

CHAIRMAN'S REPORT TO ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING, SEPTEMBER 2013

General

Now that the Government has decided that spending on infrastructure will boost the economy, we are finally being promised some long-delayed expenditure on transport in the East Midlands, including Midland Main Line upgrade and electrification, and A38 improvements in Derby. Also plans made a few years ago are now coming to fruition, especially in Nottingham, where rail replacement buses from East Midlands Parkway during the closure of the line for resignalling had to run a gauntlet of roadworks due to A453 dualling and tramway construction. We may not agree with the focus of all these works, as some will not help public transport, but the balance of funding is perhaps better than in the past.

Local Transport Boards, based on Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP) areas, but predominately comprised of Councillors from Highway Authorities, have begun work during the year. They are able to decide on which transport schemes in their area should be funded, although the total funding is much less than was available to the Regional Assembly in 2005/08. Hence, most schemes are relatively small scale. We haven't yet found a formal means of influencing these boards.

Internal

There have been no changes to membership of the Steering Group this year. As ever, my thanks go to all for their efforts on our behalf.

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.

As usual, 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. At our meeting in Kettering, Chris Wragg from Northamptonshire County Council spoke to us about the council's new bus and rail strategies. We formally responded to consultation on these.

We have not held a public meeting this year.

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; One East Midlands 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.

Passenger Focus (PF) continues to develop their new relationship with regional and local groups, mainly using electronic communications.

There have been one formal meeting of the TravelWatch Chairs' National Liaison Group, in December. Members of it continue to meet at other events and correspond by email.

Other events attended are mentioned under their respective subjects.

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

Rail

There has not been one focus of activity this year - several topics have been highlighted at different times.

To start in the long-term. Network Rail has consulted on its long-term plans for the long-distance and "regional urban" markets. Our response was that they were both starting from the existing railway rather than starting with a clean sheet as they claimed to do.

I attended a meeting on HS2 last October, which showed how much is already happening behind the scenes. The proposed route through the East Midlands was announced in January and a detailed consultation has now started. We will be responding to this. The route through Toton does not really satisfy either Derby or Nottingham, and with Leicester distant from the line, HS2 does not offer the same benefits to the three East Mids cities that it does to Sheffield and Leeds. At the time of writing, opposition to the whole scheme is becoming louder.

One worry about HS2 was that it would restrict expenditure on the improvements to the Midland Main Line. The details of electrification are becoming clearer and funds have been allocated to the scheme, to be complete by 2020.

Improvements to stations on the Midland Main Line continue, with the Nottingham resignalling project dominating activities this year. This was completed on time. Members of the Steering Group attended stakeholder meetings prior to the work and were amongst those who volunteered to help out as customer assistants. Whether we should produce a formal report on the passenger experience is a topic for discussion at our next meeting.

We maintain regular contact with East Midlands Trains (EMT) over day to day problems, and respond to consultations on future timetables. Several Steering Group members attended a stakeholder conference.

Continuing concerns include some regional fares, overcrowding, especially of single-car trains, ticket gate issues and car park charges.

We responded to the consultation on the Thameslink franchise to urge the retention of sufficient capacity on the MML for current and prospective services to the East Midlands.

CrossCountry have been more communicative with user representatives this year. We are concerned about the low availability of advance fares on their trains, particularly of the lowest fares, given that time restrictions on walk-up fares were tightened a few years ago. Crowding on many services is a continuing issue. We hope to discuss these issues with a representative of CrossCountry at a forthcoming Steering Group meeting.

As a consequence of the West Coast franchise fiasco, extensions of both EMT and CrossCountry franchises are being negotiated. We attended a Passenger Focus discussion meeting on giving passengers a voice when franchises are renewed.

London Midland plans for rebuilding Northampton station have produced objections from our local representatives concerning poor facilities for passengers.

We have continued to participate in the Nottingham-Lincoln Stakeholder Board, and through them are pressing for better services between Nottingham and Lincoln. Securing local funding for additional trains (for the first three years, after which DfT will consider support) is an issue. We also continue to lobby for a more regular service between Lincoln and Newark North Gate with better connections to and from London Kings Cross.

Along with other stakeholders we wish to see the promise of regular through trains between Kings Cross and Lincoln fulfilled.

We have also responded to consultations including ORR regarding Network Rails's Strategic Business Plan, and attended an ORR conference on the draft determination of Network Rail spending in Control Period 5, 2014-19.

Buses

The situation with bus services remains less optimistic than it is with the railways. Nottingham was the only place in our region to be awarded Green Bus Funding in round 4 (May).

Whilst Government have retained Bus Service Operators Grant (BSOG) at its current level, they are changing the way that it is paid. It is planned that money currently paid to operators of subsidised services will be paid direct to the tendering authority. Local authorities are also able to apply to create "Better Bus Areas" where the equivalent BSOG funding, plus an uplift, will be paid to them to spend on improvements. Unsurprisingly, operators have to agree to this. Our three cities were considering whether to apply for this funding and were in negotiation with operators. Decisions are awaited.

Most profitable "core" routes are going from strength to strength and we have seen competition in the Derby and Nottingham areas. The general economic situation, plus the ongoing squeeze on council funding, is leading to reductions in marginal and subsidised services.

I attended a Passenger Focus event in October on how to involve passengers better when bus services were changed.

The Future

I indulged in crystal gazing last year as to the future of public transport, so I will not do so this year.

The future of our own organisation is down for discussion at the AGM. We need to strengthen the Steering Group and find more sources of finance if we are to be as active as we would like to be.

Jim Froggatt

31.08.13