

Melksham Rail User Group

Melksham rail user group

Minutes**24 July at 19:30****Melksham Town Hall****Present**

Caroline Andrewes *Cllr MTC*
 Peter Chidley
 Peter Colegate
 Julie Colegate
 Graham Ellis *Vice-Chair*
 John Glover *Cllr MWPC*
 Judith Gradwell
 John Hamley *Secretary*

Kevin Hayes
 Paul Johnson *TWCIC*
 Horace Prickett *Cllr WC*
 Roger Witt
 Peter Tapscott
 Eddy Watts
 Adrienne Westbrook *Cllr MTC*

Apologies

Peter Blackburn *Chairman*
 Paul Carter *MWPC*
 Sophie Martin *TWCIC*
 David Phillips *WC*
 Alan Wheatherly

Abbreviations:

ACoRP - Association of Community Rail Partnerships
CCIF - Customer and Community Improvement Fund
LEP - Local Enterprise
MTC - Melksham Town Council

MWPC - Melksham Without Parish Council
SNTB - subNational Transport Bodies
TWCIC - TransWilts Community Interest Company
WC – Wiltshire Council

1. New representative

- Caroline Andrewes was welcomed as a new representative from MTC to join Adrienne Westbrook.

2. Minutes of meeting 20th March 2019

- Comments under 'Melksham station community café etc and master plan' and 'service issues' were clarified/corrected and updates added as follows:
 - Due to some CCIF applications being unsuccessful, some station improvements will be delayed.
 - Car parking fees will contribute to the leasing of the land from WC, but the costs of this will be depend on the final agreement. The figures quoted at the May meeting do not reflect any current scenario.
 - The total car parking spaces will be 55, with 35 new spaces, not 35 in total.
 - It is proposed that Hub area will now be run by TWCIC directly, and not a separate company.
 - It is understood that the VW/Audi site will not be tenanted but sold off
 - Murray Walk/underpass upgrades do not form part of the master plan, although improvements to these are thought to be desirable by other bodies.
 - An hourly service may require infrastructure changes, but how this achieved (e.g. with a loop) would be for Network rail to determine.
- Minutes were otherwise agreed - Proposed Eddy Watts, seconded Roger Witt.

3. Melksham station improvements

- Hopefully MRUG will be able to 'adopt' the station, allowing us to undertake some basic duties, such as maintenance of the flower beds.
 - We await a further training date for on-platform activities. The exact role of the team should be identified when this issue is chased through the station manager.
 - It is understood that previous training does not lapse although this needs checking. Eddy Watts, Rolf Brindle and Graham Ellis were trained a few years ago.
- (TWCIC activity) Upgrades to the car parking arrangements and other hub activities are now await planning permission, together with resolution of the water supply (lead levels are high) and if required, electrical power arrangements.
- The upgrades are planned for 3 phases, the first stage implementing car park charges
 - Changes are also planned for the car park fencing and platform fencing may change to be compatible with a north entrance at some time (which may include fencing and station entrances compatible with a north pedestrian access from the McDonalds area.)
- (TWCIC activity) Funding has been won for illuminated poster signs.

4. Service improvements

- Desirable service improvements - are being sought by TWCIC for the next few years.
 - an hourly service in each direction. The LEP may be able to assist but would probably need matched funding.
 - Extension of the route to Southampton (and the airport):- Currently Bournemouth airport is seen as the hub by the Western Gateway subnational transport body, not Southampton. It is suggested that MTC/MWPC are requested to write to the sNTB to state the case for Southampton airport as the rail/air hub.
 - In the other direction Oxford is seen as a desirable destination. Oxfordshire CC have been promoting the case for a Bristol/Oxford service reinstatement, which also assists a case for a Corsham station.
- Go-Op (part of C0-Op) open-access service plans from Taunton northwards through the TW line to Oxford have again been deferred, it is understood due to lack of rolling stock.

5. Service issues

- Cancellations are becoming too frequent after what appeared to be an improved reliability in quarter 1.
 - Given the 2 hourly schedule, provision of road transport automatically (without chasing the helpdesk) is desirable.
 - Lack of communication when the train is late or is cancelled is seen as a significant problem.
- GWR have requested suggestions for improving dwell time as an aid to overall reliability. MRUG have submitted a number of suggestions including
 - Changes to the train stop to avoid overcrowding on the narrow section of platform
 - Better station identity boards
- The provisional timetable for 12th December 2019 onwards has a number of changes, some of which have significant implications, e.g.
 - the 17:35 ex Swindon will run earlier which could affect working commuters.
 - some connections are improved and others are less convenient.
 - there is one less train (in one direction)

6. Promotion

- In the summer MRUG have undertaken a number of promotional activities to encourage rail use at Melksham:
 - A stand was manned at fetes in Shaw and Semington, and also at the Party-in-the-Park
 - The Carnival as accompanied by handouts of railway time leaflets, and the opportunity to promote the parallel D3 bus to Bath was taken.
 - A further stand is to be manned at the Melksham Market on Saturday 27th July.
 - An accompanied trip to Weymouth via Westbury was held, although support was poor. Promotion was limited as Sunday cancellations meant that the outing may have needed last minute alterations.
- An accompanied dog walk (one way via train to Trowbridge) is to be held in October.
- Imber open day in the summer will be promoted by rail from Melksham.
- A small group travelled to Seaton to lay John Money's ashes and provide an optional day out at the seaside.
- A 2019 Santa trip will be held, possibly running on two trains to allow additional participation. GWR have confirmed their support for this activity.
- Timetable leaflet drops are to be organised in the summer.

7. Finance

- A grant has been applied for from Melksham Town Council.
- At the AGM on 22nd May 2019 it was reported that our Treasurer, John Money had died. Judith Gradwell was welcomed as the new Treasurer. The Chairman Peter Blackburn, Vice-Chairman, Graham Ellis and Secretary, John Hamley were re-elected.
- It was agreed that these four officers should become the signatories on the Coventry Building Society Account, with other signatories removed.
 - It was agreed that the account should remain in the name of Melksham Railway Development Group, Melksham Rail User Group being an operating title only.

8. Other Organisations

- **TransWilts** activities have been covered elsewhere in these minutes.
 - Discussion is needed on the role of a Melksham station 'ambassador'.
- MRUG officers have agreed to apply for membership of **ACoRP** as a station 'friend'. This could open new avenues of funding to MRUG.
- The **Coffee Shop** forum covers many issues of interest to Melksham rail users, and may be accessed at <http://www.firstgreatwestern.info/coffeeshop/index.php>. The 'conversation' with Mark Hopwood on 5th August may be of particular interest.
- The next **Travelwatch SW** will be in October 2019. MRUG members include a board member of TWSW. MRUG have nominated two representatives from the officers to all open meetings.
- MRUG members attended the GWR community rail event in Bristol in June.

9. AOB - None

10. Next and subsequent meetings

- An additional meeting to avoid a 4 month gap has been arranged for

Wednesday 16 October July 2019 at 19:35 to be held at Whitley Chapel.

- *Note the time has been set to **coincide** with the arrival of the D3 bus from Melksham which stops immediately outside the chapel.*

For advance information, other meeting dates for 2019 have been set as follows.

- Wednesday 27 November 2019 19:30 Melksham Town Hall (**location may need change due to building works at the town hall**).

Other provisional dates of interest to members

- 17 August 2019 - Imber bus running day
- 12 October 2019 - Guided walk Trowbridge to Melksham, train in one direction (note rescheduled date)
- 15 December 2019 – Santa train

Brought forward items for the record

- A loudspeaker, possibly remotely controlled from Chippenham or Westbury is desirable, to advise of a delay or cancellation, and provide guidance on alternatives.
- The TVM is invaluable but
 - is difficult to use in bright weather
 - offers overpriced tickets prior to the first off-peak train, not differentiating Off-Peak and Super-Off Peak (which could give the passenger a saving of £18),
 - Advice should be displayed describing what passengers should do when the ATM is not working.
- Better taxi services are desirable perhaps with peak trains being met on a routine basis.
- The underpass to town could be promoted as it is a good facility. It could be used for community advertising etc.
- The following changes to the train service are desirable (in advance of a more general hourly service)
 - Provision of trains to fill gaps, such as an additional down commuting service in the morning, and for later/earlier services (such as 5:20 and 17:20 up, 7:36 and 22:36 down) are still urgently needed
 - User requests for earlier and later trains in each direction indicate that additional passenger generation could be created at those times
 - There is a further need for later trains from Bristol/Bath to Chippenham on weekdays.
- During significant planned disruptions, MRUG would like to see a manned assistant to provide help to users. GWR have been unable to provide this due to the lack of 'welfare' facilities.
 - Taxis are often made available from the manned stations but only after a long delay. At Melksham where there is no manning, getting a GWR provided taxi is much more difficult. (Note taxis using a station rank are obliged to accept railway business if requested, as part of the agreement to use the rank)
- The 21:30 ex Bath D3 goes empty stock to Westbury after Melksham, partly due to driver hours limitations, Proposals to run this via Bowerhill (which is almost on the same route) are being pursued.
- A bus timetable should be displayed at the station.
- Bus routes 14&15 are being looked at in detail. By some minor changes to the route and retiming, a service from the new housing estates to the station in peak (and other hours) would be possible.
- Use of the community bus to provide a station service, perhaps with volunteer drivers, is being considered.