



Campaign for Better Transport Derbyshire and Peak District

Chairman's Report 2013

Although this is titled a "Chairman's Report" and includes several references to my own activities, it is meant to be a general review and includes contributions from other members of the Group and references to work carried out by other members. My thanks to all who have been involved over the past year.

We again changed our pattern of meetings this year, as it proved difficult to get the officers to agree on suitable Saturdays. So, apart from the AGM in Matlock, we had only one Saturday meeting (In Chesterfield) and five meetings on weekday evenings in Derby. We did manage a summer (Saturday) visit this year, to the Ecclesbourne Valley Railway, including a guided tour of the yard at Wirksworth. This trip was both enjoyable and informative. Fortunately given the weather conditions, we did not have an outside speaker for the AGM, but invited our member Mike Rose to speak in his role Project Officer for the County Council on the High Peak and Hope Valley Community Rail Partnership. He explained the background to small but valuable improvements that the Partnership had made and the difficulties involved in liaising with two PTEs, three TOCs, Network Rail and freight operators.

We continue to respond to events by attending meetings, writing letters to local newspapers, taking part in radio phone-ins and responding to media inquiries. Most of these are in connection with the subjects referred to below.

We continue to work with colleagues from other CBT local groups and remain involved with the Friends of the Derwent Valley Line (FDVL), East Midlands Transport Activists Roundtable (EMTAR), TravelWatch East Midlands (TWEM), and indirectly, Passenger Focus. I continued as Chair of TWEM during the year.

Contact with Campaign for Better Transport nationally has been limited, though we have updated our information on their website! Much useful information can be obtained from the website.

Planning

This heading refers to our involvement with local government, mainly the City and County Councils, but to some extent with District Councils. From this year, I've added a reference to the Derby, Derbyshire, Nottingham and Nottinghamshire Local Enterprise Partnership, normally shortened to D2N2 LEP, as some government funding is now channelled through this organisation.

D2N2 have spent much of the year considering their "Strategic Economic Plan", which is currently out for consultation.

The three local authorities in the Derby “Housing Market Area”, Amber Valley, Derby City and South Derbyshire, again ran consultations in the autumn, this time on their Draft Core Strategies. We responded to all three. Most of our comments relate to the most suitable location for housing developments to encourage the use of sustainable modes of transport. We also objected to a planning application to and by Amber Valley for housing developments incorporating a new road to act as an A610 by-pass.

Derby City’s Local Sustainable Transport funding is being used for improvements to access to Pride Park and other industrial areas under the “Connected” brand. This is one focus of the City’s revised Sustainable Transport Partnership. I am a member of this and have been to two meetings, though missed others due to holidays. It aims to be less of a “talking shop” than the LTP Steering Group, and to involve private firms in delivery.

We have continued to cover as many meetings of Accessibility Partnerships as we can throughout the county. Our member, Mike Rose, is Project Officer for the High Peak and Hope Valley Community Rail Partnership. We are also represented on the Derwent Valley Community Rail Partnership.

We are represented on the Chesterfield Borough Council Transport Users Advisory Group. Representatives from the County Council and from the Bus and Rail service providers are invited to relevant meetings so that a useful exchange of views can be made. We also respond to Chesterfield Local Plan consultations.

Rail

The situation with rail is generally good, but there remain problems with current operations and future plans are not all clear.

East Midlands Trains (EMT) has a high profile and trumpeted minor improvements to the London timetable in December. The main event of the year for EMT was the Nottingham blockade in the summer, which went off without too many problems, following an information blitz. Midland Main Line (MML) services through Derby were little affected, but Matlock trains terminated at Beeston and those from the north at Langley Mill, while Liverpool – Norwich trains ran different routes in different directions. Those passengers who were not frightened off seemed remarkably tolerant.

Matlock to Nottingham trains have been speeded up by the elimination of the wait in Derby for the London train to pass. With the help of volunteers, the Derwent Valley line partnership has achieved some impressive smartening up of the stations and their gardens on the Matlock line.

In contrast, Cross-Country (XC) tries to keep a low profile, even when its services are improved. TWEM did manage to get a representative to attend a meeting, who made a robust defence of some policies and explained that many other problems were due to a lack of rolling stock that would take years to resolve.

Work has begun on the MML prior to electrification, though it is not clear what trains will be provided and whether some necessary improvements will be completed. These improvements include doubling the Hope Valley turnout at Dore. We expect electric trains to run in Derbyshire in 2019 -20.

Prior to that we should see the new station at Ilkeston, which did receive funding during the year, doubling of the Hope Valley line through Dore and Totley and lengthening of triangle there to hold full length freight trains.

FDVL produced a booklet giving a well-argued case for additional stops by MML trains at Belper. A stop by a southbound train in the evening peak is expected from May 2014.

At the time of writing, we are in the process of responding to the consultation on the route through our area of HS2, the deadline for which is the day before our AGM. Following several meetings organised by other interested parties, and formal exhibitions by HS2 Ltd, discussion on this dominated our last two meetings of 2013. Initial plans proposed two main alternative routes; parallel to the M1 with an East Midlands “hub” station at Toton, or through Derby. Current plans are for the Toton route. Our main talking point was whether access to the proposed station at Toton would be sufficiently easy to provide benefits for passengers from Derbyshire, or whether we should campaign for the route through Derby.

Roads

The government announced in the summer that it would fund grade separation at the A38 Derby Junctions, but the Highways Agency has stated that it needs to update detailed plans dating from 2002 (and earlier), so this scheme is still a long way off. In the meantime, additional lanes are to be created and modified traffic lights installed at Little Eaton and Markeaton in early 2014. It is also planned to modify M1 Jct 24 during 2014. Consultation is currently taking place on proposals to make M1 from Jct 28 to 35 into a “smart motorway”.

The new Local Transport Boards include one covering the same area as the D2N2 LEP. They have bid for funding for a number of schemes designed to alleviate congestion “pinch points”, some of which will also benefit bus services.

Buses

In Derby, the City Council have been spending the “Better Bus” funding that they were awarded last year. Visible signs of this included the launch of the “Spectrum” ticket (valid on all colours of bus), new (and much better) shelters at many city centre bus stops and Real Time Information screens at many stops around the city. RTI is also available on trentbarton routes via their new website. I think that it’s working better than Startrak, but is by no means perfect.

Derby Railway Station Forecourt has been completely remodelled, with a massive bus shelter providing much better facilities for interchange. Unfortunately, this was completed shortly before most bus services were diverted away for a year while London Road bridge is rebuilt. (This bridge had been on its last legs for years and has been mentioned in previous reports)

A number of years ago I suggested to Labour councillors that the Council should recruit passengers to give them a better idea of how bus services were working and whether problems could be solved by operators, the Council or the Police. Now that they are in power they have taken this up, and “Route Champions” were recruited and appointed in the spring. Better Bus Funding was used to hire a consultant to advise Council officers and myself how to set up the scheme. As expected, some of those appointed have dropped out, but we plan a recruitment drive in 2014. General comments from them are what you would expect from any regular bus user, but some detailed points have been picked up and acted upon. Some CBT members attended meetings arranged with operators.

Trent celebrated their centenary during 2013, with a family day at Langley Mill on a very hot Spring Bank Holiday Sunday, and special buses on the original Ashbourne route on 31 October. But, unusually, there were no new vehicles during the year. Competition in Notts from Premiere ceased at the beginning of the year when that firm went bankrupt, but arrived in Derbyshire from Your Bus a few weeks later. By the end of the year Your Bus were operating, with smart modern vehicles, express services to Nottingham and Ilkeston and stopping services to Heanor and Nottingham via Long Eaton. We watch with interest how this competition will progress – passengers on these routes have benefited in the short-term.

An unusual example of “making the punishment fit the crime” came when the Traffic Commissioner (TC) punished Arriva Derby for not operating the evening 44/45 Alvaston service in accordance with the registration by making them run those journeys free for a year. It doesn’t seem to have lead to a vast increase in passengers.

Derbyshire has not been immune to reductions in service and increased fares, but cuts have been less pronounced than in many parts of the country. We hope that this will continue

Through TWEM we responded to a TC Consultation on bus reliability and timetabling.

We continue to attend the East Midlands Airport Surface Transport Forum. The Leicester - Loughborough – Airport – Derby bus service continues to be successful.

Jim Froggatt, Chairman

29 January 2013