



# RRUG UPDATE

## What is RRUG all about?

Formed with the help of Rugby's then MP Andy King back in late 2004, the Group aims to:

- Fight on your behalf to improve and maintain the Rugby rail service, the station and its environment.
- Act as a voice for Rugby rail users.
- Collect your views and feed them into discussions with Virgin Trains, London Midland and Network Rail.
- Take the longer term view of Rugby rail services by taking part in consultations run by the Department for Transport, Network Rail, Passenger Focus, Local Authorities and others.
- Maintain links with other Groups through membership of Railfuture.
- Provide members with information by e-mail, post, meetings and via RRUG's website.  
([www.rugbyrailusersgroup.org.uk](http://www.rugbyrailusersgroup.org.uk))

Everyone is busy so we understand that it's difficult for you to find time to get actively involved in the campaign to improve Rugby rail services. We'll take the strain and fight on your behalf, but we can't do it without your support. You can:

- Join Rugby Rail Users Group today for just £5 to help with administrative costs (membership form on the back page of this newsletter).
- Come to periodic meetings held with the train operators and other key organisations - we will e-mail or post details to all RRUG members.
- Help with publicity and spreading news about the Group to other rail users.
- Member or not, keep us informed about your rail experiences through the 'Contact us' link on the website.

## *Members' Meeting 24<sup>th</sup> November - see Page 2*

**Birmingham service improved:** it was good news for Rugby rail users during September with London Midland introducing an additional train between Northampton, Rugby and Birmingham each hour during off-peak times on Mondays to Fridays and for most of the day on Saturdays. Although these additional trains call at more stations between Coventry and Birmingham than the existing service, and are therefore slower, these changes are to be welcomed, particularly in the southbound direction as the new xx.13 from Birmingham fills the 40 minute gap in services to Rugby that used to annoy a lot of people.

**Services to the North West:** it's good news for Birmingham rail users, but there are still unacceptable gaps in the timetable including the lack of direct fast services to the north-west and Scotland. These almost disappeared when the Very High Frequency (VHF) timetable was introduced in December 2008, but largely through RRUG's efforts the normally intransigent Department for Transport (DfT) relented slightly with the introduction of the 06:44 Glasgow.

Filling this gap in the timetable continues to be a major RRUG objective. Rugby is set to expand in future years and rail services should be provided that maximise journey opportunity and not force people to use cars and planes. The next opportunity to try and put things right is the timetable revamp scheduled for December 2013. RRUG is taking and will continue to take an active part in this process.

To date encouraging noises have come out of Network Rail's West Coast Rail Utilisation Strategy in response to concerns expressed by RRUG and Passenger Focus about north-west services. There is a recommendation that those responsible for the 2013 timetable should consider stopping a proposed additional Euston-Preston (or Blackpool) service at Nuneaton and Rugby on alternate hours.

RRUG will also be pressing its case for better services with the four short listed bidders for the West Coast franchise due to start on 9<sup>th</sup> December 2012 and run for 15 years. A meeting has already been held with Keolis/SNCF West Coast, but so far nothing has been heard from Abellio Intercity West Coast Limited, First West Coast Limited or Virgin Trains Limited. Hopefully representatives will come forward shortly.

RRUG cannot let the opportunity to try and influence the 2013 timetable pass otherwise it could be 2026, with the planned opening of the proposed HS2, before the next opportunity arises. So if you value your rail services now and into the future, please back us by joining today using the membership form on the back of this newsletter.

[www.rugbyrailusersgroup.org.uk](http://www.rugbyrailusersgroup.org.uk)



## Members' Meeting Thursday 24<sup>th</sup> November

It has been some months since RRUG held a members' meeting. This is mainly due to a lack of progress on rail issues at both a national and local level. With the fog beginning to clear, the Committee is keen to re-launch a programme of meetings over the next few months.

The first of the new series of meetings takes place on Thursday 24<sup>th</sup> November. Representatives of the Rugby Radio Station Limited Partnership will be coming along to brief us about the rail aspects of DIRFT III and a Sustainable Urban Extension to Rugby.

The meeting takes place at Age Concern, Clifton Road, Rugby at 7.15pm for a 7.30pm start. The meeting is open to members only, although non-members are welcome to join at the door for £5.

## AGM 2011:

RRUG's 6<sup>th</sup> AGM and Members' meeting was held at Age Concern, Clifton Road, Rugby on 16<sup>th</sup> March with representatives of London Midland (LM) and Virgin Trains.

Discussions centred on Network Rail's West Coast Rail Utilisation Strategy consultation and DfT's Intercity West Coast franchise consultation, as well as current issues such as better contingency planning and passenger information when services are disrupted, frequency of on-train ticket checks, the then ongoing dispute between ASLEF and LM, proposed LM ticket office closures and suggested improvements to Rugby station facilities.

During the part of the evening set aside for the AGM, the meeting voted to accept several changes to the Constitution and agreed to waive 2011/12 fees for existing members and retain the £5 joining fee for new members. Officers and Committee elected were:

Stephanie Clifford (Chair), Hilary Hall (Vice-chair and Membership Secretary), Claire Wells (Media relations), Alan Turner (Secretary), David Carpenter (website administrator), David Cheney, Chris Priddey, Jerry Thorne (Treasurer), Howard Vero, Tony Millinger, Brian Dobinson (co-opted), Robert Stevenson (co-opted and website developer).

The new constitution is available on the website. The notes of the meeting can be found on the members' area of the website.

## HS2 Consultation and Beyond

RRUG's response to the DfT's HS2 consultation, which closed on 29<sup>th</sup> July, is in the members' area of the website. The consultation findings are expected to be announced by the Secretary of State for Transport later this year.

RRUG's view is that with HS2 releasing capacity along the existing West Coast route, there is the potential for additional services at Rugby. The HS2 consultation document agrees with this view by providing additional fast commuter services in and out of London and Birmingham, supporting major growth areas, such as Northampton, Rugby and Milton Keynes.

However, as no one knows who will be running HS2 and the West Coast route in 2026, there is always the risk the latter could be downgraded, such as trains reduced to "all station" stoppers" and Rugby services would get worse.

An article in The Economist dated 3/9/2011, entitled 'Railroad to nowhere', suggested the high-speed rail link is based on mistaken assumptions about Britain's economic geography. It also suggested high speed rail will lead to poorer services at a number of locations, including Rugby. Philip Hammond, Secretary of State for Transport, has answered these criticisms in a letter confirming that modelling assumptions show that services to Rugby will increase.

A shorter term worry about HS2 concerns the reliability of West Coast services during the rebuilding of Euston station (starting around 2018 for 5 years). The existing West Coast service is fragile at best - it only takes one problem to cause severe disruption.

For the record, Warwickshire County Council is a member of "51m", a group of 18 local authorities challenging the evidence base about the HS2 project. This Group is not opposed to high speed rail per se, but feels other alternatives have not been fully explored. The '51m' website is: <http://www.51m.co.uk>.

RRUG has no view on the validity of the case for HS2 or its proposed route. RRUG's main concern is the impact of HS2 on train services at Rugby. The results of the consultation are eagerly awaited.

## London Midland Stakeholder Conference

RRUG will be attending London Midland's 2011 stakeholder event in Birmingham on Friday 14<sup>th</sup> October. The theme is 'looking back - looking forward'.

Keep up to date with [www.rugbyrailusersgroup.org.uk](http://www.rugbyrailusersgroup.org.uk)



## On The Spot - Your Points Answered

Let us have your questions about the train services, station facilities, the station environment or other rail related issues relevant to Rugby rail users. We will then put someone on the spot to provide the answers and then report back in the newsletter. Your support is needed, so if you have any points to raise, please e-mail the Secretary via the 'Contact us' link on the website.

### This newsletter - Virgin on the spot

Towards the end of August RRUG received an e-mail from an angry user about the impact of a change to the rolling stock being used for some Rugby to Euston services on Saturdays. The complaint related in particular to the 08:23 Virgin service formed of only five coaches (*rather than the usual nine*) which was grossly overcrowded, forcing people to stand for the entire journey to Euston and seat reservations were not available. The points raised concerned the apparent lack of publicity about the change and incorrect or lack of information provided by station staff about the reasons for the change. The user considered that the reduction in seating availability was wholly inconsistent with any concept of service. **Over to Virgin Trains...**

Tracy Hall, Virgin's Group Station Manager West Midlands, responded by accepting that customer service had fallen short in terms of communicating the switch to passengers and apologised that recent specific travel experiences had fallen well below the standards expected. The main cause of this was Virgin's business decision to utilise their fleet of trains in a different way to offer a better coverage of seat availability across the network as a whole.

Over the summer period Virgin decided to switch some 9 car Pendolinos to the Birmingham - Scotland services. This was to provide extra capacity on this increasingly busy long distance route, replacing the usual 5 car Voyager sets which could then be used elsewhere. Virgin looked in depth at loadings to decide where the Voyagers could best be deployed to offer the least disruption. Overall, in Virgin's view, more rail users across the network benefitted than were inconvenienced.

Tracy went on to say that the switch had not been adequately communicated locally and Virgin will be taking this feedback on board to ensure that any future developments are advertised appropriately and staff properly briefed.

With regard to providing additional capacity in the future, Tracy said that Virgin had recently put into service a new Pendolino unit earlier than anticipated. This has led to a Voyager being released to join up with a similar unit to form a 10 coach train for certain services. Also, with the proposed extension of the West Coast Pendolino fleet from 9 to 11 cars over the coming years, be it operated by Virgin Trains or not, there will be further increased capacity.

She pointed out, however, that if demand continues to grow at the current rate across the West Coast mainline, this additional capacity will eventually be taken up. The overall strategy for meeting demand across the rail network as a whole, including dictating the connections available to passengers, lies with the Department for Transport. Routes may be operated by two or more franchises, providing different journey options at different times of the day, such as is the case currently between Rugby and Euston with services being operated by Virgin and London Midland. Virgin's prime remit is for long distance travel into and out of London Euston during the peak hours, and at this stage this is focused on travel to and from stations north of Rugby.

**Note: due to space limitations the contents of the original e-mails have been summarised. Apologies if anything has been missed out or mis-interpreted.**

**Thanks to both contributors**

**Keep up to date with [www.rugbyrailusersgroup.org.uk](http://www.rugbyrailusersgroup.org.uk)**

