

West Midlands

By Peter Cousins

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■ ■ Station for Kenilworth

The branch has welcomed the award of a contract to John Laing plc for the design and construction of a new station at Kenilworth which was closed in 1964. Restoring a local passenger service to the Leamington-Coventry line is pencilled in as Phase II of the Centro-supported NUCKLE project which will start north of Coventry with an upgrade of the Coventry-Nuneaton line and a planned new station at the Ricoh Arena near Foleshill.

■ ■ Tamworth line study

A Halcrow report on the feasibility of providing a new local service to reopened stations at Bromford Bridge, Castle Bromwich and Kingsbury on the former Midland line to Tamworth and Derby was received in November by Centro's transport strategy committee. The report considered a number of service options, including a new service on the Sutton Park line, on the basic assumption that all of these could run into reopened platforms at Moor Street station if the two proposed Camp Hill chords at Bordesley were constructed. The consultants said a two-trains-per-hour Tamworth to Moor Street local service, via the Whitacre Loop and Coleshill, was feasible and would be good value for money but only if the capital cost of the Camp Hill chords was funded by another project. Many passengers suggested the notional benefit of releasing capacity at New Street station by diverting both current Leicester-Birmingham services into Moor Street station would be sufficient to cover the £100 million cost of new chords. Even if this calculation stands up to detailed analysis, our colleagues in the East Midlands would oppose such a diversion because many passengers value the connectivity provided at New Street.

■ ■ Chiltern Railways Evergreen III project

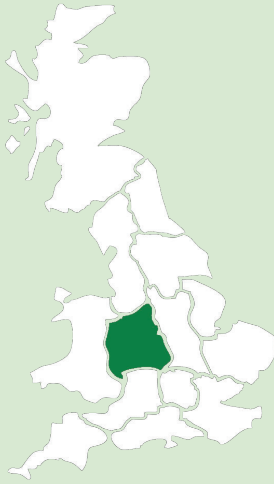
The branch has welcomed confirmation that Chiltern Railways Evergreen III project will see the reinstatement of two of the currently disused terminal platforms at Moor Street station. The planned reduction in journey times to London Marylebone which the company promises when the upgrade is complete will bring a significant benefit to passengers at Birmingham, Warwick Parkway and Leamington Spa.

■ ■ Stourbridge update

The two class 139 Parry People Movers have now been operating on the steeply graded Stourbridge Town branch for just over 10 months, with only a short break for unexpected wheel profiling. Although the branch is only 3/4 mile, the faster acceleration of these lightweight vehicles has allowed a more frequent, 10-minute-interval, service to operate compared to the 15-minute service that was provided by a conventional single car class 153 diesel. It gives Stourbridge residents their best service ever.

■ ■ Consultations

The branch has responded to the draft East Midlands rail utilisation strategy, stressing the need for a three trains per hour service between Birmingham and Leicester and pointing out the lack of a direct service from the West Midlands to the new station near East Midlands Airport. Our response to the draft Great Western RUS commented on the need for a comprehensive analysis of the main CrossCountry network, rather than the piecemeal approach of addressing segments of long-distance services in each RUS. Members of the branch have also been working on a detailed response to the West Midlands Integrated Transport Authority's new local transport plan which will set out its broad policies on all transport modes for the next five to ten years.



No more white elephants

The concrete busway from Cambridge to St Ives has been described as a white elephant.

So the jokers had a field day when the man who has become the public face of the busway, Bob Menzies of Cambridge County Council, was reported to be a delegate at a Australian conference which had an elephant logo.

The Hilton Hotel in Sydney might seem a long way from the Cambridgeshire fens but one of the topics up for discussion was said to include comparison of the performance characteristics of busways and railways.

Many Railfuture campaigners would have happily volunteered to explain the advantages of rail over guided buses – and could have saved people the trouble of journeying to the far side.

For one thing, rubber wheels have seven times more rolling resistance than steel wheels on steel rails and therefore a vehicle on rails will always use less energy than a vehicle on tarmac.

We could also point out the highly successful reopening of the Ebbw Vale line for £30 million which transformed travel opportunities and was far more successful than even its most enthusiastic backers had dreamed of hoping.

The guided busway will probably cost at least four times more and might eventual operate – but it will only be successful when compared to an ordinary bus from St Neots to Cambridge. Sadly common sense took a backseat when it was decided to rip up the Cambridge-St Ives railway and replace it with a guided busway. But the same atti-

tudes are still prevalent in Luton where there are plans for another railway to be wrecked to make way for a busway.

Perhaps, the Government could use the sensible excuse that because of the economic climate, money is in too short supply to spend on a busway for Luton-Dunstable.

Even after the years of neglect the line has suffered, it would be far better as a rail-based system with options to go to be extended to Leight Buzzard and Welwyn Garden City.

Railfuture has written to Lord Adonis asking him to cancel the Luton-Dunstable busway and consider the line for tram-trains.

In February it was reported that some English transport projects could be at risk because of budget cuts. Let's hope the Luton-Dunstable busway is at the top of the list.

One sceptical rail campaigner said: "The busway fans are looking for cities where local representatives are still too gullible, needy and poorly informed to make their mark. These have to be cities without a transport authority, hence all the misery in Exeter, Bristol and Cambridge.

"The Busco pitch to government was that busways are quicker and cheaper. 'Shorter lead times than rail investment' was undoubtedly in the PowerPoint presentation. Now we know that busways are slower and more expensive.

Another said: "It is pretty obvious to everyone that busways are not cheaper. Vehicle costs may initially be lower, for example, but buses require replacement before rail,

Guided busway is a

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and Ride? Will the details ever be published?

Have the busway land acquisitions been correctly transferred or were they discounted against the infrastructure work, network shutdown and possession costs at Cambridge station?

A council transport scrutiny committee report dated 8 March 2008 stated: "There was a considerable degree of uncertainty earlier in the project about the price of Network Rail land.

"Potential impact of this risk reduced until agreement was reached at a price less than the budget. The risk was not only eliminated but turned to a benefit." Did the Transport Secretary, the

DfT, the Rail Regulator, Network Rail and the county council act in a transparent manner and in the best interests of the taxpayers and transport users?

Most of what the public was told has been dubious to say the least.

They were promised a "step change" in public transport to commence in 2006, that it would be financially viable by 2007.

They were also told the Government would only fund a busway, and not a rail reopening.

The service was to run from Hinchbrook to Addenbrookes on "day one of operation"

No contribution would be required from Cambridgeshire taxpayers.

The cost of reopening the railway