free weekend bus travel initiative and Councillor John Harrington was praised for this initiative. Gareth Davies was thanked for production of the quarterly newsletter and his work to publicise Ledbury at the station.

The accounts for February 2020 to January 2021 showing a profit of £395 were accepted and Peter Gwatkin who had decided to stand down after 4 years was thanked for all his work.

The proposal to increase subscriptions to £10 pa for electronic membership and £15 pa for postal members was approved unanimously. There being no other business the AGM closed at 15.40

Your New RBfH Committee

Chairman: Will Frecknall will@clarach.wyenet.co.uk

Secretary: Andrew Pearson pearsondore@yahoo.com

Treasurer: John Eden johnaeden1@gmail.com

Newsletter: Gareth Calan Davies ghal@btinternet.com

Rail Monitor: Michael Sullivan michaelsullivan42@hotmail.co.uk

Members

Professor Les Lumsdon

John Thorne

Philip Bauer

Honorary President: Professor John Whitelegg

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Subscriptions

The Chairman writes:-

The proposal to increase subscriptions from 1 February 2022 was carried unanimously at our AGM on 26 October 2021. Those of you paying by standing order will already have received notification of the change, with a request to adjust the sum accordingly before the next payment.

For those members paying by cheque, please note that from 1 February 2022 annual subscriptions are increased as follows:

for those receiving newsletters digitally, to £10 per annum

for those receiving newsletters by post, to £15 per annum

Please send cheque to Andrew Pearson, RBfH Secretary, 4 Northam Field, Clehonger, HR2 9SR

Membership has held up remarkably well during the last two difficult years and I very much hope all existing members will renew. Omicron permitting, we look forward to reinstating a programme of meetings during the summer. Such meetings have been a vehicle for increasing membership in the past and it would be good to repeat that result in 2022.

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(RBfH does not accept any responsibility for any inaccuracies in this newsletter)

From Your Editor

The times they are a changing is the title of Bob Dylan's record album of 1964. Never has such a title been more appropriate than in the times of the present day. Economies everywhere continue to reel from the effects of a pandemic....no more so than here in Britain. We have now got used to phrases such as 'it ain't going to be the same again' and 'the new normal'. Surface public transport has been hit particularly badly with an initial catastrophic drop in passenger numbers and hence revenue. The government has been forced to bail out both rail and bus companies putting an incredible strain on the Treasury and at times leading to nigh on open warfare with Number 10.

However, there are positive signs of improvement. Passengers are returning to the trains and the buses but there is also taking place an interesting change in journey patterns. It is now forecast that commuting traffic will never return to pre-Covid levels, especially as the working from home pattern takes hold and companies find they can save considerable sums of money on not having to rent, lease or even own office space in the towns and cities.

On the other hand, off peak passenger traffic is showing a healthy upturn. This can be seen locally. Before 0930 the car park at Ledbury station is virtually empty. Pre-Covid it would have been full by 0900 but now passengers line the platforms for off peak trains. Such signs of change in travelling patterns must not go unheeded by both rail and bus companies. This means an in depth market analysis and an assessment as to where future traffic flows will be found, if operators are to stay in business.

All this has to be taken into account within the framework of the Williams Shapps Rail Review and the creation of Great British Railways together with the government's white paper Bus Back Better. Of course, the Treasury views all this with a degree of alarm, especially as such market changes are never going to restore pre-Covid levels of revenue for both the rail and bus sector. That means the possibility of having to dip into the Treasury coffers even further and that will be firmly resisted. The alternative is cost reduction, possibly quite drastic. It is now no secret that there are going to be major changes in the rail and bus sector, both the way they are financed and the way they are structured and operated.

There are other fall outs from Covid so in this issue we look at the reasons for current shortages of both train and bus drivers, together with the first signs of government tightening the financial noose plus I hope other articles of topical interest.

As Ed Yong, science journalist, stated: *We long to return to normal, but **normal led to this**.... We have to build something better.* As economist Mariana Mazzucato and others have been saying, *It is time to rethink capitalism.* Come on government, show us the way.

The Covid Fall Out and Train Crew

The Editor, who has worked at the sharp end in both the rail and bus industries, gives a view

The Covid epidemic and associated lockdowns has created havoc in the public transport industry. Nowhere more so than with West Midlands Trains Ltd (WMT) which operates the West Midlands Franchise trading as two subsidiaries, London North Western Railway (LNW) and West Midlands Railway (WMR). Our interest is with the latter which manages the network within the West Midlands conurbation and also lines into the shire counties of Herefordshire, Shropshire and Warwickshire.

WMT gained the franchise in December 2017 from an already rocky London Midlands Trains Ltd which had a staffing and industrial relations problem. WMT was into tackling this problem and had already started to recruit a considerable number of train crew when Covid struck. As a result and abiding by the government rules re social distancing and isolating, the training programme came to a halt. In addition the emergency reduction in the level of service provision saw a proportion of the train crew put on furlough.

The return to full service levels has put extreme pressure on the system as the expected number of new fully trained drivers fell far short of the target. The Snow Hill group of services from Worcester through to Solihull, Stratford and Leamington Spa were badly affected. This in turn impacted on the Birmingham-Hereford service which is also operated from Worcester depot. In addition a higher than average age profile of drivers at depots such as Worcester, Shrewsbury and Leamington Spa meant that many of the older drivers decided on early retirement post Covid. This further exacerbated an already serious problem with train cancellations steadily increasing throughout 2021.

To train a driver is a lengthy process. Not only is there a requirement to be proficient in railway rules and regulations, together with health and safety but each driver has to be totally familiar with routes, signalling, speed restrictions, platform lengths etc. The driver has to sign for each route as a testimony to his route knowledge. Bearing in mind that to be of any use a driver has to learn a number of different routes thus providing a flexibility of working and it is easy to see that the whole process is lengthy.

I am sure West Midlands Railway management will not deny that mistakes have been made in handling the number of cancellations. There are often cries of why not reduce the service level to provide a reliable service. It may be the Department for Transport is involved here. They recently awarded WMT a new interim contract to continue operating during the run up to the new Great British Railways. There was little else they could do. The problem of driver shortage would be the same under direct government control.

Let us hope that with a steady supply of new drivers coming on line the situation will improve throughout 2022. If it does not then that is the time to seriously tub thump and demand WMT is stripped of its contract to operate.



Class 172 trains provide increased capacity on the Hereford Line. Now we want service reliability (photo courtesy RbfH member mike Hart)

Where Have All the Bus Drivers Gone?

The following article is printed here courtesy of Herefordshire Sustainable Transport Group

In July the Hereford Times ran a news item that bus services in Hereford were being cut to an emergency timetable as Yeomans Travel faced a driver shortage. The indication was that this was due to drivers having to self isolate as part of the Covid precautions. However a national shortage of both bus and HGV drivers is being caused by other reasons as well. Recent issues of Omnibus Society publications throw some interesting light on this. We now know that Yeoman's is pulling out of city bus services. No surprise!

Maintaining a good level of staff has always been a problem for bus operators. Turnover of staff is consistently high and the drift between goods vehicle and bus driving has always been in existence. Hauliers are now having to substantially increase wages and this will exacerbate the drift of drivers between the two transport sectors.

The bus industry generally relies on overtime being worked and during the Covid crisis the anomaly was created whereby staff were often earning more on the 80% furlough average than those who were working. In consequence as time went on and more drivers were required, there was a reluctance to return whilst wages in the HGV sector were increasing rapidly making a transfer to that sector attractive.

Training new drivers and putting them through the test was very restricted during the height of the Covid crisis and in addition those eastern European drivers who went home when Covid started have not returned post Brexit. This would particularly impact on bus companies such as Yeomans who employed a considerable number of eastern European drivers at their Hereford and Leominster depots.

But perhaps one of the main underlying reasons is that bus driving is not an attractive job. The hours are long and unsocial, split shifts and overtime are common and the wage rate is low. There is not much incentive for young people to enter the bus sector now that work in the hospitality sector is on the increase and here too wage rates are rising.

With the government pushing for improvement in the provision of bus services, the bus sector as an industry has a great deal to think about. Bus companies along with organisations such as the Confederation of Passenger Transport and the Association of Local Bus Managers need to bring the industry into the

twenty first century and pay attention to making work in the bus industry a well paid profession.

The Integrated Rail Plan: (Treasury puts its foot down)

The Editor, with his transport cronies, local and national, offer the following

Let's face it, most people with a modicum of sense would by now concede that the government cannot go on throwing money around at a large number of, what are proving, very expensive ideologies. The Treasury was bound to step in sometime, put its foot down and say enough is enough.

So we have yet another plan. This time the Integrated Rail Plan which dramatically is a very scaled down plan of what was meant to happen, particularly as it affects the north and the so called levelling up agenda. The original promises were:

HS2 through to Sheffield and Leeds

Northern Powerhouse Rail: A High-Speed line linking Manchester and Leeds

Electrification and Upgrades: Midland Main Line Electrification and East coast Line upgrades

Reform of ticketing to improve journeys and connections

But then the Treasury size 20 boot stamped down and the result:

HS2 will go no further than an East Midlands hub.

Manchester-Leeds will be a series of downscaled upgrades with doubt as to its electrification throughout.

Midland Main Line electrification was stopped in 2017 and the East coast upgrades are in long term progress. It is therefore unlikely that there is new money for these.

Reform of ticketing relegated to the introduction of a London style contactless and integrated system linking some bus and tram systems.

That size 20 Treasury boot certainly came down heavily and it is not a bit of wonder the northerners are up in arms. But there was worse for them. Hot foot on the announcement of the Integrated Rail Plan, as one headline put it: *The fallout from the Government's controversial Integrated Rail Plan has sparked a transport civil war, with the Department for Transport stripping Transport for the North of powers and the regional body fighting a rear-guard war of words.*

Not only has the government taken the knife to rail transport spending, it has also had a blatant stab at devolved transport to the regions. There must be economists, constitutional lawyers and transport professionals who are now debating the death knell of English regional devolution. Devolution means that decision making moves closer to the citizen and is more democratic. This was being achieved in England through decentralisation and the transfer of powers, budgets and responsibilities to regional bodies. But the Department for Transport has written to Transport for the North to say it intends to *'assume immediate and full responsibility for finalising the NPR [Northern Powerhouse Rail] Strategic Outline Case'*.

So watch out Transport for the West Midlands. Its not that far from Birmingham to Leeds and who knows, the next round may well see HS2 end in a field outside Rugby whilst local rail services within the region, currently devolved to West Midlands Rail Ltd, are clawed back to central government under Great British Railways.

Poor Herefordshire, even less of a chance of getting the line between Hereford and Ledbury doubled!!

Meanwhile Across the Border

Transport for Wales has set a target of no net loss of biodiversity in its operations by 2024 as part of an ambitious new Biodiversity Action Plan launched today.

Using the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs' biodiversity metric for guidance, TfW is aiming to achieve no net loss of biodiversity through its work and, where possible, a biodiversity net gain.

The Biodiversity Action Plan sets out the principles Transport for Wales will embrace to ensure the organisation protects, enhances and champions wildlife, biodiversity and our ecosystems throughout its work.

James Price, Transport for Wales Chief Executive, said: "I'm really pleased to be able to share the Transport for Wales Biodiversity Action Plan.

"We are absolutely committed to fulfilling our duties in protecting, enhancing and championing our biodiversity and ecosystems throughout our operations. We want to be seen as a leader and as an exemplar of sustainable transport, promoting Wales as leading the way in the sustainable management of natural resources which will enable the public and future generations to enjoy the beauty of the Wales.

"This ambitious plan will help ensure we are in the strongest possible position to deliver on this vision for our natural environment."

TfW Ecologist Laura Jones said: "Our transport networks in Wales and the Borders have an essential role to play in protecting and enhancing our natural environment.

"This Biodiversity Action Plan forms a key component of our wider sustainability aims at Transport for Wales; it is our commitment to halt species decline, habitat degradation and protect our biodiversity and ecosystems throughout our operations.

"Our aspiration is - and always will be - that sustainable transport can positively contribute to the protection and enhancement of our wildlife."

The five principles which make up the action plan are: no net loss of biodiversity, communication and transparency with the public and stakeholders about what TfW is doing and why, mainstreaming best practice throughout our operations, collaboration and engagement with wildlife organisations, stakeholders and local communities and a commitment to identifying and implementing biodiversity initiatives wherever possible.

Projects already underway include the replacement of habitat on a 2:1 basis at Llanwern, near Newport, where a new rail line is being constructed as part of a scheme to increase service capacity when major events are taking place in South Wales. More than 6 ha of mitigation broadleaved woodland was created along with 150 dormice boxes.

TfW was recently awarded £100,000 from the National Lottery Heritage Fund and Welsh Government's Local Places for Nature scheme to enhance local biodiversity at and near railway stations.

The organisation will introduce green features at 22 stations and in five community areas near stations in areas of multiple deprivation and where major enhancement works are taking place on the network. Features will include green walls, green roofs, planters, hanging baskets, native trees and water butts. Bird houses, bat boxes, bug hotels, hedgehog houses and ladybird houses will also be introduced where appropriate to boost local biodiversity.

From Red to Green: Railways and the Environment

On October 31 from Ludlow, and other stations on the Marches line, the 11.21 Transport for Wales train to Manchester saw members of the *Red Rebel Brigade* board. The purpose of their journey was to bear witness to the climate and ecological emergency, urging our leaders at COP 26 in Glasgow to take action to save the planet from drought, flooding, scorching temperatures, life threatening pollution levels and environmental collapse.



The Red Rebel Brigade at Ludlow

The Rail Delivery Group's message is clear:

- A single train removes up to 500 cars off our roads
 - Every freight train removes on average 76 lorries from our roads
 - Leaving your car at home and taking the train cuts carbon emissions by two thirds
- rail accounts for 10% of journeys, but it is responsible for just 1% of transport emissions.

(Article and image courtesy of Ludlow Sustainable Transport)

BUT

Rail Fares Hike Makes a Mockery of Tackling Climate Change

The Campaign for Better Transport summed it up neatly: *Considering the urgent need to act on climate change, the Government should be making rail the affordable choice. It should have frozen rail fares to match the freeze on fuel duty. Instead, it is increasing fares by the highest percentage for eight years.*

Bus It—Update

Les Lumsdon gives us an update on this pioneering Herefordshire Council scheme

There are over 100 towns and city regions which have adopted a free bus network where residents and in most cases visitors can use bus services for free. Most are located on the European continent and in North America and yes, you have guessed it, there are none in the UK.

That is not entirely true. We have witnessed very progressive campaigns to encourage travel in Wales. For example, the Traws Cymru inter-urban bus network offered free travel at weekends in 2017. The results showed that people can be persuaded to leave their cars behind if you provide a quality, free fare service. Professor Stuart Cole, who advised the Welsh government on the development of Traws Cymru bus network, reported that in the first 6 months of the scheme patronage increased by 53% on Saturdays and 84% on Sundays. In the first year, there was an overall increase of 68% in trips on the network, of which 40% of passengers had switched from car travel to the bus. It makes for a good comparison with Herefordshire principal bus routes as the Traws Cymru network serves mainly rural areas between small towns. Unfortunately, the Traws Cymru scheme was suspended during the early days of the Covid pandemic.

Nevertheless, there's been a recent Welsh initiative in Swansea; this included free travel for residents for 6 long weekends (Friday to Monday) last summer. Once again, the figures proved to be better than expected with First Cymru, the principal operator, reporting a 51% increase in passengers overall and a 65% increase on routes leading into the Gower peninsula so the seaside tourism factor was clearly in evidence. The scheme was so successful according to Swansea City and County that the scheme has been re-introduced for the run up to Christmas and New Year.

Like these two forerunners, Herefordshire Council has pioneered free travel at weekends citing Covid recovery mainly but also environmental reasons for launching the BUS-IT campaign. This is a first for England and Rail & Bus for Herefordshire applauds this progressive intervention. Monitoring by members suggests that to date there are mixed outcomes, especially in relation to Sunday services. Some routes such as the 33 to Ross-on-Wye, and the 476 to Ledbury are doing really well, but the likes of the 36 to Monmouth or the 496 to Shobdon circular less so. With regard to the Monmouth route passengers from Monmouthshire are expected to pay to the boundary and perhaps this is suppressing demand.

Rail & Bus for Herefordshire has argued that the marketing push for the campaign has been too limited from day one. We have also argued that Covid Recovery is as much about encouraging people to use buses to visit the market towns and villages as well as just into Hereford. But it is easy to sit back and criticise so we decided to design and print two leaflets aimed at the general public.

The first leaflet focused on the 454 bus from Fownhope to Hereford as our view is that village services will need to be primed more to increase patronage. This was distributed door to door in Fownhope and Holme Lacy by two committee members. However, we are also keen to encourage people to take a trip out to Fownhope on a Sunday, perhaps for a walk and coffee at Coe Corner or lunch at the New Inn or Greenman both of which are 2 minutes from the bus stop! There are buses from Hereford Country Bus Station at 1130 and 1330 and returning from Fownhope (stop opposite the Fire Station) at 1401 and 1601, allowing two or four hours in the village and surrounding countryside.

The second leaflet was designed to encourage people to visit our market towns and, like the Fownhope leaflet, provides timetable information to allow people to plan a trip. In each case there are shops open, cafes and pubs offering refreshment and an opportunity to take some fresh air this Winter. The leaflet has been distributed around Hereford; you can pick one up at the information centre at the Town Hall.

Admittedly, it is hard to measure the impact of our efforts in terms of generating interest and demand for services. Our hope is that Herefordshire Council will be undertaking surveys of weekend bus users in the New Year. In the meantime, we are reliant on limited monitoring exercises. These show that services are picking up as people get the message. Passengers we have spoken to are very pleased with the opportunity

to travel about on Sundays. Several have commented that they would not have travelled to town otherwise. What is very clear is that young people are being enticed back on board. For example, on the first Saturday in December, the 1350 from Kington to Hereford carried 19 passengers of which only four were concessionary pass holders, the rest were 15 fare payers including teenagers.

The Herefordshire Council public transport team has reported that in September 2021 there were 21157 weekend journeys and in November, 22672 weekend trips, a 7% increase. Analysis of the Hay Ho! bus between Hereford and Hay-on-Wye, launched by us as a community trial in 2014, indicates that in comparison to September 2019 there has been a 6% increase, but the figures for November 2019 and 2021 show a staggering 126%. There may well be some abstraction of demand in the weekday, but this as yet to be proven. There are a number of factors affecting weekday travel such as online shopping, free parking campaigns, etcetera.

Rail & Bus for Herefordshire is keen to get behind this campaign; the bus is part of the solution to reducing the use of the car. There is, of course, concern as to the Omnicron virus. Hopefully, this will not impact heavily on society as we move into Spring and BUS-IT will continue to flourish. If any member is keen to help in spreading the word about BUS-IT please get in touch with Les Lumsdon: leslumsdon@hotmail.com



Bus Service Changes since Autumn

RBfH Secretary Andrew Pearson gives an update.

Yeomans Travel have withdrawn from a number of commercially operated Hereford City services from the end of December and been replaced by Sargeants. This represents the biggest shake up of Hereford city services since Midland Red operated them.

71/71A/71B/71S Hereford – Credenhill replaced by Sargeants hourly 71B Monday – Saturday which will divert via Moor Park Road to cover for the 72 and then return to Kings Acre Road. Green Lanes (for Crematorium and Westfaling St) will no longer be served. On Sundays the 3 journeys each way on 461 Kington – Hereford will divert to Credenhill village.

72 Hereford-Bobblestock cancelled and covered by 461 at Three Elms Road end and by existing Sargeants B service at Bobblestock. Yazor road no longer served.

74 Hereford – Newton Farm improved Sunday service from 2 January

74A Hereford – Hunderton – Newton Farm cancelled and replaced by Sargeants 75

75 Hereford – Redhill – Belmont – Hunderton – Hereford circular. New Monday – Friday hourly Sargeants service.

77A Hereford – Bobblestock cancelled and replaced by Sargeants B and 81B services.

78/78A/78X Hereford – Putson – Rotherwas. Monday – Friday journeys no longer serve Redhill. Saturday service withdrawn and replaced by new Sargeants 88/88B hourly Saturdays only Hereford – Putson – Redhill – Hereford circular.

79A Hereford – Putson – Redhill Yeomans service withdrawn

81B New Sargeants service Hereford – College Green – Venns Lane - Hereford Monday – Saturday hourly circular

88/88B Yeomans Monday – Friday no longer serves Redhill see Sergeants service 75. Saturdays new Sargeants hourly service 88/88B Hereford – Hinton –Putson – Pastures – Redhill – Hereford circular.

Resume of Hereford City Services

A Hereford- Tupsley-Hampton Park circular Sargeants Monday - Saturday

B Hereford-Holmer-Bobblestock circular Sargeants Monday-Saturday

71B Hereford – Credenhill Sargeants Monday – Saturday

74 Hereford – Newton Farm Yeomans Daily

75 Hereford–Redhill–Belmont–Hundertton–Hereford Sargeants Monday-Friday

76/76A Hereford- Bartonsham circular Lugg Valley Monday – Saturday

78/78X Hereford-Putson-Rotherwas Yeomans Monday-Friday

81B Hereford-College Green circular Sargeants Monday – Saturday

88/88A Hereford-Hinton-Putson circular Yeomans Monday-Friday

88/88B Hereford – Hinton-Putson-Redhill circular Sargeants Saturdays only

Other Herefordshire changes:

441 Longtown – Hereford Wednesdays extended back to start from Ewyas Harold

492 Hereford – Leominster 9.30 Leominster – Hereford, 17.45 Hereford – Leominster and 18.33 Leominster – Holmer; all these Monday - Friday journeys withdrawn.

Bus Service Improvement Plans - an update

The government initiative to improve bus services of the future was released in March of this year. Given the name Bus Back Better, it was backed by funds of £3bn. Local Transport Authorities throughout England were told that in order to bid for a slice of the fund they would need to enter into enhanced partnerships with bus operators and prepare a Bus Service Improvement Plan (BSIP).

The Midland Branch of the Omnibus Society has given us an update on BSIPs in the West Midlands as part of its December Newsletter. There is a telling statement in the article which reads: *LTAs had a very tight timescale to produce their BSIPs after the announcement in March of this year. By 30 June they must have decided which course they were following – Franchising or EP and by the 31 October, BSIPs needed to have been completed, received LTA approval, and be submitted to the DfT. A decision on the results of the bids is expected by the end of the year. **However, there are reports that the bids exceed the available funding by around £7bn and therefore it is likely we won't see a number of the ambitious plans put forward to encourage greater bus use.***

The Confederation of Passenger Transport trade group states BSIPs require well over £7bn to be delivered. They argue that there is a funding gap of over £5bn.

Without further funding from the Government the ambitions of most BSIPs will go unfulfilled, the CPT warn.

'The National Bus Strategy challenged local authorities and bus operators to set out jointly how they would transform bus services,' said CPT chief executive Graham Vidler.

'They have risen to this challenge and produced ambitious plans right across the country focusing on new fare and ticketing initiatives, investment in measures to make the bus more reliable, improved facilities for passengers and new zero emission buses.'

'The scale of this ambition will not be met though with the funds that were announced at the Spending Review. Current funding is likely to be able to transform bus services in only a small number of places, including our major cities, but the vision of the National Bus Strategy was rightly much greater.'

A quick look at the bids for funds from the LTAs in the West Midlands Region tells us that most have taken the government at its word and submitted ambitious BSIPs which could transform the bus service networks of the future. The bids are:

West Midlands Combined Authority (the conurbation)	£800m
Warwickshire	£115m
Staffordshire	£113m
Shropshire	£98m
Worcestershire	£86m
Telford & Wrekin	£40m
Herefordshire	£18m

(source: Google search)

The total for the West Midlands Region alone reaches £1.27 billion let alone the rest of England. There are nine regions for England. Set this against a total BSIP 'lottery fund' of £3bn and it is easy to see the Department for Transport and politicians have some very hard decisions to make on the fund allocation.

There is likely to be a great deal of disappointment, bus wise, in the next few years, but we wish Herefordshire every success in securing the total of its modest bid.

New Heritage Display Cabinet for Ledbury Station



A low key opening ceremony with project manager Gareth Davies and the three artists together with Nina Shields (in blue check coat) representing Sustainable Ledbury and the Ledbury Civic Trust (photo courtesy of Will Frecknall, RBfH chairman)

The Ledbury Station Project reached fruition at the end of October with the siting of the new Heritage Display Board. Funded by the West Midlands Railway Your Community Your Fund scheme with assistance from Ledbury Town Council and Ledbury Civic Trust the three bay panel gives information in calligraphic script on Ledbury's historic buildings, a map with original artwork of the buildings and giving their location and how to get to the town centre from the station. The third panel gives a history of the coming of the railway. The project was managed by Rail & Bus for Herefordshire with Gareth Davies as project manager. As part of the project, £1,000 was also given to the Sustainable Ledbury Group for their biodiversity work on the Town Trail, a traffic free route from the station to the town along the old Gloucester branch railway formation.

The artwork and cabinet are much admired by those using the station as well as those who have been to see it. Fay Easton, Head of Community & Stakeholder at West Midlands Railway commented:

"The Heritage Information Board for Ledbury is a triumph for the designers and organisers. The board itself is beautiful, way beyond the functional information boards at stations up and down the country, this is a work of art as are the contents. The quiet determination of the project leaders to 'get this done' has been impressive and from WMR perspective the community leads have been a joy to work with. Not only Lovely Ledbury brought to life on that stunning board, but Lucky Ledbury in its community champions."

From the Archives - The Leyland Lynx

The Leyland Lynx was a British Bus through and through. Designed as a replacement for the highly successful Leyland National whose production from 1972 to 1985 ran into thousands. In 1986 the new Leyland Lynx was launched. The Lynx differed from the National in many ways though key components such as the choice of engine from Leyland or Gardner and the semi-auto gearbox were carried over. The main differences were the extensive use of aluminium in body construction and bonded glazing whereas the National was an all steel design using traditional gasket rubbers for the windows. The usage of alloy gave a considerable improvement in unladen weight, the obvious payoff being good fuel consumption and better performance.

By 1988 the company was in the hands of Volvo and the Cummins L10 engine with ZF transmission became available as the horizontal power unit from Leyland was deleted. These new power units gave incredible acceleration described by some drivers as 'alarming'. I know, I tried it on the straight at Canon Frome! The Lynx was a popular vehicle amongst drivers, especially if you had to make up time!

Most Lynx's went to the large operators such as the PTE's but deregulation of bus services was imminent and with it a huge change in the structure of the industry and the way bus services were planned and operated. Disabled access legislation, requiring level low floor entrances finished the Lynx off. The Lynx thus had a short life, the last model coming off the production line at Workington in 1992. Nevertheless the Lynx continued to operate in large numbers, especially in the conurbations and it was not until the turn of the millennium that they were replaced in large numbers by low floor Volvo and Scania vehicles.

Lynx buses came into the second hand market at a low price and some even found their way to Herefordshire. Bus dealer and breaker Martin Perry obtained a small number, mostly from the ex PTE company West Midlands Travel plus a couple from First, previously Badgerline Bristol and before that Midland Red West. Others went to the fruit growers for transporting their pickers between the extensive fruit farm sites of Herefordshire.



A Lynk selection: top left: ex West Midlands Lynx at DRMBus, Bromyard: top middle: ex Badgerline Lynx at DMRBus: top right: about to be relaced by the new Scania order at DRMBus: bottom left and centre: Noby and Fred as pickers buses parked in Hereford bus station: bottom right: front ends at DRMBus

From the Archives: Where Vanfits come to Rest

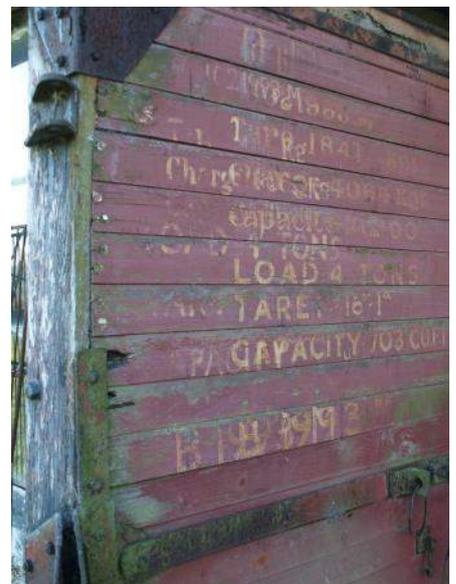
The vanfit was one of the best known of all British Railways wagons. A short wheelbase general utility covered wagon it was used for a miscellany of traffic from Cornish flowers and veg to South Wales cement. I remember in my BR days dealing with trainloads of them from the Aberthaw cement works loaded with bagged cement. The name vanfit came about because they were fitted with the vacuum brake, thus allowing faster speeds as the train would be continuously braked. Shocvan versions of them worked from Worcester dealing with the porcelain traffic and cases of Lea & Perrins Worcester Sauce. They had a separate shock absorbing body mounted on the chassis. Some had demountable container bodies.



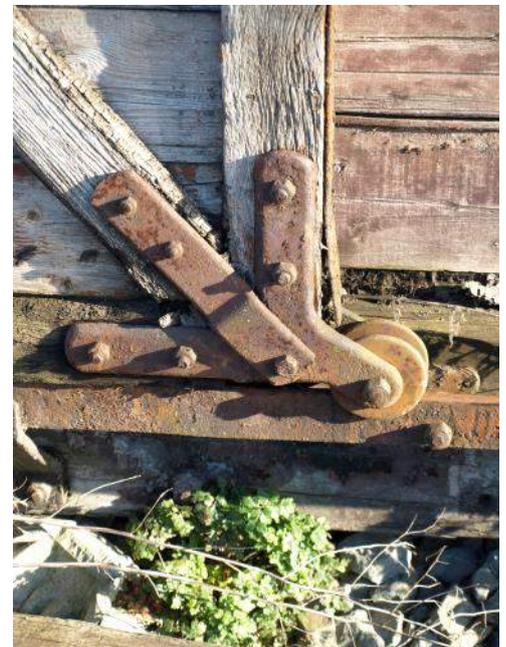
Train of vanfits at Aberthaw cement works on the Vale of Glamorgan line during the early 1970s. (photo GHAL Productions).

During the 1970/80s wagon load traffic on BR was being phased out in favour of what is called the block train, i.e. trains of generally one commodity in high capacity bogie wagons. Thousands of vanfits were made redundant. Many went to the scrap yard but a surprising number of the bodies found themselves in retirement in the countryside. Sold for next to nothing the bodies made good covered storage space, especially for farmers.

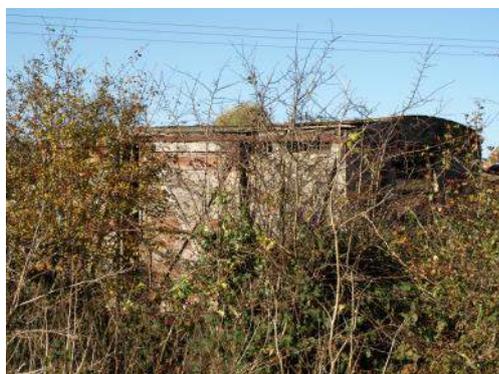
Quite a few found their way to Herefordshire.



Spotted in a field near Bishops Frome this demountable vanfit body had acquired a window, a door and a corrugated tin roof. The iron loops indicate it was demountable, these being for lifting it. The original BR lettering indicating the load weight, the cubic capacity, the tare weight and BR number could still be found on the sheltered side



This farmer at Bishops Frome would appear to have acquired a trainload of vanfit bodies. These had sliding doors, the roller mechanism of which is shown on the right. They have since been broken up but many are just left to blend into the countryside (below).



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