

# Business Update

November 2020



Operated by West Midlands Trains



**WE'RE IN IT TOGETHER**

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## MD: "Vital to keep a reliable service during Covid-19"

As we head into the winter months we are once again facing a challenging period to deliver train services against a backdrop of increasing cases of coronavirus, writes **West Midlands Trains managing director Julian Edwards (right)**.

Since the pandemic really took hold in the spring it has felt in many ways like a rollercoaster as we have adapted our service to meet the demands of passengers while acknowledging that our own colleagues are not immune from Covid-19.

In fact, since March one-in-three colleagues have at some stage been unable to work due to the pandemic, whether through contracting Covid-19 itself or needing to isolate or shield from others.

What that has meant is we have tried to build a simpler timetable to give us the flexibility to keep a regular, reliable service running for our customers.

In September we were able to formalise the changes we had made over the summer in a new, modular timetable focused on that reliability.

We have been pleased with the performance of the timetable, with Public Performance Measure figures routinely at 90% and above (Page 4).

We encountered some challenges with train crew availability on services via Birmingham Snow Hill due to the impact of Covid-19.

We are confident that subsequent changes in October will reduce short-notice cancellations while protecting key services such as those on the school run. We continue to watch the route closely.

With the four-week 'lockdown' in England under way we have pledged to continue running our advertised timetable for as long as possible.

The next scheduled timetable change is on December 13 and while no major changes are



currently planned, we will of course need to take account of the current Covid-19 impact on services.

In September, the Government confirmed it would extend the emergency measures agreements in place with passenger operators into 2021.

This move has provided welcome certainty and financial support to the industry while the Government considers how it wants the railway to look in a post-Covid environment.

Elsewhere, I know our colleagues have been pleased by our customers' response to the rules which make the wearing of face coverings on board mandatory, with high levels of compliance.

As a tough winter looms large, I am pleased to say that in many ways we are better prepared now than when the pandemic turned things upside down in March as we have some idea of what to expect.

Our stations and trains are already Covid-secure, with signage and cleaning regimes in place to keep passengers and colleagues safe while travelling.

Our controllers, who manage the day-to-day operation of our trains, are now back co-located with Network Rail at the Saltley signalling centre after a spell at our Birmingham offices while social distancing measures were put in place.

My promise to you all is that we'll continue to provide the best service possible given the impact of Covid-19, and one which matches the demand for journeys across the network. We're in this together.



WMT controllers are back at Saltley Signalling Centre.

## Second phase of Wolverhampton Station build under way



Officials from Wolverhampton Council and builders Ion and Galliford Try on site.



Artist's impression (featuring tram lines).

The second phase of construction at the new-look Wolverhampton Station is well under way ahead of its expected completion next year.

The former station building has been demolished and a new steel framework has been installed at the site.

Next steps will see the installation of floor slabs and block work for external walls.

Phase one of the station opened in May as part of a £150million investment in improvements to rail, tram and bus connectivity in the city.

The new section will increase the size of the concourse and includes three new retail units.

Louise Miles, from the Council, said: "The station is a prime example of how our regeneration projects can help us relight the city."

"Our contractors Galliford Try have made excellent progress and it is a great sight to see the second part of our fantastic new railway station coming out of the ground."

## Operators hailed for commitment to apprenticeships

West Midlands Railway and London Northwestern Railway have been hailed for their commitment to apprenticeships in newly-published prestigious national rankings.

The operators are part of the Abellio Transport Holdings group, which has been named in the Top apprenticeship employers in Britain.

The list recognises companies for their overall commitment to employing apprentices, their creation of new apprenticeships, the diversity of their new apprentices and the progression of their apprentices onto further apprenticeships and employment.

WMR and LNR currently has more than 80 people completing apprenticeships in roles such as train drivers and engineering.

Jo MacPhail, HR director for the operators, said: "Ever since we began running the West Midlands franchise in 2017 we have made clear our commitment to apprenticeships."

"Training our own people allows colleagues to gain on-the-job experience and obtain nationally-recognised qualifications to help them in their future careers."



### Station cat George steals show in 'World Cup of Stations'



For passengers at Stourbridge Junction in the West Midlands he's been a familiar sight for years but this autumn station cat George has received national attention.

With Stourbridge Junction nominated in the 'World Cup of Stations' event held on Twitter, George was front and centre of the competition to win public votes.

From 48 stations across Britain, George helped Stourbridge Junction claim second spot overall, narrowly behind Glasgow Queen Street in the final standings.

The vote was run by the Rail Delivery Group, which represents train operators, to celebrate the role of the railway during 'Stations Day' on 16 October.

Tamworth station, in Staffordshire, and Kempston Hardwick station, in Bedfordshire, were also placed in the Top 48 stations after public nominations.

For more information on the contest, visit [www.raildeliverygroup.com](http://www.raildeliverygroup.com)



Line supervisor Russell Field.



### Minor Works accessibility scheme needs your suggestions

Passengers are being invited to have their say on small improvements which could be made to improve accessibility at stations operated by West Midlands Railway and London Northwestern Railway.

A dedicated "Minor Works" fund is available to carry out work such as: accessible toilet fittings; signage; hand rails; step nosing; step tactiles; induction loops; dropped kerbs or blue badge markings.

Works not eligible for this funding include repairs or replacement of existing facilities or larger projects such as installing brand new toilets.

Recent projects have seen dual-height hand rails installed at Droitwich Spa and Kings Langley stations as well as dropped kerbs at Walsall and new stair treads at Leighton Buzzard and Watford Junction.

To suggest a scheme, email [accessibility@wmtrains.co.uk](mailto:accessibility@wmtrains.co.uk)



New hand rails at Droitwich Spa.

### Performance Update - West Midland Trains

Railway Period	PPM %	MAA %	Reliability %
5: July 26 - August 22	91.5%	80.5%	98.0%
6: August 23 - September 19	91.0%	81.6%	96.0%
7: September 20 - October 17	88.5%	82.2%	95.0%

- PPM (Public Performance Measure) is the % of trains arriving within five minutes of advertised times.
- MAA (Moving Annual Average) is the average PPM over the last year to date.
- Reliability is the % of trains that ran for the whole of their journey.

### Forecourt revamp brings 'Hollywood' to Watford Junction

A colourful art installation in the style of America's famous 'Hollywood' sign has been unveiled as centrepiece of the new forecourt at Watford Junction station.

The project, carried out by Watford Borough Council in partnership with local businesses and London Northwestern Railway, also involved the creation of new seating, extra planting and open space.

Sarah Higgins, LNR head of stations, said: "This fantastic scheme will improve the journey experience for the millions of customers who use the station each year."

Mayor Peter Taylor said: "The works have made the forecourt more welcoming and create a much better first impression for people coming to our town."



Council and business officials mark the completion of the project.

### Progress made on new stations for the West Midlands



Darlaston.

New stations at Darlaston and Willenhall have moved a step closer after planners at Walsall Council approved the schemes. The stations are due to open in 2023.

New designs for the revamp of Perry Barr station have also been unveiled. Work starts next year ahead of the 2022 Commonwealth Games in Birmingham.



Perry Barr.

### Lift refurbishments latest



Passenger lifts have reopened at Tamworth after Network Rail completed a major refurbishment.

The next station in line for an upgrade is The Hawthorns in West Bromwich, where lifts will be out of use from early December until spring 2021.

Passengers requiring assistance are advised to book ahead where possible by visiting [www.wmr.uk/assistance](http://www.wmr.uk/assistance) or calling 0800 024 8998.

### Marston Vale trail opens



A fun new treasure hunt style activity has launched for kids along the Marston Vale Line.

The 'Symbol Spot' encourages children to hunt for hidden discs along the line and has been developed with Mini Map-Makers and the line's Community Rail Partnership.

Packs are available from Bedford or Bletchley stations as well as Ridgmont Heritage Centre.

## Big take-up for November's online stakeholder conference

A big turnout is expected for this month's online stakeholder event hosted by West Midlands Trains.

The theme of the event is 'Restoring Confidence in Rail' and confirmed guest speakers include Peter Wilkinson from the Department for Transport and Robert Nisbet of the Rail Delivery Group.

WMT managing director Julian Edwards will also feature, which follows on from successful online forums hosted by West Midlands Railway and London Northwestern Railway earlier this year.

The event takes place on Friday 13 November at 9.45am. To book a place visit <https://bit.ly/2HMmbsY> or catch-up post event at [wmr.uk](http://wmr.uk) and [lnr.uk](http://lnr.uk).



WMT managing director Julian Edwards will be among the speakers

## Annual stakeholder survey draws a huge response

A big thank you to those of you who have taken the time to take part in our annual stakeholder survey.

We are very grateful for your input, it really helps us to understand what we need to do to improve and where we are doing things well.

The report delivered some pleasing findings, with praise from stakeholders for the way in which we have managed to communicate during the Covid crisis.

We hope we can keep up this open and honest dialogue with you and your feedback will shape the way we operate and communicate with you in future.

Overall our engagement score has increased but we are not complacent and always recognise there is more to do. As always, if you have any comments or questions, please do not hesitate to get in touch using the contact details on the back page of this update.

## Memorial pledge as Tamworth honours 1870 rail crash

A ceremony was held at Tamworth station to mark 150 years since a rail crash at the site which resulted in three deaths.

It was 14 September 1870 when a signaller's error misdirected a mail train into a siding and ultimately into the River Anker (as shows in the artist's impression, right).

The driver, stoker and a passenger - all aged between 26 and 41 - were killed and 13 others were injured.

Following discussions with Tamworth Civic Society, London Northwestern Railway has pledged to install a permanent memorial at the station to honour the crash.

Sarah Higgins, head of stations for LNR, said: "Tamworth station has served the people of the town since 1839 and we are proud to play our part in commemorating its long history."

"The sad events 150 years ago will have had a lasting impact on those people affected and it is right such incidents are not forgotten."

David Biggs, from the Civic Society, said: "I am pleased London Northwestern Railway wish to do this and we look forward to seeing the memorial installed."



David Biggs, from Tamworth Civic Society, Carolyn Baker, from St Paul's Parish Church and station manager Honor Evans lay wreaths.



Tamworth Herald.

## Shakespeare Line going purple to mark World Polio Day



Railway volunteers from across the West Midlands turned out in force to add a splash of colour to stations along the Shakespeare Line between Stratford-upon-Avon and Birmingham to mark World Polio Day in October.

A total of 8,000 purple crocuses were planted at 18 stations along the line as part of the project, which is run as a partnership between Rotary International, the United Nations and the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation.

Vivienne Wilkes, president of the Rotary Club of Birmingham, pictured front centre above, is a station volunteer at Yardley Wood and was instrumental in working with the Friends of the Shakespeare Line on the project. The plants are due to bloom in the spring, creating a stunning purple display for passengers to enjoy.

Fay Easton, head of stakeholder and community at West Midlands Railway, said: "It has been an honour to work with Vivienne to help involve our railways in this global charitable venture and our volunteers are all delighted to be planting purple corms to ensure a beautiful colourful display is ready to bloom in 2021."

## Station volunteers enjoy getting back on the platforms



Belinda at Watford Junction.

Station adopters have been getting back into the swing of things with gardening projects.

After a short period during lockdown when no activity was permitted, a limited amount of activity has been able to take place over recent months.

At Watford Junction, volunteers took part in a Bee Friendly Trust project to plant shrubs which will boost the local wildlife.

To get involved in station adoption email Fay or Vicky using the contact details on the back page.



Vicky Cropper-Clarke, LNR head of stakeholder and community, with Edna Woname at Watford Junction.

# About Us

## West Midlands Trains

West Midlands Trains operates services under West Midlands Railway and London Northwestern Railway. The franchise started in December 2017 and will run until 2025/26. The company is investing £1billion into the rail network to deliver new trains, improved routes and station upgrades.

Our mission is to provide quality rail services and develop sustainable travel. The communities we serve are central to our ethos and we work closely with a regional network of volunteers and community rail partnerships. We are proud to work with our dedicated station adopters who take huge pride in their neighbourhood stations.

**If you ever have any questions or feedback on what we're doing in your area, please contact:**



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