

GETTING TO THE MATCH

by Roger Davis

You can always tell when there is a big match on as local streets are jammed with parked cars and roads around the stadia become no-go areas before and after each match. This is particularly galling as the one cricket stadium and six major football stadia in the West Midlands are, by and large, well served by public transport.

- **Edgbaston Cricket Ground (Warwickshire CC)** is not well served by train nor tram. Five Ways railway station and Edgbaston Village tram stop are currently the closest but are 1½ miles away. However, when it opens, Moseley Village station will be less than a mile away. Bus service provision is excellent with frequent services 1, 35, 45, 47, 61 and 63 all within walking distance of the ground. In addition, for internationals, National Express West Midlands operates a direct service 501 from New Street station to the ground, albeit at a premium price.
- **Molineux (Wolves)** is less than ⅔ mile from Wolverhampton railway station with through train services from many parts of the country. It is just over ½ mile from the Pipers Row Metro stop and Wolverhampton Bus Station.
- **Bescot Stadium (Walsall)** is only 250 yards from Bescot Stadium station. Although the station normally only sees two trains per hour in each direction, it is increased to four trains per hour before and after the game. In addition, Diamond bus service 45 between Walsall and West Bromwich passes the ground every 30 minutes while frequent bus services 4/4H/4M, which run from Walsall to West Bromwich, Blackheath, Halesowen and Merry Hill, stop about ½ mile away.
- **The Hawthorns (West Brom)** is about ¼ mile from The Hawthorns railway station which sees four trains per hour in each direction on services between Worcester and Stratford-upon-Avon. The adjacent Metro stop sees frequent tram services from Edgbaston Village to Wolverhampton while next season should see through trams to Dudley. In addition, the frequent bus service 74 passes the ground.

The tram stop [L] and railway station [R] at The Hawthorns is about ¼ mile from the football stadium



(Roger Davis)

- **Villa Park (Villa)** is about 500 yards from Witton station and ¾ mile from Aston station. Witton station is due for improvement and has two timetabled services per hour in each direction, although extra services operate before and after matches. Aston station has six trains per hour in each direction. Frequent bus services stop near Witton station (7, 11A and 11C) and Aston station (65 and 67).
- **St Andrew's (Blues)** is under ½ mile from Bordesley station which normally sees one “parliamentary” train per week. However, on match days, four trains per hour serve the station before and after the match. Frequent bus services 17, 60, 97 and 97A pass the ground. Blues intend to move to a new stadium under ½ mile from Adderley Park station by the end of the decade.

- **Coventry Building Society Arena (Coventry)** is alongside Coventry Arena station which only has one two-car train per hour in each direction, even on match days. Bus service 3 operates every 15 minutes and stops outside the railway station.

So, what can be done to get more people out of their cars and onto public transport? West Bromwich Albion liaised with Transport for West Midlands in September to offer a free 4-Week Regional nBus ticket to season ticket holders who are over 16. It was a start, but went nowhere near far enough.

One club that has gone the extra mile to promote public transport is Brighton and Hove Albion. The Amex Stadium, opened in 2011, is alongside Falmer railway station with four trains per hour between Brighton, Seaford, Eastbourne and Hastings. The station is also adjacent to the A27 which is served by 14 buses per hour.

However, to encourage use of public transport, home and away fans can travel free on buses and trains within a free travel zone on production of a matchday or season ticket. This applies for most services between 1130 and 2100 for a 1500 kick-off and between 1615 and midnight for a 1945 kick-off. The free train travel zone stretches from Worthing in the west, Haywards Heath in the north and Eastbourne in the east while spectators can travel free on all buses operated by Brighton & Hove Buses. This includes direct bus services from Eastbourne (22 miles away) and Tunbridge Wells (33 miles away) to the ground. Stagecoach also allows free travel from Worthing on its service 700 but not on its other service from Horsham.



In addition, two park and ride sites open 1½ hours before kick off with free bus transfer to and from the match. At least one wheelchair-accessible bus is provided at each site.

Of course, there are people who will insist on taking their car. Limited car parking is available at the ground and at the University of Sussex on the far side of the A27. However, parking must be pre-booked and costs £18 per match (£9 for blue badge holders). In addition, if car owners are determined enough to park for free on the nearest housing estate, they would be faced with a walk of over a mile along the busy A27 dual carriageway, much of it with no pavement. If that doesn't encourage fans to use public transport, nothing will!

Campaign for Rail would support any initiative to introduce such a scheme in the West Midlands so, come on Transport for West Midlands, why not work with the clubs and the transport operators to make it happen?