TransWilts Connecting Wiltshire's Communities

incorporating TransWilts Community Rail Partnership

NEWSLETTER FORTY NINE – DECEMBER 2023

Ten Years on the TransWilts

In December 2013 services between Westbury and Swindon increased from two services a day to eight services each way. This marked the culmination of a campaign launched by the ancestors of the TransWilts to restore the cuts which had been made a few years before. Initially operated by a single coach Class 153 train the service soon struggled to provide sufficient capacity for those wanting to use it – so much so that the decision was taken not to promote certain trains for fear of people being left behind. Eventually in 2018 the single carriage was replaced by either two or three coach trains. In that time patronage had risen dramatically and nearly quarter of a million journeys were being made on the line. This made it the fastest growing service in the GWR area.

Supporters greet the first train of the new timetable at Melksham on 8th December 2013

Life membership for former chairman

The board of directors has awarded former chairman Paul Johnson with life membership of the TransWilts in recognition of his service over many years.

Clean up for Trowbridge

Representatives of the Bradford on Avon Station Adoption group turned their attention to Trowbridge Station in September. Half a dozen volunteers spruced up both platforms and the station car parks. After several hours' work a large skip was filled with bags of litter and other debris. It is the latest event where stations along the TransWilts have been smartened up. A big thank you the Bradford on Avon group. If you would like to take part in a future event email Community Rail Officer Sophie Martin at sophie@transwilts.org for more information.

December timetable sees more trains from Swindon to London

GWR introduces its new timetable on the 10th December and breaking with recent ones it will run until 2nd June 2024 rather than May. There are no changes to TransWilts services but additional capacity is being provided from Swindon to London to reduce overcrowding at weekends. On Saturdays three extra trains will run from Swindon to London with five in the opposite direction. Meanwhile on Sundays there will be an additional eight trains in both directions. There will also be a few alterations to other services including some westbound services becoming pick up only at Reading. This is to try to prevent people only travelling as far as Reading filling trains at the expense of passengers travelling further afield. Full details are available on GWR.com

High Speed 2 construction work closes Paddington over Christmas

As work intensifies on the new station at Old Oak Common in West London for HS2 services, Paddington will be closed on Christmas Eve and December 27th. Long distance trains will terminate and start from Reading while stopping services will continue to Ealing Broadway where connections via the Underground will be available. As usual no trains will run on Christmas Day and Boxing Day.

The works will continue throughout the next two years. Most of the work will involve two of the four lines past the site but there will be other total closures. Notably it is planned to close Paddington over Christmas 2024 for six days however planners are looking at diverting long distance GWR services to either Euston or Waterloo.

Ticket Office closure proposals dropped

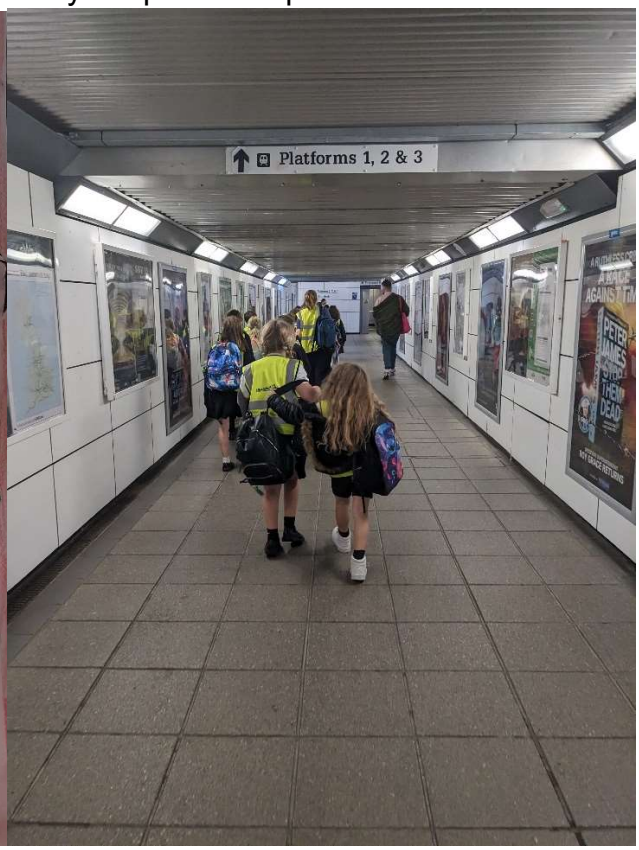
Following a public consultation which attracted around 750,000 comments, the government has scrapped plans to close ticket offices across the country. Discussions are now on going to establish how the planned savings can be made elsewhere.

Wiltshire Connect expands

The on demand bus service run by Wiltshire Council has been expanded after the initial success of the first route in the Pewsey area. Two new routes now run between Marlborough and Devizes and between Marlborough, Great Bedwyn and Hungerford. However the bus can be booked to divert away from the core route to take people to and from neighbouring villages. Wiltshire Connect journeys can been booked via a dedicated app or by telephone. The new services replace some conventional bus services operated by Swindon's Buses and Salisbury Reds.

Swindon school complete artwork project

Students at Swindon's Colebrook Junior School were treated to a day out by train after completing an artwork project highlighting the role women play in the life of the railway. As part of their day out they were shown around some of the artwork installed at Swindon station last year as part of the same project. They then caught the train to Trowbridge to see more of the artwork and enjoy a lunch. The day was organised by Platform – the education project jointly run by TransWilts and three other community rail partnerships.



SWR completes defibrillator installation project

South Western Railway has just finished installing defibrillators at all 150 of its staffed stations. The project was masterminded by SWR Operations Trainer Steve Wardle after his son Alex died of a sudden heart event in 2016. All the locations have been lodged with the British Heart Foundation so can easily be located by ambulance crews and their telephone operators can direct 999 callers to them as well. The one at Salisbury station has been installed at the front of the station and is visible from the car park.

Poppies to Paddington

TransWilts was honoured to take part in GWR's annual Poppies to Paddington event in the run up to Remembrance Sunday. Trains from across the region carried over 200 wreaths to London where they were laid around the war memorial on Platform 1 ahead of a short service.

The TransWilts wreath joined a GWR train at Chippenham along with other tributes collected on its journey from Taunton.

With engineering work stopping trains in Cornwall the Royal Navy was on hand to fly wreaths from the far South West to Plymouth to connect with a train.

TransWilts engineering summary

Work by Network Rail will mean some changes to TransWilts services in January as the railway will be closed in the Swindon area. On Sunday 7th, Saturday 13th and Sunday 14th all services from Westbury will terminate at Chippenham where there will be an hourly bus service to Swindon. On both Christmas Eve and 21st January the first return trip on the line will be replaced by a bus between Warminster and Chippenham and the return to Westbury.

Although no trains will operate on Christmas Day and Boxing Day, TransWilts services on other days over the festive period will be largely unchanged. The final round trip on Christmas Eve will not operate and the start up of services on 27th December will be slightly later with the early through service to Southampton Central not operating.

Latest passenger figures show a year on year rise

Despite services still being plagued with reliability issues nearly 18,000 journeys were made on the TransWilts in October – a rise of 3.7% on the same time last year. However figures are still down 22% on pre-pandemic levels.

Thanks to members

A big thank you to all those members who have renewed their Friends subscription for another year. We very much appreciate your support and as we close for another year everyone at TransWilts offers you the compliments of the season and all good wishes for 2024.