

CHAIRMAN'S REPORT TO ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING, JUNE 2010

This is the first Chairman's report to a TWEM AGM from anyone other than Alan Meredith, and I feel that I have had a hard act to follow. Despite standing down last year, he was persuaded to be co-opted onto the Steering Group and to become Vice-Chairman, in which role he has been remarkably active. I would particularly like to thank him for his help and advice.

I did not seek to become Chairman, and thought long and hard before taking on the role, given my involvement in other organisations. I have not been able to give as much time to the position as I would have hoped, partly due to health issues, and the organisation has not been able to do everything I would have liked it to. However, as you will see below, we have carried out a great deal, given our limited resources and reliance on volunteers.

We have held 4 Steering Group meetings during the year and I would like to thank Kettering Borough Council, East Midlands Trains (EMT) and East Midlands Airport for hosting them. I would also like to thank EMT for their help with travel to events and to Passenger Focus for their support. Both Passenger Focus and CPT have changed their representatives on the Steering Group this year, and we have welcomed Guy Dangerfield, Kelly Betchley and Keith McNally to our meetings. I would like to thank all Steering Group members, both old and new, for their assistance, and especially my fellow officers, Steve Abbott and Roger Bacon.

Rail

During the year we have been involved in regular correspondence with East Midlands Trains over day to day operation, and have been invited to represent passengers at several events, including the formal opening of the rebuilt Derby station, the launch of the second hourly Sheffield – London service and the opening of the new Etches Park depot.

During the summer EMT ran "special offer" days from both their new stations, Corby and East Midlands Parkway, which were sufficiently successful for the idea to be repeated and extended to other stations on the Midland Main Line. There has been some tweaking of the new timetables agreed when the new franchises were let. The extension of the "stopping" London-Derby service to Sheffield has not only provided additional trains from Sheffield to London, but a much needed direct service to East Midlands Parkway and Loughborough. We would still like to see a Kettering stop on this service. The Matlock trains were slightly retimed so as to precede this service southbound, providing a much requested connection.

EMT still has a rolling stock shortage, but it's not quite so severe on the Midland Main Line since the arrival of four Meridian sets from Hull Trains. But one additional 153 (single coach) is all that has been found to reduce over-crowding on local services.

The Liverpool – Norwich service continues to be constrained by availability of rolling stock. All the 158s used on it have now been refurbished, though not to everyone's taste.

After many requests by both EMT and the Stakeholder Board in which we participated, DfT have finally agreed to provide additional trains for the route, though as this is by a multi-step cascade, there is plenty of scope for delay in their arrival.

We are also participating in a Stakeholder Board set up by EMT for the Nottingham-Newark-Lincoln route.

The introduction of revenue protection schemes, i.e. ticket gates and penalty fares, has been poorly managed and has caused resentment amongst honest passengers who have been inconvenienced.

Proposals for the future were made by Network Rail in the Electrification and East Midlands Rail Utilisation Strategies (RUS). The former considered electrification of the Midland Main Line to show a return on capital before considering any external benefits, but the Labour government proposed to electrify other lines first. We were amongst stakeholders lobbying to change this. We attended meetings and made a formal response to the EMRUS. We felt that this was a disappointing document, as it restricted its remit to existing services and, while in many cases it recognised that the answer was more rolling stock, it could not suggest how this could be obtained.

In Passenger Focus' view, the EMRUS did not consider station car parking sufficiently. So we agreed to take part in a joint exercise in which we surveyed the use of car parks in the region in order to provide data. Somewhat to our surprise, the results showed that small car parks attached to "small" stations had the highest percentage of spaces occupied.

We were disappointed that the pilot scheme for Station Travel Plans did not appear to have progressed. However, progress is slowly being made on improving access to Derby (subject to finance not being lost) while (overdue) improvements to Loughborough station have recently been announced.

In addition to involvement in consultation on the RUS and timetable changes, we have also responded to:

- West Midlands Rail Strategy
- ATOC Fares Strategy
- House of Commons Transport Committee Investigation into Priorities for Rail Investment
- House of Commons East Midlands Committee Investigation into Funding of the East Midlands.

For the latter, Stephen Abbott not only prepared a written submission but gave oral evidence to a meeting of the committee considering the case for greater investment in the Midland Main Line.

Buses

As responsibilities for bus services are at less than regional level, most of the contact with operators and local authority staff is through our constituent bodies, though I do represent TWEM on the Derby Strategic Bus Partnership.

We responded to three DfT consultations on buses, on:

- The role of Passenger Focus in relation to Buses and Trams
- Funding of Concessionary Fares (which showed that a disproportionate number of East Midlands authorities had been under-funded)
- Improving Bus Service Regulation

Passenger Focus held a reception to launch their responsibilities for buses and trams, which I attended. There has been a major re-organisation of staff to cover this work. Paul Fullwood has been appointed as Manager for the Midlands, assisted by Phil Tonks, who was active in TW West Midlands prior to his appointment. We look forward to working with them.

General

We continue to be represented on a number of groups not directly involved with providing public transport. These have included the EMRA Transport Group; EM Rail Forum; EM Airport Surface Access Forum, Greater Notts' Light Rail Advisory Committee; Notts' Bus Forum; EM Transport Activists Round Table; and the EM Rural Affairs Forum.

Stephen Abbott gave a presentation to a Railfuture conference highlighting our work on the Liverpool-Norwich service.

I have attended one meeting of the regional TravelWatch chairs – for the only other during the year I was taken ill on the day.

Paul Clark continues to maintain our website, my thanks to him for that.

We have only managed one public meeting this year, on “Inter-Regional Links” and as it will be on the morning of the AGM I am unable to report on it! I was disappointed that we had to postpone this from March, but the decision was justified.

The Future

Our vision will not change in the future, but the context in which we work has changed with the national financial situation and the change of government. In the longer term we still face climate change and energy shortages, but TravelWatch is mainly concerned with the short-medium term.

The Labour government abolished Regional Assemblies; the new one has abolished regional housing targets and with them, the funding that paid for regional transport planning teams. Regional government offices and development agencies are under review. So we don't know who we will be working with, or how.

We do know that counties and unitary authorities are preparing new Local Transport Plans, and our member groups need to be involved in consultations on these to ensure that public transport is given adequate recognition in them.

All government spending is being reviewed, with major cuts expected to spending on transport, both capital and revenue. As I write, LTP budgets are being cut for the current year. We will be insisting that public transport operators maintain quality of service even if there are reductions in quantity. We can suggest inexpensive improvements. We should continue to argue the need for accessible, affordable and attractive public transport.

Jim Froggatt

11.06.10