TransWilts

Connecting Wiltshire's Communities

incorporating TransWilts Community Rail Partnership

NEWSLETTER FORTY SIX – JUNE 2023

Trowbridge schoolchildren make the trip to Weymouth

At the end of April a group of over 30 five and six year olds from Studley Green Primary School in Trowbridge took the train to Weymouth. Run as part of the Platform education initiative the group learned about train travel including how to behave on board and while moving about stations.

You can read more about the day here - https://platformrail.org/next-stop-the-beach/

South Wales services affected by engineering work

On various dates in June, including weekdays, the Severn Tunnel will be closed for engineering work. It will mean services from Swindon to South Wales will be diverted and not call at Bristol Parkway. They will also take longer to reach the principality.

Meanwhile on the first two weekends in July trains from Swindon to Gloucester will only run as far as Stroud or Kemble with road replacement arranged for those travelling further.

The only planned work on the Melksham line is on Sunday 18th June where the first northbound service will be a bus as far as Chippenham with a train forming the first southbound service starting there rather than Swindon.

Looking further ahead services through Oxford will be affected for ten days from the 29th July, Details will be published on GWR.com shortly.

Women in Rail

A series of murals have been erected at TransWilts stations between Swindon and Westbury as well as Dilton Marsh and Warminster to showcase the role of women in the rail industry.

It is hoped these Women in Rail artworks, by local artists, will help bridge the skills gap in rail, further alleviate insecurities and challenge any perceived gender imbalance. The project was made possible with funding from GWR and the Community Rail Network.

Oxfordshire bridge repairs due to finish

Rail passengers have endured weeks of disruption between Didcot Parkway and Oxford after the emergency closure of a bridge. Regular monitoring of Nuneham Viaduct which takes the railway over the River Thames near Abingdon showed the foundations starting to fail and Network Rail was forced to block the line.

It is hoped the work will be completed by the 9th June. Until then there are buses running between Didcot and Oxford and limited rail shuttles to Culham from Didcot and Radley from Oxford.

Rail tickets are also being accepted on Stagecoach's S6 bus service from Swindon to Oxford however due to roadworks in the city, the bus terminates on Botley Road a short distance from Oxford station.

Slow improvement continues

Latest passenger numbers show a slight increase compared to the equivalent period last year. In April 17,128 journeys were made on trains between Swindon and Westbury. That is 5.4% up on last year but still over 15% down on pre-Covid levels.

By contrast passengers travelling to Weymouth fell year on year but are now above 2019 levels.

Royal Surprise for Platform participants

Year Five pupils from Warminster's Minster School had a surprise as they returned from a day trip organised by Platform – the rail education group supported by TransWilts and other neighbouring CRPs. The children had been to Bath to experience travelling by rail and to learn map reading skills. As they waited on the platform at the station on their way home they were spotted by the Princess of Wales as she made her way back from a charity event in the city. As she rushed down the platform to reach her carriage she was able to ask the children how they were and what they had been doing. Talking later on BBC Radio Wiltshire their teacher Kate Drew said the youngsters were surprised and thrilled to see the Princess and it would be hard to find another school trip to top it.

Devizes Parkway not forgotten

Devizes station is widely reported as being on hold but it could be part of a wider rail improvement plan for Wiltshire. The "Wiltshire Strategic Rail Study" is aiming to complete by December this year and will include an economic appraisal, infrastructure needs and a recommended train service specification.

A new stopping service would be considered extending the London-Newbury and Bedwyn/Pewsey service to Westbury calling at Devizes. Stakeholders include Wiltshire Council, NR, Western Gateway STB, GWR, SWR and TransWilts. Our input included the need for hourly stopping local services on all our Wiltshire routes plus more effective connections at Westbury.

Search for new chair is on

With no candidates volunteering to replace Paul Johnson as TransWilts chair, the CIC is now advertising externally for someone to take on the role. Full details are on the website – transwilts.org

In the meantime Paul will continue in the job for the short term.

Rolling stock availability hitting reliability

Problems with trains has led to a number of TransWilts cancellations in recent weeks. With additional trains between Westbury and Bristol Temple Meads and more Cardiff to Portsmouth services being formed of four or five coaches there is no longer a spare unit on standby in case of problems. It means if there is a breakdown a train has either got to be brought in from elsewhere or removed from a Cardiff/Portsmouth service when it passes through Westbury.

Successful Stakeholders Meeting

Attendees at the May TransWilts Stakeholders meeting were treated to an excellent array of speakers.

Jon Morgan of GWR outlined the work is going on to improve reliability of services through Westbury and gave an insight into the day to day challenges the train operator faces. Andrew Robinson from Network Rail talked about the plans for rail infrastructure in Wiltshire over the coming years. Caroline Thomas, the new Wiltshire Council Cabinet Member for Highways and Transport gave an overview of the council's strategy for rail while Laura Gosling explored the council's plans for bus/rail links.

Paul Johnson of TransWilts and Dan Okey of GWR explained the proposals for a community rail partnership for the Kennet Valley while Community Rail Officer Sophie Martin showcased some the activities the CIC has been involved in over the last year.