



CHAIRMAN'S REPORT TO ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING, SEPTEMBER 2012

General

In my report last year, I began with a long review of the effects of the change of government on our activities. I will not repeat myself, but will mention some of the points.

We still wonder what part, if any, Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEPs) will play in transport planning. Earlier this year, we responded to a government consultation on "Devolving Local Major Transport Schemes". This suggested that LEPs, or consortia of LEPs and local authorities, should decide priorities for major schemes. We were cautious in our welcome of the proposals and did demand that users should be involved in decision-making. DfT have published a summary of responses, but, as yet, no conclusions. The summary of responses suggests that LEPs want to be part of local transport bodies, but not to be those bodies. Most responses were in favour of "using LEP geography as a starting point", with a central assurance framework.

While local authority budgets have been cut, the government has set up a Local Sustainable Transport Fund. After 3 announcements, Derby, Leicester, Leicestershire, Lincolnshire and Nottingham have received some funding; Derbyshire, Northamptonshire and Nottinghamshire have been refused, while Rutland's bid is still to be decided upon.

Internal

Unfortunately, Barry Davies has had to drop out of the Steering Group for personal reasons. Terry Kirby has maintained our relationship with One East Midlands.

There have been no other changes to membership of the Steering Group, although several members have had to reduce the time devoted to TWEM for personal and family reasons. My thanks go to all. As last year, I need to especially thank Steve Abbott, for shouldering more of the burden than we should expect.

We have held four Steering Group meetings during the year and I would like to thank Kettering Borough Council, East Midlands Airport and East Midlands Trains (EMT) for hosting three of them. I would also like to thank EMT for their help with travel to events.

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 the EM Rural Affairs Forum.

We have continued to liaise with and support our member user groups

Paul Clark continues to maintain our website, my thanks to him for that. We receive a steady flow of enquiries from passengers, many via the website enquiry form. Many of these enquiries have raised issues of which we were already aware, but we have been able to give advice as appropriate.

We have not held a public meeting this year.

Passenger Focus (PF) are slowly working out their new relationship with regional and local groups. I attended a meeting of Midlands groups in Birmingham in March to discuss this. The first outcome was a new electronics newsletter, circulated in August.

There have been no formal meetings of the TravelWatch Chairs' National Liaison Group, though members of it have had discussions when we have met at other events, and have corresponded by email.

Rail

The main focus of activity this year has been the campaign for the upgrading and electrification of the Midland Main Line. We have been part of this, along with politicians of all parties and businesses of all types. The Government have announced that electrification will happen, but the details remain to be clarified, partly because different parts of the railway are still discussing how best to carry out associated works. We owe particular thanks to Jim Bamford, a co-opted member of our Steering Group, for his work on the campaign.

The current situation with the Midland Main Line is encouraging. The rebuilding of Loughborough station is complete, and improvements elsewhere are ongoing. Train services continue to top the inter-city punctuality list.

On other routes, East Midlands Trains (EMT) still suffers from a shortage of stock, although a few additional trains have been obtained and over-crowding is less common. We maintain regular contact with EMT, have responded to timetable consultations and had a discussion over fares, which slightly modified a few anomalies.

Continuing concerns include some regional fares, ticket gate issues and car park charges.

Cross-Country seem less responsive to passengers' concerns, and are less communicative with user representatives, but we have welcomed minor fine-tuning of timetables.

We have continued to participate in the Nottingham-Lincoln Stakeholder Board, and through them have pressed for better services between Nottingham and Lincoln. A mid-evening train from Nottingham was reinstated from Dec 2011. We have also lobbied for a more regular service between Lincoln and Newark North Gate with better connections to and from London Kings Cross. The DfT agreed to fund a small number of extra trains from December 2011.

Along with other stakeholders we wish to see the promise of regular through trains between Kings Cross and Lincoln fulfilled, and have highlighted this issue at a meeting at the DfT and in our response to the draft specification for the InterCity East Coast franchise.

We responded to Network Rail's Initial Industry Plan, which contained many aspirations we supported. Some of these have been supported by government. Responses have also been made to consultations on alternative solutions, fares and ticketing, and decentralisation of responsibility for franchises.

We attended a meeting on HS2 in Loughborough in October, at which it was said that details of the route through the East Midlands would be announced by summer 2012 – they have not been. Aspirations for better services from the East Midlands that did not require new infrastructure were also discussed at this meeting.

Buses

The situation with bus services is less optimistic than it is with the railways, though Derby, Leicestershire and Nottingham have all been awarded funding from the government's Better Bus Areas Fund for urban transport improvements.

The cut in Bus Service Operators Grant and ongoing problems with concessionary fare reimbursement have led to fare increases on most routes. There have been reductions in some commercial services, particularly in the evenings. Whether this reflects a genuine change in demand, or simply the economic situation, is a matter of debate.

Plans to revise subsidised services to reduce costs are ongoing, particularly in Leicestershire, where Steering Group member Terry Kirby, has been heavily involved.

At our meeting in March, we had a very interesting presentation on how the economic situation (and a consequent reduction in the number of air travellers) had affected the viability of bus routes serving East Midlands Airport, with a need to make changes to these routes.

The Future

After significant increases in the two previous years, the price of motor fuel has been more stable over the past twelve months. It is difficult to judge how much effect increased motoring costs are having on public transport usage, given other economic effects, but it seems that there is some shift to public transport.

In the medium-term, I think that the future looks brighter for rail than bus – though you may want to debate that. For long journeys, a train journey is often quicker and cheaper than driving, as well as more pleasant, but for short journeys (other than into city centres) the convenience of a car may outweigh all else. Journey patterns continue to change. Provision of information and sale of tickets will become increasingly electronic – and it is easier for the railways to adapt to this than the fragmented bus industry. In any case, there will be plenty to keep us interested.

As mentioned above, our activities over the past year have been constrained by the availability of Steering Group members, so we would welcome new volunteers. We also have no ongoing sources of funding. Nevertheless, we will continue to work as best we can to represent the interests of passengers.

Jim Froggatt

31.08.12