

## CHAIRMAN'S REPORT TO ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING, SEPTEMBER 2015

### **General**

This has been a mixed year for transport in the East Midlands. After everything was on hold for the General Election, plans for longer-term changes are still no further forward, with Midland Main Line electrification “paused” and no announcement about the route of HS2 phase 2. However, the Nottingham tram extensions have opened and the improved Nottingham – Newark – Lincoln train service has started.

Proposals for devolution of powers (including transport) to combined local authorities are flying about, though no-one seems sure what they will involve and which areas will be first. In the meantime, existing authorities are increasingly starved of funding.

### **Internal**

Our first Chairman, Alan Meredith, has continued to help out, but has said that he wishes to resign from the Steering Group at the AGM. As Vice-Chair of the old Midlands RPC, he was instrumental in starting TWEM. Without his enthusiasm and contacts, this organisation would not exist. We thank him for his efforts and wish him well in the future.

We have lost another founder member, Jean Needham, who is no longer able to attend meetings. We have however gained Chris Brown, from Railfuture Lincolnshire, who also has a keen interest in buses. Keith McNally, who represented the Confederation of Passenger Transport (CPT) is now national Operations Manager for CPT, based in London. We hope to welcome to the Steering Group his successor as Regional Manager.

As ever, my thanks go to all Steering Group members, old and new, for their efforts on our behalf.

We have held four Steering Group meetings during the year and I would like to thank Nottingham City Council, East Midlands Trains (EMT), Kettering Borough Council and East Midlands Airport for hosting them.

Our meeting at EMT was attended by Neil Micklethwaite, Customer Service and Commercial Director, and Steve Leyland, Route Manager (South), who answered our questions about the day to day running of their railway in an open and honest fashion.

As we have come to expect, Colleen Hempson from EM Airport gave us an update on activities there during the meeting that she hosted, covering both surface access and changes to the airport fabric and destinations served.

We have not held a public meeting this year.

However, we do get out and about. Apart from meetings referred to under "Rail", I should mention that our secretary, Steve Abbott, addressed Railfuture Lincolnshire's AGM; I attended a Midlands Economic Forum event on Connectivity and that many members attended a Railfuture national conference in Newark.

We continue to be represented on a number of groups not directly involved with providing public transport. These include the EM Rail Forum; Leicestershire and Northamptonshire Rail Action Committee (LANRAC); EM Airport Surface Access Forum; Greater Nottingham Light Rapid Transit Advisory Committee; Notts' Bus Forum; EM Transport Activists Round Table and One East Midlands.

There have been two formal meetings of the TravelWatch Chairs' National Liaison Group. David Harby attended the first and myself the second. Both were held in the offices of Passenger Focus in London and included an update as to their activities and their views on recent events. Passenger Focus are now known as Transport Focus as they have added responsibilities for the interests of users of trunk roads and motorways.

I would like to thank EMT for their help with travel to these meetings and to other events held near stations on their network.

We continue to deal with a steady flow of enquiries from individuals, mainly via our website, and from the media when transport is in the news. TWEM officers can often be heard on local radio.

## **Rail**

Many members of the Steering Group attended a "rail summit" for local council leaders in Loughborough in October 2014. Although "trailed" as being about HS2, the majority of the event discussed problems and aspirations regarding the existing railway, especially improvements to the Midland Main Line (MML)

While these improvements have started, all are currently "paused" to allow DfT to decide if Network Rail has the resources (financial, materiel and human) to work on the MML at the same time as on the GW line from London to South Wales and Bristol. Debate over where the priority should lie is not confined to TWEM – local MPs have been loud in their criticism of the situation.

EMT's franchise has been extended to October 2015. We responded to a DfT consultation and visited them to discuss aspirations for improvements as part of a further "direct award" to March 2018, after which there will be a new franchise competition. There was also a lot of discussion around this award at EMT's stakeholder conference last November, which we attended.

One piece of good news is the improved service between Nottingham, Newark and Lincoln, introduced in May. This is part funded by local LEAs and follows lengthy campaigning by the Nottingham-Lincoln Stakeholder Board, in which we participate. There are now two trains an hour between Nottingham and Newark for most of the day, one fast and one stopping. The fast train continues to Lincoln, with additional stops at Hykeham now possible within a reduced overall journey time. Improvements to Newark Castle station are planned.

Stagecoach took over responsibility for the East Coast franchise in April, though Virgin have 10% of the joint venture and trains have been rebranded as “Virgin”. There is little other visible change yet.

In the south of our region, Northampton has a rebuilt station, which many do not regard as an improvement. That area has been involved with the detail of HS2 phase 1, which is currently being discussed in Parliament. Announcements regarding phase 2 have dried up.

Re-franchising the Northern and Trans-Pennine areas is ongoing. We responded to the DfT consultation and were pleased to see that proposals to split Liverpool – Norwich services at Nottingham and from Manchester to Cleethorpes at Doncaster have been abandoned.

Network Rail are proposing improvements to the Hope Valley line in North Derbyshire to allow improvements to both passenger and freight services. We have responded to consultations on this.

We also attended a meeting and responded to the Network Rail consultation concerning the East Midlands Route Study, which looks ahead to the interventions likely to be needed to cope with demand over the next 10 years, and - more speculatively - in 30 years' time.

## **Buses (and Trams)**

As mentioned above, the new government plans a “Buses Bill” to allow more local control, but details are still awaited. In the meantime, most changes to bus services are local and are dealt with by our constituent groups, though important developments are discussed by the Steering Group.

Pedestrianisation of Loughborough Town Centre has moved bus stops and made access by bus more difficult, with a reduction in the numbers of people using buses to the town centre.

There continue to be cuts to services in parts of the region, though Derbyshire is retaining existing subsidised services while carrying out a major review.

The extensions to Nottingham's trams were due to open before Christmas 2014, but have only just done so. Major disruption to roads and existing bus services is tolerable if work is completed to schedule, but significant over-running disappoints even staunch supporters. We hope that the extensions are successful.

One problem with bus travel is that high-quality services may be let down by poor quality bus stations, or vice versa. So we are currently surveying the presence and quality of bus stations in the region.

Jim Froggatt

15.09.15