TransWilts Connecting Wiltshire's Communities

incorporating TransWilts Community Rail Partnership

NEWSLETTER FORTY ONE – AUGUST 2022

PETER BLACKBURN – 1933-2022

The TransWilts CIC was sorry to learn of the death of its long serving board member Peter Blackburn on the 13th July.

Peter, who was 88, had been a stalwart of public transport in Melksham for nearly 30 years. He was chairman of the Melksham Railway Development Group, from which the TransWilts was born, and which itself has become the Melksham Transport Users Group to reflect its wider activities.

His wise counsel was much welcomed on the board of the TransWilts, from which he only stood down a couple of months ago. However it was not only at meetings where Peter could be found. He was always on hand to support public events where he would meet and speak to a whole range of people.

Away from the railway, he had a lifetime in business, primarily shipping, and performed a number of roles. In his time he was a regional chairman of the Federation of Small Business which under his leadership saw Swindon get its own branch in 2003. He was also an election agent and was at home talking to both local and national politicians. In what spare time he had he was a keen hockey follower and was President of the Wiltshire County Association.

He leaves a wife, Margaret, and three sons.

TransWilts chairman Paul Johnson paid tribute: "Peter was President of the TransWilts CIC since its formation in 2015 and his positive attitude was appreciated and respected by everyone he met.

He was tremendously supportive of TransWilts providing a wise head on our Board with whom to discuss issues. HIs telephone calls became an essential part of my week for many years. He attended many community rail events and was always good company.

He was a frequent visitor to the new Melksham Café together with his wife Margaret.

Sadly his recent decline in health meant he could not continue to attend meetings and events - he will be sadly missed."

Peter's funeral will be at the West Wiltshire Crematorium in Semington on Friday 19th August starting at 1.45pm.

Work moves ahead on Devizes Gateway

As part of its Restoring your Railway initiative, The Department for Transport is allocating £400,000 to fund a feasibility study for plans to provide a station near Devizes and improvements at Westbury station.

Devizes station, and the line it was on, closed in 1966. The new proposal is for a station on the Newbury to Taunton line at Lydeway – around 3 and a half miles from Devizes itself. The study will look at which existing services could call at the station, the work needed to provide station facilities, bus links to the town, car parking and connection to the A342. Work will also be undertaken to look at the possibility of extending the Newbury to Bedwyn shuttle to Westbury with a call at Devizes.

At Westbury the study will look at infrastructure improvements needed for additional services, both passenger and freight.

The report is scheduled to be completed by the end of March next year.

(The former station area at Devizes)

Summer timetable ends

GWR's summer timetable ends after the 10th September. For the TransWilts that means the Saturday morning through train to Weymouth and the return in the evening are withdrawn. As a consequence the last train on a Saturday from Swindon to Westbury will an hour earlier at 21:07.

Forthcoming engineering work

On Sunday 11th September the first train from Warminster to Swindon via Westbury will be replaced by a bus leaving at 07:27 and arriving in Chippenham at 08:45 where a train will take you to Swindon for 09:09. The bus will then return to Westbury at 09:28.

Although the TransWilts line is relatively free of engineering work over the next two months, there is a lot of work planned by Network Rail in neighbouring areas.

On the morning of Sunday 14th August the Severn Tunnel will be closed to allow the final pieces of work connected with the recent track relaying. Trains from Swindon to and from South Wales will be diverted via Gloucester.

On Tuesday the 16th and 17th August the route from Swindon to Gloucester will be closed to trains and replaced by buses. Some services from Cheltenham will operate to London via Bristol Parkway and Swindon.

Between the 18th and 23rd September the line from Bristol Temple Meads and Taunton via Weston-super-Mare will be closed. A limited service via Westbury will be operated by Cross Country while buses will replace trains for the most part.

Oxford Station will be closed on Saturday and Sundays for four weekends starting on the 10th/11th September. The line between Salisbury and Southampton will be closed on the 17th and 18th September while from the 24th until the 30th September services to Weymouth will be replaced by buses south of Yeovil Pen Mill.

Finally the line from Castle Cary to Taunton will be shut from 1st until 11th October. Most West of England services will operate via Bristol Temple Meads.

Full details are available at gwr.com

Strikes stunt passenger recovery

A week of disruption caused by strike action by members of the RMT Union in June saw the numbers travelling in the month fall to 15,954 – that is a drop of 20% on three years ago before the pandemic. That compares with 17,210 in May (a decrease of 16% on 2019). The biggest fall in the Severn & Solent area was Bristol to Gloucester which was down nearly 30% while as leisure journeys increase Weymouth services were down by only 5%.

The RMT action continued into July and has now been joined by ASLEF who represent train drivers and TSSA whose members come from across various railway jobs including control staff engineers and those working at stations.

Action is planned on various dates in August unless a breakthrough comes in ongoing talks.

On strike days so far TransWilts services have all been withdrawn and with no staff to run the signalbox at Westbury on some days there have been no trains along the Reading to Taunton line via Newbury,

Ramble & Rail

Taking advantage of the summer weather, TransWilts has organised a number of walking events. On the 6th July a group met at Trowbridge Station for a 7 mile walk to Melksham station where they enjoyed refreshments at the café before catching the train back to Trowbridge.

Other outdoor events are planned – including a daytrip to Weston-super-Mare on Saturday 6th August. Details from sophie@transwilts.org

Imberbus day to go ahead

Despite a planned rail strike that day, the organisers of the Imberbus Day on the 20th August have announced it will be going ahead. The military ranges on Salisbury Plain will be open to allow people to visit the abandoned village of Imber. Details of the event and bus and coach services which will connect with the special services are available at imberbus.org