

Issued - 20 November 2018

## Right direction but we need to go faster...

The Shakespeare Line Promotion Group (SLPG) has responded to the West Midlands Rail Executive's Rail Investment Strategy (RIS) that was published in October and sets out a vision and plan for the railways in the West Midlands over the next 30 years.

The group that represents rail users between Stratford upon Avon and Birmingham and Leamington Spa/London and Stratford upon Avon has largely welcomed and supported the RIS but says that it needs to be bolder and set much faster timescales to deliver service improvements.

Using data gained from online surveys it carried out with communities, rail users and Stratford upon Avon town centre businesses in Spring 2018 that led to just under 900 responses SLPG says the need for more frequent and faster Stratford upon Avon < Birmingham train services is the highest priority for both users and businesses. It means that extending to and from Stratford upon Avon train services that currently stop and turn back at Whitlocks End near Shirley would combine with the Stratford-Solihull-Birmingham service to provide a 20 minute "turn up and go" interval train service for the town.

Fraser Pithie, Secretary of the SLPG Rail User Group, said "The attraction of extending current train services to and from Stratford upon Avon that already come halfway down the line with Birmingham is it doesn't mean any costly and time-consuming infrastructure work. It would be relatively easy to re-timetable the services to provide a much-improved interval service."

Stratford already has two trains an hour to and from Birmingham through the day, one service travelling via Henley in Arden and Shirley and the other service going via Dorridge and Solihull. By extending the train service that currently turns back at Whitlocks End every hour would provide a third service for Stratford upon Avon. "SLPG have stated that passengers want to see greater frequency and faster services. Consequently, we want a third service operating semi-fast from and to Whitlocks End calling only at Henley in Arden and Wythall. Let's not forget this is also about supporting Stratford's town centre businesses and we need to do all we can to help sustain them " Fraser Pithie added.

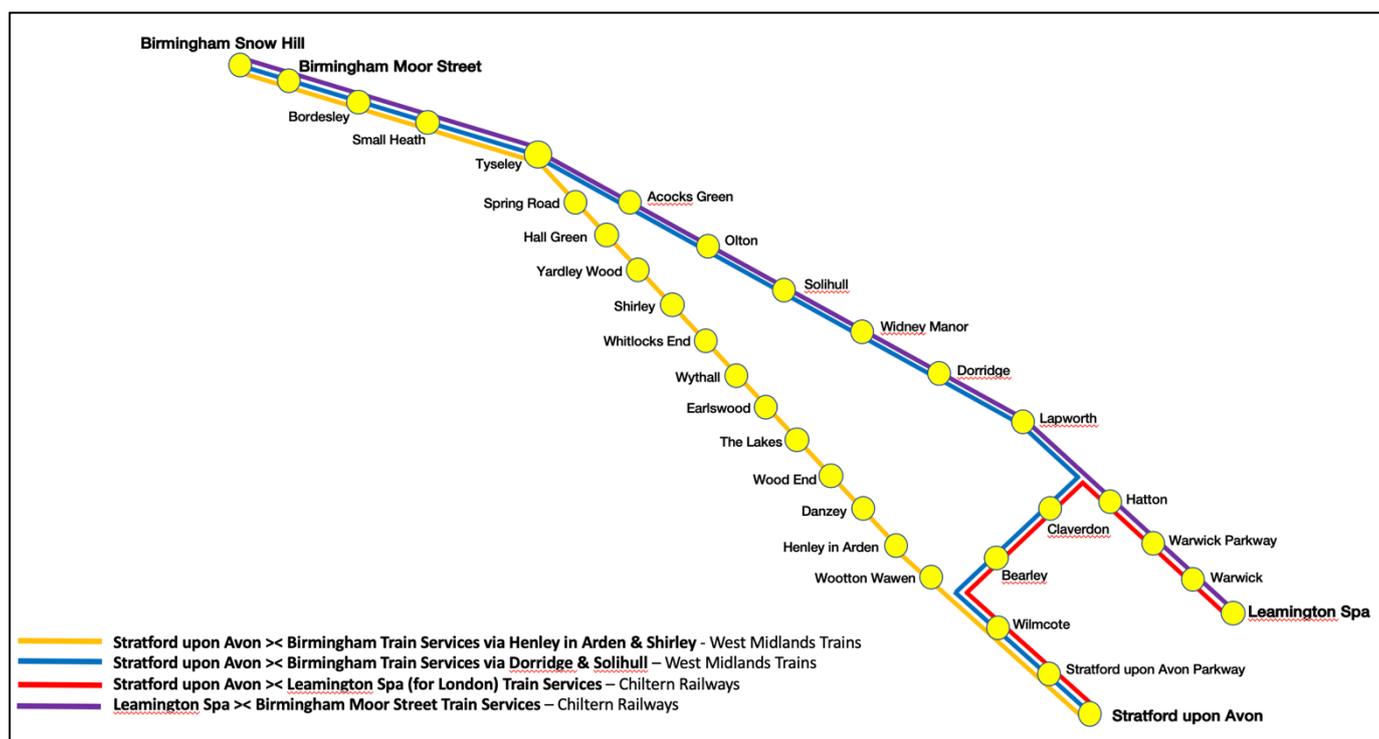
The RIS states economic, and housing growth is expected to lead to some 900,000 more people and 450,000 more jobs by 2032 in the West Midlands. Combined with the committed housing growth in the Stratford upon Avon District and the two District Local Planning Authorities to the south-west, whose boundaries meet Stratford's near Long Marston some 28,475 new homes increase the overall population to 971,000.

Fraser added “We have gone out and asked passengers and businesses what’s important to them and what they need. The results show that we need to be planning now for the future and it's encouraging that in many respects the RIS seeks to do that. However, we would challenge the RIS ‘quick wins’ when many of them are estimated to take seven years. Increasing train frequency and introducing some faster services will significantly improve connectivity, help reduce overcrowding and can be done relatively quickly within the next couple of years. We have set out what passengers and businesses need and expect in our response to the consultation on the RIS. Passengers and local businesses need to see some real tangible improvements at a much quicker pace”.

ENDS

20 November 2018

For more information please contact Fraser Pithie on 07976 932762



Notes for editors:

1. SLPG are continuing to campaign for the restoration of more direct train services between Stratford upon Avon and London since they were reduced by Chiltern Railways in October 2015 to accommodate their new Oxford – Bicester Village- London train service. This includes promoting through the DfT’s Great Western Franchise consultation the extension of GW services at Oxford and Banbury to and from Stratford upon Avon.

2. SLPG do not support the unreserved reopening of the Stratford upon Avon><Honeybourne railway line but do not accept that reopening the disused rail corridor should be dismissed without objective evidence. Consequently, SLPG want an Economic Impact Study to be carried out as a pre-appraisal to determine the viability of the scheme as a notional value of £20m is indicated as potentially available to the local economy arising from significantly improved rail service connectivity.
3. SLPG strongly believe that there needs to be greater co-operation and co-ordination between Local Planning Authorities, Local Transport Authorities and WMRE in respect of residential and commercial development and the potential impact resulting in increased demand for rail capacity. Specifically, we are actively pursuing with the relevant local authorities significant increased car parking at Henley in Arden and enabling car parking at Wythall through the Bromsgrove District Plan and potential developer funding.

SLPG support the proposed frequency along the Birmingham-Solihull- Leamington Spa route with the exception of Lapworth. SLPG believe that the Birmingham><Solihull><Stratford upon Avon train services that run through Lapworth should call at the station enabling connectivity between Lapworth and Stratford upon Avon. This would also improve the number of trains between Birmingham and Lapworth.

4. SLPG believe that the operation of the Birmingham><Leamington Spa local service should be transferred to the West Midlands Rail Franchise from Chiltern Railways as this would ensure greater continuity and inclusivity with other local services and the West Midlands rail network. It would also minimise the potential for service disruption caused by withdrawal of services to enable Chiltern Railways to concentrate their operating resources on London services when the West Coast Main Line route between the West Midlands and London is closed.
5. SLPG have shared the results of its online surveys and our Aims and Objectives since April 2018 to the following organisations/individuals:

West Midlands Trains	Great Western Railway
Worcestershire County Council	Warwickshire County Council
Stratford on Avon District Council	Bromsgrove District Council
StratfordwardBID	Stratford on Avon Town Council
Royal Shakespeare Theatre	Nadhim Zahawi MP
Shakespeare Birthplace Trust	Shakespeares England (Visit England)