

Melksham Rail User Group

Melksham rail user group

Record of Meeting 18 November 2020 at 19:30

Held by Zoom

Present:

Peter Blackburn	<i>Chairman</i>	Kevin Hayes	
Peter Chidley		Paul Johnson	<i>Chair TWCIC</i>
Graham Ellis	<i>Vice-Chair</i>	Bob Morrison	
John Glover	<i>Cllr MWPC</i>	David Redgewell	
John Hamley	<i>Secretary</i>	Roger Witt	
Mark Harris			

Apologies

Rolf Brindle	
Judith Gradwell	<i>Treasurer</i>
David Phillips	
Horace Prickett	<i>Cllr WC</i>
Peter Tapscott	

Abbreviations:

ACoRP - Association of Community Rail Partnerships,
-now CRN, Community Rail Network
CCIF - Customer and Community Improvement Fund
GWR – Great Western Railway
LEP - Local Enterprise Partnership
MTC - Melksham Town Council
MWPC - Melksham Without Parish Council

MRUG – Melksham Railway User Group
SNTB - subNational Transport Bodies
TWCIC - TransWilts Community Interest Company
TWCRP – TransWilts Community Rail Partnership
WC – Wiltshire Council
WWRUG-- West Wilts Rail Users Group

Note:

- Meeting slides are available at <http://www.mrug.org.uk/mrug20201118.pdf>.

1. Westbury Station meeting room (TWCIC)

- The TW meeting room/office at Westbury is now complete. (*The slides show the interior*).
- It is fully furnished and capable of holding small group meetings (contact Sophie Martin for details).
- The room is also planned to be a railway educational base for local schools.

2. Melksham station and HUB upgrades (TWCIC)

Further details on the hub are available at the website <https://melkshamhub.co.uk/home/>.

- Heavy work on site is largely finished (see slide set)
 - The CCTV and parking charges now commissioned and in use.
 - Two electric charging points will be commissioned soon, more later when the demand is there.
 - Power pillars are provided for pop-up events on the piazza.
 - Bicycle racks have been installed and bike hire company has been nominated.
 - An illuminated café sign will be displayed prominently to indicate the café is open.
 - USB charging sockets and free WiFi will be available.
 - A lockable shed for cleaning equipment etc, will be installed in early 2021.
 - Water supplies for gardening etc will be provided.
 - An accessible toilet is provided in the café.
- A café manager will be appointed soon.
 - A number of volunteers have indicated willingness to help.
- A planned opening ceremony will be held in April 2021.

3. Other TW activities

- The GWR local timetable includes other train services. TW will be producing a simpler format leaflet showing only the TW trains
 - Train timetables should be more stable after 13th December. In 2020 there have been numerous revisions due to changing lockdown arrangements.
- Several leaflets for walking and cycling from TW stations have been produced to promote leisure use of the line, (see <https://transwilts.org/2020/09/29/transwilts-walking-and-cycling-leaflets/>)
- No TW Santa train will operate this year. Instead TW will be providing 'goody bags' of railway related materials for distribution to local schools.

4. Long Term Enhancements being pursued by TW related to Melksham

- In order to improve the reliability and frequency of services, TW are supporting a number of initiatives:
 - Increased track capacity on the single line
 - Use of an additional platform at Westbury, and if the service is extended to Salisbury/Southampton, an additional platform at Salisbury.
- Opening the Northern Access to Melksham station to minimise the walking route from Scotland Rd estate and Forest via the bridge.

5. Service Issues

See slides for statistics.

- Trains services held up reasonably well during the lockdown (with a reduced timetabled service) until October. The monthly passenger numbers varied between 10% and 60% of the previous year's footfall.
- In October a serious cable fault resulted in several days with minimal service. More information to passengers would have been very useful both at this time and after the event.
- The TW line recovery from lockdown 1 has been stronger than on other GWR branches, and services have returned to near pre CV19 levels quicker than many others.
- Generally, it appears that local commuting routes, such as the TW route, are getting patronage back quicker than longer distance services.
- The 19:15 to Westbury and 20:20 to Swindon are reinstated in the 13th December timetable revision. The 19:15 fills the long gap after the 17:36 ex Swindon.
- From 13th December and for several months thereafter, the first Sunday service from Melksham is provided by a bus. MRUG will provide a volunteer to help passengers at the station.
- The next timetable revision in May 2021 is expected to be minor.
 - MRUG hope that an additional train to Swindon on Saturday evenings can be provided.
- Day trips to Weymouth on Sunday are still not practical.
- 2021 will be a year when the (hopefully) recovery from CV19 will define the new normal. Use of trains in 2021 could dictate timetables for 2022, so 'Use It or Lose It'.

6. Station Activity

- Currently any volunteer work at the station by MRUG members would be limited to off-platform activities, as specified by GWR.
 - Light gardening is allowed subject to some constraints
 - If MRUG wish to undertake other activities such as litter picking, a plan of work can be applied for from GWR. Sophie Martin of TW can coordinate this.
- Train usage information recorded by Graham Ellis and other MRUG members is still being collected. Any observations could usefully be sent to Graham Ellis.
- Given the ban on platform activities, litter bins have been seen to overflow, which gave rise to some concern
- Volunteer journey makers (to meet and greet passengers) have been scheduled at Swindon and Graham Ellis from MRUG undertakes this. A similar volunteer role would be useful at times at Melksham.
- Although the cause is not clear, significant numbers of cars are now parked during the day on the station approach rather than the car park.

7. Bus Issues

- Since April all bus services in Melksham have been provided by Faresaver (except the town services by Frome Buses and the long-distance coach services by National Express.)
- Faresaver have built a new timetable (271, 272, 273) which replaces many of the previous services taken over the principal D3 route (which no longer operates. Faresaver are providing evening and Sunday services on the 273 route, previously Faresaver did not operate through Melksham in the evenings or Sundays.
- Although passenger numbers are significantly lower than pre CV19, timetables are now similar to pre CV19 levels (allowing for different routings with Faresaver)
- Bath bus services drop off passengers at the rail station stop before entering the bus station to minimise the interaction between alighting and entering passengers.
 - If there are mobility or other compelling reasons, the driver can allow travel into the bus station on request.
- Current bus services in our area are largely underwritten by the government until passenger numbers return to commercial levels.
 - The same warning for trains applies to bus services 'Use It or Lose It'.

8. Melksham Bypass

- A bypass for the A350 through Melksham has been funded and consultation has started on the route, for which 4 main options are being considered (each with a few variations)
- This inevitably has supporters and objectors. However, it seems inevitable that there will be improvements on the N-S corridors in this area. One option might be to resurrect the plans for an A46/A36 link from junction 18 of the M4.
- Whereas the bypass will provide considerable relief for local traffic in Melksham, it may create problems further south at Westbury where a bypass is not yet funded.
- Considerations of freight as well as passenger traffic needs to be emphasised.
- The need for a good corridor on the road from Chippenham southwards, should demonstrate that the rail solution also needs upgrading (e.g. double tracking or a dynamic loop).
- MRUG should provide input to the consultation.

9. Promotion

- No MRUG Santa Special will be held this year. This is unfortunate but inevitable. A Santa run in 2021 will be pencilled in.
- A summer outing to Weston-Super-Mare might be viable, if the movement rules allow it then.
- Attendance at the fetes such as the River and Food festival, the Carnival, the Party in the Park etc will be considered if allowed.

10. Melksham Transport Users Group

- MRUG developed as a railway pressure group in the late 1990s. Services are now viable (although considerable improvement is still very desirable) and TransWilts are promoting the services and developing the station Hub.
- The group has always been interested in other transport issues for Melksham and the area. It is therefore up for consideration that we rename the group to Melksham Transport User Group.
- This in no way would diminish our involvement with the railway service but expand our operation to cover the Melksham buses.
- This will be developed over the next few months and we will propose formalising our new name at the next AGM.

11. AOB

- Thanks to TransWilts for their input to the Melksham Hub and service update at this meeting

12. Diary and next meeting

- **Wednesday 13 January 2021 19:30 (probably by Zoom)**
- The draft meeting schedule for 2021 follows. Meetings will be zoom or at the United Reformed church hall (in which case, it is hoped that a zoom monitor can also be provided). All will start at 19:30.
 - 13th January 2021
 - 17th March 2021
 - 19th May 2021 (AGM)
 - 14th July 2021
 - 15th September 2021
 - 17th November 2021
- Other DRAFT dates of interest
 - 30th November 2020 - Current Melksham Bypass consultation closes
 - 4th December 2020 - TravelWatch SouthWest AGM – needs ticket, authorised representatives only
 - 9th December 2020 - Community Rail Network Annual Awards – needs ticket
 - 13th December 2020 - New Timetable (and first MRUG support Sunday at Melksham station)
 - 3rd April 2021 - Official Opening by TransWilts of the Melksham Hub
 - 16th May 2021 - First day of any changes for summer to timetable
 - 17th May 2021 - TransWilts members update – needs ticket, members only
 - 1st December 2021 - Santa's Elves - present wrapping
 - 5th December 2021 – Melksham Santa outing
 - 12th December 2021 - First day of 2022 timetable
- To be added to the diary as and when planned:
 - Melksham Party in the Park
 - Melksham Carnival
 - Melksham River and Food Festival
 - Melksham Maker's Markets
 - Imber bus running day
 - Trip by train to Weston-super-Mare

13. Websites for Reference

- **MRUG** www.mrug.org.uk
- **TransWilts** <https://transwilts.org/>
- **Station Hub** <https://melkshamhub.co.uk/home/>
- **GWR** <https://www.gwr.com/>
- **Railfuture** <https://www.railfuture.org.uk/Sevenside+Branch>
- **Coffee Shop** <http://www.firstgreatwestern.info/coffeeshop/index.php>.
- **Neighbourhood Plan** <https://www.melkshamneighbourhoodplan.org/copy-of-housing>
- **Faresaver Buses** <http://www.faresaver.co.uk/>
- **Frome Buses** <http://www.fromebus.co.uk/>
- **Travelwatch SW** <http://www.travelwatchsouthwest.org/>
- **Community Rail Network (was ACoRP)** <http://communityrail.org.uk/>
- *Meeting slides are available at* <http://www.mrug.org.uk/mrug20201118.pdf>.
- *Trans Wilts leisure Leaflets* <https://transwilts.org/2020/09/29/transwilts-walking-and-cycling-leaflets/>