

Why Chiltern's on the right line

Transport giant **Chiltern Railways** is sponsoring the technology and digital category at this year's Birmingham Post Business Awards. Here, the rail firm looks back at a period of growth fuelled by technology

IT'S just over two years since Chiltern Railways launched Mainline, which was the first part of a £250 million infrastructure project undertaken by the company. It was the largest rail passenger infrastructure project since before the Second World War and has marked a transformational point in the history of the company.

The concept behind Mainline was to provide a fast, reliable and value for money train service to the capital, which allowed business people to travel and work in comfort. Not only would their service now be faster and remain value for money but also it would fulfil a need to provide West Midlands with a reliable and comfortable travel option, where they could use their travel time productively.

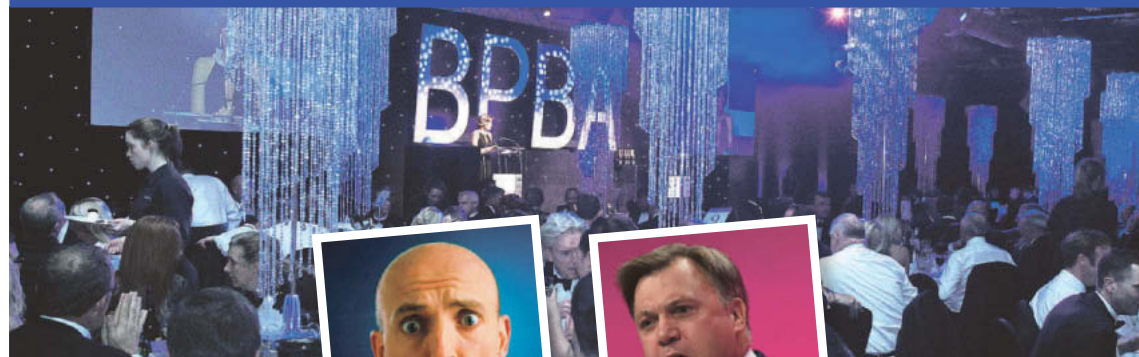
They increased the frequency of the service and the journey time to London. Trains now run twice an hour between Birmingham and London all day every day making it easier than ever for business travellers to commute to and from the capital. The project also reduced journey times by up to 28 minutes and



➤ Chiltern Mainline at Moor Street station in Birmingham

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journey times along the M40 corridor by 20 per cent.

Following consultation with the West Midlands business community and to enhance the passenger experience, they increased the number of tables on their trains and introduced free wifi on all Mainline trains which has been extraordinarily well received.

They also launched their 'premium economy' Business Zone, which was a first for the rail sector. Aimed at the Birmingham to London business traveller market, the zone offers all the valued business benefits of first class, but excluding the non-essentials at a fraction of the cost. The Business Zone even beats first class from other providers when it comes to seating. Legroom is 520mm in the Business Zone, more than any first class train service between Birmingham and London.

They have also made significant improvements to the ticketing process. They launched their app which was voted 'App of the Week' by Apple just after the launch. They were the first train company to offer live running time information for any UK journey free of charge and the first to allow customers to not only purchase their train ticket through an app, but to also pass through barriers simply by scanning the barcode on their phone avoiding the need to print at home or queue at a ticket vending machine or ticket office. This has improved the passenger experience significantly.

What's more, the train operator continues to make improvements to enhance travel. The company recently unveiled the first of its new-look trains as part of a £5.3 million train investment programme. The trains have been designed to emulate the style of the company's silver inter-city trains. Kitted out with new carpets, seat covers and tables, they have all the accoutrements of the popular silver trains. The revitalised trains offer an even more comfortable space for passengers travelling along the route and the project has been delivered without recourse to taxpayer funds. Furthermore, the train company has confirmed that they are updating the entire fleet of Clubman trains by 2016.

Their investment has also been focused on stations. In preparation for the Mainline launch, they completed the sympathetic restoration of their flagship Edwardian Birmingham Moor Street station. They have also made significant improvements to the car parking facilities at Solihull and Warwick Parkway to meet the increase in demand and were recently awarded Major Station of the Year, at the UK's prestigious National Rail Awards. The station was up against other major stations such as London Liverpool Street, York and London St Pancras International. The judges praised the helpful staff, the cleanliness of the station and the new information centre. This comes at a time when the company were this year the top DfT franchised operator for overall passenger satisfaction according to the National Passenger Survey.

The company also continues its strong track record for punctuality with the company remaining top franchised rail operator for right time train punctuality, according to the latest research released by Network Rail.

The official rail industry figures from Network Rail up to September 13 2014, which are based on the percentage of services that arrive within a minute of their scheduled time, revealed that 85.2 per cent of Chiltern Railways trains were on time against a national average of 65.1 per cent, placing the train operator miles ahead of companies such as Virgin and London Midland.

Andrew Munden, operations and safety director at Chiltern Railways said: "These results reinforce our commitment to providing a punctual service on which our passengers can rely. We take punctuality very seriously and our team works hard to make sure we give our passengers the best travel experience possible."

These improvements have all been made to ensure our passengers have the best quality travel experience possible. With comfortable, spacious carriages and mod cons such as free wifi, our passengers can sit back and spend their time as they wish – in work or simple relaxation.