

NEWSLETTER FORTY TWO – OCTOBER 2022

Train Trippers to the seaside



A two dozen strong group from Swindon and Chippenham took advantage of the summer weather to use the train for a day trip to Weston-super Mare organised by the TransWilts.

They arrived at the beach by 11am and spent the day building sandcastles, having a dip in the sea, enjoying fish and chips or just relaxing.

Some even took advantage of the donkey rides on offer.

Plans are now being drawn up for more trips to promote day trips from Wiltshire.

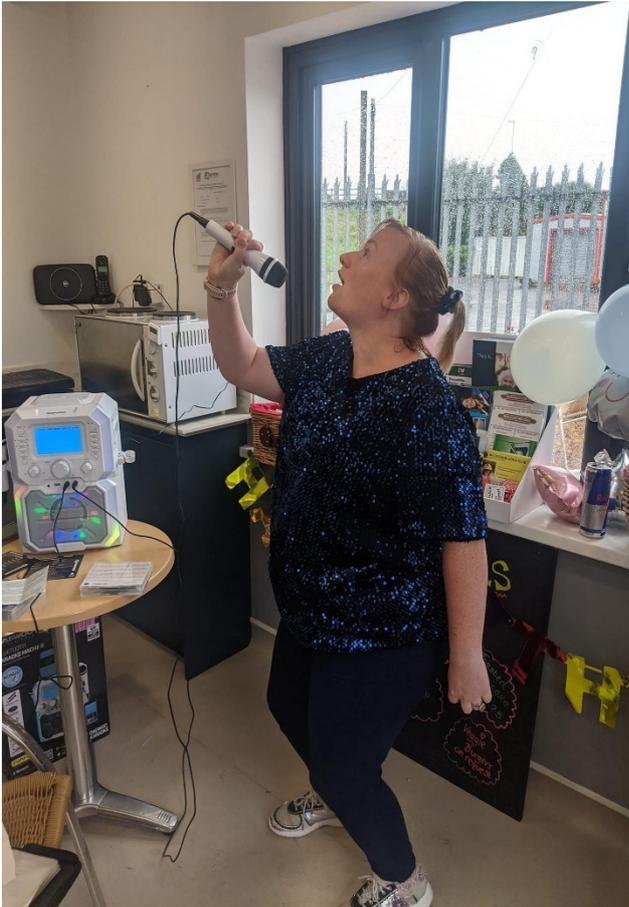
TransWilts working to aid the set up a Kennet & Avon Community Rail Partnership

Work is underway to found a group to promote the rail line from Pewsey to Theale via Newbury. A total of 13 stations are included in the plan. The Partnership, once up and running, would support existing passengers and promote the line to non users in the same way the TransWilts has for those from Swindon to Westbury and Warminster via Melksham. With grant funding from GWR, TW has recruited a new administration officer, Corinne Martin. She will be based in the White Horse Room at Westbury Station and assist Community Rail Officer Sophie Martin (no relation) on the project. Corinne can be contacted via admin@transwilts.org.

There is significant community interest along the route for engaging with the railway, including the community at Devizes. A new station is proposed to serve Devizes, which is located between Pewsey and Westbury. This is currently being progressed as a Department for Transport funded Restoring Your Railway (RYR) initiative, with work currently underway to support and develop the Strategic Outline Business Case. The Devizes RYR proposal includes aspirations for an hourly local service along the line, including a study on the infrastructure and connectivity needs at Westbury. Westbury provides the connecting hub for services to South Wiltshire (Salisbury) and to coastal towns in Dorset (Weymouth) and Hampshire (Southampton and Portsmouth).

There is a significant synergy with the leisure market as the line corridor provides convenient access to the Kennet and Avon Canal between Reading and Devizes. A leisure market strategy will also include Newbury Racecourse, which has a station on the route. It is estimated that the route, including a new station to serve Devizes, has the potential to attract around 4.75 million passengers per annum.

Melksham Glee Club



It is estimated that up to 1.5 million people in the UK have a learning disability. In Wiltshire, young people with learning disabilities are taught at special needs schools and mainstream schools with special resources. When they are 16 they can move to specialist colleges such as Fairfield Farm College in Dilton Marsh or other colleges with specialist facilities. Once they leave these specialist environments there is often nowhere locally where they can continue to learn the skills to work in a structured way. Yet, many people with a learning disability, with the right support, make a valuable contribution to organisations and society. There is now a weekly session at the Melksham Hub Café where they can meet on a Wednesday. As well as socialising they get the chance to gain experience in how the café is run. The Glee Club is now seeking funding so they provide more equipment for the club and provide transport to the café for those coming from further afield.

Engineering Work – Autumn 2022

A bus will replace the first TransWilts train on Sunday 16th October. It will run between Warminster and Chippenham where it will connect into a train to Swindon. On the 13th November there will be a greatly reduced service as Westbury station is closed to all trains. The first northbound train will start from Trowbridge, there will then be a four and a half hour gap until just after 1pm. Southbound after the first train there will be a similar gap. Trains will call at Frome rather than Westbury with all services, after the first one, extended to or from Weymouth.

Meanwhile on Sunday 4th December the first two services will be replaced by bus between Warminster/Westbury and Chippenham.

Extensive work continues in the Wessex area. From 1st until 11th October the line through Castle Cary will be closed. Long distance services to and from the West of England will divert via Bristol. There will be a limited service from London to Castle Cary and to Westbury. Weymouth services will start south from Castle Cary. Rail replacement bus services will be limited with none currently planned between the 2nd and 6th October when there will be strike action across much of the network.

Full details are available at www.gwr.com

Electric Vehicle charging at Melksham cheaper than most

The RAC recently suggested the average cost of charging an electric vehicle away from home is around 63p per kilowatt hour (kWh). Although recently increased, the price at the Hub is 32.5p per kWh. Part of the energy to supply the chargers come from the roof mounted solar panels on the café. Car parking charges remain unchanged at £3.50 per day.

TransWilts project shortlisted for Community Rail Awards



@platform_rail is a rail education scheme created during lockdown to present young people with sustainable & healthy travel choices in an accessible, interactive & meaningful way. By June '22, workshops & assemblies had been delivered to 1848 students.



Platform, the joint scheme between the Trans Wilts, Severnside, Gloucestershire and Worcester Community Rail Partnerships, has been shortlisted in the “Influencing Positive change”

The awards evening in Manchester is on the 6th October – delayed by 24 hours because of the planned rail strike on the 5th.

Reliability remains a concern

The cancellations which have plagued the TransWilts service over the summer have continued. The two main issues have been crew shortages and disruption on the Berks & Hants line through Newbury. That often leads to long distance trains to and from the West of England being diverted along the single line through Melksham at the expense of the local service.

The TransWilts have been working with GWR to understand the issues surrounding the disruption to the service, what can be done to improve it and a strategy to help intending passengers when cancellations do occur. This latter project has been delayed due to the ongoing industrial action and changes to staff in the GWR control room in Swindon.

Membership renewals

The majority of TW membership subscriptions fall due for renewal at the end of October. For those who do not have standing orders we will be writing to you in early November and very much hope you will feel able to renew despite the current pressures on household expenditure.

All change in Swindon

Work has started on a two year project to improve travel connections in Swindon. Fleming Way, where most of the town's local services stop, has been closed while it is landscaped and brought to the same level as the town centre shopping area. As a result many services operated by Swindon's Bus Company now have alternative stopping places including the bus station, Regents Circus and Faringdon Road. Full details are available at www.swindonbus.co.uk

Passenger numbers

Latest figures show 17,600 rail journeys were made on the TransWilts in August which is down around 18% on 2019 before the pandemic. Service reliability has undoubtedly played a part as has industrial action. ASLEF (drivers) and RMT (on board and station staff) members withdrew their labour on three days leading to no TransWilts services operating. This decrease in passengers was on a par with Cardiff to Portsmouth, Bristol to Wesbury and Bristol to South Wales. However services to Weymouth are almost back to the levels they were three years ago.

Chippenham station works delayed

The ambitious plans to redevelop the traffic arrangements at the front of the station have been delayed. The contractor has informed GWR that it is no longer able to sign the project agreement due to rises in labour and raw material costs. GWR is now looking at the scheme again and is "reasonably confident" it can progress it even if certain parts have to be scaled back. At present it is concentrating on the northern side of the station where an extra lift is planned to provide access to the overbridge from the car park. Network Rail has already made changes to the bridge and GWR is keen to finish this work as a priority.

December Timetable change

GWR is finalising its plans for the timetable change in December. The TransWilts service remains as now with 17 services along the line throughout the day, Monday to Saturday and 14 on Sundays.

On Friday nights there will be a later final service from Bristol Temple Meads to London calling at Bath, Chippenham and Swindon leaving at 22:40. On Sundays there will be an earlier first train from these stations to London leaving Bristol at 07:45. This will give a 40 minute earlier arrival in Paddington for those west of Swindon or 15 minutes for those joining at Swindon.

On weekdays there is an extra call at Dilton Marsh at 08:04 offering journeys to Warminster and Salisbury for school and commuters.

Full details are now appearing in on line journey planners. The next timetable change will be in May when GWR hopes to introduce more services alongside the usual extra capacity to holiday destinations.

