TransWilts Connecting Wiltshire's Communities

incorporating TransWilts Community Rail Partnership

NEWSLETTER SIXTY ONE – DECEMBER 2025

Queen takes TransWilts Poppies to Paddington

Pupils from Monkton Park Primary School in Chippenham have played a key part in marking Armistice Day by crocheting 60 poppies for a special wreath that travelled with Her Majesty Queen Camilla as part of GWR's Poppies to Paddington initiative.

The poppies were crocheted by pupils in Years 5 and 6, helped by teachers and their families. Seven of the talented pupils attended Chippenham train station, meeting The Queen and presenting the wreath.

Sophie Martin, Community Partnership Manager at TransWilts, said: "The railways played an incredibly important role during the World Wars and continue to do so today. We were so pleased that pupils from Monkton Park School joined us in this year's commemorative events and that their work and creativity will play an important role in how the nation is marking the day." In addition to crocheting 60 poppies for the wreath, with the help of teachers, parents and grandparents, pupils also made extra to sell to raise money for the Royal British Legion Poppy Appeal.

Monkton Park teacher Penny Hamilton added: "This project has been such a meaningful way for the children to learn about remembrance. Crocheting the poppies gave them time to reflect on why we mark this day, and they were so proud to see their work become part of a national tribute." Year 5 pupils Eira and Jacob were among those who attended the wreath presentation at Chippenham station. Eira said: "It was amazing to see our poppies go on the train and know they would be at Paddington Station. Meeting the Queen was really exciting too – I'll never forget that!" "I liked making the poppies because it felt like we were doing something important," Jacob explained. "When we gave the wreath to the train guard, I thought about all the people who fought in the wars and how we were remembering them."

New Murals at Trowbridge

A corner of Trowbridge station has been brightened up with some new artwork as part of the partnership between the Bee Friendly Trust and GWR.

Across the network various stations have been decorated with murals which highlight the work of the trust and the vital role bees play in nature.

Emma Pritchard from the Trust said: “Continuing our bee-friendly partnership with GWR, the Bee Friendly Trust has brightened up a forgotten part of Trowbridge Railway Station. We installed two planters, filled with pollen-rich lavender, rosemary and ceanothus, and commissioned Wiltshire artist Sarah Harris to brighten up the wall behind with a mural. The mural, which depicts people tending a flower garden, highlights the joy and calm that can be had from creating vital habitats for bees, a vital pollinator.”

The displays compliment others at the station and the planters which have been installed and been nurtured by TransWilts volunteers at the station.

Buses using new layout at Chippenham Station

The work to improve the area at the front of Chippenham Railway station is nearing completion.

Buses have now started to use the three stops arranged in the horseshoe at the front of the building, reducing congestion which used to arise under the old arrangement.

Contractors are now working to complete the short stay car park with motorists being directed to a section of the long stay car park in the interim.

Thank you to members

The end of October sees most Friends’ memberships due for renewal. Many thanks to those who already have confirmed their support for another year. If you have received a renewal reminder and have yet to respond, please do so as soon as possible to reduce the need for additional administration chasing up payments.

Wiltshire Connect spreads

Wiltshire Council has expanded its Wiltshire Connect service to include the Warminster, Mere and surrounding south-west Wiltshire areas. It hopes this will reduce isolation, improve access, and support sustainable travel across the region.

The new services follow successful rollouts in both the Pewsey Vale and the Royal Wootton Bassett and Malmesbury areas. The new service also provides new connections to Frome in Somerset, and Shaftesbury and Gillingham in Dorset.

With seamless connections to rail services at Warminster, Gillingham, Tisbury and Frome, plus new direct links to major attractions such as Stourhead, Longleat, Shearwater and Center Parcs, Wiltshire Connect is the perfect way to explore the area – and beyond. The buses operate on an on-demand basis, which allows passengers to book a bus from a stop of their choosing in the service area to their destination at a time to suit them, either by booking through the Wiltshire Connect smartphone app or by phone.

Christmas Engineering Arrangements

As in past years Network Rail will be using the Christmas period to undertake major engineering projects across the railway network.

Between the 27th December and 4th January only two of the four tracks in and out of London Paddington will be available and train times will be amended. In addition services to and from Cheltenham Spa will involve a change at Swindon. On the final day of works (4th January) there will be no trains in or out of Paddington until around 11am.

Between the 2nd and the morning of the 4th January the lines between Didcot Parkway and Swindon or Chippenham will be closed. On Friday 2nd buses will shuttle between Didcot and Swindon for onward rail connections, with the buses extended to Chippenham on the Saturday. Services through Melksham will be largely unaffected on Friday the 2nd but will terminate and start back from Chippenham on the Saturday with some timetable changes.

Work on the weekends of 10th, 17th and 24th January will also mean similar arrangements to those in place on the 3rd.

New December timetable

GWR introduces its new timetable on 14th December. The majority of services through Melksham are unchanged. However one notable improvement is the retiming of the first southbound weekday service. It will now depart three minutes earlier at 06:03 and so provide a connection into a service to Weymouth at 06:50 from Westbury.

The timetable will run until the 16th May.

Government confirms GWR's move from private sector

Having previously announced GWR would be among the next group of Train Operating Companies to move into the public sector, the government has signalled that is likely to take place next October. Initially passengers should see no change day to day. Behind the scenes the industry will be moving to a unified structure under Great British Railways which will bring the running of trains and assets they use – track and signalling – under one umbrella.

GWR Reliability Summit

Representatives of TransWilts and other local rail user groups have met with GWR management to discuss the continuing poor reliability of train services between Swindon and Westbury.

In recent months an average of one in ten trains on the route have failed to run, a situation which drives people away from the railway if they have an alternative available for their journeys.

Westbury depot, which provides the majority of the staff used to operate the service, has been particularly affected by sickness and retirements. New staff are now in training, although it can take up to a year before a driver is ready to work on their own. In addition some drivers are moving from other companies who will be able to work solo in a much shorter time frame.

Once again the need to provide road replacement transport in lieu of cancelled trains was emphasised. New software on the way which will also allow GWR to advertise these more easily on station information displays.

More work will also be done to identify which long distance trains can call at Melksham when they are diverted along the single line.

Latest passenger numbers

In October 20,500 passengers travelled on TransWilts services – a rise of 2.6% on the same time last year. However the total is still more than 10% less than pre-Covid levels. It is one of only three lines in the area to get back to the levels enjoyed before the pandemic. Bristol to Westbury is still over 7% down and North Somerset to London trails by 15%.

Season's Greetings

As this is the last newsletter of 2025, the Chair, directors and all connected with TransWilts would like to wish all our supporters the very best for the festive period. We look forward to meeting as many of you as possible in 2026 as the railways continue to move from the private sector.

Founding board member stands down

Horace Prickett, one of the original board members of the TransWilts CIC has tendered his resignation. His involvement with the line predates the founding of the CIC and for many years as a councillor he provided a valuable link with Wiltshire Council.

Horace, who early in his career had a job at the railway works in Swindon, made time to attend many of our events and has often been seen manning stalls and talking to visitors. He was also a central figure in our Santa Specials.

Chair Paddy Bradley said: “Horace has been a loyal supporter of the TransWilts and I’d like to take the opportunity to thank him for his work over many years. I am sure we will see him around the line in his retirement.”

Sustainable Transport Roundtable kicks off in Chippenham

Local MP Sarah Gibson has launched a Sustainable Transport Roundtable in Chippenham.

Local Town Councils, Wiltshire Council, Cycle Chippenham, the Corsham Bus Group, the Wilts & Berks Canal Trust and TransWilts came together for a discussion on creating more joined-up, sustainable transport plans across Chippenham, Calne and Corsham.

There was a clear shared commitment to stronger cross-town partnerships. The MP believes by planning together, it will be possible to deliver safer routes, smoother connections and more reliable services for residents, businesses and the environment.

TransWilts is delighted to be involved as it works on its mission to champion sustainable transport and better links between the various modes.

Government announces a fare freeze

Regulated fares will not be going up in the new year. The annual review usually sees ticket prices rise by at least the rate of inflation but the government has said this will not be the case in 2026. Regulated fares include season tickets covering most commuter routes, long distance off-peak return tickets and walk up tickets for travel in and around major cities.

Other fares are set by individual train companies and may increase although many expect them to follow the lead set on regulated fares.

This year fares rose by around 4.6%. The last time prices were frozen was in 1996 when the railways were first privatised.

Last chance to enter our photo competition

Time is running out if you want to enter our Down the Line photography competition.

Run in conjunction with the Arts Society Kington Langley, the competition has already attracted scores of entries as we look to celebrate Railway 200 and the role the railway has played in the last two centuries.

You need to submit your entries by midnight on 31st December via our website, which also has full details of the requirements. A panel of judges will sift through the entries and the winning photographs will be announced in January.

Twelfth anniversary but still much to do

On 8th December 2013 the train service through Melksham increased overnight from two trains each way a day to eight. Passenger numbers rose dramatically in the following years only to be halted by the Covid pandemic.

In the short term GWR are working to improve the reliability of the service. Longer term there is a desire to increase the capacity on the single line and re-open a platform at Westbury to allow an hourly service from Swindon.

Keep following the TransWilts for news of more progress in 2026.