



possibility, reinforcing the need to know what the fee agreed and derived from taxpayers amounts to.

However, detailed information on this aspect of the Kenilworth scheme is scarce, because it is included in minutes and briefing papers taken from cabinet meetings that were exempt from the public, effectively placing reports beyond the reach of FoI requests.

In summary, the story of Kenilworth has to serve as a warning to local authorities across the UK not to commit to schemes unless they have clear understanding regarding rail construction and operations, and are assured through robust scrutiny procedures that those managing schemes on their behalf are effective in meeting deliverables on time and on budget.

Perhaps it's time for ORR to consider carrying out a benchmarking exercise on new station builds?

Funding for projects such as Kenilworth comes from one source - you and me, through local and general taxation. That is why we have a right to know what, why, where and how our money is spent.

Left unchallenged or without a rethink of how they are governed, I fear that the number of schemes with unclear and increasing costs is likely to grow. A situation could then emerge that chokes off a great many innovative and much-needed enhancements because financial estimates are adjusted upwards, owing to the inflated costs arising from poorly executed schemes.

This has the potential to kill off otherwise sound business cases at a time when NR is increasingly opening itself up to third party financed schemes, and the DfT is seeking a more market-led approach to enhancements (RAIL 849).

The apparent lack of effective oversight and governance in the case of Kenilworth cannot and should not be tolerated, when so much taxpayers' money appears unaccounted for within the £13.6m new station scheme that (at the time of writing) has still not opened its doors. **✉**

pressure on the authority to now explain its actions.

We must ask ourselves if such behavior is befitting of a higher-tier local authority, but also what scrutiny has been applied to WCC's project manager SLC Rail?

Sadly, we may never know the answer to the latter question, owing to WCC's seemingly ritual use of 'commercial sensitivity' and 'competitive advantage' to claim FoI exemptions. While there are legitimate reasons to using such exemptions, I doubt that it should extend to providing a simple total annual spend with a supplier as has been requested, yet WCC continues to reject such transparency.

I think that Kenilworth station could more accurately be described as 'Mothball Halt'. At an incredible £13.6m, we have an over-budget station with a redundant footbridge and no second platform.

There will also be a service that will operate on just six days a week, after WMT withdrew its application to ORR for seven-day running due to a lack of suitable rolling stock. WCC cannot be blamed for this, but it comes as a further disappointment to local residents who have been waiting for 53 years to get their station back.

This brings me to usage figures for the station. In February 2018, Fogarty said that an estimated 445 passengers would use

the station daily (which would equate to approximately 162,000 annually). But the forecast estimate of 275,000 suggests 753 people would use the station daily. WCC has subsequently clarified this by stating that the forecast passenger numbers of 445 per day relate to "new to rail" journeys, whereas the per annum figure relates to the total journeys, including those abstracted from other stations.

The accuracy of these usage figures is important, as WCC was pressed by broadcast media on March 20 about underwriting train service operating losses. In response, Fogarty said: "We have done a new deal with West Midlands Trains via the DfT, and we will be paying a one-off fee".

Sensing there was a need for further clarity, BBC Coventry & Warwickshire Radio pursued the issue with interviewer Phil Upton asking: "Will Warwickshire County Council underwrite any operating losses for the train operating company at Kenilworth?" Fogarty replied: "No", effectively contradicting her previous response.

Subsequent correspondence confirms payment of a one-off fee in respect of underwriting operating losses, but yet again WCC refuses to say how much this payment/one-off fee is. With a service running for just six days out of seven, a potential significant operating cost shortfall becomes a real

Further reading

- Clash over Kenilworth station's opening date - RAIL 841
- DfT and council clash over third Kenilworth delay - RAIL 842
- No Sunday services as Kenilworth station finally set to open - RAIL 847
- Another delay to Kenilworth station opening - RAIL 848
- Still no date in sight for Kenilworth station opening - RAIL 849

About the author

Fraser Pithie, Contributing Writer



Retired after a career of over 30 years in the utility industry, Fraser was Severn Trent's senior operations manager. He now writes on railway matters.