

West Coast Main Line

Introduction

Since the class 90s were first introduced back in the late 1980's, their flagship route has always been the West Coast Main Line. We look back at some of the key highlights from the past 24 years below. I shall add more information to this pdf document over time as I conduct more research, but if anybody has any information they like to share, then please get in touch.

The first loco to be released from Crewe Works at BREL was 90001 on the 31st October 1987 and went to Derby for a number of months for extensive type testing – interestingly as part of her testing phase the 90 spent some time at Bounds Green depot, however much of the testing took place on various sections of the WCML. On the 31st October 2012, the 90s entered their silver anniversary year in connection with the release of 90001 25 years earlier.

The class 90s have spent the last 24 years or so working passenger, parcel freight, and charter traffic on the WCML in one form or another. The original allocation of 90s saw 90001-90025 working passenger, with the remainder assigned to freight, although it was not unusual at the time to see freight engines working both passenger and vice-a-versa.

Following sectorisation, the main passenger fleet was reduced to a dedicated pool of 15 locos – this being 90001-90015. These worked for Inter-City and latterly Virgin Trains. However, as a result of Pendolinos and Voyager units being introduced, the first 15 90s became surplus to requirements, and so were transferred to the Great Eastern Region – this is where they can still be found today.

The loss of Royal Mail traffic in 2004, combined with the introduction of class 66s and 67s as well as the ending of loco-hauled passenger operations in 2004 (VWC) and 2007 (VXC) resulted in a significant lack of work for some of the class 90 fleet; notably those owned by the then EWS (now DBS). Sadly, this arrangement meant that as it stands at the moment there are 14 class 90s in long term store at Crewe EMD. Today the sole remaining 90s left in use on the West Coast are those that are owned by DBS and Freightliner which work a combination of freight and passenger services including charters and railtours.

A further aspect of the class 90s operational history was the inter-working that took place between mainline and cross-country duties for Inter-City, and latterly Virgin Trains. This saw many members of the fleet being in action (a practice no longer seen on the WCML). This was particularly noticeable for 90006, 90008 and 90010, which spent long periods of time unable to operate in push-pull mode. In 2012, all serviceable 90s are able to operate in push-pull mode including 90026 which finally had its TDM fixed back in the summer of 2009.

Most workings of the class 90 fleet on the WCML have been undertaken by single 90s due to their power output and consumption. However, pairs of 90s have worked on the WCML over the years; both passenger and freight in addition to railtours. Some noticeable examples include:

- 90132 & 90150 on a Pathfinders 'Grampian Highlander' tour from Crewe to Mossend on 6/8/94;
- 90129 & 90130 on a A1A charter "Whisky Galore" from Stafford to Edinburgh on the 5/8/95;
- 90128 & 90140 on another A1A charter "Road to the Isles" from Carlisle to Preston on 3/8/96;
- 90024 & 90021 worked a DBS Intermodal freight from Trafford Park to Wembley on 29/10/09 in multiple;
- 90002 & 90019 worked in multiple on the Garston to Wembley car train (6L48) on 17th September 2010. The Anglia 90 was leading which was on the train as a result of having a major exam at Crewe – this was its test run. 90002 returned North on 6X41 with 90029, although it is not clear if both 90s were powering or not;

- 90045 & 90016 worked 4L89 between Coatbridge and Crewe on the evening of 4th March 2011. It was a pair of 90s due to 90045 having been to York on driver training the day before. The duet was captured passing Preston station in the early hours;
- On the 8th April 2011, 90010 and 90026 operated as a working pair on 0Z27 between Crewe and Wembley Yard. Note that 90010 were returning to Anglia following a major overhaul exam and the duet ran as a light engine movement with 90026 leading;
- During December 2010, various Freightliner cl.90s worked in pairs on container trains due to adverse weather conditions in the UK as well as performing duties booked for cl.86s and cl.66s. The notable 90s that worked in pairs were; 90049 + 90043 plus 90041 + 90042 to name but a few. In addition, it has not been uncommon in recent years to see 90s working in multiple with 86s (see forums area for some noticeable workings). There have also been many other examples of 90s working in pairs in recent years including 90026 and 90010 at Crewe on the 8th April 2011.
- 90021 and 90028 worked an Intermodal freight train between Crewe and Mossend on the 23rd April 2012 after the planned class 92 needed to be detached from the freight train for repairs.

As already noted, class 90s were once common place on Cross-Country services for both Inter-City and Virgin Trains post-1997. One diagram that continued to operate in the early part of the 21st Century was the hiring of both MK3s and MK2s by Virgin Trains which featured both Freightliner and EWS owned 90s. This included 90023, 90024, 90044 and 90048 to name but a few. In addition, 90142 and 90146 as well as 90143 spent a period of time on hire to Virgin Trains during the early part of the 21st Century. One other significant hiring to Virgin West Coast was 90049 - this performed a few services on the WCML notably to Manchester Piccadilly, but on one particular occasion it was at the helm of the 12:25 EUS-GLC (1S75) and has never been repeated.

The last Cross-Country service to operate with a class 90 came on July 18th 2007 when 90026 worked the 20:24 Manchester Piccadilly to Birmingham New Street (1G80) which terminated at Stockport due to a fault with the DVT. The stock then returned to Manchester as ecs where 90026 was shunt released and it was game over. However, on Friday 24th August 2007 Virgin Trains hired the MK2 rake of stock to carry out Cross-Country duties, but due to operational issues, the curtain came down with the 12:48 BNS-MAN which was rescued by a 57, again due to a DVT fault and so the train terminated at Stafford.

Owing to the introduction of Pendolinos and the curtailment of class 86s in Anglia, the dedicated pool of passenger class 90s used by Virgin (90001-90015) were slowly transferred to Crown Point for use by 'One' during 2004. The curtain came down for the Virgin passenger 90s on Friday 24th August 2004 when 90015 worked the last service on the WCML - this involved the 10:30 EUS-GLC (1S57) for the 17:00 GLC-EUS (1M34). On arrival at Euston off 1M34, 90015 came off-lease and transferred to 'One'. However, despite 90001-90015 finishing their days on the WCML other members of the fleet continued to see use before all the Pendolinos and Voyagers entered traffic.

Other Passenger Operations Post-2007

Following an accident with 390033 in Cumbria on 23rd February 2007, a class 90 daytime loco-haulage diagram returned to the WCML with Virgin Trains on 12th March 2007 using a set of MK3s and a EWS owned 90. The services involved were 1R90 06:20 RUG-EUS; 1G21 16:40 EUS-BNS and 1B05 19:00 BNS-EUS. As well as working this daily diagram Mon-Fri only, the stock was also deployed to working a Sunday only diagram to Wolverhampton and Crewe during 2007-2008.

In addition, the MK3 stock + 90 also saw action on Bank Holiday weekends (Friday only) where it worked the 13:46 EUS-PRE (1T63) relief for the 17:00 return PRE-EUS (1T05) operating via Bescot and Birmingham. It would then re-join its proper diagram i.e. the 19:00 BNS-EUS, but operated as a through service from Preston. On the odd occasion owing to a shortage of rolling stock or some kind of infrastructure incident, the MK3 set would be deployed to the 08:10 EUS-BNS or the 08:40 EUS-WVH having worked 1R90 to Euston on weekdays only.

Due to the MK3 set of stock (WB64) running out of hours and requiring an overhaul, the set finished its days with Virgin on 12/12/08 with 1B05 19:00 BNS-EUS. The final service was celebrated by a fair

number of people including myself and on arrival at Euston off 1B05, the stock went to Doncaster for overhaul and it returned to Virgin in mid-2009 (more details below).

In the middle part of February 2009, loco-hauled services with class 90 traction returned to the WCML for Virgin Trains in the form of the 18:46 EUS-PRE (Friday Only). This service started in earnest on 20/02/09 with a set of MK3 stock hired in from Cargo-D + 90018 at the helm and lasted for a 7wk period. The use of the Cargo-D stock for 7wk's came to an abrupt end due to two Pendolinos becoming damaged at Wembley in early March. On Monday 6th April a new weekday diagram started with the Cargo-D set - this involved three out and back trips to Birmingham Mon-Fri Only:

07:43 EUS-BNS (1G06)
09:30 BNS-EUS (1B35)
11:43 EUS-BNS (1G18)
13:30 BNS-EUS (1B50)
15:43 EUS-BNS (1G30)
17:30 BNS-EUS (1B74)

On the first day 90036 started the proceedings by performing the 13:30 BNS-EUS having come ecs from Crewe (earlier in the morning the set failed and so went back to Crewe where 90036 was placed on the set). This new diagram at the time was performed by a hired set of MK3 stock from Cargo-D nicknamed 'WB65' (the same set that was used on 1p05 for a few weeks earlier). The weekday diagram using WB65 remained in place until Friday 24th July 2009 - the final day of operations was performed by 90026.

On a few occasions at weekends, the Cargo-D set hired to VT worked a couple of football specials. For example on Sunday 19th April 2009, the MK3 Set + 90036 performed a football charter to/from Liverpool Lime Street taking Everton fans to Wembley Central. The 'up' service was 1Z93 leaving Liverpool at 10:15 and the return train was 1Z94 (left Wembley at 19:19).

The day after WB65 had finished with VT, the refurbished set of MK3 stock in Virgin Trains livery (nicknamed WB64) was kicked into action making its inaugural run on Saturday 25th July 2009 with 90028 at the helm. It worked a one way trip to Birmingham - The 17:43 EUS-BNS (1G36) and then returned south ecs. The following Monday (27th July 2009) a new diagram started using WB64. This included:

07:03 EUS-BNS (1G04)
08:50 BNS-EUS (1B29)
10:43 EUS-BNS (1G15)
12:30 BNS-EUS (1B44)
14:43 EUS-BNS (1G27)
16:30 BNS-EUS (1B68)

The above diagram lasted until Friday 14th August 2009, but unfortunately the set + 90029 providing the traction on the final day was stepped down at Euston off 1B44 due to issues with the DVT on 14th August 2009, and so never worked 1G27 or 1B68. The 90 did still perform the Fridays Only turn to Preston departing Euston at 18:46 as booked.

Since August 2009, the Virgin Trains MK3 set has been used on the West Midlands route at various stages in one form or another, as well as working football specials and other charters as required. At the time of writing (May 2011), WB64 continues to see action on the West Midlands route as and when required in addition to performing spot hire specials.

14th November 2009

Similar to what happened in October 2009, the Virgin Trains MK3 set with 90021 providing the traction this time was pushed into action on Saturday 14th November due to a shortage of operational Pendolinos. The trains involved were:

07:03 EUS-BNS 1G04 / 08:50 BNS-EUS 1B09
12:03 EUS-BNS 1G19 / 13:50 BNS-EUS 1B24

The class 90 and stock were due to work the 15:43 EUS-BNS out and back, but this was changed at the last minute. Incidentally a fatality occurred at Tile Hill just after we passed on 1B24, so I doubt very much if WB64 would have worked the remainder of the diagram anyway.

December 7th 2009 to February 14th 2010

In order to carry out maintenance work on the class 390 notably to 390040, the Virgin MK3 set was once again pushed into action on the Birmingham route for a period of 13wks. This started in earnest on December 7th 2009, and finished on Sunday 14th February 2010. On the last day of operations, 90024 provided the traction.

The class 90s that featured during the above period were 90020, 90024, 90029, and 90039. The use of WB64 once again on daily passenger operations highlights the importance of having the slam door stock at the disposal of Virgin West Coast.

In addition to working services to and from Birmingham, one service originated from Wolverhampton following OHLE problems. The train in question was the 21:45 ex-Wolves to Euston on February 8th 2010 (which even stopped at Sandwell & Dudley) much to my enjoyment. A few days later on 10th February 90020 worked from Euston to Liverpool for Chelsea fans.

April 16th until May 8th 2010

Due to the volcano erupting in Iceland and the derailment of 390004 at Oxley depot, Virgin Trains re-deployed their loco-hauled set to the Euston to Birmingham services from 16th April - 8th May.

The services worked by WB64 included:

07:03 EUS-BNS 1G04 / 08:50 BNS-EUS
10:43 EUS-BNS 1G15 / 10:43 BNS-EUS
14:43 EUS-BNS 1G27 / 16:30 BNS-EUS
19:03 EUS-BNS 1G40 / 20:50 BNS-EUS (Monday to Thursday)
18:46 EUS-PRE 1P05 (Friday)

On Saturday 17th of April, WB64 with 90021 at the helm was used for a special football service from Watford Junction to Wigan. On arrival at Wigan, the stock went to Preston to form the 19:27 PRE-EUS as a service train. But the DVT failed at Crewe, so the train was cancelled and it went ecs to Wembley.

The next day on Sunday 18th April 2010, WB64 and 90021 worked a service train to Preston departing Euston at 13:30. On arrival at Preston, the stock went ecs to Wigan to pick-up the returning Arsenal football team taking them as far as Watford Junction - the train then went forward ecs to Euston.

In a surprise move, the final day of working for WB64 in this latest round of use on the Birmingham corridor came on Saturday 8th May when it worked the following with 90039 providing the traction:

07:43 EUS-BNS / 09:30 BNS-EUS
11:43 EUS-BNS / 13:30 BNS-EUS
15:43 EUS-BNS / 17:30 BNS-EUS

During the above period, 90020, 90021 and 90039 saw action on the MK3 set.

Post 8th May - December 23rd December

Beyond 8th of May 2010, WB64 reverted back to performing the Friday's only service to Preston with the occasional outing to the West Midlands as well as working special charter trains and football specials, notably to Liverpool and Preston/Blackburn. This also included the visit of WB64 to Manchester Piccadilly on December 13th 2011 which was the first time that the set had been to the city for a number of years - 90024 provided the traction on this date in question.

December 23rd 2010 until 7th December 2012

In a surprise move Virgin Trains started hiring from Freightliner commencing on the 23rd December 2010 with 90045 being the first engine to see action on WB64. It is also worth noting that on

December 30th 2010, 90045 worked the last loco-hauled 1p05 to Preston. Thereafter the set of stock started performing the 18:43 Euston to Crewe 1K39 via the West Midlands area - a practice that lasted until the 7th December 2012.

The final loco-hauled 1K39 from Euston to Crewe ran on the 7th December 2012 with 90044 - also on this day, WB64 worked the 14:03 EUS-BHM for the 15:50 BHM-EUS rtn. At the time of writing the Virgin MK3 set has no regular booked workings, but the set remains with the TOC for charters and other duties as required.

From December 2010 until December 2012 traction for Virgin Trains was supplied by Freightliner on a weekly basis and featured 90016, 90041, 90042, 90043, 90044, 90045, 90046, 90047, 90048 and 90049. On one occasion a DB 90 was hired to Virgin during this period for one day only and this came in the form of 90029.

Also during this period the MK3 set saw plenty of action during the 2012 Olympics and Paralympic Games featuring 90043 and 90044 and visited places such as Manchester Piccadilly. In late 2011 WB64 worked a series of charter trains between Euston and Glasgow Central for Omega Holidays - again traction came from Freightliner.

Other notable passenger & freight workings

As well as regular passenger workings with Virgin Trains, 90s have also seen action on a number of charters including those operated by UKR and Pathfinders. For example 90047 worked a charter train between Basford Hall & Birmingham International in December 2008.

On the freight side, 90s have continued to see daily use on container trains with Freightliner in addition to working services with DB. Examples can include pairs of 90s working to/from Coatbridge with Freightliner as well as DB engines on the daily Garston to Wembley car train in both directions.

Greater Anglia 90s (at the time of writing) which are undergoing overhaul at Crewe has also been used on freight trains notably as a test bed to see if they are ok and in operational order. However, following issues with 90010 in April 2011, East Anglia 90s are no longer used on freight trains but are instead dragged between Norwich and Crewe by DRS.

Derailment of 90046 (2012)

On the 3rd February 2012, 90046 derailed at Bletchley in spectacular fashion whilst enroute from Crewe to Wembley light engine - the 90 survived the incident and returned to traffic a few months later after being transferred by road back to Crewe for repairs following the accident. The RAIB has concluded that the derailment of 90046 was a result of over speeding at 15mph crossover at Bletchley.

General Information

Please see the forums area under categories such as Freightliner, Virgin West Coast, DBS, and FSR etc in addition to the archived news and gen for other specific workings. More information shall be posted here in due course. If you have any information you like to share on West Coast operations, then please email me at info@class90electriclocogroup.co.uk Thanks.