

RAIL PASSENGER journeys at Yardley Wood have increased further by over 4.7% compared to last year in the latest figures recorded and released by the Rail Regulator, the Office of Rail & Road (ORR) for 2016/17. It means that Yardley Wood with over 448,000 passenger journeys a year has the highest usage of any intermediate station along the rail route known as the North Warwickshire Line between Birmingham's Snow Hill & Moor Street and Stratford upon Avon. The news comes as the Rail User Group for the Birmingham-Stratford upon Avon route, known as the Shakespeare Line Promotion Group (SLPG), has launched an online survey asking rail passengers what issues they have and what improvements they want to see from the new train operator for the route, West Midlands Railways Ltd. While it is encouraging passengers that use the line to join the SLPG the survey is open to everyone, enabling all who use the railway line to have their say.

Hall Green, Shirley and Whitlocks End adjacent to Dickens Heath are all served by the line with half hourly service. Earlswood and Wythall only enjoy an hourly service and consequently users at these stations suffer much more when and if there are rail service cancellations. Earlier this week the SLPG in response to plans from Warwickshire County Council stated it welcomed the commitment for more direct peak time rail services between Stratford upon Avon and Birmingham via Solihull but it will be pressing for more peak time semi-fast rail services between Stratford upon Avon and Birmingham via and serving Henley in Arden, and Wythall particularly as stations beyond Whitlocks End only have an hourly service.

The latest passenger figures from ORR show that Stratford upon Avon has hit and exceeded the one million mark for rail passenger journeys in the year. Stratford is a popular destination for long distance and international visitors but also for many living in Birmingham and the West Midlands who visit the town for a day out particularly in school holiday periods and at weekends. It's a significant turnaround of the Shakespeare Line's fortunes as in 1969 and again in 1984 British Rail tried to close the rail route. For several years now on Summer Sundays Vintage Trains of Tyseley have also used the route for their steam hauled "Shakespeare Express" service between Birmingham and Stratford upon Avon. In 2018 it is widely expected that the newly restored 'Clun Castle' steam locomotive will be operating some of these summer Sunday services.

West Midlands Metro Mayor Andy Street supports and has arranged for his office to meet with SLPG to discuss the future needs and plans for the line as some 27,000 new homes are due to be built along its catchment by 2030.