TransWilts Connecting Wiltshire's Communities

incorporating TransWilts Community Rail Partnership

NEWSLETTER SIXTY FIVE – AUGUST 2026

TransWilts Annual Meeting hears of a year of progress and more to come

Supporters and stakeholders met in Trowbridge at the end of July for the CIC's Annual Meeting.

Highlights of the year have included the Queen taking a crocheted wreath organised by TW and a Chippenham school to Paddington for the annual remembrance service. A hugely successful photography competition, trips to various locations and work to improve the environment at local stations along the line.

Representatives of GWR outlined their plans to manage their increasingly ageing diesel rolling stock, refurbish the IETs and explore ways of becoming more climate friendly. They also showcased their work to integrate bus and train travel to make journeys more seamless with better timetabling and through ticketing. Among the highlights are improved bus and cycle interchange facilities at Bedwyn and more buses to local towns from Castle Cary.

Looking forward there was also an update on plans for new stations at Corsham and Devizes Gateway and the latest on proposals to re-open the disused platform at Westbury and improve capacity on the single line through Melksham. Early plans to work towards a new CRP for Pewsey, Bedwyn and West Berkshire were also announced.

The event also provided the chance for local stakeholders to meet and discuss local issues during the lunch interval.

The highlights from the slides shown at the meeting can be found on the latest news page of the website.

The meeting, along with our recent board meetings, was held at the recently refurbished Old Town Hall in Trowbridge. TransWilts offers it grateful thanks to the staff there for all their assistance staging these gatherings.

October midweek disruption for TransWilts services

GWR is warning of timetable changes for TransWilts services from the 10th to 16th October while engineers work on the line in the Pewsey area.

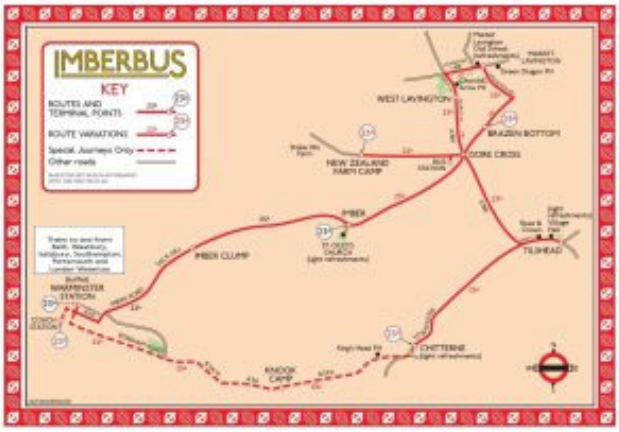
During the week all Swindon to Westbury services will be replaced by buses to and from Chippenham with the exception of a peak hour service to Swindon in the mornings and one back to Westbury in the evening.

All services through Pewsey will be replaced by buses to Swindon while West of England services will be diverted, some calling at Swindon.

Buses to Imber

The 2026 Imber Bus day will be on Saturday 15th August.

Each year a fleet of 30 Routemaster buses, bolstered by some newer models, operate a shuttle service from Warminster railway station to the normally off limits village of Imber on Salisbury Plain.



The villagers were evacuated during the Second World War to allow the area to be turned into a training area and they never returned. The area is re-opened on a limited number of days to allow those with connections to the area to return alongside the general public. On one of those days the buses allow easy access to the village including St Giles Church.

Advance booking is not required to travel with buses operating from 9.30am from the station with the last one returning at 5.30pm.

Full details at https://imberbus.org/imberbus-2026/

Christmas (engineering) is coming

With the hot summer weather the last thing anyone is thinking about is Christmas. Apart that is for those at Network Rail and GWR.

With fewer people travelling between Christmas and New Year, engineers will be working on a key junction near Slough and that will affect services from the West heading into London Paddington.

When services resume after the festive shutdown on the 27th December until the early hours of Friday 4th January 2027 most GWR long distance trains will start and finish at Reading, while local services will continue to Maidenhead or Slough.

In addition there will be two trains an hour from Bristol Temple Meads and South Wales which will divert after Swindon and run non stop to London Euston.

During the closure engineers will work to replace equipment at Dolphin Junction near Slough where trains cross between the main (fast) lines and the slower relief lines. There will also be more work carried out near Old Oak Common in West London in connection with HS2.

Preparatory work is also scheduled on the last weekend of November and final adjustments will be made over the weekend of the 9th/10th January 2027.

Full details will be in journey planners nearer the time.

Diversions continue in Bath city centre

Extensive alterations to bus services in Bath are set to continue until the end of November.

Manvers Street opposite the city's railway station is closed while engineers repair the road, upgrade the pavements and replace streetlamps. The road runs over underground cellars and vaults which were overlaid with concrete slabs in the 1940s but are now starting to show their age.

The road is a main artery for bus services coming in and out of the city and so widespread diversions are in place. Some services will no longer serve the bus station while others will take a different route into the city and approach the station from the other side of the river.

Please check your local bus company's website for specific details of any bus you plan to take into Bath.

It is scheduled to complete the works before the famous Christmas Market starts on the 26th November.

Work to improve air cooling on GWR Turbos

Just as we have struggled in the heat, so has some of GWR's rolling stock. However work is underway to improve the situation.

The class 165s/166s (turbos) which run between Swindon and Westbury were first introduced in 1991 and over the years have been retrospectively fitted with various forms of air cooling but the gradual rise in summer temperatures has left them increasingly struggling to cope.

While train staff can unlock windows in the passenger sections of the trains when conditions become uncomfortable the same option is not available in the driver's cab. From a safety point of view a train has to be cancelled if the cab gets too hot.

Now a 12 month programme of works is underway to improve the cooling in the cabs. GWR admits it will not be a complete solution as the equipment will only lower temperatures by around seven degrees. However that is the best that can be achieved with these trains.

In the meantime staff are trying to mitigate things as best they can by lowering blinds and leaving cab windows open when trains are laying over at stations between trips.

Measures being taken to prevent Limpley Stoke bridge strikes

Train services through Melksham are being increasingly disrupted by overheight road vehicles hitting a rail bridge at Limpley Stoke.

Although the bridge is not on the TransWilts line, when the line over it has to close for an inspection services from Cardiff to Portsmouth have to divert over the TransWilts at the expense of the local service.

Faced with at least seven strikes since March this year Network Rail is working with the highway authorities to reduce the occurrences. It is thought the extension of the weight limit over the Cleveland bridge in Bath and the city's Clean Air Zone has led to affected vehicles diverting along the B3108.

Among the measures being looked at are

• Upgraded road signage on approaches to the bridge
• Flashing over height vehicle detection lights, similar to those at White House Road bridge in Swindon
• Exploring funding for collision protection beams
• Updated briefing on the bridge's structural condition, reinforcing why it remains safe despite its appearance
• Reviewing the late reported bridge strike process within Network Rail's Route Control
• Updating local instructions and publications to reflect revised response requirements
• Briefing staff on the updated approach to ensure consistency on site
•Pursuing insurance claims when vehicle registration details are available.

In conjunction with GWR, Network Rail is also looking at contingency plans to use when the bridge is closed for inspections.

Back to pre-Covid levels

Better reliability with TransWilts services has seen passenger numbers rise above pre-pandemic levels for the first time. While there are still cancellations from time to time, the general trend is moving in the right direction. There is far less disruption due to crew shortages which has plagued the service for the last two years. However infrastructure problems, often on adjacent lines, and rolling stock issues do still cause trains to be cancelled. Figures released by GWR based on ticket sales has shown a year on year growth to April has risen 17.7% and, looking back to 2019 before COVID, starting to better the number travelling then by 2.9%.