TransWilts Connecting Wiltshire's Communities

incorporating TransWilts Community Rail Partnership

NEWSLETTER FORTY SEVEN – AUGUST 2023

Ticket office closures

Consultation on Government plans to close railway station ticket offices across the country has been extended to 1st September. Under the proposals staff would leave the booking offices to undertake a wider range of roles around stations. GWR, which runs 79 offices, says no stations which are currently staffed would become unstaffed and availability of waiting rooms, lifts and toilets would not be affected. Staff on the concourse would assist those to buy the tickets they require from station machines. These would also be upgraded to sell a wider range of tickets. Comments should be submitted to Transport Focus (https://www.transportfocus.org.uk) rather than GWR or SWR.

Currently GWR has ticket offices at Swindon, Chippenham, Trowbridge and Westbury on the TransWilts but these would all close over the next two years if the proposals are implemented. SWR, which has 153 offices, recently opened a new ticket office at Ryde Esplanade on the Isle of Wight as part of the revamp of the transport interchange. If the proposals go through unchanged it could close after less than a year in use. The plans have been drawn up because of the huge drop in the number of tickets bought from booking clerks over the last 30 years in favour of the internet. Some of those tickets still being bought at stations are not currently available to buy on line and work is continuing to extend the range.

Journeys slightly up year on year

Passengers on TransWilts services in June were nearly 5% up on the same period in 2022. That was despite the continuing reliability problems with the service. Taking a longer term view numbers are still 16% down on pre Covid levels. Looking at other local lines almost all have yet to bounce back but TW has still the furthest to go.

Greater platform capacity at Westbury

The signalling system has been upgraded on platform 3 at Westbury and it is now possible for two trains to wait at the platform before departing separately.

Car charging at Melksham

The current fix termed contract which covered the cost of the electric vehicle charging at Melksham has come to an end and the new agreement has forced TW to increase the rate charged to customers to 50p/Kwh with immediate effect.

Design problem with new Chippenham lift tower

The new lift on the north side of Chippenham station has been out of action after rainwater flooded the pit at the bottom of the tower. Network Rail engineers are working on a temporary solution while designers come up with a permanent fix for the problem.

Platform completes its first full academic year

Platform, the educational initiative which helps boost rail awareness among school age children, has finished its first full year. In the last 12 months over 5,500 children have received a personal rail education session while nearly 3,000 have been on a train trip. The scheme is a joint initiative involving TransWilts, Gloucestershire CRP, Worcestershire CRP, Severnside and South Wessex

New service links Marlborough, Pewsey, Bedwyn and Hungerford

People arriving by train at Pewsey, Bedwyn and Hungerford can now continue their onward journey to the local area by bus thanks to a new initiative supported by GWR, Salisbury Reds and Government funding. Wiltshire Connect users can book a journey six days a week via an app. The organisation will also start to run be a handful of local timetabled bus routes over the next few weeks for which no booking will be required.

Engineering Summary

The first two journeys on the TW on Sunday 10th September will be replaced by buses to and from Chippenham. Connections will be available to and from Swindon. A reminder too that after the 9th September the Saturday services to and from Weymouth will no longer run. It also means the late night journey to Swindon to Westbury will be withdrawn from the same date. The last southbound service will now leave at 21:31.

Elsewhere trains will not call at Gloucester on 16th August or Kemble, Stroud and Stonehouse between the 21st and 24th August. On the weekend on the 2nd/3rd September the line between Salisbury and Southampton Central will be closed. The line will also be closed between Warminster and Southampton on the 30th September and 1st October.

Day trip to Weston-super-Mare

On the last day of July a group of families from Trowbridge took advantage of a TransWilts organised trip to Weston-super-Mare. Although the initial weather forecast was not promising on the day the rain kept away and the children were able to play on the sand and everyone enjoyed fish and chips. For many it was their first experience of train travel. Leaving Trowbridge at 09:20 and changing at Bristol Temple Meads the party had nearly five hours on the coast. More trips are planned – see the website for announcements.

Track reliability may take a hit

According to a report in *Modern Railways* the diversion of resources to the West Coast main line in preparation for HS2 may lead to an increase in infrastructure failures in Network Rail's Wales & Western Region over the next five years. Initial estimates suggest there could be a rise of 8%. Services on the Melksham single line have been affected by axle counter failures in the Lacock area and with the points at Bradford and Thingley Junctions. It is hoped a risk assessment will be carried out on the line, particularly as it is used to convey some of the construction materials.

More diversions for Swindon's Buses

As the redevelopment of the town centre continues passengers arriving at Swindon may have to look for different stops for onward bus services. Following on from the closure of Fleming Way further changes will come into effect on 14th August. Corporation Street will close meaning buses will be further diverted and the pedestrian underpass beneath Fleming Way will be demolished. There will be signed diversion via Milford Street.

The Big Dog Art Trail comes to Swindon

A total of 72 Swindogs and Swinpups have sprung up around Swindon to raise money for Julia's House, a hospice for children. The location of each sculpture can be found on line or via an app. They will be around the town until 3rd September they will then be moved to the STEAM museum for a mass display on the weekend of the 16th/17th September. Finally on the 19th September they will each be auctioned to raise money for the charity. Among those supporting the venture are Swindon Borough Council, the Swindon Advertiser and Swindon's Bus Company.

London Day Travelcards set to be withdrawn

Transport for London is proposing to withdraw the add on card which allows rail passengers to purchase a ticket which allows travel to and from the capital as well as unlimited journeys on buses, underground and other transport facilities while in London. TfL says it cannot continue subsidising the cost anymore and has given six months' notice of its plan. Going forward passengers would have to use Oyster or a contactless card or phone to travel round the city. While Oyster can be loaded with railcard discounts it is not currently possible with contactless.