TransWilts Connecting Wiltshire's Communities

incorporating TransWilts Community Rail Partnership

NEWSLETTER SIXTY SIX – OCTOBER 2026

Seaside trip for Melksham café

A group of two dozen members of Melksham's Shine Friendship café, which caters for adults with learning disabilities, have enjoyed a day trip to Weston-super-Mare thanks to TransWilts and Great Western Railway (GWR).

For many it was their first trip on a train and it is hoped it will give them the confidence to make more journeys in the future. The group joined a service at Chippenham for the hour long excursion to Weston. As well as taking in the scenery passing by as they headed west, they also took part in a general knowledge quiz based on facts about the coastal town.

Once at the destination they made the short walk to the seafront and spent time on the beach, looking round the souvenir shops and enjoying fish and chips.

Carolyn Fernandes from the café said: "We really had a fabulous time, the GWR staff were so accommodating and helpful assisting us boarding the train. I was amazed how relaxed Shine folk were on the train and we were all surprised how easy and accessible the journey to Weston-super-Mare was; many folk couldn't believe how soon we arrived.

Many of the Shine folk will definitely be repeating the trip next summer and they will definitely be more confident travelling by trains to explore their next adventures."

Sophie Martin, TransWilts CIC's Community Partnership Manager, explained: "While the emphasis was on a fun day out, it had a serious message. We showed the members what to expect when travelling by train, from getting to the platform to asking for assistance if they needed help getting on board. We now hope they will feel confident to try the train again."

Member renewals

The majority of Friends Membership renewals fall due at the end of October. For those who do not pay by standing order, reminders will be sent in early November. An early response to them would be appreciated to prevent additional administration.

Latest on TransWilts reliability

As reported in previous newsletters, the severe summer weather led to widespread cancellations in July and August. The trains used on the TransWilts were simply not designed to cope with the extreme temperatures. The driver's cab was a particular problem with the heat making them unsafe for train crew to use. The aftermath lasted into early September with ten cancellations in the opening week or so. Since then the situation has approved but some cancellations remain.

However GWR is still walking a tightrope with stock availability. It was hoped the introduction of class 175s in the South West would allow some other trains to move to the Bristol area and provide more resilience. However after two years in storage they have been plagued with faults and very few of the 26 trains are yet in regular use.

Siemens lift top award

TransWilts Community partner Siemens Mobility scooped an award at the recent "Railway Oscars". Their Efficient Electrification entry led the way in the Innovation of the Year category. Electrification X is a suite of products which combine to increase reliability, stability and security when it comes to electrifying the railway. They were presented with their National Rail Award at a gala dinner at the Grosvenor House Hotel in London's Mayfair.

Last days of GWR in the private sector

With Chiltern Railways moving into public ownership in September, GWR will be the next to make the change. The Department for Transport confirmed earlier this year the change will happen in the early hours of Sunday 13th December.

Lengthy repairs to lift at Swindon station completed

After a month out of use the lift which connects the subway to platforms 1,2 and 3 is now back in action.

Engineers discovered the large gas cylinders which support the hydraulics had reached the end of their useful life and had be replaced. This was no easy task however as they needed to be hoisted out of the shaft and scaffolding on platform 3 was required. The electric overhead wires brought an additional complication. The work had to be scheduled for a time when the overhead system could be switched off.

This was duly accomplished in late August and the repair successfully completed. During the time the lift was not working dedicated staff were on hand to assist customers with luggage to use the stairs. Those who could not use the stairs were directed via neighbouring stations to return to Swindon's platform 4 to access the station exit.

TransWilts services face midweek October disruption

As mentioned in the last newsletter GWR and Network Rail are 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.

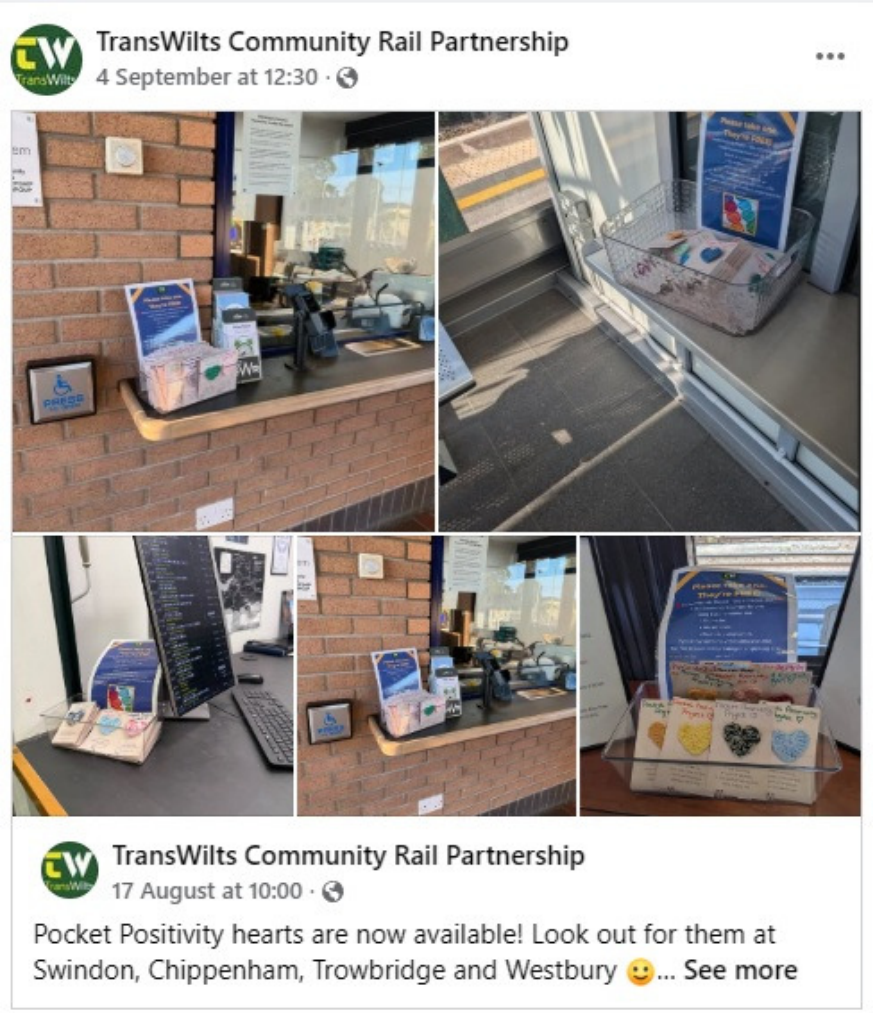
All services through Pewsey will be replaced by buses to Swindon while West of England services will be diverted, some calling at Swindon.

Elsewhere services from Warminster will be affected on various dates over the next few weeks. On the 10th/11th and 17th/18th of October buses will replace trains south of the town. On the Sunday the 8th, the morning service to Swindon will be replaced by a bus as far as Westbury.

Monday to Wednesday, the 26th to 28th October the line between Bath Spa and Bristol Temple Meads will be closed. A special service will run from London Paddington to Bath Spa, calling at Swindon and Chippenham, while other trains will run to Bristol Temple Meads via an alternative route after Swindon. The direct Bristol to Oxford service will not run on those three days.

On the weekend of the 31st October the line through Chipping Sodbury will be closed and services from Swindon to South Wales will operate via a different route extending journey times by up to half an hour. Finally on the last weekend of November lines out of London Paddington will be closed. Hourly trains will run from Bristol Temple Meads and South Wales to London Euston. The trains will operate non-stop between Swindon and London. Services from Pewsey and Bedwyn will only run as far as Reading.

Still time to pick up Pocket Positivity



TransWilts' Pocket Positivity project has proved a huge success. Since August more than 500 hearts have been collected from Swindon, Chippenham, Trowbridge and Westbury stations. Schools and community groups have produced them before they are mounted on display cards with an inspirational message. The gifts, which are free, are designed to bring a smile to those having a down day.

There is also more good news in that with the start of the new term, more schools have joined the project and are busily producing additional stocks which will soon be available at the stations.

Oxford railway bridge re-opens

After more than three years the Botley Road bridge by Oxford station has re-opened – two years later than planned. The bridge has been upgraded to allow for future extensions to some platforms and a new platform 5. It now has slightly higher headroom and grade separated passenger walkways. Its completion means buses from Swindon and the west can now serve the station and the city centre. Since April 2023 visitors have faced a five minute walk to get to the station and even longer to the city shopping area.