FRIENDS OF THE DERWENT VALLEY LINE

Chairman’s Annual Report - October 2018

There is much to report upon for the past year, even if one were to omit reference to recent activities in the Derby Station area. F.D.V.L. members have attended meetings and participated in consultations &, as can be seen at each of the branch stations, there has been much good work on Community Action Days, and by Network Rail during the blockade, and through the sustained attention of over fifty station adopters. However, the Derby remodelling, recently completed over a period of 78 days, did have a significant impact on the line’s travellers and as such requires comment.

Derby Remodelling

Prior to the commencement of the remodelling in July, ridership on the line had increased for the fifth year running, reaching 738,000 passenger journeys for the year 2017/18. To sustain this growth is one of the prime objectives of the F.D.V.L. and therefore there is concern that the blockade may have had an adverse effect. At present it is too soon to know. In the absence of trains, the scheduling of road coaches at half-hour intervals, with additional services at busy periods, was welcome. However, data has shown that a significant proportion of travellers did not transfer to this option. It is a sad indication of the local road systems that (for example) the 8 miles from Belper to Derby, which takes 12 minutes by rail, requires 45 minutes by road at the busiest times. It may be no surprise that some made their own plans, but equally there may be no surprise if they return to rail.

Special mention could be made of those commuters between Belper and Sheffield. F.D.V.L. have continued to press for improved main line services at Belper, but the regular timetable remains one each way per weekday. For the final five weeks of the blockade the option of a bus service to Chesterfield was withdrawn, directing travellers via Derby - a lengthy and expensive option.

The Train Service

For most of the year E.M.T. have run a reliable service - F.D.V.L.’s most frequent criticism being that of providing single carriage trains at busy times. This can happen so often on summer Saturdays, with stock getting allocated to more pressing routes. It is hoped that the transfer of stock that has begun between T.O.C.s will be to our benefit.

Station platforms are of importance to train services, as we are learning at Matlock Bath and Whatstandwell. At the former, the surface quality of part of the platform has deteriorated such that Network Rail has fenced it off, thereby categorising the station as for 3-car maximum. This is contrary to what is required at busy times - such as the Illuminations. F.D.V.L. are to press Network Rail to correct this situation.

F.D.V.L. have met with intending franchisees, and responded to the DfT public consultation. Foremost in our demands is that all trains be 2-car minimum, that late evening services are improved, that the recent enhancement to the Sunday service be improved to hourly. We are very aware that our ultimate aim - a more frequent service at commuter times - will require significant investment in double-tracking part of the branch.

Along the Line

The recent blockade has allowed various works to take place along the branch. - maintenance of two footbridges (Cromford & Whatstandwell), the realigning of the platform edge at Cromford, the repainting and improvements to the Matlock station canopy. Unfortunately the near future may well see the closure of the foot crossing at Matlock Bath for safety reasons and F.D.V.L. hope that an alternative route to the cable cars can be found, given their appeal to visitors to the line.

There have been Community Action Days at several stations. I have enjoyed taking part, amongst other volunteers and the employees of several railway companies. It helps when someone else is providing the paint & brushes, and the drinks!

Amongst the station adopters, the Cromford Station Group’s work was acknowledged at the 2017 Community Rail Awards, receiving the “Lead Silver Award” in the “It’s Your Station Category”. All station adopters require F.D.V.L.’s thanks - in maintaining colourful flower displays throughout a warm & dry summer; it is perhaps just as well that the now extensive beds at Duffield are populated by plants of a Mediterranean origin!

Good News

With the introduction of the May 2018 timetable, the last train of the day from Derby departed just before the arrival of a service from London. This had been a good connection for some years. Now, following pressure from various quarters, including M.P.s, E.M.T. have confirmed that the link will return with the December timetable. My thanks to all concerned. The making of connections, particularly now that Derby is a larger station, with less complex departure options, may need new emphasis.

Thanks

Attending the D.V.L. Rail Partnership meetings, one is conscious just how many groups and companies have an interest in, and make contributions, financial and otherwise, to the well being of the branch. If anyone ought to be singled out for especial thanks it is Alastair Morley, Partnership Officer: his enthusiasm for working within both the D.C.C. and E.M.T. to the good of the service is much appreciated.

I wish to thank members of the F.D.V.L. steering group. Their range of knowledge & enthusiasm is good to have access to. In particular, my thanks go to David Rayner for keeping our web site “on schedule” and to Chris Darrall for turning meeting notes into records of our efforts.