

From: TransWilts Community Rail Partnership

27th June 2012 - The Department of Transport announced that Wiltshire Council was successful in its £4.25m bid which will help boost the economy and encourage people to use sustainable transport. The bid, entitled "Improving Wiltshire's Rail Offer" is under the Local Sustainable Transport Fund.

The TransWilts Community Rail Partnership has been in support of Wiltshire Council's bid, and congratulates the Council on the success of the bid. We note with pleasure that the Department for Transport has approved the bid fully rather than partially funded, and we look forward to working with Wiltshire Council to bring all the various elements in the package together.

"Successful projects were those judged to perform well against the twin objectives of supporting the local economy and facilitating economic development, while reducing carbon emissions. They also demonstrated potential to deliver wider social and economic benefits, to improve safety, to bring about improvements to air quality, or to promote increased levels of physical activity." says Norman Baker MP, announcing the decision.

There is now a common consensus, based on considerable research - consultancy reports, Network Rail studies, surveys and a trial service that a train service at a minimum interval of 2 hours (hourly at peak) will bring substantial economic and quality of life benefit to the areas served. It has also become apparent during that research that a high proportion of travellers require onward travel facilities from stations along the line; the limited existing infrastructure to support such multimodal journeys would quickly become stretched by a new train service without enhancement, and indeed that extra infrastructure will encourage new journeys and journeys to convert from other less sustainable modes than would be the case without it. The research has also forecast a three year ramp-up period for passenger levels, requiring a degree of operational funding coverage. After that point, the service should be cost-neutral or approaching such, and carry on without considerable seed subsidy under longer term arrangements. A proportion of the seed funding has been promised by local government in addition to the £4.25 million - a real example of everyone working together.

What does the announced package mean for Wiltshire, for the TransWilts Rail line, businesses and people along the line, and for the Community Rail Partnership?

It means that the funding is in place to improve station infrastructure - bus access, cycle access, car parking, walkways, information systems, and other station and near-station facilities. There's funding too for specific station to town / attraction link services. And there's also seeding money within the total package, which includes an extra local contribution too, to cover the gap between operational costs and income in the build-up period.

A direct train from Swindon and Chippenham, via Melksham to Trowbridge and Westbury (at least) with a maximum gap of 2 hours between services, will allow:

- Practical public transport commuting from Melksham, Trowbridge and Westbury to Chippenham and Swindon
- An opening up for business visitors from outside the area via Swindon and Chippenham to Melksham and Trowbridge

- Public transport links from Swindon and Chippenham to Trowbridge, Westbury, Warminster and Salisbury
- Hourly trains (change at Trowbridge or Chippenham) from Melksham to Bath, Bristol, Filton (Abbey Wood), etc
- Leisure opportunities such as days out to Weymouth, to the South Coast, Salisbury, London, etc.

And this will reduce journeys that need to be made on the A350 road, and parking requirements and congestion in towns such as Chippenham and Swindon.

"Funding in place" does not mean that an operator has been identified and that we have a start date for the trains. At present, four companies (Arriva, First, National Express and Stagecoach) are tendering to operate franchised services over the whole of the South West of England, including on the TransWilts line. At the TransWilts CRP we are in touch with all bidders at a senior level, and helping to inform them as to key local factors and how the service will be best constructed and tailored to provide a maximum of benefit to our area, as well as being operationally sound and financially beneficial for them. We will continue to be in touch with them all through the bidding process, and we are delighted that they wish to engage (and are doing so). A fifth company - Go-op - is also looking to run a Westbury to Swindon service, which would continue to Oxford and Birmingham. Should their plans come to fruition in a similar timescale to a potential franchised service - or indeed at a later point after such a service has started, their service will be most welcome. Analysis shows that an hourly service would result in trains being even busier than trains on a two-hourly service, so they would compliment rather than compete.

The LSTF application and linked plans cover funding for a Swindon to Westbury service every 2 hours, but the LSTF bid includes significant elements in transport linkage at stations to the south - Warminster and Salisbury - too. At the refranchise, questions have been raised about the shape of the services south of Westbury which run in addition to the Cardiff - Portsmouth expresses. Without moving any existing rail customer journeys by more than a few minutes, existing resources can be reused to allow for either an extension of the TransWilts service to Salisbury, or for an excellent same-platform connection to be made at Westbury for the journey onward, service intermediate stations at Dilton Marsh and Warminster.

For the Community Rail Partnership, this announcement brings a lot of hard work - already started in our discussions with the Franchise bidders. When the new franchise (and any other) services start, we want to help champion them and promote them - and their connections - to a high standard such that they can be enhanced and developed further as appropriate. We already have some successes achieved - the southbound Sunday service, timetable changes to improve Westbury connections, and the very successful trial summer service last year. And just within the last few weeks, a fare anomaly that we were pressing to have corrected has indeed been corrected, reducing the cost of anytime ticket from Swindon to Salisbury on direct trains by over 50%.

The TransWilts Community Rail Partnership (TWCRP) is a group of like-minded organisations seeking to achieve positive, sustainable and imaginative development of the TransWilts (Swindon to Salisbury) railway in ways which also benefit the places it serves, including enhancement of services to meet the current and future travel requirements of those places. It sees the line as an essential link for the local communities and

businesses along the route, and as part of the projected strategic north - south rail link through an area experiencing major expansion. The TWCRP liaise with all interested parties to promote the social, economic and environmental prosperity of the local communities.

Hon. Chair - Sion Bretton; Hon. ViceChair - Peter Blackburn; Secretary - Phil McMullen; Hon. Treasurer - Chris Hankin. This team of officers is a strong one. Between them, they have considerable business, financial, legal, government, administrative and organisational, event, IT, project and rail industry experience. And all are regular rail users of TransWilts and/or other rail services.

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