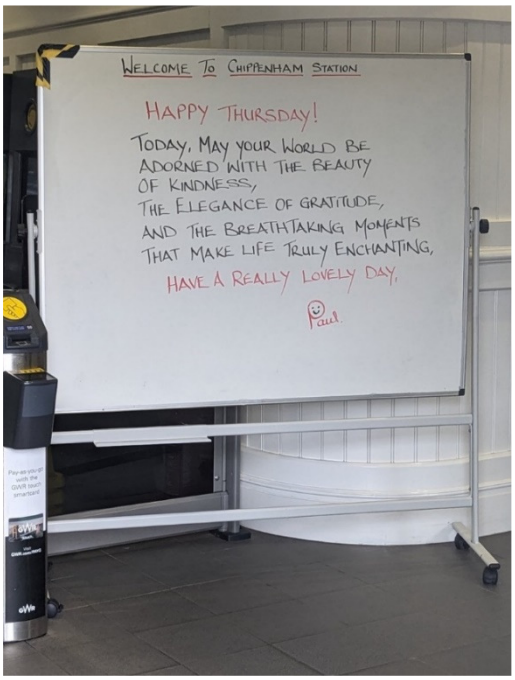
TransWilts Connecting Wiltshire's Communities

incorporating TransWilts Community Rail Partnership

NEWSLETTER FIFTY FOUR – OCTOBER 2024

Spreading good vibes at Chippenham



A simple initiative at Chippenham station hit the headlines in August. Gateline assistant Paul Rowland has been brightening up passengers' days with a simple welcome board at the south side station entrance.

Talking to the BBC he said it brightened people's commute and made it less likely for them to take out their frustrations on staff.

The board was previously used to advise of disruptions and cancellations but now Paul posts a new thought for the day each morning. He admits initially the messages were all his but now he has resorted to the internet to find new inspiration. It has certainly proved popular with many stopping to read them or take photos.

Swindon Station gets spruced up

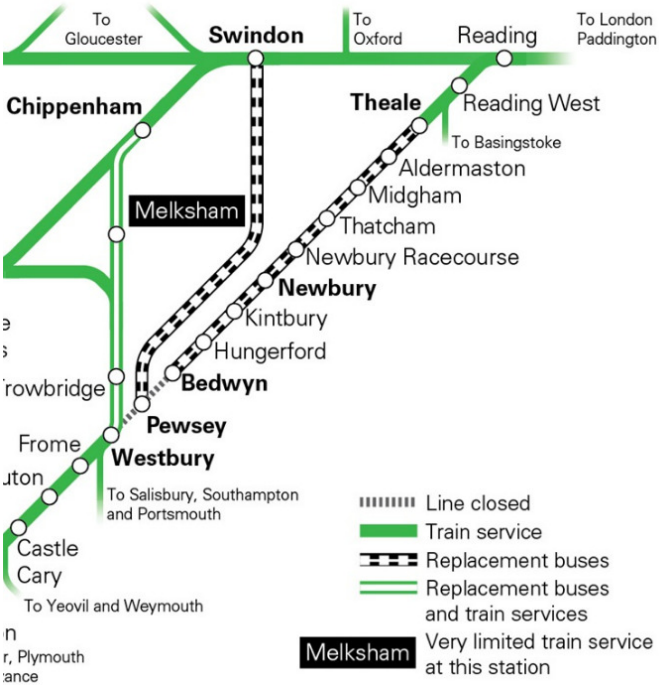
Contractors have finished work to refurbish the canopy on the island platform at Swindon station to reverse years of being battered by the weather. The traditional daggerboards around the edge of the roof have been replaced and repainted.

Strikes over, but reliability still poor

Between April and August 177 trains failed to run on the TransWilts route, an average of more than a one a day. In April and May industrial action led to whole days with no service. Although that dispute is now over, staff shortages continued to affect the reliability with over 90% of cancellations blamed on lack of crew. Problems came to a head in August with the weekend service all but wiped out for 24 hours on two successive weekends.

TransWilts continues to urge GWR to address the problems, look at the way cancellations out of Westbury are decided and to ensure alternative arrangements are made for passengers affected – particularly at Melksham where the TransWilts trains provide the only service. On occasions road transport has been provided but it has not always been effectively advertised. TransWilts believes with a likely two hour wait until the next train, buses or taxis should be the norm… and be publicised.

More weekday engineering work to come



After September's midweek closure of the TransWilts line due to engineering work, there will be disruption again from Monday 11th and Thursday 14th November. Again this is to allow long distance services to and from the West Country to use the single line while work is carried out in the Newbury area. As happened during the recent closure there will be one train to Swindon in the morning and a return in the evening. The remainder will be replaced by buses between Westbury and Chippenham. This will be repeated between the 10th and 12th December ahead of the month long closure after Christmas – more details in the next newsletter.

Meanwhile the first return trips on Sundays 6th October and 17th November will be replaced by buses between Warminster/Westbury and Chippenham. On Sunday the 10th November the first service from Warminster to Swindon will be a bus as far as Chippenham but a train will work the return service from Swindon.

On most Sundays until Christmas, fewer trains will run between Reading and London Paddington as work in the Old Oak Common area ramps up for the HS2 high speed line. Closer to home, no trains will call at Cheltenham Spa on the first two weekends in October and Sunday 20th October. On the last Sunday in October the line between Trowbridge and Bath Spa via Bradford on Avon will be closed, followed by the route between Bath and Bristol Temple Meads being shut from Monday 28th October until Thursday 31st.

New Service to Oxford

GWR has launched a trial Saturday service of two trains each way between Bristol Temple Meads and Oxford calling at Chippenham and Swindon en route. This allows passengers to reach the city of dreaming spires without the need to change at Didcot Parkway. The journey from Chippenham will take 45 minutes. The service will also provide extra capacity for those going to Bath Christmas market and the one in Oxford.

Please stay Friends

The majority of Friends Memberships expire at the end of October. For those who do not pay by standing order, renewal reminders will be sent out in early November. It saves on our administration costs if subscriptions are paid on receipt to save additional reminders.

CRN Accreditation renewed

In September the TransWilts was pleased to receive the news that its accreditation from the Community Rail Network and the Department for Transport had been renewed. This followed a detail review of our future plans and financial records. Accreditation allows the CIC to apply for additional funding and a sign of good housekeeping.

Community Rail
Accredited Partnership
2024-25

Swindon Heritage trail

Swindon Borough Council has launched its Heritage Trail in the town centre. Around two miles long, the walk takes you on a tour of Swindon's rich railway history, through the Railway Village and towards the Swindon Designer Outlet.

The trail is marked using 47 bronze medallions on the path and you can read about the history on 21 newly-installed signs throughout The Works area. The new trail forms part of the council's regeneration of the area which includes refurbishing the Carriage Works and Health Hydro, as well as carrying out improvements to the streets in the Railway Village and the Bristol Street and Sheppard Street underpasses.

The trail starts next to the railway station but you can find the full online and interactive map on The Works website by scanning the QR code on the signs or by visiting the dedicated website itself - https://theworksswindon.co.uk/

New board members bring increased vigour to TransWilts

Over recent months TransWilts has welcomed three new directors to their board. David Phillips, from Trowbridge, has recently retired from Wiltshire Council where he had been a Senior Transport Planner for quarter of a century. He is joined by local businessman Chris Johnson from Corsham who has been championing the opening of a new station in his area and Liz Chawner from Siemens Mobility in Chippenham. Over the last year she has helped co-ordinate volunteers from the company to carry out litter picking and other work at local stations.

Network Rail releases is strategy for rail in Wiltshire

Over the last two years representatives of TransWilts have been working with Network Rail and other stakeholders on the future of rail in Wiltshire.

In its draft report Network Rail recommends progressing plans for an hourly service on the TransWilts, an hourly service from London Paddington to Westbury calling at Bedwyn and Pewsey and developing the Bristol to Oxford service, mentioned on page two.

It has identified that a loop is needed somewhere on the single line near Melksham to increase capacity to allow the doubling of the service. Work will also be needed to re-instate the fourth platform at Westbury. Currently the station is operating at full capacity at times during the day and this would be needed to allow the additional trains to terminate and lay over before going back to Swindon. More work will now be carried out on the costs involved and possible funding.

Brighter outlook at Swindon and Chippenham Stations

Blooming Smiles, the Swindon based community group has been bringing floral displays across the town throughout the spring and summer. Their smart and distinctive purple planters have been installed in a number of locations including the railway station.

Meanwhile the Friends of Chippenham Station have been busy at their adopted home.