TransWilts

Connecting Wiltshire's Communities

incorporating TransWilts Community Rail Partnership

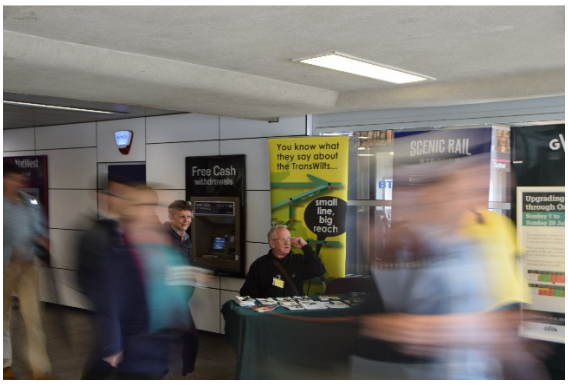
NEWSLETTER SEVENTEEN – AUGUST 2018

GWR Community Rail Conference

The TransWilts was pleased to work alongside GWR in staging the train operator's 2018 Community Rail Conference at the STEAM museum in Swindon in June.

Over 100 representatives of rail user groups, local authorities, industry bodies and transport organisations came to hear the latest news from GWR and exchange ideas on promoting rail travel.

TW Community Rail Officer Graham Ellis led a tour of the TransWilts line from Swindon to Westbury. Other volunteers were on hand to greet delegates, and meet the general public, as they arrived at Swindon station and manned a stall at the conference itself.



At the dinner which marked the opening of the conference the TransWilts were presented with a special birthday cake to mark the first anniversary of the line receiving designated status. (see back page)

The TW is very grateful to GWR for their kind thought and the many favourable comments received from other community rail groups who attended.

STOP PRESS

TransWilts shortlisted in two categories for the ACoRP Community Rail Awards in October. The TransWilts Mobile phone app in Best Marketing or Communications Campaign and Paul Johnson for Outstanding Volunteer Contribution.

TransWilts Stakeholder conference – June 2018
With the theme "Connecting Communities by Rail – a Strategy for Wiltshire" over 40 delegates gathered in Trowbridge for the 2018 TransWilts Stakeholders Conference. A top quality line of speakers included Andy Mellors, MD of South Western Railway and Dan Panes, GWR's Head of External Communications.

(L-R Dan Panes (GWR), Paul Johnson (TW Chairman) and Nick Farthing (Three Rivers CRP))

Alexander Maltby of Network Rail outlined the relationship NR have with community rail and the changes being made to the industry's planning processes for improvements. Bridget Fox from the Campaign for Better Transport talked of the challenges Wiltshire faces in its search for better transport co-ordination. Plans are now underway for the 2019 event.

Pewsey Vale Rail Users Group up and running
Following two set-up meetings the Pewsey Vale Rail Users Group has now set up a committee and been offered funding by GWR. Its first formal meeting will be in September.

Christmas disruption at Westbury
The TransWilts has been made aware that Network Rail is planning extensive engineering work in the Westbury area over the Christmas period. The work will last for 10 days over the holiday and affect the service to and from Swindon. Full details are being finalised and will be made available as soon as possible. The Severn Tunnel will also be closed over the festive period while the autumn sees more work in Newbury and between Bristol Temple Meads and Bristol Parkway.

Newbury Electrification Works - TransWilts Services affected

Tuesday 28th to Thursday 30th August, Monday 8th to Thursday 11th October

and Monday 19th to Thursday 22nd November

Perfomance still below par

The summer has seen GWR services still suffering from cancellations throughout the week. The TransWilts line, which has seen services cut to a morning and evening peak only service on a number of occasions due to the electrification work around Newbury, has seen even some of those services cancelled.

In many cases the official reason given is a shortage of crew. GWR is quick to point out it is not a recruitment issue – the company actually has more drivers than this time last year – but by a perfect storm of other factors. Delays to the electrification programme has thrown the training of drivers on the new trains and unfamiliar stock as units cascade west out of step. Much of it has had to be condensed into a shorter period which has pulled drivers away from frontline duties. This has been particularly acute at weekends which relys to a large part on staff working overtime. GWR was forced to issue an emergency timetable for the World Cup final weekend after many staff, hoping for an England appearance, made themselves unavailable.

The new IETs have had a number of niggling faults which have affected performance while some of the trains which have moved from the Thames Valley are restricted to certain routes. Turbo trains are not yet cleared to run to Portsmouth Harbour while a few of the fleet are banned from the Severn Tunnel. On occasions this has led to the frustration of having a crew in place but no suitable train to run a service.

GWR believes it is near the beginning of the end of the worst disruption. The summer programme of engineering work – which has seen both Oxford and Newbury closed – is over. The peak staff holiday season is drawing to a close. Most of the IET training is completed and staff being trained on cascaded rolling stock is progressing well. Depots are getting more experience working on new stock and more of the new trains are becoming available.

The TransWilts continues to press GWR on the situation and trying to ensure the TW service is not the first casualty when cancellations are needed at Westbury depot.

Melksham platform extension

Network Rail has been working to extend the platform at Melksham to cater for the longer trains now in use on the line.

The main works are now complete and services now calling can use all doors which means passengers no longer have to be in a certain part of a train. It also means shorter dwell time at the station at busy times.

More IETs in service

The first nine car IETs entered service with GWR in June. They now appear regularly on services to Cheltenham Spa and Weston-super-Mare. In July they operated to Devon for the first time. 36 of the trains are due in service by the end of the year.

Happy Birthday to the TransWilts – see page one