TransWilts

Connecting Wiltshire's Communities

incorporating TransWilts Community Rail Partnership

NEWSLETTER THIRTY FOUR – JUNE 2021

Battling Back Better

As restrictions have eased – and the promise of more to come – we have seen more passengers travelling and the return of a Saturday evening train in the new summer timetable.

On Saturdays there is now a 20:05 service from Westbury to Swindon which gives the opportunity for a later return from a day out and also additional options for those who commute on the line.

On Saturday morning there is a through train from Swindon to Weymouth which leaves at 08:34 as two coaches and joins up with another two at Westbury to make the journey south arriving in Weymouth just before 11 o'clock. At present return journeys in the afternoon require a long wait at either Westbury for Melksham or Bath Spa for Chippenham and Swindon and TransWilts is pressing to see if this gap can be filled.

On Sunday there are two through trips to Weymouth – engineering work permitting.

Chippenham Station 180

The 31st May 2021 marked the 180th anniversary of Chippenham Station opening. For the first month of its existence it was the terminus of the line from Paddington before the route through Box Tunnel to Bath opened a month later.

To mark the anniversary the Friends of Chippenham Station have gathered photographs from the past in partnership with Chippenham Museum. These have been published at https://bit.ly/ChippenhamStation180 where you can also download a PDF showing views from then and now.

Mark Hopwood addresses TW Annual Stakeholder Meeting

The principal speaker at this month's TransWilts stakeholder meeting was GWR managing director Mark Hopwood CBE.

In a wide-ranging presentation he outlined the problems caused by the cracks found on some of the IET fleet. In the early hours of the 8th May the entire allocation of 93 GWR class 800s and 802s was grounded leading to widespread cancellations over the following days. He explained how Hitachi had worked with GWR and others to understand the problem and work on remedial measures. He also highlighted the help GWR had received from other companies to mitigate the problems. Cross Country had run Swindon to Bristol shuttles while C2C had lent three Class 387 sets to run on the Reading-Newbury route thus freeing up trains for other routes.

GWR has extended its own 387 operation to run services from Bristol Parkway while turbos are providing a Newbury-Bedwyn shuttle to reduce the need for IETs on that line.

He also commended the continuing achievements of the TransWilts and re-confirmed GWR's commitment to the line with the need for greater reliability and future investment.

Congratulations – community rail

- TransWilts has come so far in less than a decade – you should be very proud
- Now two-hourly service with three-carriage train compared to limited service with one carriage
- Car park and Hub café at Melksham; Knorr-Bremse sponsorship
- White Horse Room at Westbury

Scores on the doors

The Melksham Hub was delighted to receive a five star Food Hygiene rating following a Wiltshire Council inspection in April. It is a tribute to the standard of the fitting out of the building and the work put in by manager Siân Coppin to get the facility up and running. It is now open from 7.30am six days a week.

Major engineering work at Bristol Temple Meads

While the TransWilts line is free of engineering work for the remainder of June and July, there will be a major project continuing around Bristol Temple Meads station. Network Rail has been working to upgrade Bristol East junction, where the lines from Bath meet those from Filton and Bristol Parkway.

The work will be carried out in stages throughout the summer and early autumn. From 10th July to 6th August there will be fewer trains between Temple Meads and Bristol Parkway.

On the 7th August and again between the 9th and 13th August trains from Paddington will not call at Temple Meads and there will be no service from Temple Meads to either Bath or Bristol Parkway while on Sunday 8th Temple Meads will be closed completely.

Then for the remainder of August trains from London and Swindon will be diverted via Bristol Parkway to Temple Meads and not call at either Chippenham or Bath Spa.

As the project nears completion Temple Meads will again be closed to all services between 31st August and 3rd September.

Replacement road transport will be in operation throughout the works with full details available from GWR.com

Further work will also be carried out over the weekend of the 25th/26th September to complete the project. This will affect services from London and Swindon as well as through Bath Spa.

Reliability improves but more work being done

Jon Morgan, GWR's Central Regional Performance Manager, shared details of the work being done behind the scenes to improve services on the TransWilts when he addressed the TW's annual meeting.

Over the last few months there have been far fewer cancellations but of those that have occurred many have been due to problems elsewhere. The infrastructure on the Berks & Hants line through Newbury and Westbury has failed on a number of occasions meaning long distance services to and from the West of England have to be diverted through Melksham. This often means local services have to be cancelled to free up capacity.

The line, which forms part of the Severn & Solent mini group within GWR, did suffer from staff shortages last year due to the effects of the virus on the existing workforce and delays in training new recruits. This situation has improved although there is still some refresher training outstanding to keep staff up to date with their route knowledge.

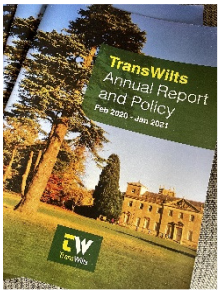
Jon has also been working with freight companies who have intensive services around Westbury to improve their reliability, thus ensuring their trains do not hold up other services.

It is also hoped that more Turbo trains, of the type which form the majority of TransWilts services, will move west from Reading in September when other rolling stock becomes available there.

School posters brighten Melksham

The area around the Melksham Café has been decorated with railway themed posters drawn by children at the town's Aleoric, Forest and Sandridge and Shaw Primary schools. Although we have not seen steam trains in regular service for many years, they still seem a firm favourite with the children!

TransWilts Annual Report



Our annual look back at the year and plans going forward was published at the recent Members' meeting and has now been posted to all members and stakeholders.

Despite the restrictions of the last year, it has been a very busy time with the completion of the White Horse Meeting Room at Westbury and the provision of extended car parking, vehicle charging, bike hire and the café at Melksham among the highlights.

Summer Days out are better by Rail

TransWilts will be supporting the Community Rail Network's summer campaign to attract people back to the trains. A day of events is planned at Chippenham Station on the 30th June. A final decision on the further easing of lockdown measures on the 21st June will dictate the final programme of events. More details will be available on the website nearer the time.