TransWilts Connecting Wiltshire's Communities

incorporating TransWilts Community Rail Partnership

NEWSLETTER FORTY – JUNE 2022

Train Trippers to Salisbury

As we all try to get back to life as we knew it two years ago, a group of just over a dozen took part in the TransWilts Try the Train day to Salisbury at the beginning of April.

After a complimentary drink and snack at the Melksham Hub Café the party set off to Wiltshire's only city via a change of train at Westbury. Once at the destination the group were able to take in the sites or look around the shopping area before returning to Melksham in the late afternoon.

There are now plans to organise other trips to different destinations in the coming months.

Concerted plan to tackle reliability

Following continuing problems with cancellations to the TransWilts service in March and April there have been several meetings with GWR to understand the problems and work with them to both improve the service and establish a co-ordinated response when cancellations do occur.

The main issues have been staff unavailability and problems elsewhere meaning long distance trains needing to be diverted via the single line through Melksham. Over the last two years GWR have fallen behind in their training, partly because Government rules meant learners could not accompany drivers in their cabs.

GWR are now working to catch up on that training. In addition drivers at the Fratton depot near Portsmouth will be adding the Melksham route to the list of services they can operate in a effort to improve reliability.

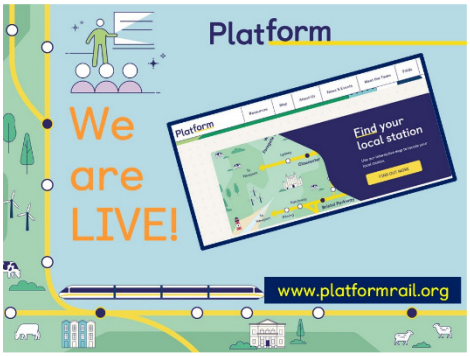
There have also a number of changes to staff at the Control Room in Swindon and new members are being briefed on the contingency plans in place for TransWilts services.

Chippenham work to start

Network Rail contractors are moving in to make Chippenham station fully accessible. A lift from the Northern car park is being installed to connect with the existing footbridge which already has lifts to the island platform and ticket office.

Attention will also turn to the front of the station. The bus interchange will be improved to make the area safer for pedestrians. There will also be increased provision for taxis and cyclists.

Educational aid programme launched



Platform – a series of initiatives to help young people access the rail network – has been launched as a partnership between TransWilts and three other CRPs. The scheme aims to provide schools with classroom talks and practical sessions at stations and on board trains. The material will include details of how to plan a journey, buy tickets, what to expect at the station and when travelling as well as the sort of behaviour expected on board.

The material on offer can be easily changed on a bespoke basis to cater for specific needs of schools and pupils.

Forthcoming engineering work

On both Sundays 19th June and 31st July the first two TransWilts services will be replaced by buses between Warminster and Chippenham. Those travelling to Swindon will be able to change for a train service onward and arrive in Swindon at 09:08.

Further afield the line between Swindon and Gloucester will be closed on Sunday 12th June until mid-afternoon with buses running in place of trains.

Work is continuing in the Bristol area. Bristol Parkway will be closed on three Sundays from the 12th June while the Severn Tunnel will be closed for 10 days from the 1st July. South Wales services will be diverted via Gloucester and not call at Bristol Parkway. The same will also apply on Sunday 17th July.

Full details are available at gwr.com

Out with the old

The Department for Transport is to update the image for the railway used on road signs. Out will go the outline of a steam train to be replaced by a more modern image. Signs will be replaced on a rolling basis as they become due for maintenance.

Volunteers tidy Trowbridge and Chippenham stations

After being postponed due to storms in February, volunteers descended on two TransWilts stations in April to litter pick and tidy them. Trowbridge and Chippenham were given a spring clean with dozens of bags of rubbish being collected.

GWR launches new timetable

Last month GWR introduced its new timetable. On the TransWilts the remaining services which were suspended in January amid crew shortages have been restored. In addition until September there will be a through service to and from Weymouth on a Saturday for those wishing to make a daytrip. Leaving Swindon at 08:08 it arrives in Weymouth at 10:24 and returns at 19:40 reaching Swindon at 21:59. The trains call at Chippenham, Melksham, Trowbridge and Westbury in both directions.

Café goes greener

Solar panels have been installed on the roof of the Melksham Hub café and are already offsetting the electricity bills associated with the building.

In the first six weeks of operation, despite some indifferent weather at times, the panels have produced 379 kWh of electricity. That's a carbon saving of 87.5 kg – as much as driving a petrol car for around 300 miles.

As well as providing power to the café the system also supplies the car charging points making them an even greener choice.

Any surplus energy is fed back to the National Grid and provides a small income to the TransWilts.

Peter honoured

Long serving Peter Blackburn has stood down from the board of TransWilts after guiding it through its early years. He has also given considerable service to the Melksham Transport Users Group. In recognition of his valued input to the CIC he has been awarded Honorary Life Membership – the first person to be afforded that honour.

Although he was unable to attend the recent AGM members of the board visited him at home and presented him with an engraved crystal glass and a bottle of his favourite tipple.

Informative Stakeholders Meeting

After a two year gap the TransWilts Stakeholder meeting returned to Trowbridge at the end of May.

Attendees heard updates from GWR on their plans to improve reliability on the Westbury/Swindon route. With restrictions easing they are catching up on training to increase the number of drivers cleared to work on the line and in conjunction with Network Rail looking to improve their contingency plans when things do go wrong.

Go-Op updated the meeting on their plans to run a service. They hope to begin in May next year between Taunton and Westbury using single coach Class 153s. They are still in discussions with Network Rail to find additional paths to take the service on to Swindon via Westbury.

Wiltshire Council outlined the progress they are making on their Transport Plan and Demand Responsive Transport. The Community Rail Network talked about Community Rail week, the Swindon & Wiltshire Local Enterprise Partnership outlined their work on rail while Platform explained the benefits of their partnership with local schools to promote rail travel to young people.

Community Rail Officer Sophie Martin and Corsham councillor Alun Crockford were also elected to the board.