



## NEWSLETTER THREE – DECEMBER 2015

### Electrification Delayed – what it means for the TransWilts

The eagerly awaited Hendy Review has confirmed Network Rail's plans to electrify much of the Great Western Railway is running behind schedule and over-budget. Various reasons are behind this, not least that early work has discovered many vital cables running alongside the track have not been accurately mapped and so much of the initial digging for each mast has to be done by hand. As a result it has been decided to concentrate initially on the route to Cardiff via Bristol Parkway ahead of the route through Chippenham and Bath Spa – which is now planned to be completed three years later than planned in 2019.



While the TransWilts was not on the list of lines to benefit from the wires directly, it is set to receive new rolling stock as diesel units are replaced by electric ones in the east. With the wires yet to reach Reading and plans to extend them to Oxford and Basingstoke now delayed it will not be possible to release as many of the class 165/166 trains to the Bristol and Exeter areas next year as planned. The two coach version of these trains had been earmarked to run the service between Swindon and Westbury from late 2018 with the current class 153 single

coach initially replaced, in 2017, by the class 158 trains which are presently operating many of the Cardiff-Portsmouth services that run through Trowbridge and Westbury. A revised plan has yet to be announced.

GWR is currently in talks with the Department for Transport to see which of its franchise commitments it can now deliver in the light of the delays. Although improvements to stations and community projects are unaffected by the longer timescales for completing the electrification, a key part of GWR's plans were based on new electric trains replacing HSTs on long distance routes and smaller units to replace the diesel fleet in the Thames Valley.

GWR Managing Director Mark Hopwood, speaking to the newsletter, said: "Peter Hendy's report is an important first step in understanding the impact of the delays to Network Rail's electrification programme, and we will be studying it carefully to understand exactly what impact it may have on our improvement plans for customers.

"While the Super Express Trains will still be able to deliver some of the capacity improvements we planned for customers without full electrification, the full benefits will only be seen once Network Rail's electrification programme is completed.

"We will do everything we can to help Network Rail deliver this programme in the best possible way for customers. However, for now we will be working with the DFT to investigate alternative ways of delivering the full package of capacity and frequency improvements we promised in the new GWR franchise, despite the challenges of electrification."

Despite the delays to the scheme it is still anticipated the closures affecting the TransWilts in the late Spring in 2016 will go ahead.

## Keeping Count



Between the 12<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> December volunteers from the TransWilts Community Rail Partnership were on board services between Swindon and Westbury counting the number of people travelling. Since the improved timetable began in December 2013 volunteers have been out regularly charting the rise in passenger numbers over the last two years.

More surveys will be carried out in 2016. If you would like to assist please get in touch. Just one return trip on the line is a great help. No previous experience is needed, just the ability to count to 100 (or perhaps more!).

## Santa pays a visit



On December 13<sup>th</sup> Father Christmas took time out from his busy schedule to pay his regular visit to the TransWilts. Assisted by his willing elves he made two return trips on the Sunday afternoon giving out presents to children and mince pies for the grown-ups.

Organised by the Melksham Railway Development Group, the event has been running annually since the mid-1990s and for many children (and a few adults) it represents their only train journey of the year.

With the improved service it is hoped more of them will become regular passengers – although we cannot always offer mince pies and presents!

## TransWilts seeks designation status

The CiC has spent a lot of time producing a prospectus to apply for the service between Swindon and Westbury to be granted “designated status”. Other areas have successfully applied to get a line designated. The TransWilts cannot do this as the route is used by other services so we are seeking to get this applied to the passenger service which passes through Melksham. If successful this will give us access to some extra funding sources and more flexibility in a few areas. It is likely the Department for Transport will put the proposal out for consultation in the New Year.

## Fares on the rise

As usual in January most rail fares will rise. There are different rules for different types but for tickets on the TransWilts the increases are modest

The following are Anytime Day Returns (valid on any train)\*

Trowbridge to Bristol Temple Meads – is £11.00 will be £11.10

Melksham to Swindon goes from £9.40 to £9.50

Westbury to Paddington (with a travelcard for the underground) increases from £166.60 to £167.50

Chippenham to Reading moves from £102 to £103

\*Cheaper tickets are available for these journeys depending on the time of day

## **At a glance guide to Christmas and New Year services on the TransWilts**

Peak ticket restrictions are lifted from 24th December to 3rd January inclusive - so fares:

\* Melksham to London - 51.00 return (102.00 for a group of 3 adults)

\* Melksham to Swindon - 6.80 return (13.60 for a group of 3 adults)

### **Until 23rd December 2015**

Regular timetable at ... <http://www.twcrp.org.uk/timetable.html>

*Also available in printed form from Town and tourist information centres, Westbury heritage centre, Chippenham and Westbury stations, Melksham Town Hall and Library, and TransWilts office at Well House Manor, Melksham or request by email – see page 4.*

### **24th December**

Swindon <-> Westbury trains run as normal.

\* In the evening, the 18:52 from Swindon (which normally carries on to Southampton) will not run beyond Salisbury

\* The 19:35 from Westbury, which normally runs to Cheltenham Spa, will not run beyond Swindon

### **25th and 26th December**

No trains.

### **27th December**

Normal Sunday service

### **28th December (Monday)**

\* From Westbury to Swindon at 06:21 (in place of 07:02)

\* 18:32 from Westbury WILL NOT RUN, other northbound services at regular times.

\* From Swindon 06:12 moves to 06:31

\* 17:36 moves to 17:48

\* 18:52 WILL NOT RUN

\* 20:12 moves to 20:49

other southbound services at normal times.

\* All through services southbound terminate at Westbury (no Southampton extensions) and the 19:46 from Westbury terminates at Swindon rather than carrying on to Cheltenham Spa

### **29th December (Tuesday), 30th December (Wednesday), 31st December (Thursday)**

\* 06:12 from Swindon (southbound) WILL NOT RUN

\* 07:02 from Westbury (Northbound) WILL NOT RUN

\* 19:32 from Westbury (northbound) terminates at Swindon (not carrying on to Cheltenham Spa)

### **1st January 2016 (Friday)**

\* 07:02 and 07:32 from Westbury to Swindon WILL NOT RUN

\* 06:12 and 08:48 from Swindon to Westbury WILL NOT RUN

Then normal service for a Friday

### **2nd January onwards**

Normal services

## Exclusive Ticket Wallets now available

The TransWilts now has its own ticket wallets and they are available free of charge!



They come complete with the current train AND bus timetables for the route between Swindon and Westbury and have room to keep your daily travel ticket or season ticket and photocard.

To receive one drop an email to [friends@transwilts.org](mailto:friends@transwilts.org) and we will pop one in the post at no cost to you. Supplies are limited so get your emails in now!

## December Timetable Change

Services on the TransWilts were left largely unchanged when the new timetable took effect on the 13<sup>th</sup> December. There was however one minor change which has a very positive benefit. The train which used to leave at 15:14 and then wait for time at Chippenham and Melksham now leaves two minutes earlier and arrives at Westbury in time to connect to a southbound service meaning a saving of an hour or more for travellers to Southampton Central or Portsmouth Harbour.

### Dates for your diary

Saturday 20<sup>th</sup> Feb - TransWilts AGM, Jury's Inn, Swindon

2<sup>nd</sup> -11<sup>th</sup> Apr Line Closure Bath to Keynsham

Saturday 16<sup>th</sup> Apr TransWilts CIC Link - Salisbury

## Passenger Numbers up

Each year the Office of Road and Rail (or its predecessors) publish the number of people using each station in the country. These are based on ticket sales to and from each destination.

Of the 2,540 stations in the country Melksham recorded the 7<sup>th</sup> highest increase as numbers in 2014-15 rose by 117% with nearly 52,000 using the station compared to 24,000 the year before. It is the biggest rise on the Great Western network. Elsewhere Chippenham now has 1.8 million passing through each year, Swindon recorded 3.5 million passengers, Trowbridge 903,248 and Westbury 529,358.

Since figures were first compiled in 2003-2004 the latest number of passengers for Melksham is the highest recorded. The previous best was 38,000 in 2007-8. The lowest was in 2009-10 when, with a limited service of two trains each way a day, only 10,000 made journeys.

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