TransWilts — Connecting Wiltshire's Communities

incorporating TransWilts Community Rail Partnership

NEWSLETTER FORTY FIVE – APRIL 2023

New late evening TransWilts service

GWR has unveiled its May to December timetable which comes into effect from the 21st of next month.

There are some minor changes to the daytime service on Mondays to Fridays. The first southbound train now starts from Gloucester but still continues to Southampton Central.

The current first service from Westbury to Swindon at 05:17 will no longer run. The first train north will now leave Westbury at 07:05 having started at Salisbury. As now it will continue to Cheltenham Spa but then continue to Worcester Foregate Street. The next northbound service will leave Westbury slightly later at 07:45.

The icing on the cake is a new late evening service leaving Westbury at 21:16 which will return from Swindon at 22:26.

On Saturdays until September there will be a through train to Weymouth leaving at 08:45 with a return service departing the south coast at 19:40. On Sundays there will be two through services to Weymouth plus other extensions to Frome and Salisbury.

Full details will appear on GWR.com shortly.

Paul Johnson to step down

TransWilts chairman Paul Johnson has announced his intention to step down as chairman at next month's AGM.

Paul and his wife Rosemarie, who celebrated their Golden Wedding anniversary earlier this year, plan to move out of the area and Paul feels it is the right time to move aside although will work with his successor on an orderly handover and will continue to follow progress from the sidelines.

March fare rises announced

The annual fares rise took effect from 1st March. The average increase nationwide is 5.9%, Some sample local fares are shown below. New prices in red.

Anytime return fares		
Westbury to London (any route)	£222.40	£235.60
Chippenham to London	£195.00	£206.60
Anytime day return fares		
Melksham to Swindon	£ 11.20	£ 11.90
Trowbridge to Chippenham (via Melksham)	£ 7.40	£ 7.80
Super Off Peak return fares		
Westbury to London (any route)	£ 67.20	£ 71.20
Chippenham to London	£ 59.60	£ 63.10
Off Peak day return fares		
Melksham to Swindon	£ 8.30	£ 8.80
Trowbridge to Chippenham (via Melksham)	£ 6.30	£ 6.70

Lessons to be learned from Newbury engineering work

The closure of the Berks & Hants line in February and March led to long distance services to and from the West Country being diverted via the single line through Melksham. This meant most off peak local weekday journeys were replaced by buses. However a number of the rush hour services which were planned to be operated by train were either delayed, cancelled or diverted via Bath, missing Melksham. This was due to congestion on the single line. GWR are now looking back through the data from the period and initial thoughts are that when there is future engineering work between Reading and Westbury more use will be made of the route via Hullavington rather than Melksham. This is the line normally taken by services to and from South Wales and is double track throughout.

Melksham Café to close

With regret the TransWilts has announced the café at Melksham Station will close in its current form by the end of May. Opened in spring 2021 it has provided hot and cold food and drinks six days a week for both rail passengers and local businesses as well as a home delivery service. However the number of those using the trains since the pandemic has not risen sufficiently to allow the café to cover its costs. This has not been helped by the unreliability of the service and the suspension of the service for the Newbury works proved to be the final straw.

It is hoped to continue the very successful weekly Glee Club which will make use of the building going forward.

Midweek closure for TransWilts services in April.

All trains between Westbury and Swindon will be replaced by buses for three days from the 25th April due to engineering work. Train services will resume on Friday 28th April.

Meanwhile on Sunday 7th May the first round trip on the line will be replaced by a bus to and from Chippenham. The lunchtime train service will only go as far as Chippenham as well.

Staff availability improves

Over the last two months staff absences have not affected the TransWilts service to the extent they did over the previous six months. This comes after GWR's training programme got back on track after the pandemic. However other factors have seen short notice cancellations. As well as the problems connected with the Newbury engineering work mentioned on the previous page, continuing issues with the points at Thingley Junction and unreliability with the turbo fleet has seen services withdrawn at the last minute.

On the plus side the news the RMT union has withdrawn the latest planned strikes has given rise to the hope a solution may be found to the dispute which has rumbled on for the last nine months.

2023 AGM

The TransWilts CIC Annual General Meeting will be held on Monday 22nd May at the Trowbridge Civic Centre in St Patrick's Place starting at 10am. Details of the day and a link to apply for a free ticket are on the TransWilts website.

Litter picks

Following last year's successful events at Trowbridge and Chippenham, litter picking days are being planned to smarten up Trowbridge again and Swindon.

Details and an appeal for volunteers will be announced later. Last year dozens of bags of rubbish were collected during a two day blitz over Easter.

Remembering Roger

Friends gathered at Trowbridge Station in February to remember long time campaigner Roger Newman.

He was chairman and driving force behind the West Wilts Users Group for many years. He was also part of the station adoption team at Trowbridge until his death in 2020 at the age of 83.

Work continues at Chippenham

Contractors are continuing their work to improve access to the north side of Chippenham Station. The end of the new footbridge is being turned to enable the installation of a lift to complement the existing lifts giving access to the island platform and the ticket office.

The planned improvements to the front of the station have been delayed after the chosen contractor withdrew but the work is being re-advertised.

TransWilts completes Kennet & Avon study

Since January members of the TransWilts have been conducting research on behalf of GWR to establish the feasibility of setting up a Community Rail Partnership (CRP) for the stations between Theale and Pewsey which are not currently covered by a CRP. As well as visiting all ten stations along the line there have been meetings with local councillors and others to explain the role of a CRP and explore possible funding opportunities.

The line closely follows the Kennet & Avon Canal and links to that and Newbury Racecourse have also been researched. GWR and the Department for Transport will now study the findings and see what funding is available.