TransWilts Connecting Wiltshire's Communities

incorporating TransWilts Community Rail Partnership

NEWSLETTER FIFTY THREE – AUGUST 2024

TransWilts sets out its plans for the next 12 months

June's annual meeting looked back at the highlights of the last year and the TransWilts hopes for the forthcoming year.

The last year saw the celebration of 10 years of the enhanced service between Swindon and Westbury, the retirement of longstanding chair Paul Johnson and a number of successful community initiatives. It has also seen its challenges with reliability of the service due to weather, rolling stock problems and industrial action among other things.

Looking ahead new chair Paddy Bradley outlined his hopes of collaborating with Wiltshire Council and GWR on producing summary profiles of all stations in Wiltshire, using data from the Wiltshire Local Plan, Network Rail and GWR. These profiles will include issues of accessibility (current and aspirations). It is important always to have the data to justify a train service using a particular station. Therefore an aim of the profiles is to link the impact of the train service on jobs, houses, sustainability and wider social need and community benefits.

He also wanted to see the TransWilts build greater financial resilience in the context of growing budgetary pressures at its main supporters, GWR and Wiltshire Council.

Community Rail Officer, Sophie Martin, would be working on increasing the presence on social media to reach a wider audience and draw more people and organisations to the existing community programmes run by TW rather than start new ones at this stage,

TransWilts would like to thank GWR for their help in providing facilities for the hybrid meeting which allowed some to join in person and many more on line.

Siemens volunteers spruce up Chippenham

As part of their community programme, staff from Siemens mobility in Chippenham spent a June morning litter picking and tidying up the area around the town's station. More events are planned at other stations in the near future.

Midweek engineering work means September disruption

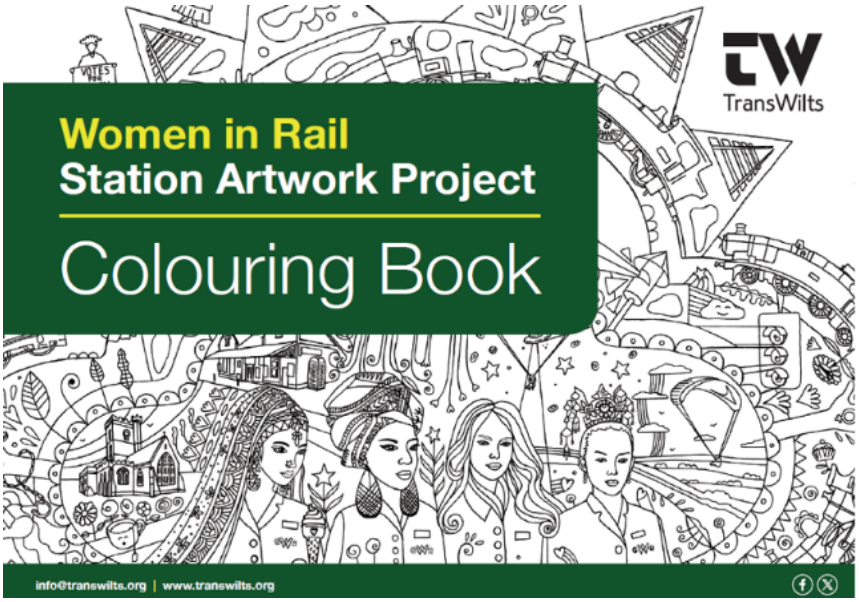
Network Rail will be working between Newbury and Westbury between Tuesday 17th September and long distance trains will be diverted along the single line through Melksham. It means TransWilts services will largely be replaced by buses between Westbury and Chippenham. However one morning peak hour service and two evening services will still be run as trains.

Meanwhile the first round trip on Sunday 22nd September from Westbury will terminate at Chippenham for onward connections to Swindon while Network Rail carry out rail improvement work. On the same day the lunchtime trains to and from Weymouth will terminate and start back from Dorchester West with road connections to the coast. The same will apply the following week only from Castle Cary instead.

September timetable changes

GWR's through Saturday summer services to Weymouth from Swindon via Melksham will end after running on the 7th September. It also means the final services on a Saturday night between Swindon and Westbury will be an hour earlier from the 14th September.

Colouring Book proving popular



The colouring book produced by TransWilts, with funding from Community Rail Network, features outline drawings by artists Mary Hart and Sam Lindup and celebrate the role women play in rail – both now and in the past.
Copies of the book and pack of crayons can be obtained free of charge from Community Rail Officer Sophie Martin (sophie@transwilts.org).

Cancellations continue

Although industrial action by train drivers has been suspended since the announcement of the General Election there have still been continuing problems with reliability of the Swindon to Westbury service. Traditionally weekends have been the worst but increasingly weekdays have seen services cancelled. Shortage of crew and the need to use the single line for diverted services have been the main causes.

Through the ages on TransWilts

Hours and hours of archive film is being made available in a new partnership between GWR and the Windrose Rural Media Trust. The five stations on the TransWilts line between Westbury and Swindon are among 24 where travellers can click on a QR code to see vintage film from the local area. The Westinghouse Factory in Chippenham in the 1920s and the long forgotten Samuel Salters wool factory in Trowbridge are among many featured. You can also visit the project's website https://windroseruralmedia.org/projects/great-western-approaches-revisited/ to see all films from across the Wessex area. The Trust has been gathering archive film for decades and has material dating back to 1905 which have now been preserved.

More details emerge about Westbury work

As reported in previous newsletters, Westbury station is to be closed for a month after Christmas for extensive track work.

From Friday 27th December until Friday 24th January all TransWilts serices will be withdrawn and replaced by buses between Chippenham and Westbury. Long distance services to and from the West Country will use the avoiding lines with those due to call at Westbury stopping at Frome instead. Cardiff to Portsmouth services will be split with trains from Wales terminatiing at Trowbridge and coast bound services resuming at Salisbury. Trains from Weymouth will continue to run but not call at Wesbury. As well as the buses replacing TW services, there wil also be coaches to Westbury. Frome and Salisbury (via Warminster) from Trowbridge.

Passenger numbers edging back

Latest figures from ticket sales show the numbers travelling on services between Swindon and Westbury rose by nearly 12 percent year on year in June, with 18,780 people making trips. Slowly but surely numbers are getting closer to pre-Covid levels and are now just 6.4% short. Reliability issues, reported elsewhere in this newsletter, are still holding back progress but with most other local lines now exceeding 2019 levels it is hoped the TransWilts can soon do the same.

King's Speech heralds change on the railways

The new government unvelied its plans for the future of the railways in the King's Speech to both Houses of Parliament a fortnight after winning the General Election. Among its proposals are to bring the private rail companies back into public ownership as their contracts expire. GWR's current agreement runs until 22nd June 2025.

Art project unveiled at Chippenham

In conjunction with The Arts Society, GWR and Chippenham Schools, TransWilts has masterminded the placing of artwork on the platforms and waiting areas at Chippenham Station.

Platform celebrates more success

As the 2023-24 school year comes to an end Platform, the rail education programme supported by TransWilts and three other community rail partnerships, has been looking back over the last 12 months. 3,364 children have enjoyed free train trips to various places – both on the coast and inland. More than ten percent of the children had never been on a train before. Nearly 6,000 have taken part in classroom sessions learning about trains and rail safety. Teachers have also embraced the initiative with over 600 downloads of learning resources.