TransWilts

Connecting Wiltshire's Communities

incorporating TransWilts Community Rail Partnership

NEWSLETTER NINETEEN – DECEMBER 2018

Five years on the TransWilts

On Sunday 8th December 2013 a group made up of rail campaigners, railway staff, the media and some 30 passengers gathered on the platform at Melksham to mark the start of a new era. After years of making a case for a meaningful service along the TransWilts line between Swindon and Westbury they were there to witness the first train of the improved era. Overnight the timetable saw the two trains each way a day bolstered to eight (and later nine).

Although that first day was one of celebration it also marked the start of a second phase – keeping the service in the public's mind and proving they would use it. Initially the extra services were largely operated by one car Class 153s providing 72 seats. Very quickly passenger numbers grew – with the 17:36 from Swindon regularly carrying more than 100 people. Lower "via Melksham" fares attracted people to use the line and it became the fastest growing line in First Great Western and later Great Western Railway's area.

Almost immediately all the peak hour services were filled to capacity and marketing attention turned to the leisure market with summer campaigns to take families to Weymouth or days out in towns along the route.

Improvements were also made at Melksham Station. The platform gained a modern shelter and a ticket vending machine allowing passengers to buy tickets on the day as well as collect ones pre-booked on the internet. A car park was also laid out and very quickly became popular.

Footfall at Melksham	
2011/12	11,300
2012/13	12,080
2013/14	23,930
2014/15	51,858
2015/16	60,676
2016/17	74,666
2017/18	74,220

The work done to promote the line has not gone unnoticed across the rail industry and has drawn a number of prestigious awards. (See inside)

Remember – No trains through Westbury Station for 12 days over Christmas

See back page for details

In March 2017 the line celebrated gaining Designated Status from the Department for Transport – giving it greater input on the shaping of the service.

The then transport minister Paul Maynard joined members of the TransWilts Community Rail Partnership to mark the occasion and travelled the line, continuing south of Westbury to the site of the proposed station at Wilton Parkway.

2018 saw the replacement of the Class 153s with two and three car Turbo trains as they moved west from the Thames Valley. It was always recognised when planning the extended service back in 2013 that the line would be used for diverted services while the lines through Swindon and Newbury were electrified. Thus for much of 2018 the off peak service along the line was replaced by buses. Coupled with staffing issues as drivers and guards were trained on the new rolling stock it led to reliability issues and a number of cancellations, especially on summer weekends. Thankfully the work through Newbury finished earlier than planned and the service has been much more reliable since October. The year also saw the extension of the platform at Melksham. This allows all doors of the longer trains to be used – thus preventing delays experienced while passengers tried to use the one door previously available.

While Melksham has in many ways been the focus of the service as it is the station that has benefitted most from the improved service, the direct service between Swindon and Westbury has also helped many living along the route. It has made commuting from Trowbridge to Swindon more attractive while leisure passengers have a greater range of destinations.

So five very successful years, but the TransWilts has always been looking forward and that continues. As well as aiming to extend southwards to provide a regular service to Southampton Airport and the South Coast plans are being developed to improve the facilities at Melksham Station with more car parking, a community hub and a bus interchange.

Also on the agenda are earlier and later trains with the ultimate ambition of an hourly service when the infrastructure allows.

In marking the anniversary, Matthew Golton, Deputy Managing Director of GWR said:

"When I waved off the first of the new TransWilts services five years ago I was confident they would prove a success and would hopefully become part of the DfT's specified timetable. They did that in record time, customer numbers were regularly described as phenomenal and TransWilts topped the growth charts for community rail lines. That initial success continued and five years on we have doubled capacity with newer, longer trains.

TransWilts is one of the greatest success stories of any partnership work on the Great Western network. It would not have happened without investment and engagement from Wiltshire Council, without the support of the Department for Transport and the rail industry, and I am proud of our role in that, but most especially it would not have happened without our customers and the local community coming together and working with us to improve their railway.

Something that they have continued to do throughout the last five years. Now an official Community Rail Partnership, they have not wavered in their support, in their promotion of the line and in putting together plans for an even greater future. I can't wait to see where the TransWilts will be in another five years, I am confident it will be another massive stride further forward, and I am happy to pledge our support in getting you there.

Congratulations on an amazing first five years and thank you for all you do to make this railway work for our customers"

Awards and shortlistings won over the last five years

2015
ACoRP Outstanding Volunteer Finalist " Lee Fletcher"
RailFuture - Silver Award for Best Website "Great Western Forum"
RailFuture - Silver Award for Best Campaign "TransWilts Line"
RailFuture - Gold Award for Best Social Media Promotion "Weymouth Wizard"
RailFuture - Silver Award for Best Individual Volunteer "Bob Morrison"
2016
ACoRP Community Rail Awards - Winner Best Marketing Campaign
2017
Sheila McKechnie Foundation – Transport Award – "Graham Ellis"
ACoRP Community Rail Awards Outstanding Volunteer Finalist "Peter Blackburn"
RailFuture Awards - Best Marketing Campaign
2018
ACoRP Community Rail Awards Outstanding Volunteer Finalist "Paul Johnson"
ACoRP Community Rail Awards Marketing campaign Finalist "The TransWilts App"

Christmas sees no trains calling at Westbury

From Sunday 23rd December 2018 until the morning of Friday 4th January 2019 no trains will call at Westbury while major engineering work takes place. For much of the period TransWilts services will be replaced by buses. However on both the 2nd and 3rd January there will be a peak hour train service to and from Swindon. Trains to and from the West of England which would normally call at Westbury will call at Frome instead and buses will connect with those.

Elsewhere work will be going on in South Wales, near Paddington and on the route to Gatwick Airport. Full details are available at www.gwr.com/christmas

IETs to Bedwyn delayed

The planned introduction of bi-mode IET trains to Bedwyn due to begin in January has been delayed. Concerns have been expressed about the CCTV used by drivers to check the door areas before leaving stations. As many stations in West Berkshire and Bedwyn are unstaffed these safety systems are vital but problems have been experienced with the cameras during poor weather. While work continues to resolve these issues the existing Turbos will continue to operate the service. IETs will also continue to run where they already do as these are operated with both a driver and a train manager who can oversee the safe closing of the doors.

Santa makes TW Turbo debut

On December 9th Santa made his annual visit to the TransWilts line – a tradition dating back more than 20 years. Around 80 people, including 36 children, travelled from Melksham to Swindon and back. Each child received a present from Santa while the adults had mince pies and a drink. The event, run by the Melksham Rail Users Group – part of the TransWilts CIC – has been staged on various types of rolling stock, including an HST on one occasion, but this was the first on a Turbo.

Seasons Greetings

All connected with the TransWilts CIC would like to offer season's greetings and all good wishes for 2019. A grateful thanks also to all those members who have renewed.