TransWilts Connecting Wiltshire's Communities

incorporating TransWilts Community Rail Partnership

NEWSLETTER FIFTY SEVEN – APRIL 2025

Welcome improvement in TransWilts service reliability

February saw only 10 cancellations on the core Swindon to Westbury route all month. There were also four part cancellations with a train from Westbury being turned round at either Chippenham or Melksham because of problems on the main line.

In addition six trains were cut short either south of Westbury or north of Swindon but ran over the core route. The cancellations were caused by a lack of crew, vandalism on a train and a fatality at Pewsey meaning West of England services had to use the single line. The trend continued in the first half of March with only three outright cancellations.

GWR has seen a rise in reliability across its network since the start of the year, particularly at weekends. Many drivers do not have a requirement to work on Sundays in their contracts however GWR have now been given permission by the Department for Transport to negotiate with the unions over the issue. In the meantime they have also been authorised to allow additional payments for weekend working.

£420,000 investment in Wiltshire bus link

Swindon's bus company has invested in two new vehicles to operate newly won contracts from Wiltshire Council. Route 40 operates a town service around Calne, while the 42 links Calne with Marlborough – two towns which formerly had railway stations.

The route also passes through Avebury where passengers can change for buses to Devizes and Trowbridge. The buses feature the latest next stop announcements and provide a service between the towns every two hours, six days a week. In between trips they run a link to and from the Calne branches of Sainsbury's, Tescos and the doctors from local estates.

Engineering Summary – April to May

On the weekend of the 20th and 21st April all services between Frome and Westbury will be replaced by buses while on the 11th May the line from Warminster to Salisbury will be closed.

Rail improvement work on the 4th and 25th May means the first service on those Sundays will be replaced by a bus between Warminster and Chippenham.

Further afield work will affect services in the Gloucester area on the first two weekends in May. Full details on GWR.com.

Work starts at Chippenham Station

After much delay work has started to improve the south side of Chippenham Station.

Work on the north side was completed nearly two years ago but contractor issues led to a delay in the project for the main entrance. Now a new contractor has been brought in and work commenced on the 5th March.

Among the highlights of the project are

- Better walking routes towards the main road and the nearby college.
- A 200 space cycle hub with CCTV monitoring.
- New capacity for buses with an additional stop and better manoeuvring space.
- Improved disabled parking spaces.

The initial phase has seen the short stay car park closed with the pick up and drop off places temporarily moved to the long stay car park. Then on the 3rd April buses and taxis will move to the short stay car park while work on the forecourt is completed.

Work is scheduled to finish on the 13th June.

The scheme has cost over £2.25 million with funding coming from the Swindon and Wiltshire Local Enterprise Partnership and the Department for Transport's support of GWR's annual business plan.

Spring about to arrive at Swindon

GWR staff at Swindon have used their spare time to brighten up the station environment. They have taken over the tending of the various planters around the station and got them ready for Spring. TransWilts is now looking for volunteers from the community to carry on the work and undertake other tasks, such as litter-picking in the car parks and station frontage. For more information please contact our Community Rail Officer, Sophie Martin – sophie@transwilts.org . TransWilts is also on the lookout for similar helpers at Melksham Station.

Eyes Down for Fairfield College

Pupils from Fairfield College in Dilton Marsh near Westbury have been the latest group to experience “Bingo on the Train”.

A dozen students took the train from Westbury to Swindon and back and spent part of the journey playing Bingo for small prizes. However there was a more important theme to the day. For most of those on board it was their first experience of train travel. The day out was planned to give them confidence in travelling independently. They had the chance to see what to expect at the station and on board in a relaxed and friendly environment.

Fairfield is a specialist college for young people with additional needs and the day out helped fulfil their mission statement “To enable young people to live and work without barriers”. They hope to take other students on similar trips in the future.

Fare rises come into effect

The annual fares rise took effect from 2nd March. The average increase nationwide is 4.6% compared to 4.9% in 2024. Some sample local fares are shown below. New prices in red.

Anytime return fares		
Westbury to London (any route)	£247.20	£258.60
Chippenham to London	£216.80	£226.80
Anytime day return fares		
Melksham to Swindon	£ 12.50	£ 13.10
Trowbridge to Chippenham (via Melksham)	£ 8.20	£ 8.60
Super Off Peak return fares		
Westbury to London (any route)	£ 74.60	£ 78.00
Chippenham to London	£ 66.20	£ 69.20
Off Peak day return fares		
Melksham to Swindon	£ 9.20	£ 9.60
Trowbridge to Chippenham (via Melksham)	£ 7.00	£ 7.30

Also, for the first time since 2013 the cost of most railcards will rise by £5 a year taking them to £35. Full details of the range of cards and the discounts they offer can be found at https://www.railcard.co.uk/

Swindon schoolchildren get to know Brunel

Over 70 children from a Swindon primary school have been learning about Isambard Kingdom Brunel and the contribution he made to the building of the railways.

The pupils from Beechcroft Infants School have travelled by GWR train to Bristol Temple Meads in the footsteps of Brunel to find out more about the man who designed and built the line from London to Bristol in the 1830s and 40s. For many it was their first experience of train travel which was organised as part of a trip organised by Platform. The award winning community rail education organisation connects schools with the rail industry with bespoke days out by train with an educational theme.

After the 35 minute journey the children visited the statue of Brunel outside the station before going on to join in a series of railway themed activities. After learning more about the famous engineer and taking part in a quiz, the youngsters then tried their hand in a number of engineering challenges based on the sort of problems some of the early railway engineers faced.

After lunch and two hours in Bristol they then took the train back to Swindon, tired but excited.

Liz Hancock, the school's deputy headteacher, was delighted with the days out: "I have completed 3 visits with our Y1 classes, and I can honestly say that this enrichment experience has been the most meaningful opportunity I have had the pleasure to be involved with in my 23 year career."

She went on "Evert child benefitted from this experience in different ways. Every member of staff was up skilled in some way. Most empowering is the realisation that with the right knowledge and planning, even the most daunting task can be successful and even enjoyable! Without doubt, this experience improved the life experiences of a significant number of children. Over 50% of the year group went on a train for the first time! This would not have been possible without the passion, organisation and funding behind this initiative. Thank you so much for having this vision and making this valuable opportunity accessible and so enjoyable."