TransWilts Connecting Wiltshire's Communities

incorporating TransWilts Community Rail Partnership

NEWSLETTER FIFTY ONE – APRIL 2024

TransWilts appoints new chair

The TransWilts CIC is delighted to announce the appointment of Paddy Bradley as its new Chair. He succeeds Paul Johnson, who retired last year.

Paddy, who turned 70 recently, brings a wealth of experience to the role. He spent seven years as CEO at the Swindon and Wiltshire Local Enterprise partnership before standing down last summer. Before that he had senior roles at Swindon Borough Council and Portsmouth City Council and spent 20 years in the education sector as a teacher, headteacher and inspector. He lives in Salisbury and was appointed an MBE for services to the local economy in the 2023 New Year's Honours List.

As he takes up his role Paddy said "I am delighted and honoured to take on the role of Chair of TransWilts. I do appreciate the confidence the Directors have in me, and I will do my utmost to secure the further development of the organisation.

I would like to record my deep appreciation for the leadership of Paul Johnson, the previous Chair, who I did work with through my involvement with the Swindon and Wiltshire Local Enterprise Partnership. The drive and ambition of members and the enthusiasm of Sophie Martin are great to see as an incoming Chair.

My aims are to help the organisation achieve financial sustainability and acquire greater resources to support strong, community-led projects to significantly enhance the engagement of the people of Wiltshire, including Swindon, in local rail and integrated transport solutions to help us reduce our carbon footprint. For some, it will be making the experience of their regular travel even better. For others, including those new to the area, we will seek to open up the possibilities of seeing our great landscape and experiencing the friendship of our welcoming community. For children we want to give them memory-making experiences which will last through their lives.

I look forward to working with and for you in the coming years."

One of his first jobs in the role will be chairing the annual meeting in June.

Latest ridership figures continue to rise year on year

GWR's latest passenger figures show a rise of 9.7% year on year in February between Swindon and Westbury. Although 15,353 travelled, that is still more than 18% down on pre Covid levels.

March fare rises announced

The annual fares rise took effect from 3rd March. The average increase nationwide is 4.9%, Some sample local fares are shown below. New prices in red.

Anytime return fares		
Westbury to London (any route)	£235.60	£247.20
Chippenham to London	£206.60	£216.80
Anytime day return fares		
Melksham to Swindon	£ 11.90	£12.50
Trowbridge to Chippenham (via Melksham)	£ 7.80	£ 8.20
Super Off Peak return fares		
Westbury to London (any route)	£ 71.20	£74.60
Chippenham to London	£ 63.10	£66.20
Off Peak day return fares		
Melksham to Swindon	£ 8.80	£ 9.20
Trowbridge to Chippenham (via Melksham)	£ 6.70	£ 7.00

Westbury Warning

GWR and Network Rail have announced an extensive programme of engineering work which will affect services through Westbury from Christmas this year until 24th January 2025. Full details have yet to be revealed but work will be undertaken on more than a dozen sets of points in the station area. Trains from the north and east will terminate at Trowbridge while those from the west will start and finish at Frome. Some long distance services will be diverted avoiding the area completely.

Meanwhile as work continues at Old Oak Common in preparation for High Speed 2 (HS2) Paddington station will be closed for six days over Christmas. This will also prevent access to the North Pole depot where many of GWR's High Speed Trains are stored overnight and serviced. Plans are being drawn up to find alternative stabling.

In the past when Paddington has been closed long distance trains have diverted to Waterloo. Discussions are continuing to explore the possibility of using Euston instead which is a shorter distance and offers better connections and facilities.

Summer trains return for Weymouth

A through Saturday service from Swindon to Weymouth via Melksham and Westbury will run again this summer from the 8th June to the 7th September. Leaving at 08:45 it will arrive at the coast at 11:08. Coming home there is a through service leaving at 19:32 arriving in Swindon at 22:00. You can return home earlier by changing at Westbury but choose your service to avoid a long wait for a connection.

Annual meeting

Preparations are being made for this year's annual meeting to be held in June. Details in the next newsletter and on the website.

Valentine's Day litter pick at Trowbridge

The first fruits of the TransWilts partnership with Siemens in Chippenham, featured in the last newsletter, saw a group of volunteers giving Trowbridge Station a spring clean. The forecourt and car park areas have all been combed for litter and other debris with 12 bags of rubbish collected. Look out for us working at other stations along the line soon.

Engineering Work – April/May 2024

The first round trip on the TransWilts line on the 28th April will be replaced by buses between Warminster/Westbury and Chippenham.

Elsewhere on the first Sunday in April services to and from the West Country will be diverted via Swindon rather than Newbury. Replacement buses will operate between Pewsey and Swindon to connect with the trains.

If you are heading to Gatwick Airport on the first two weekends in both April and May part of the journey will be replaced by a coach and lead to longer journey times.

Further ahead the Severn Tunnel will be closed for a fortnight from the 3rd July. Through trains will still run between Swindon and South Wales but be diverted via Gloucester and Lydney leading to longer journey times.

Reliability comes and goes

Overall the reliability of the Swindon to Westbury service has improved over the last two months. Fewer days of industrial action involving drivers' union ASLEF have resulted in less disruption due to staffing issues. However infrastructure problems either locally or on the line through Newbury have seen cancellations. Often the TransWilts service has to be sacrificed when long distance trains are diverted along the single line through Melksham.

Overall the level of cancellations in January and February were the lowest since May last year.

Platform is a winner

The joint venture Platform came up trumps at the annual Community Rail Awards in Swansea last month. The initiative, which is jointly run by TransWilts, Severnside, South Wessex and the Gloucestershire CRP, came tops in the Empowering Diverse Groups category.

The project aimed to improve access to the railways for young people with disabilities, creating bespoke packages to help remove barriers to travel.

14 years of TransWilts

The TransWilts Community Rail Partnership was founded in March 2010. It was born out of a number of groups who were working to improve services on the line. While the first step was to campaign for an improved service there is still much to be done. Work is continuing to achieve an hourly service, better connections at Westbury and improved reliability.