

# Business Update

February 2022



Operated by West Midlands Trains



## NEW TRAIN FLEET IN HOME STRETCH

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## Building a stronger railway our post-pandemic focus

The withdrawal of the final Covid-19 restrictions in England represents a key moment for the railway, writes **West Midlands Trains deputy managing director Lawrence Bowman (right)**.



After a rollercoaster two years of change and uncertainty, it does begin to feel like we can start planning the future shape of the railway in earnest.

Our first job is to work with our industry partners to devise timetables which reflect the changing face of our customers' lives - both for work and for leisure.

We know the Government has spent vast sums of taxpayers' money on keeping the railway running during the pandemic, so we must look for value for money as we make our plans.

Of course we are not complacent when it comes to Covid-19. We know the pandemic is not over and the threat of a new variant could set back our plans.

We have seen a steady increase in passengers coming back to the railway - and numbers are likely to accelerate with the removal of restrictions.

We also know our customers are likely to come back at different speeds - that's why we're keeping up our enhanced cleaning regimes to give confidence to the travelling public.

We have been very up front with our customers about the challenges the pandemic has left us with when it comes to our driver training programme.

With 25,000 training days lost, it will take us a number of months to get our crewing levels back to where they need to be, particularly on our most impacted routes via

Birmingham Snow Hill.

We are making good progress but there is still more to do - if you haven't already done so, I would encourage you to take a moment to read our dedicated blog at [wmr.uk/snowhillplan](http://wmr.uk/snowhillplan)

Elsewhere, there are now fewer than 150 days to go until the 2022 Commonwealth Games get under way in Birmingham.

We know the event will bring thousands of new visitors to the region and our dedicated Head of Commonwealth Games is very busy working with partners to make sure the event is one to remember.

Finally, I was delighted that WMT was recognised for our commitment to inclusion and diversity at the Rail Business Awards (*see page 7*).

Creating a positive, inclusive and equal working environment is at the heart of everything we do and this award is great recognition of that.



## Services return following suspension due to Covid-19

Services have now resumed on every route operated by West Midlands Trains following temporary suspensions caused by the impact of the Omicron wave of Covid-19.

Due to the high number of traincrew unable to work, services were temporarily withdrawn on our Bedford-Bletchley, Watford-St Albans and Nuneaton-Leamington Spa routes over Christmas.

However, with case numbers falling, trains are once again running on all routes. See [Inr.uk](http://Inr.uk) and [wmr.uk](http://wmr.uk) for timetables.



## Final preparations begin for Class 196 introduction



One of the new Class 196 fleet at Tyseley Depot in Birmingham.

Final preparations are getting under way for the introduction of West Midlands Railway's new fleet of diesel trains - the Class 196.

A total of 80 new carriages have been ordered in a mixture of two and four-carriage formations.

The fleet will primarily serve the Birmingham-Shrewsbury and Birmingham-Hereford routes.

Following some delays caused by the pandemic, the first train is expected to enter passenger service in the summer on the Shrewsbury Line.

Jonny Wiseman, WMR customer experience director, said: "This new fleet of trains represents a significant upgrade for our passengers.

"We are now in the advanced stages of testing and training our colleagues and we look forward to welcoming passengers on board later this year."

Among the benefits of the new fleet are:

- More seats and tables
- At least one accessible toilet on every train
- New digital information screens
- Plug and USB sockets at every seat
- Intelligent air conditioning system
- Free WiFi to stay connected on the go

For more information and to read about our new electric trains, visit [www.wmr.uk/newtrains](http://www.wmr.uk/newtrains)

## New accessibility training delivered to WMT colleagues

A new training programme to raise awareness of disability equality has been delivered to WMT staff.

The programme - Accessibility Matters - covers topics identified as priorities by passengers.

These include: identifying people who may need assistance, types of disability, effective communication and how to deliver assistance safely.

In total, over 94% of all 2,958 employees at WMT have now undergone the training, which included an assessment of knowledge and understanding.

A refresher programme is now under development and will be rolled out by July 2022.

For more information on accessibility at WMT, log on to [wmr.uk/accessibility](http://wmr.uk/accessibility) or [Inr.uk/accessibility](http://Inr.uk/accessibility)

## New trees brighten up Long Buckby station approach

Dozens of young trees have been planted on the approach to Long Buckby station thanks to a partnership between London Northwestern Railway and the local community.

Chris Heaton-Harris MP, whose Daventry constituency includes the station, visited the "Trees For Station Road" project to see the volunteers in action.

The project is part of LNR's *Your Community, Your Fund* scheme, funded by the Department for Transport.

Under the scheme, LNR and West Midlands Railway are investing £1.7million in dozens of projects across the network.

Chris Heaton-Harris MP said: "I was delighted to visit this fantastic initiative and see for myself the hard work of a wonderful team of volunteers.

"Their work will improve the appearance of the area, absorb pollution and attract wildlife.

"I would like to say a big thank you to LNR for supporting the project and I look forward to seeing the trees blossom."



Chris Heaton Harris MP, left, with community volunteers and officials.

Among the varieties planted were mountain ash, grey alder and silver birch as well as cherry trees donated by the Japanese government.

Tim Bellenger, LNR head of stakeholder and community, said: "Making our stations warm and

welcoming for our customers is incredibly important and we were delighted to support our fantastic team of volunteers at Long Buckby.

"Schemes like this do brilliant work in developing an enjoyable travelling experience for rail users."

## Performance Update - West Midlands Trains

Railway Period	T3 %	MAA %	Reliability %
9: November 14 - December 11	72.4%	87.9%	95.0%
10: December 12 - January 8	84.9%	86.6%	97.0%
11: January 9 - February 5	86.4%	86.2%	98.0%

- T3 is the % of trains arriving within three minutes of advertised times.
- MAA (Moving Annual Average) is the average T3 over the last year to date.
- Reliability is the % of trains that ran for the whole of their journey.

The high numbers of staff unable to work due to the Omicron variant impacted WMT's operational performance in the lead up to Christmas.

WMT temporarily withdraw services on some routes over New Year to improve performance.

As detailed above, this resulted in a significant reduction in cancellations and improvement in T3.

With cases of Covid-19 returning to manageable levels, WMT has been able to reinstate the majority of suspended services throughout February.

Elsewhere, incidents affecting T3 in Periods 9, 10 and 11 included a number of fatalities on the network and several trees falling onto overhead power lines during storms in December.

## Three storms in six days bring major network disruption

Three storms in six days brought major disruption to the railway network in February.

Storm Dudley, Storm Eunice and Storm Franklin uprooted hundreds of trees across the country between February 16-21, resulting in thousands of cancellations nationwide - and a significant repair bill.

On the West Midlands Trains network, incidents affecting services included a number of fly-away trampolines landing on the tracks as well as dozens of fallen trees and even a mattress.

Due to the strength of the forecast winds, WMT took the rare step of issuing a 'Do Not Travel' warning for Friday 18 February as Storm Eunice arrived.

The warning proved appropriate with widespread disruption across the railway network, including most routes to and from London closed to trains.

Transport for Wales took the unprecedented step of closing the Welsh rail network entirely on Friday 18 February, resulting in the cancellation of WMT services to Hereford and Shrewsbury.



A tree falls at Kings Langley station in Hertfordshire.



A trampoline at Stechford.



Tree on the line in Bedfordshire.



A mattress near Stourbridge.

## Special train livery marks 175 years of Marston Vale Line

Customers using the Marston Vale Line can keep their eyes peeled for a new Class 230 livery produced to mark 175 years of the route.

The design (*shown right*) has been produced in tandem with Greensand Country Landscape Partnership, which has been established to celebrate the beautiful scenery of Bedfordshire.

The Marston Vale Line, which runs between Bedford and Bletchley, was established in late 1846. Its dedicated Community Rail Partnership is staging a series of events for the anniversary.

See [www.marstonvalecommunityrail.org.uk](http://www.marstonvalecommunityrail.org.uk)



## Fay Easton: Why the future is bright for community rail



Volunteers at Birmingham New Street.

The trend for localism and community involvement within our railways has grown during the pandemic, **writes Fay Easton**, head of stakeholder and community for West Midlands Railway.

The industry greatly benefits from the support of communities and stakeholders who are experts in their own local areas.

Their entrepreneurial and innovative skills are a priceless asset and a dynamic new model has emanated in the work carried out in recent years.

Community Station Partnerships (CSPs) are the result of a new model for community rail, evolved from the grassroots of communities.

These volunteer-led social enterprises are helping people connect with the railway, bringing stations to life as well as contributing to rail recovery, economic and social development and sustainable travel.

The first CSP was created in the first lockdown along the Shakespeare Line in Warwickshire.



It enables volunteer work at stations, helping to pool local knowledge and resources to help with wider neighbourhood regeneration.

CSPs seek to change passengers' perceptions of rail journeys as simply travel and develop the journey as a pleasurable activity.

To do this, local community groups 'adopt' stations to make them more welcoming places.

A second CSP has now launched along the Chase Line in the West Midlands and it is hoped more will follow over the coming months.

Over the past four years, WMR has worked closely to develop this model into urban areas and inner-city community partnerships are now being nurtured, supporting the national levelling up agenda.

- This piece is an extract from an article originally published in the *Global Railway Review* - for the full article visit <https://bit.ly/3sF2Spp>

## New face in WMT comms team as Francis Thomas retires



Charlotte Ritchie

Charlotte Ritchie has joined West Midlands Trains as head of external communications and engagement following the retirement of Francis Thomas.

Charlotte joins from National Express and has also worked in education and Chambers of Commerce.

She said: "It is an exciting time to join the rail industry and I look forward to meeting as many of our stakeholders as possible in the coming months."

Francis retires after nine years with WMT and its predecessor London Midland - and 38 years after first joining the rail industry.



Francis Thomas

## West Midlands Trains hailed for diversity and inclusion

West Midlands Trains has won a prestigious industry award for our commitment to inclusivity at work.

WMT picked up the *Diversity and Inclusion in Rail Award* at the 2022 Rail Business Awards.

The award recognises the steps WMT takes to create an inclusive working environment, such as establishing representative groups.

Jo MacPhail, HR director, said: "We want our employees to feel safe, respected and welcome in the workplace.

"This award is recognition that equality, diversity and inclusion are at the heart of our business."

The award was presented at an industry ceremony in London hosted by comedian Suzi Ruffell.



The West Midlands Trains delegation accepts the diversity award.

## Service changes for platform repairs at Cheddington

Passengers are being advised to check their journeys with most southbound trains currently unable to call at Cheddington station in Buckinghamshire while platform repairs are carried out.

Network Rail began strengthening work began in January and it will take a further six weeks to complete. Passengers travelling south are advised to use Tring and Leighton Buzzard stations.

Northbound services are unaffected. Those wishing to travel to Cheddington from the north should change at Leighton Buzzard for a rail replacement bus service.



Cheddington Station

## New waiting shelters open at two Abbey Line stations



Passengers using the Abbey Line in Hertfordshire are making use of two new waiting shelters on the platforms.

The structures have been installed at How Wood and Watford North stations.

Tim Bellenger, head of stakeholder and community for London Northwestern Railway, said: "I am certain these smart shelters, including art designs celebrating sustainable travel, will prove popular."

The shelters have been introduced in partnership with the Abbey Line CRP.



# About Us

## West Midlands Trains

West Midlands Trains has operated services under West Midlands Railway and London Northwestern Railway since the beginning of our original franchise in December 2017. 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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