TransWilts — Connecting Wiltshire's Communities

incorporating TransWilts Community Rail Partnership

NEWSLETTER SIXTEEN – JUNE 2018

Massive Boost for Melksham Masterplan

The TransWilts plans to upgrade the facilities at Melksham Station have been given a huge lift by Great Western Railway. The CRP has been working on a masterplan to provide a community café, extra parking spaces and a bus interchange. GWR have now agreed to the principle of leasing the land from Wiltshire Council and taking on the responsibility for the laying out and operation of around 75 car parking spaces at the station. The CRP will work with GWR to develop the business case and see how the proposals can come forward. The proposal would also enable the sub leasing of sufficient land to the CRP at a peppercorn rent to erect a community hub which would provide waiting and refreshment facilities for rail passengers and others. The facilities would also be available for local events. Work would also be carried to provide a bus turning area and bus stop to make it easier for people to arrive at the station on public transport.

In announcing the deal TransWilts chairman Paul Johnson said "This agreement is another step forward on a project the CRP has been working on for over a year. GWR have studied the plans and believe they would be a valuable addition for rail passengers as well as others in the local community. Here at the CRP we now have to look at funding sources to ensure the community café comes to fruition."

Dan Okey Regional Development Manager for GWR said "The TransWilts line has gone from strength to strength. We have seen phenomenal growth in customer numbers, and have doubled the number of carriages on the route. We are delighted to be working with the TransWilts CRP and Wiltshire Council on plans for Melksham station. We believe very strongly in community rail and in this route and we want to see it continue to grow."

Newbury Electrification Works (see page 3)

TransWilts Services affected

Saturday 2 to Thursday 7 June and Saturday 9 and Sunday 10 June

Monday 16 July to Sunday 5 August

Top names lined up for TransWilts Stakeholder conference

The annual TransWilts Stakeholder conference will be held in Trowbridge on Wednesday 20th June. Among the keynote speakers are Andy Mellors, MD of South Western Railways and Matthew Golton, deputy MD of GWR.

Also on stage will be Alexander Maltby, a strategic planner at Network Rail. The day will look at the need for better integration on the North/South transport corridor through Wiltshire and better links between bus and train services.

Places are still available – contact Paul Johnson (chair@transwilts.org) for details.

Pewsey Vale Rail Users Group off the ground

A second meeting of rail users in Pewsey has agreed to set up a formal group to promote the needs and interests of people using trains from the town's station. Jane Jones of GWR outlined the plans for improved services once electrification is completed to Newbury. There will be more trains and some of the long gaps between services will be shortened. She also acknowleged the real difficulties the current works are causing with all services being replaced by buses over several days each month for most of this year. She also promised £500 to get the group off the ground. A meeting is now planned to set up a committee.

Newbury disruption continues
Work to electrify the line between Reading and Newbury is continuing with the line closed for eight out of nine days at the beginning of June and then three weeks from mid-July to early August.

As with previous closures the TransWilts service will be affected. This is because long distance trains to and from the West Country will be using the single line between Chippenham and Trowbridge through Melksham and there is not the capacity to run a normal TransWilts service at the same time. Thus off peak trains on weekdays will be replaced by buses. Weekend services will vary but most will be replaced by road transport. A full list of dates for the work at Newbury can be found at www.gwr.com/newbury2018.

The TransWilts CRP has been working with GWR to improve publicity of the revised arrangements but problems at Network Rail are hampering their joint efforts. As well as carrying out the work, NR are responsible for ensuring the timetable will work with the infrastructure available. Such is the amount of work being carried out across the country staff at NR are struggling to keep up. The industry standard is that timetables should be confirmed 12 weeks ahead. In recent months this has slipped and in some cases changes have been made as late as a few days before. This has caused issues with ensuring staffing and rolling stock are in place and allowing online seat reservations and advance tickets to be purchased. Both GWR and the Department for Transport have been in discussions with NR to get the situation resolved and it is hoped there will be an improvement over the coming months. This will be particularly important as the programme of Christmas engineering work approaches and people want to plan their seasonal travel. Among the works taking place over the festive period will be a ten day closure of Westbury station.

Work to be carried out to improve Chippenham ticket machines
Plans are afoot to speed up the new automatic ticket machines at Chippenham station. Users have discovered it can take over three minutes to buy or collect a pre-purchased ticket. It was initially thought the problem was down to the connection back to GWR's main computer system. However it has now been identified that the actual machines need an internal upgrade and this is being rolled out across GWR starting with the most intensively used machines at London Paddington and Bristol Temple Meads.

In the meantime extra staff will be on duty at the ticket office at Chippenham for those who wish to buy tickets over the counter.

Chippenham and Melksham Rail Users Groups
As reported in the last newsletter the next meeting of CRUG will be on Thursday July 12th at 7pm. The venue has now been fixed as the Chippenham Borough Lands Office in Market Place, Chippenham, SN15 3HP. Among the items on the agenda will be an update on electrification and wider rail issues in Wiltshire and the latest on the projects around the station including the northern lift and access.

Meanwhile the next meeing of the Melksham Rail Users Group will be on the 4th July at Melksham Town Hall starting at 7.30pm.

Department for Transport visits the TransWilts

Following the line being granted designated status in 2017, the Department for Transport visited the line last month to check on progress and our latest plans

.

Paul Webster of ACoRP and Kulvinder Bassi of the DfT join Paul Johnson at Melksham Station

Designation allows the TransWilts to access additional sources of funding, greater input with the train operators over timetabling and fares and regular feedback from the DfT.

.

Summer Days out on the TransWilts

Salisbury, Mottisfont and Weymouth – just some of the places you can enjoy a day out from TransWilts line stations – and most trips can be made seven days a week. Discounts for railcards and groups of three or more apply but even at full price an off peak ticket to Weymouth is £18.10 from Swindon, Chippenham or Melksham. Salisbury can be reached for less than £15.