

West Midlands

By Peter Cousins

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■ ■ West Midlands franchise

The branch has welcomed the announcement that the new West Midlands franchise will be awarded to Govia. The company's commitment to replace both the older class 321 EMUs and virtually the whole of the diesel multiple unit fleet with new class 172s from Bombardier came as a very welcome surprise. We note that several other regions are likely to benefit from the resulting rolling stock cascade.

Govia has also said that the new company, trading as London Midland, will be based in Birmingham and will continue to work closely with the West Midlands PTE (Centro).

■ ■ North Staffordshire

It is still unclear how the North Staffordshire stations of Stone, Barlaston and Wedgwood will be served in the new London Midland franchise. The initial plan, which suggests diverting the new Trent Valley semi-fast service to run via Stone and Stoke rather than direct to Crewe (as at present), has not been welcomed by local residents – who would prefer a direct service to Birmingham.

Local user groups have suggested that one of the two Birmingham-Liverpool services should instead be diverted to run via Stone and terminate at Crewe, with a separate unit picking up the diagram north of Crewe.

■ ■ CrossCountry franchise

We welcome the award of the new CrossCountry franchise to Arriva and note in particular the new company's intention to lease five InterCity 125 sets to add capacity on the busy North East to South West route. However it remains to be seen whether simply adding a few seats to the existing four-car Voyager units will provide sufficient capacity on peak hour trains between Reading and Manchester.

Despite our earlier objections, the new CrossCountry franchise will take over all local services from Birmingham to Derby and Leicester. Passenger growth at both Nuneaton (5.1%) and Tamworth (6.7%) has been higher than the regional average over the past three years with several trains regularly overcrowded. There is also no provision for a direct service from Birmingham to the new East Midlands Parkway station at Ratcliffe-on-Soar. We believe that, despite the constraints of New Street station, an enhanced local service of three trains per hour is needed on both of these routes.

■ ■ Coleshill station

The new station at Coleshill, on the line between Birmingham and Nuneaton, opened in August after a delay while the access road was re-laid. The station, which will have a 200-space car park, is one-mile north of Coleshill Town on the site of the Midland Railway's former Forge Mills station. Most services from Birmingham to Leicester and Stansted Airport will call at the new station which will also have an express bus link to Birmingham Airport.

From November 2007 the new station, along with nearby stations at Water Orton, and Wilnecote will be managed by the new London Midland franchise – although all services on these former Midland lines to Derby and Leicester will be run by the new CrossCountry franchise. See also page 18.

■ ■ Bromsgrove

Following a strong local campaign, Network Rail has agreed that there is a good business case for building a completely new station at Bromsgrove. We understand that serious consideration is also being given to extending the Cross-City local electric services to this station.



The green pound



Councillor Bryan Lodge, poet Ian McMillan, Roy Wicks and Councillor Mick Jameson and leaflet distributors

Britain's first green money was launched in September to reward people for going by train and public transport.

For two weeks in September, anyone who made a journey using sustainable travel in South Yorkshire was rewarded with Carbon Quids.

The Quids could then be exchanged for a wide range of prizes including gym membership, free travel, trees and a bike. The more people changed their behaviour

the more 'Carbon Quids' they earned. The prizes were redeemed at Carbon Cash In points in Sheffield, Rotherham, Doncaster and Barnsley when people provided their personal travel diaries.

"Local businesses have got on board to support us by donating a range of prizes," said Roy Wicks, director general at South Yorkshire passenger transport executive. "By catching the bus to work once a week, or walking to the shop, everyone can do their bit for the environment."

Railway land at risk again

A new directive from Rail Minister Tom Harris in August about disposal of "unwanted" railway land has alarmed campaigners. There is now a wishy-washy requirement for consultation but then the onus is put on the "body" that wants to see the land used for rail to put up cash to prevent other developments taking place.

In several cases in the recent past rail has been sacrificed so money can be made from a land sale. Access to disused station sites is a classic case. Bedford Borough Council recently gave planning consent for land at Sharnbrook station – on the Midland main line – such that a reopening there would now be difficult if not impossible. Similarly there is a planning application appeal at Turvey, which would sever the trackbed of the former Bedford-Northampton line which should have been reopened in line with the recommendation of a multi-modal study. In France, the route of a closed railway is given automatic protection for 50 years.