



Rugby Rail Users Group

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KEEPING MEMBERS IN TOUCH

RRUG MEMBERS' MEETING* **RUGBY TOWN HALL, THURSDAY 8TH NOVEMBER, 7.30PM** **LONDON MIDLAND - THE START OF A NEW ERA**

On Thursday 21 June the DfT announced that Govia had won the West Midlands franchise. Now, after months of preparation, the reality is almost upon us with Govia taking over the services currently run by Silverlink and most of Central Trains on 11 November. The franchise can run until 19 September 2015 and will operate under the name of "London Midland". But, what will the new franchise bring in terms of benefits and improvements for Rugby rail users?

On Thursday 8 November you have the opportunity to learn more when Govia's Communications Director, Samantha Hodder and Strategic Planning Manager, Howard Read roll into town as the guest speakers at RRUG's third and final Members' meeting of 2007. Samantha and Howard, veterans of a number of presentations at various venues around the Country, will provide an overview of London Midland and cover issues relevant to Rugby. There will be ample opportunity for questions.

RRUG Chairperson Stephanie Clifford said, "In addition to the station and track remodelling work this is another major change affecting Rugby. However, unlike the works where the full implications will not be apparent until the end of 2008, users will have a more or less instant opportunity to check out London Midland and judge performance against expectations."

The meeting starts at 7.30pm prompt in the Seminar Room at Rugby Town Hall.

* Entry is free to Members. Non-members can join at the door for £5.

Date for the Diary: Thursday 13 March 2008 - Seminar Room, Rugby Town Hall, 7:30pm to 9:00pm, Members' Meeting with Annual General Meeting - speaker to be announced.

2009 TIMETABLE CONSULTATION

On 20 and 21 September the Department for Transport (DfT) launched the "December 2008", or 2009, timetable consultation exercise with presentations in Birmingham and Manchester. Members of the RRUG Committee attended the Birmingham event. RRUG has submitted a response which can be seen on the website. But, it's not too late to send in your views. Details of the consultation are on DfT's website and the last date for submissions is 1700 on Friday 16 November. More on RRUG's 2009 timetable campaign is presented overleaf.



2009 TIMETABLE – THE CAMPAIGN GOES ON

RRUG's campaign to pro-actively raise awareness about the implications of the draft December 2008 timetable for Rugby rail users continues. RRUG is pleased that other rail groups are making their voices heard, including the recently formed Nuneaton and Bedworth Rail Users Group. While issues differ, the implications of the draft timetable as it currently stands means there are serious potential knock-on effects for Rugby.

The major plank of the DfT's strategy in developing the draft timetable is to target Virgin Trains to serving 'end to end' flows with limited stops, for example, London to Manchester. This is a deliberate policy that WILL be implemented, according to DfT officials, to match available capacity to expected demand. The strategy also relies for support on a set of good underlying regional services to make more connections possible. In Rugby's case the regional services will be provided by London Midland.

Briefly, this means for Rugby that focus is on the London to Birmingham corridor where the current main passenger flows take place. However, for fast, direct services to the north and Scotland, Virgin trains will flash through the new station layout in a 125mph blur.

A reminder of the main issues:

Positives:

1. The increased service frequencies to Northampton (London Midland) and Birmingham (London Midland/Virgin Trains - both routes three trains per hour;
2. More connections opened up by the new London Midland stopping service to Crewe at Nuneaton (Nottingham), Tamworth (the Northeast) and Stoke (Manchester); and
3. The restoration of hourly through trains to Milton Keynes and Watford.

Negatives:

4. **Capacity and overcrowding** - there is growing concern about overcrowding on trains between Rugby and London, particularly in the morning peak, but also at other times. The DfT's proposals show no change in the number of trains on this service, which is a poor return for Rugby from the £8bn investment in the West Coast modernisation programme. In the crucial hour between 7am and 8am, the number of departures from Rugby to London has reduced from five in 2004, to four now and only three in the draft 2009 timetable. Some trains from Rugby to London are already full now upon arrival at Rugby in the morning (especially the 0715 departure). This situation will be further exacerbated by:
 - The increase in commuting generally;
 - The increase in population of Rugby, with up to 23,000 new homes planned;
 - Passengers changing at Rugby to/from the London Midland train serving Nuneaton, Tamworth and Lichfield because this runs slow from Rugby to London; and
 - Construction of a multi-storey car park at Rugby station.
5. **Journey times** - there is disappointment that the new service to Milton Keynes and Watford has not been specified to run on the fast tracks (via Weedon), as this would reduce journey times by about twenty-five minutes. This would also have made it a viable through service to London both from Rugby and the Trent Valley stations. As it stands, off-peak passengers from, for example, Lichfield to London may find it beneficial to change from London Midland to Virgin at Rugby introducing another potential capacity issue.



Negatives (continued):

6. **Virgin services to the north** - RRUG is appalled by the plans to remove all fast trains to Crewe and the Northwest (currently an hourly service). The alternative put forward by DfT of using the new London Midland service to Crewe (see 2) is no longer a viable option since the decision was made to route via Stoke, with four additional stops. This is a well-established route from Rugby; figures obtained by RRUG under Freedom of Information show that in excess of 100,000 journeys to/from Rugby via Crewe are made per year. RRUG is still pressing hard for some of these services to be retained. If not, is there a gap in the market for an Open Access operator?

Influencing the Outcome:

In addition to responding to the DfT's 2009 timetable consultation, RRUG continues to lobby hard for support from all available sources which in addition to media coverage has resulted in the following actions:

- **Rugby Borough Council** – unanimous support from the elected members to a motion about rail services promoted by Cllr Neil Campbell and Cllr Neil Sandison which has empowered officers to make representations to Transport Secretary, Ruth Kelly;
- **Warwickshire County Council** - emergency Cabinet report resulting in a letter to Ruth Kelly expressing concerns about rail services at Nuneaton and Rugby;
- **Jeremy Wright MP and RRUG Chairperson Stephanie Clifford** to meet with Transport Minister, Tom Harris on 15 November at the DfT (**see postcard campaign below**); and
- **Mark Pawsey** (Conservative Parliamentary Spokesman for the Rugby constituency) **and Stephanie Clifford** met with Stephen Hammond MP, Conservative front bench spokesman on rail issues at Rugby station on 26 September.

POSTCARD CAMPAIGN

For the price of a postage stamp you can tell Tom Harris what you think about the 2009 timetable before his meeting with RRUG on 15 November by sending him a postcard with the information shown in the example panel below (the address is on the reverse side).



DEPARTMENT FOR TRANSPORT 2009 TIMETABLE CONSULTATION

"I support the demands of the Rugby Rail Users Group for better peak services from Rugby to London and a retained fast service on the line from Rugby to Crewe and Preston"

Name:

Address:.....

.....



RRUG'S VISIT TO THE RUGBY SCC and ECR, 29TH SEPTEMBER 2007

Passengers travelling from Rugby towards Birmingham and Crewe (while they still can!) may not have noticed a large anonymous windowless building to the north side of the railway lines. Labelled "Rugby SCC" it can easily be taken for a warehouse or factory. In fact this is the nerve centre for the southern part of the West Coast Main Line, and over the past few years many of the old signal boxes have been closed and the control moved to the Rugby "Signal Control Centre".

On the Saturday morning of the visit, a party of 12 RRUG members (and two children!) assembled at the station for a tour of the SCC, led by Mark Abbott from Network Rail. We were impressed by the "mission control" style of the building, although apparently our visit was on a good quiet day, when nothing big went wrong. One wall of the long control room was covered with a map of the tracks, with coloured lights showing the trains, points and signals. Other screens allowed us to see a train from Rugby being held just outside Coventry station, but we could see the reason as another train was being given priority. That was probably my connection down to Oxford & Reading!

Rugby SCC controls the track all the way from Wembley in the south to the borders of Crewe in the North, but for the moment there are two "islands" still controlled by the old signal boxes. One is the Bletchley area, and one is Rugby station itself, which is controlled from the concrete box on Abbey Street. Maybe that would make an instructive comparison visit?

After the SCC, we moved on to a facility I'd never thought about, the Rugby Electrical Control Room (ECR). This controls the power to trains from overhead wires and third rails, and we were given a "live" demo of switching off one feed to one end of a section near Hemel Hempstead. If the feed to the other end was also to be switched off, this would isolate the section and allow maintenance work to be done in that area. The voltage meters fluttered around 25 thousand volts, and we learnt a lot about regenerative braking, current losses during wet weather and the voltage drop when several Pendolinos accelerate together. Physics on a grand scale.

All in all, it was a very interesting morning - many thanks to Mark Abbott for arranging this.

Stephanie Clifford

Stamp

**Tom Harris MP
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