TransWilts

Connecting Wiltshire's Communities

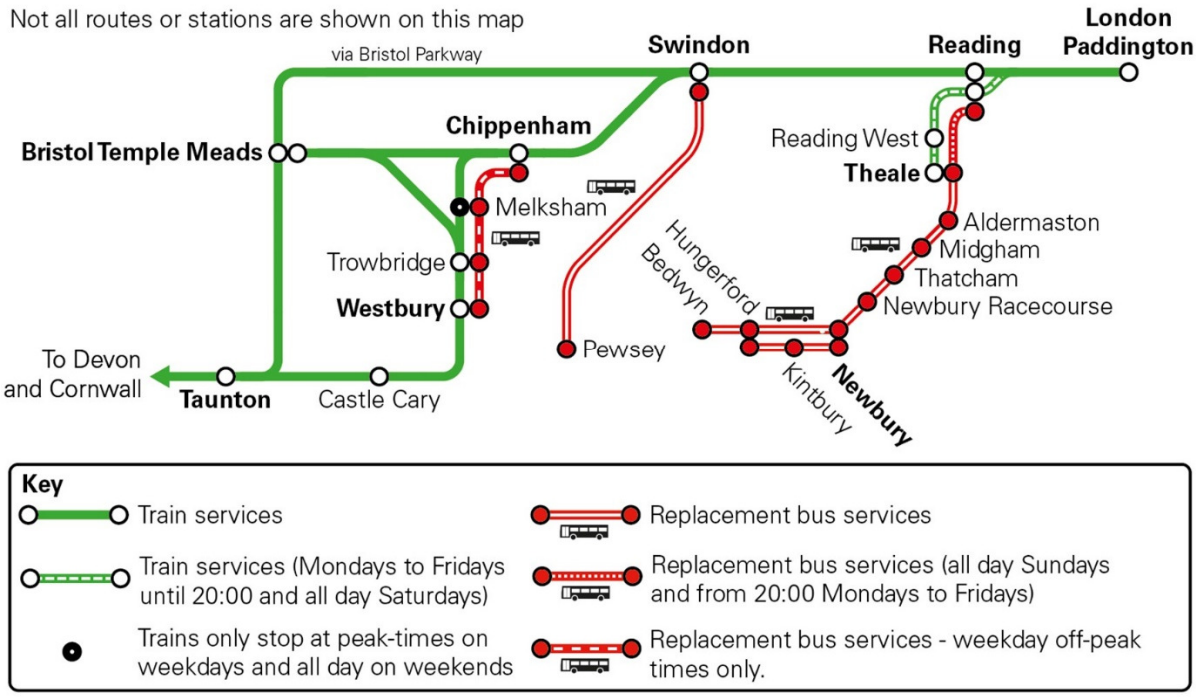
incorporating TransWilts Community Rail Partnership

NEWSLETTER FORTY FOUR – FEBRUARY 2023

Extensive engineering work to affect TransWilts services for a fortnight

Network Rail will be working in the Newbury area from the 18th February to the 2nd March which means trains for Devon and Cornwall will be diverted via Swindon and Melksham.

It means ALL off-peak trains on the TransWilts service from Westbury to Swindon via Melksham on Mondays to Fridays will be replaced by buses between Westbury and Chippenham. The first return service, an 07:52 from Westbury, a retimed 17:46 from Swindon and a return at 18:51 will run as trains over the complete route.



Meanwhile on Saturday 5th and Sunday 11th February all TransWilts services will again be replaced by buses between Westbury and Chippenham with onward train connections to Swindon.

On Sunday 26th March the first journey from Warminster to Swindon will be replaced by a bus as far as Chippenham. The first southbound service will be a train but starting from Chippenham rather than Swindon.

Further afield, the line through Warminster will be closed on the weekend of the 11th/12th of February and again on the 4th/5th March. Meanwhile services to Weymouth will be affected between the 6th and 10th March.

TransWilts service continues to suffer

Cancellations continue to plague the Swindon to Westbury service. Since the last newsletter a combination of sickness, continuing industrial action, infrastructure problems and the weather have thwarted efforts to run a reliable service.

Between Christmas and New Year an outbreak of flu at Westbury depot led to numerous cancellations because of a shortage of drivers. 2023 did not start well with a series of trains not running on New Year's Day because of a lack of crew. Strike action between the 3rd and 8th January meant all services were cancelled. As services resumed on the 9th a points failure at Thingley Junction near Chippenham prevented access to the Melksham single line while the following day issues at Bedwyn on the Berks & Hants route meant long distance trains to and from the West Country had to be diverted via Melksham at the expense of the TransWilts service. The weather then took a hand with flooding in several locations near Chippenham affecting services on the 12th and 14th January.

Margaret Blackburn

TransWilts was sorry to learn of the death of Margaret Blackburn, widow of former President Peter Blackburn. She died on the 13th of December, five months to the day since her husband. She provided enthusiastic back up to many of Peter's activities – including those connected with the railway and was a frequent visitor to the Melksham Café in its early days.

TransWilts earns Re-accreditation

The TransWilts was pleased to receive notification from the Department for Transport that it has had its accreditation renewed for another 12 months. The process is a formal recognition that it operates to a high professional standard and is a safe recipient for public funds.

It also means the TransWilts is eligible to apply for grants of up to £25,000 from the Community Rail Development Fund which provides funds for projects which further the CRPs plans and projects.

Passenger figures

Continuing reliability problems and strike action (see page two) continue to stifle passenger numbers on the TransWilts. Latest figures for December 2022 show 13,270 journeys were made on the line – that is down almost a third on the same period three years ago before the pandemic.

Across the whole of last year nearly 190,000 journeys were recorded – down a quarter on 2019.

TransWilts working with GWR to promote canal rail links

Plans to set up a community rail partnership for the stations alongside the Kennet & Avon Canal between Theale and Pewsey are being supported by the TransWilts CIC. In freezing conditions at the end of January officials from the TW visited every station along the route to check facilities and access to the waterway. The details gathered will be the basis of a feasibility study to help GWR push the plan forward.

Santa comes to Melksham

The station café was transformed into Santa's Grotto ahead of Christmas. Families from across the area came to see Santa and his helpers. The children received a goodie bag while hot drinks and food were available for those who braved the weather.

Wiltshire council transport stalwarts move on

Two transport experts at Wiltshire Council are stepping down from their roles.

Dr Mark McClelland has stepped down as the Cabinet Member for Transport, Waste, Street Scene and Flooding. His decision came after he was appointed as a Special Advisor to the Chief Secretary to the Treasury in Whitehall and felt he could not devote enough time to his council role. He has been replaced by Marlborough councillor Caroline Thomas.

Meanwhile Rob Murphy, an officer in the Sustainable Transport group at the council, is moving to a new job within National Highways. Both have worked closely with the TransWilts over the years.