TransWilts Connecting Wiltshire's Communities

incorporating TransWilts Community Rail Partnership

NEWSLETTER THIRTY TWO – FEBRUARY 2021

New Year honour for GWR's Mark Hopwood

GWR Managing Director Mark Hopwood was named a CBE in the New Year's Honours List for services to transport. Mr Hopwood, a career railway man, has led GWR and its predecessors since 2008 but has spent the last year working at SWR to improve their services before returning to GWR last month.

Commenting on his award, he said: "This is an honour that reflects the efforts of thousands of railway colleagues I have worked with throughout my 31-year career. The railway plays a part in the daily lives of millions, and I am very proud and delighted that my small contribution has been recognised in this way."

First Rail Managing Director Steve Montgomery said: "Mark has held a number of senior roles in his long and successful career, including more than a decade as GWR's Managing Director. His dedication to serving passengers, using his extensive knowledge and experience, is demonstrated every day and has contributed to a greatly transformed experience for customers. We are proud that these efforts have been recognised in this award of a CBE for Mark."

December timetable sees Sunday morning bus

GWR brought in its December timetable just before Christmas. To accommodate engineering work and catch up on staff training the first Sunday train from Westbury to Swindon is replaced by a bus until Easter. It takes slightly longer than the train but still gives a pre-10am arrival into Swindon to help key workers in shops and the hospital to arrive in time for their shifts.

GWR trims timetable in third lockdown

Following the introduction of a third national lockdown in the first week of January, GWR has made some changes to its timetables to avoid over capacity as fewer people are travelling and make the best use of staff resources as the company copes with growing numbers of virus related absences.

Services between Paddington and Bristol Temple Meads as well as Paddington to South Wales will run hourly off peak. Currently there are no Monday to Friday changes to services on the TransWilts although the times of connections at Westbury, Chippenham and Swindon may change. The final Saturday service of the day from Swindon is withdrawn.

Meanwhile latest figures – which include the Christmas period and the first week of the latest lockdown – show passenger numbers on the TransWilts down by just over 70% compared to the same time last year.

TransWilts helps make children's Christmas

With the virus restrictions preventing the running of the usual Santa train in December, TransWilts produced a number of gift bags for local children.

With help from GWR, British Transport Police and local charities, Community Rail Officer Sophie Martin produced 65 gift sets for schools in Westbury, Trowbridge, Chippenham and Melksham.

It is hoped Father Christmas will make a return this December for his usual train trip.

Modern Railways visits the TransWilts

A network for Wiltshire

JAMES ABBOTT takes a ride along the TransWilts route from Swindon to Westbury and hears about plans for expansion

The February issue of Modern Railways Magazine contains an in-depth look at the TransWilts line and an interview with TW Chairman Paul Johnson.

The four page illustrated article takes a look at the history of the line, the current situation and plans for the future. The work on the Melksham Station Hub and the recently completed White Horse Meeting room at Westbury station are also pictured.

There is also a section on the work of Community Rail Officer Sophie Martin.

The edition will be in the shops until late February, priced £4.99

March engineering work

Network Rail will be working in the Westbury area on Sunday 7th March. This will affect TransWilts services as well as those to Cardiff via Bristol. Buses will run between Westbury and both Bath Spa and Chippenham.

On the same day long distance services to London will terminate or start at Reading. There will also be work on the Weymouth line with trains only heading south as far as Dorchester West.

On Sunday 21st March Westbury Station will be closed. Trains to and from the West of England will call at Frome instead. There will also be no trains between Westbury and Swindon or Trowbridge and Salisbury. Again buses will be laid on to provide connections to Chippenham.

Through trains to West Somerset Railway?

For the last decade the Go-Op cooperative has been looking at running a train service through Melksham to Swindon. Over time the northern and southern termini have changed with past proposals including Westbury, Oxford, Birmingham and Nuneaton.

Now it is being reported the group is looking at linking up with the West Somerset Heritage Railway to run services from Bishops Lydeard to Taunton and thence to Swindon via Westbury.

GWR has run a shuttle from Taunton to the steam railway's southern terminus in the past but only on selected summer weekends.

Annual fares rise due in March

This year the Government announced that the annual fare rise would be delayed from 1st January to 1st March. Although specific fares have yet to be announced the headline increase is 2.6%. Although current advice is still to only travel for essential reasons, tickets bought before the beginning of March at the old prices will still be valid after the increases.

Virus absences hit TW service

December saw further problems with 56 trains cancelled out of a scheduled 448 according to figures compiled by the Melksham Rail Users Group. 16 of these were due to flooding elsewhere and the need to divert other services along the single line.

Westbury depot was particularly hard hit by virus related absences which led to 38 cancellations. In many cases these were flagged up the day before but the TransWilts working with GWR alternative transport was arranged and attention drawn to it on Twitter.

New timetable leaflets

The TransWilts has produced copies of the latest Westbury to Swindon timetable to compliment those published by GWR. The TW version concentrates on the service via Melksham rather than showing the wider connections offered in the GWR version.

Copies are available for those travelling via the TW noticeboards at Westbury, Trowbridge, Melksham and Swindon. Access restrictions prevent us restocking them at present. However if you would like a copy in the post please email friends@transwilts.org

More progress at Melksham Hub

Work has continued at the Melksham Hub and by the end of January the kitchen area was almost completed.

Meanwhile it is hoped to appoint a café manager by the middle of this month and then recruit a band of volunteers to staff the hub.

While the prevailing virus conditions will play a part, it is hoped to officially open the café on Easter Saturday 3rd April.

For updates see https://melkshamhub.co.uk/