



CHAIRMAN'S REPORT TO ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING, SEPTEMBER 2017

General

This year has been one of waiting for promised events, notably the consultation on re-franchising East Midlands Trains, which was postponed several times.

So was clarification on how the government's proposals for air quality would affect buses and taxis in cities in our region. This could require an almost complete replacement of fleets, which, if not financed properly, could result in mass withdrawals of services, far more cars on the road and a worsening of air quality!

The announcement came with the news, shocking but not unexpected, that Midland Main Line (MML) electrification had been cancelled north of Kettering. Particularly shocking was the "spin" whereby the Secretary of State claimed that bi-mode trains rendered electrification unnecessary, despite their use elsewhere only to extend otherwise electrified services on to branch lines. In the same week came the announcement of long-term plans to reduce the use of petrol and diesel cars. Member groups joined in the chorus of protests.

We know that work is taking place behind the scenes on "Midlands Connect", but none of the plans are yet out to public consultation.

Internal

During the year, we lost the services of Stephen Abbott, who had been secretary since the formation of the East Midlands Passenger Transport Users Forum in 2005. This was due to his moving away from the region, to Renfrewshire! We miss him. He was replaced as secretary by Chris Brown, and as a member of the Steering Group, by Steve Jones, of the Harborough Rail Users Group.

As ever, my thanks go to all Steering Group members for their efforts on our behalf. In particular, this year, to Chris Brown and Steve Jones for filling the vacancies.

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.

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.

There continues to be slow growth in passenger numbers, both on aircraft and buses, but faster growth in parcels traffic. A major extension to the buildings of the dominant operator, DHL, was almost complete at the time of our meeting in June.

We talked about holding a public meeting about refranchising, but this may not be necessary given the consultation meetings organised by DfT and East Midlands Councils.

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

There has only been one formal meeting of the TravelWatch Chairs' National Liaison Group, and this was as far back as last October. This was in the offices of Transport Focus in London and included an update as to their activities and their views on recent events. The most active TW groups are North-West, with whom we are in regular contact, and South-West, who have a comprehensive website.

I would like to thank EMT for their help with travel to this meeting 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. On a national level, Steve Abbott contributed a lengthy article on East Midlands' aspirations to the January issue of "Modern Railways".

Rail

The main event of the year was expected to be consultation on the refranchising of East Midlands Trains, which was originally scheduled for winter 2016 – 17. It finally began in July, and is ongoing.

As mentioned at the start of this report, with the franchise announcement came with the news, shocking but not unexpected, that Midland Main Line (MML) electrification had been cancelled north of Kettering.

Electrification work south of Corby is ongoing. It is not clear whether Network Rail will meet the plan to have the London – Corby service electrified by Dec 2019. The delay to refranchising means that no new trains have been ordered. It is equally unclear what rolling stock will be used on services currently worked by HSTs or Class 153 units, neither of which meet standards to be introduced in 2020.s

East Midlands Councils (EMC) arranged a meeting intended to coincide with the refranchising consultation but, despite several postponements, held in February, before the consultation began. This useful event was attended by most of the Steering Group (as well as many others) and was followed by a meeting with representatives of First Group, one of the short-listed bidders. We met representatives of Stagecoach at our December meeting.

The current consultation includes several meetings around the region, organised by DfT and EMC.

EMC have issued a suggested response that they hope others will incorporate on their responses. At the event I attended, it was suggested that the short-list of bidders might change, as it was made so long ago.

Two pieces of good news were the opening of Ilkeston station in April (delayed from 2016, and originally planned for 2004) and Sunday morning services on the Lincoln – Nottingham line following the installation of centralised signalling.

A Direct Award franchise extension was made to CrossCountry at the end of the year. One requirement was improvement in relationships with stakeholders. We will be meeting the new Stakeholder Liaison Manager later this month. A further consequence was consultation on a draft timetable to make better use of existing rolling stock, to which we responded. The proposals have run into difficulties elsewhere and will need to be revised.

Promised improvements to East Coast and Northern services in our region await delivery of new rolling stock. One change we do know about is that the Cleethorpes – Barton on Humber service will transfer to the new East Midlands franchise.

Consultation on revisions to the route of HS2 were carried out during the winter. These were followed by the announcement that the line would run through Long Eaton on a 16m high viaduct, and confirmation that Sheffield will be served by a loop. Phase 1, London – Birmingham, has now completed its passage through Parliament.

Many, more detailed, items have been the subject of discussion at Steering Group meetings.

Buses

The government's "Buses Bill" became law just before the General Election, but it isn't clear what effect it will have, particularly in the East Midlands, away from any metropolitan authorities.

Derbyshire has drawn back from the proposed complete withdrawal of subsidised services, and is in discussion with operators about how to reduce costs. In other counties, modification and withdrawal of rural services continue. Operators of all types of service continue to complain of increased road congestion. Lifestyle changes, while spread over a number of years, have affected patronage, with some services busier but evening services, in general, in decline.

As feared, Derby City Council have joined Nottingham in deciding to cease reimbursing concessionary fares on the "Red Arrow" express service, This does not, yet, seem to have been followed elsewhere.

Most changes to bus services are local and are dealt with by our constituent groups, though important developments are discussed by the Steering Group.

We now have a database of information on what facilities are available at bus stations and equivalent around the region, which is being distributed to local authority transport officers.

Jim Froggatt
21.09.17