TransWilts

Connecting Wiltshire's Communities

incorporating TransWilts Community Rail Partnership

NEWSLETTER FOURTEEN – FEBRUARY 2018

One...two...three!

As previewed in the last newsletter the one coach class 153s gave way to the two coach class 150s or 158s on January 2nd on the Swindon to Westbury service. This is the latest phase in the cascade of rolling stock with units heading west as more electric trains are delivered for use in the Thames Valley.

A month later three car Turbo trains arrived on the line. It has meant two obvious changes. Firstly the door system means only one door on the rear carriage can be opened at Melksham. It is possible to walk the whole length of the train once on board, but you will obviously find it easier if you travel in the rear coach.

The second alteration is the first southbound train of the day currently terminates at Westbury with a second train being used to continue the journey to Southampton Central. The timetable allows sufficient time for passengers to change between trains.

The changes should only be temporary. The parts needed to convert more of the trains' door systems are being delivered at the moment and once installed they will allow more doors to be used at Melksham and the restoration of the through train to Southampton.

In the meantime the three car trains do have faster acceleration and a higher top speed than the ones they have replaced meaning the longer dwell times at Melksham should not impact on the overall time-keeping.

To mark the introduction of the longer trains GWR treated regular customers to a celebration event at Melksham Station where an impressive cake was soon consumed!

The three car trains are likely to revert to two car trains of a similar style later in the year as more units come west.

Stagecoach bring Gold to Chippenham

Following last year's "bus wars" between Stagecoach and Thamesdown Buses on the Swindon to Royal Wootton Bassett route things have now settled down. Following Thamesdown's decision to pull its R1 route last autumn, Stagecoach are now reverting to their previous pattern of three buses an hour to Chippenham from Swindon with another two buses an hour running as a new route 54 between Swindon and Royal Wootton Bassett via the Link shopping centre in West Swindon.

The buses running to Chippenham on route 55 are now operated with a fleet of ten buses running under the Stagecoach Gold brand with on board wifi and charging points.

Department for Transport consults on the future GW franchise

The board of the TransWilts CIC has spent much of the time since the turn of the year working on its response to the Department for Transport's consultation on the future of rail travel in the area. The DfT is working on the specification which will be issued to those operators who want to bid to run the Great Western franchise in the years to come.

Department for Transport

A series of public meetings have been held as the DfT tries to get as many views as possible. It will now spend the next few months going through the responses it has received before drawing up the tender document.

Swindon to Southampton
A lot of progress has been made on the proposal to provide an all-day service between Wiltshire and Southampton Airport and the city itself. Following extensive efforts, led by the TransWilts, it has been established the service could utilise existing rolling stock that currently runs between Swindon and Westbury, Westbury and Salisbury and the service south of Salisbury but as a joined up service.

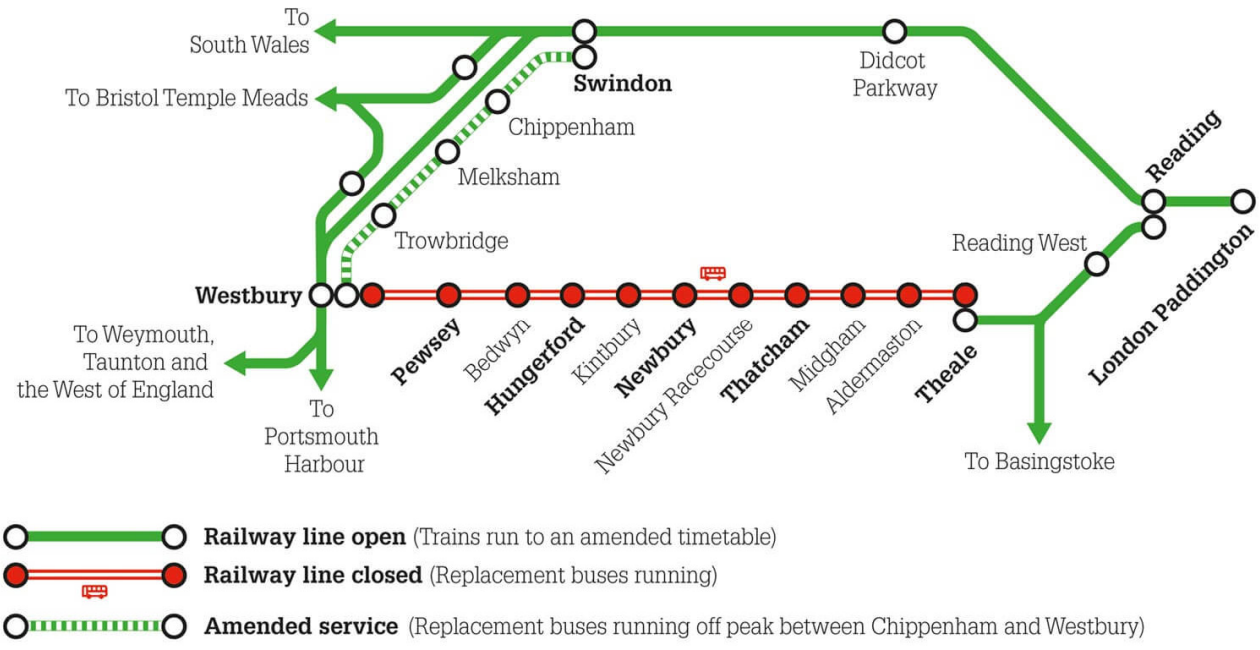
As well as providing long distance connectivity the proposals also include earlier northbound arrivals into Swindon from Westbury and better timed commuter services for those heading south to Trowbridge and Westbury.

Talks are continuing with GWR and SWR to iron out the details and move towards a possible start date.

Engineering work brings temporary changes to the TransWilts Service
A programme of works has been drawn up to install and energise the overhead wires between Reading and Newbury which will mean changes to trains running between Swindon and Westbury throughout 2018.

With the line through Newbury being closed, trains for the West of England will be routed through Swindon, Chippenham and Melksham for approximately four days each month. To make room for them on the single line the TransWilts service will be replaced by buses during the middle of the day but the morning and evening peak trains will run as normal.

The weeks affected are (all Monday to Thursday)
12th to 15th March, 23rd to 26th April, 14th to 17th May, 4th to 7th June, 9th to 12th July, 8th to 11th October and 19th to 22nd November. There is also a three day closure between 28th and 30th August after the bank holiday and provisional plans for a three week closure between 16th July and 15th August.



Reliability improves (slowly) from a nine year low

As we have reported there were real problems with reliability on the TransWilts leading up to Christmas. Indeed the official figures published in January showed the number of cancellations at their worst since 2008. A number of reasons have been given but most problems have centred around the need to train drivers on the new trains in advance of their arrival. Since January things have improved. There have still been some outright cancellations especially during half term week due to staff shortages. Signal problems at Westbury, Bradford Junction and Thingley Junction also contributed to trains not running. However on occasions when the train due to work the service had a fault it has sometimes been possible to substitute another one to avoid a cancellation.

Travelling at Easter?

Major signalling work will be taking place in the Bristol area over Easter. No trains will call at Bristol Temple Meads on Good Friday and the following days until services resume on Wednesday 4th April.

Replacement buses will run from a variety of locations including Bath Spa. Trains from London to Bristol Temple Meads will be reduced to one an hour and terminate at Bath.

Melksham platform extension

Work is due to start soon to extend the platform at Melksham to cater for the longer trains. The work is not scheduled to disrupt train services but there willl be additional vehicle movements in the station forecourt area. If you are parking, we suggest you use the railway car parkl on Station approach during this period.

Meanwhile the software which operates the help point has been upgraded and it now appears to be more reliable in displaying arrivals and departures. In the longer term it is hoped a display at head height will be installed along with automatic annoucements as found at other stations on the line.