

Atherstone Station : 2018, 2019 and Beyond

Passenger Figures The number of passengers taking the train at Atherstone continues to grow year on year. Footfall in 2017/18 was assessed as 148,998 travellers, up 7004 on the previous year. A look at the figures over the years since 2009/10 shows an average annual percentage increase of 17.86%; better than the growth achieved at any other station in the Trent Valley on the Euston to Crewe service. Although the numbers of passengers at Tamworth and Nuneaton are significantly higher, neither station shows an annual growth rate anywhere near this percentage figure.

LNWR December Newsletter

Timetable The planned 2018 December timetable changes were postponed due to Government intervention nationwide over problems elsewhere that were well publicised. This resulted in no change from the previous May timetable. Changes are expected in May 2019.

Twelve months to December 2018 London Northwestern Railway (LNR), the train provider, issued a newsletter in December to summarise the company's achievements over its first year of operation – summarised below.

- An **App** was introduced to allow mobile phone tickets to be used instead of the familiar paper ones from the machines.
- A **24/7 Twitter Team** was set up to keep passengers updated on their journey.
- **Compensation** payments are to be made if a journey is delayed by more than 15 minutes.
- **Barriers are to be set up at manned LNR stations** to combat fare dodgers.
- A new train livery is being introduced

Next Twelve months to December 2019

- **More seats/services** are to be provided through doubling carriages on long distance services and peak hour London services using the existing four car (class 350) units.
- Additional late hour and Sunday services are to be introduced.

Beyond 2019 LNR indicates that new trains that are currently being built will be introduced. These will have extra capacity. However these are not planned to be introduced to TVR until 2021, in the later stages of the build programme.

Meanwhile a consultation on a West Midlands Rail Investment Strategy sent out in autumn 2018 by WMRE (West Midlands Rail Executive), has led to a final report published on 11th January. This covers the period 2018 to 2047.

This is intended to set the programme for both the development of existing services; new services; and rail infrastructure development in the West Midlands to 2047. It will form part of a “Prospectus for Rail” to be published later in 2019.

The comments below are directed to the proposals and aspirations as they concern the Trent Valley Corridor (TVR) and the service available at Atherstone summarised from what is a comprehensive document.

Future developments on TVR on top of the existing service are substantially dependent on releasing paths for local and regional trains on the route through the removal of long distance expresses. This in turn is totally dependent on progress with the High Speed Line (**HS2 stage 1** – due for completion 2026), and particularly the stages after stage 1 to Birmingham that are labelled **HS2a** (from Lichfield to Crewe-due for completion 2027) and **HS2b** (to Manchester and the leg across North Warwickshire alongside M42 from near Dunton Island to the East Midlands and Leeds – due for completion 2033).

There is obviously the potential for delay around any uncertainty linked to the ongoing issues surrounding political will; cost and ability to achieve the project within this timescale.

There are essentially three identified phases.

Phase 1 Short Term - Quick Wins- to 2025

The initial benefit to be introduced from May 2019 is a focus on longer, more and later trains based around the existing service together with an enhanced

Sunday service. This means that the service at Atherstone will remain hourly for the immediately foreseeable future. This matches LNR's intentions.

The main concern is how quickly this can be done in the face of the overcrowding experienced on trains now.

The strategy report does not address infrastructure issues as "quick wins", particularly on a "local" front. This is possibly understandable in the context of a regional strategy, but is disappointing because remediation will be disjointed and time consuming if left to the various parties involved to come together.

Atherstone desperately needs more car parking space that could be provided on adjoining land, particularly that owned by Network Rail alongside the station and the resolution of access issues for disabled people between the platforms through having to negotiate the unsatisfactory link by using the "cattle arch" that does not meet legal requirements and has been a bone of contention for all the years since the original introduction of the hourly service.

The continuation of the hourly service also points to the need to introduce a half hourly connecting service between Nuneaton, Coventry and beyond to mid and south Warwickshire with adequate carriage capacity as soon as possible in this "quick win" period. This is programmed for May 2019 too.

Phase 2 Indicative Medium Term Strategy – 2026 to 2033

This relates to the projected, released capacity for more trains to run on TVR due to HS2 phases 1 and 2a completion, bearing in mind that TVR is also an important freight route too.

The key aspirational change for TVR is a higher frequency service based around a reworked timetable, linked to improved cross connections at Nuneaton; Tamworth and Lichfield for example.

Atherstone would benefit from the introduction of two trains per hour.

The existing hourly service would be augmented by a projected intervening service serving TVR via Coventry to Euston. On the face of it, a good idea, but will it require major, expensive track segregation works to accommodate trains crossing the main lines at Nuneaton? These are referred to in the post 2034 period but crucially not in this period.

A "quicker win" here would be to introduce an additional TVR shuttle between say, Rugby and Stafford, linking to all of the crossing/connecting half hourly services at Nuneaton; Tamworth and other TVR stations.

Period 3 - Longer Term Aspirations - 2033 to 2047

There are ambitious proposals that would mean better links through new crossing/connecting services such as one from Leicester to Coventry direct via Nuneaton.

On TVR the emphasis is to a focus on further improvements along the lines suggested in Period 2 through further reworking of the timetable after the completion of HS2b that "**may** facilitate higher regional service frequencies to **key** Trent Valley stations" (our emphasis on direct quote). We must make sure that Atherstone's interest is upheld in this debate.

Concluding Remarks

Demand for rail services in the region and on TVR is growing continuously. It is outstripping supply. The continual growth at Atherstone is indicative of this.

Employment wise the A5 corridor is a growth area, but this is not specifically recognised in the strategy; rather it points the finger at the corridors from Birmingham out towards Tamworth and Nuneaton.

There are indications that the Atherstone train service is attracting people to the area to live and passengers from a wide area including Leicestershire within a reasonable driving distance and avoiding access/parking issues at the larger towns.

The main concern has to be that the improvements to services on TVR do not take "second place" to the prime motivational focus of the strategy on access by rail to the west midlands conurbation.

