

## West Midlands

By Peter Cousins

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### ■ ■ Chase line service cuts

Four years ago the Department for Transport indicated that a half-hourly service on the Chase line would be a "priced option" in the new West Midlands Rail franchise. The formal "invitation to tender" for the new franchise was published in 2006 and confirmed that all Chase line services would be terminated at Rugeley Trent Valley but, in partial compensation for the loss of the through service to Stafford, an option for a new half-hourly service to Rugeley was included.

Since the line was reopened to a new station at Rugeley in 1997, Cannock Chase District Council has paid the marginal cost of the service north of Hednesford on weekdays and the full cost of this extension on Sundays. Staffordshire County Council was also contributing to the cost of the extension to Stafford. As part of the new franchise arrangements, the DfT confirmed that neither Cannock Chase nor Staffordshire Council would be required to fund the basic hourly service to Rugeley after November 2007.

Agreement was reached in mid 2008 for a new half-hourly off-peak and a new hourly evening service to Rugeley Trent Valley to run with funding from Centro, the district and county councils from the December timetable change. However a substantial part of this funding package was "transitional funding" from the DfT and, although this was extended for a second year, continued support has now been refused.

Urgent discussions in July 2010 have resulted in a compromise whereby the three local authorities will continue to fund the hourly evening service to Rugeley Trent Valley and the half-hourly trains on Saturdays – but NOT on weekdays. Two of the latter trains were already truncated at Hednesford to provide a daytime path for freight services.

It remains to be seen how this revised service pattern will fit in with school hours at Cannock and whether useful connections can be retained at Rugeley Trent Valley with local services for Stafford and London.

It would also be interesting to know how many other local authorities are currently funding rail services in England.

### ■ ■ More trains now serve local CrossCountry stations

The branch has welcomed the addition of extra stops at Wilnecote and Willington by CrossCountry Trains in the May timetable. The new station at Willington was opened in 1995 as part of the Ivanhoe line project and both stations have seen a significant rise in passenger numbers in recent years.

### ■ ■ Rail users raise cash for Stratford reopening study

The Shakespeare Line Promotion Group is raising funds to commission an independent report into the benefits to the region of reopening the rail link between Stratford-upon-Avon and Long Marston. The report is intended to strengthen the case for including this line in the draft Warwickshire local transport plan.

### ■ ■ £800,000 boost for facilities at country park station

Centro and Solihull Council have invested £450,000 to extend the car park at Marston Green station which serves the 300-acre Sheldon Country Park and is also popular with park-and-ride commuters. Now the car park is open, another £370,000 is to be spent on new bus shelters and bays in front of the station, a passenger drop-off parking bay, a pedestrian crossing, upgraded CCTV and new electronic information screens for trains and buses.



# Railwatch book offer

## *Transport for Suburbia. Beyond the Automobile Age*

In this important book, Paul Mees discusses ways in which we need to plan for the end of the automobile age.

The way we use cars is unsustainable and he shows the public transport "problem is easier to solve than most people think.

"We don't have to demolish our suburbs and rebuild them at many times their present densities; nor do we need a fundamental transformation in human consciousness however desirable that might be for other reasons.

"The high-quality public transport found in places like Switzerland has been adapted to serve the existing environment and a population that shares our faults and feelings."

He dispels myths about the automobile age, such as how the Los Angeles light rail system met its demise ... a lesson for us now.

Even more important he shows how planners and politicians have used "the density of population rule" of public transport planning to do ... well nothing, except to build roads. He demonstrates that they have been plain wrong, sometimes wilfully, dishonestly wrong.

Paul Mees is senior lecturer in transport planning at the Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology, Melbourne, Victoria. His case studies include Toronto, Ottawa, Vancouver, Los Angeles, Melbourne, Perth, Brisbane, the UK and of course Zurich.

Some have high public transport usage, others dismal. He explores the role of individual planners, politicians, electorates, lobby groups and looks at franchising, de-regulation, regulation, public ownership, central planning, laissez-faire. See if you can guess the combination that leads to success or otherwise.

Heavy rail is important as a high quality, much sought-after option by the public, but he also reviews buses, busways, guided busways, light rail, trams, laissez-faire options such the jitney system in the US, Australia and the Phillipines. All have their advocates but Mr Mees plumps for good old-fashioned buses, trains and trams plus regula-

tion, an intermodal fare system, cross subsidy and the network. No mode will work on its own beyond the automobile age unless it is fully integrated into a continuously evolving network that has an easily understood fare system and simple interchanges.

He emphasises that a sustainable public transport option to replace the car must be a network. It is not possible to have through services to and from everywhere. He disproves the conventional planning tenet that users will not interchange. They will if the interchange is physically easy, connections tight and reliable and there is an intermodal fare system in place.

Diversions into exciting sounding technologies are just that.

There is no substitute for a controlled, tightly planned and evolutionary network, using reliable, well-understood equipment.

Central to the public transport network is full integration with walking and cycling. He explodes some of the myths regarding cycling which have a certain resonance with the bike schemes being propounded in the UK today.

He links some the cycling schemes with "the diversions" mentioned above. As you might expect, the UK has some of the worst practice in providing for biking and walking.

He does though have warm words about how Transport for London is evolving, and highlighting the dismal showing of public transport usage in the rest of the UK.

Maybe you will agree with me when you have read this fascinating, well-written, well-researched book, easily understood by the layman, such as me, that the TfL model is one we should be campaigning for in each region of the UK, whether urban or rural, with the rail network central to the greater network.

Most of the doggedly held "problem mindsets" in providing for the post-automobile age, are sadly to found in the English-speaking world.

Peter Wakefield

Earthscan, the publishers of *Transport for Suburbia. Beyond the Automobile Age* have agreed a 20% price cut for *Railwatch* readers. In fact you can get a 20% discount when ordering any Earthscan book at [www.earthscan.co.uk](http://www.earthscan.co.uk) and using the voucher code RAILWATCH. *Transport for Suburbia* is £39.99 full price but costs £32 for *Railwatch* readers, plus £3.50 post and packing. Airmail to Europe is £5 + £2 per additional book, airmail to the rest of the world is £7.50 + £2 per additional book. *Transport for Suburbia. Beyond the Automobile Age* by Paul Mees. 225 pages. ISBN: 978-1-84407-740-3. Earthscan, 14a St Cross Street, London EC1N 8XA