TransWilts

Connecting Wiltshire's Communities

incorporating TransWilts Community Rail Partnership

NEWSLETTER THIRTY – OCTOBER 2020

Near normal TransWilts timetable re-introduced

The further easing of lockdown restrictions and the return of children to schools saw the TransWilts timetable restored to almost its pre-virus levels from September. The first southbound train on weekdays once again continues past Westbury to Southampton Central including stops at Warminster and Salisbury. In the opposite direction the 07:05 is restored although only continues as far as Gloucester rather than Cheltenham Spa for the moment. All weekend services are back (although see the notes regarding engineering work below). The only services which have not returned are the early evening service from Swindon to Southampton and the mid evening service from Westbury to Cheltenham. This does leave a gap between the main commuter services and the final trains of the day. Talks are continuing with GWR to see if some re-timing can be done to improve the frequency.

Engineering work – October to December

For the first three weekends in October buses are replacing trains on both Saturdays and Sundays. This is to allow Network Rail to improve the drainage at Melksham station and work on the platforms at Westbury.

On the 24th and 25th of October trains to Weymouth will only go as far as Dorchester West with buses covering the final part of the journey.

Slightly further afield bridge replacement work between the 25th October and 6th November means trains from Swindon to South Wales will not call at Bristol Parkway but be diverted via Gloucester with longer journey times.

Finally on the 27th December when services resume after Christmas the eastern approaches to Bristol Temple Meads will be closed with trains from Swindon and Chippenham terminating at Bath Spa.

Passenger numbers continue to improve

After the dramatic drop in the number of people using public transport when lockdown measures were first introduced there has been a steady rise in those coming back to the trains. On the TransWilts, where the weekday service remained largely intact, the fall by two-thirds in passenger numbers measured in August is large but not as big as on some other local lines. The lower numbers have however helped those who do travel to keep a better distance from other passengers with no reported overcrowding on Swindon-Westbury services. The return of passengers has continued to rise in the provisional figures for September.

Reliability still an occasional concern

Throughout August only around a dozen of the nearly 400 planned trains were cancelled according to figures produced by the Melksham Rail Users Group. Some were as a result of problems on the route through Newbury and the need to divert long distance trains along the single line. However on the 25th of August the problem was closer to home when a large marquee blew onto the line north of Melksham.

Due to the high winds and the danger posed by nearby high voltage overhead power cables it took sometime to dismantle and safely remove the tent during which time no trains were able to run.

In September there were only seven cancellations out of a planned 442 services – meaning over 98% of services ran. Timekeeping was also good with just over 300 running on time and only 26 significantly late.

Membership matters

Friends of TransWilts memberships run from 1st November to 31st October the following year. Last year, ahead of the increase in subscriptions, many took advantage of the offer to renew for two years at the old rate.

For those who did not their memberships will expire at the end of this month. The new rates are £7 for individuals who receive this newsletter by email, £10.50 for those who have the newsletter be post and £20 for corporate members. If you pay by standing order please ask your bank to increase the yearly payment to match the figures above. As these are not direct debits we cannot do it for you unfortunately.

Progress at Melksham

Contractors have continued to work on the car park and Hub at Melksham Station.

Charging has now been introduced for the small existing car park and will be extended to the new larger one once it is complete. The income from this will be ploughed back into other facilities on site. There remain a small number of free spaces immediately adjacent to the platform for people dropping off passengers or waiting to greet those arriving on trains.

Attention is now turning to fitting out the café area of the hub building. TransWilts is seeking the help of kitchen installers, painters and decorators and ultimately catering staff to volunteer their time to help the project. Anyone who would like to offer or would like more information is asked to contact Sophie Martin at sophie@transwilts.org

GWR Emergency Measures Agreement extended

When passenger numbers plummeted in March as the nationwide lockdown was put in place the Government took over the day to day financial risk of running the railways and paid the train operating companies a management fee to keep services running. The initial six month period has now been extended in GWR's case to next June.

In welcoming the move GWR Interim Managing Director Matthew Golton said "We are pleased that the Government has taken this decision. It ensures that we can continue to operate during the current situation, providing services that are essential to restarting the economy. Our responsibility is to run a service that our customers and our partners can rely on, and we have taken sensible measures to make sure customers can travel by train with confidence. This means we can continue to run this key part of the nation's railway in a safe and sustainable way as the country takes the next steps in responding to the situation.

Bike marking at Chippenham

In an effort to stop a recent spate of bike thefts at Chippenham Station, British Transport Police staged a bike marking event at the end of September. Cyclists could have their machines security tagged. Initially these deter thieves from taking the bike but in the event of a stolen one being recovered makes it easier to reunite it with its owner.

BTP regularly hold bike marking events at local stations. For details of future events, follow their Twitter account.

In 2019 16 bikes were stolen from Swindon, a similar number in Trowbridge and five from Chippenham. In most cases the figures have more than tripled in the last three years leading to increased CCTV being installed in bike parking areas at stations.

December Timetable

GWR are finalising their plans for the December Timetable. The restrictions on people working in close proximity has had an effect on staff training and engineering work. In an effort to catch up on both there are plans for a later start to Sunday morning services for the whole of 2021. Discussions are continuing to see what effect it will have on TW services.

New TransWilts Leisure leaflets

TransWilts has produced two new leaflets to encourage us to get out and enjoy the countryside. The full colour publications highlight suggested walking and cycling routes from each of the TransWilts stations. The walking leaflet is now available from the TW noticeboards at Westbury, Trowbridge, Melksham and Swindon alongside the Autumn timetable. The cycling leaflet will follow shortly. Copies of all three can also be obtained by sending your postal address to friends@transwilts.org