



incorporating TransWilts Community Rail Partnership

NEWSLETTER THIRTY EIGHT – FEBRUARY 2022

Service improves after Christmas low

TransWilts services in the last two weeks of December were badly hit by shortages at both Westbury and Gloucester depots with staff being forced to isolate leading to short notice changes. The situation was particularly acute immediately after Christmas when trains were removed from the timetable overnight so did not appear as explicit cancellations on station screens or Journeycheck. After intervention from the TransWilts these changes were eventually highlighted on the GWR website. An emergency timetable was introduced across the GWR network from the 8th January. Although it has seen the removal of the first round trip from Westbury in the morning on Mondays to Fridays and one round trip in the middle of the day on both Saturdays and Sundays the remaining services have been much more reliable. The timetable is reviewed weekly and also includes changes to services which normally continue south of Westbury but continue to run on the core TransWilts route.

GWR Volunteer Newsletter

GWR have started a Volunteer newsletter to showcase the work that Community Rail Partnerships do across their network. The new defibrillator at Melksham was featured in the first issue along with the work to brighten Swindon Station.

Community round-up

Swindon station comes into bloom

Local community gardening group Blooming Smiles adopts the Wiltshire station and installs planters

Blooming Smiles, the Swindon community gardening group that aims to preserve and maintain the town's natural beauty, has adopted Swindon station, installing four colourful planters.

The group, which was established nearly 20 years ago, encourages voluntary gardening and donates fresh produce to food banks. The team also deliver bouquets of 'blooming smiles' to local care homes.



Forthcoming Engineering Work

Work by Network Rail on Sunday 13th February will mean a late start to services on the TransWilts line. The first train will start from Westbury, not Warminster, at 09:21 and terminate at Chippenham rather than Swindon. Bus connections will be provided from Warminster and to Swindon. The first southbound service will start from Chippenham at 09:56.

On the 6th March buses will replace trains between Westbury and Chippenham in both directions until lunchtime. Three weeks later on the 27th March the first round trip will be replaced by buses but unlike February will run at closer to the usual train times.

Further afield and on all weekends in February the lines between Exeter and Plymouth will be closed while between the 7th and 13th March the lines in the far south west between Truro and Penzance will be blocked. Details on gwr.com

Nigel Bray – Railfuture

TransWilts was very sorry to hear of the death of rail campaigner Nigel Bray on the 19th December. The 69 year old was a dedicated transport enthusiast who had worked for British Rail, its privatised successors and the heritage sector as well as being an accomplished author. In his later years he was secretary of the Severnside Branch of Railfuture and a member of TransWilts. We mourn his passing and send our condolences to his family and friends.

TW seeks new Board Members

The TransWilts CIC is looking for people interested in joining its Board of Directors. No previous experience is required but a willingness to engage with stakeholders and others to further our aims would be a benefit. The Board meets every three months, usually in Westbury, and communicates regularly via email in between times. Anyone interested, or who would like further details, should contact Bob Morrison (friends@transwilts.org)

Passenger numbers still to recover

Latest figures show 12,887 journeys were made on the TransWilts in December 2021 – a fall of just over 30% on the equivalent period in 2019. The situation was not helped in the latest period by the short notice cancellations and timetable changes highlighted on the front page.

Looking forward there has been a slow rise in the number of people parking their cars at Melksham Station in the mornings.

Fare rises delayed

The annual rail fare increases have again been postponed until 1st March. Specific fares have not been released but the average increase for what are known as regulated fares is set to be capped at 3.8%. These include season tickets, Anytime, Off Peak and Super Off Peak but other fares could rise by more.

Details will be included in the next newsletter.

Café Improvements



Over the Christmas period volunteers worked to improve the outside seating area and reconfigure the internal café space.

The gazebo now has protection from the elements to go with the lighting and heating while the counter and tables have been re-arranged to provide greater capacity.



Café Winter opening hours

The serving times at the café have been revised for the winter period. Monday to Friday 07:00 - 15:00, Saturday 07:30 - 13:00 and Sunday – Closed. If you bring your re-usable travel mugs you can claim 10% off your hot drink.

Go-Op Update



Go-Op – the open access operator which hopes to run services along the TransWilts line issued an update in January.

Previous plans had been centred around various forms of rolling stock but they have now announced they plan to use re-purposed Class 153 single car units. Un-refurbished examples of these trains used to run on the TransWilts before they were displaced by two and three car services. The group is still having discussions with Network Rail to establish what services they could run given the constraints of the single line through Melksham.

They are proposing to run between Taunton and Westbury with some services continuing to Swindon. They are also looking at extending beyond Taunton onto the West Somerset heritage railway.

They still hope to begin services at some point in 2022.

Christmas Café treat



The TransWilts Christmas Train Trip Experience took place on Saturday 4th December.

Despite more COVID complications scuppering the usual Santa Train plans, it was decided to team up with Swindon Station Adoption Group to bring some families to Melksham to visit the Hub Cafe and the Christmas Fayre.



The Swindon residents arrived in Melksham where they were welcomed off the train by Santa himself. Santa gave out some gifts donated by the TW and The Lions Group. Lunch was provided before the group headed into town for a wander around the Christmas Fayre.

Date for your diary

The 2022 Annual Meeting has been provisionally set for the 23rd May and is likely to be held in Trowbridge. More details about the programme for the day will be announced nearer the time.

Silence is Golden?

The Department for Transport has signalled the government wants to see fewer automatic announcements on board trains. Industry bodies are consulting to look at what has been dubbed “Tannoy Spam”. Safety announcements would remain but the aim is to reduce the frequency or eliminate altogether messages about ticket inspections, catering arrangements and, ironically, the quiet coach.

It seems however the British Transport Police message of “See it, Say it, Sorted” will remain despite it being rated by some as the most annoying.



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