

Melksham Rail User Group



Minutes

5th October 2016 at 19:30

Well House Manor

Present

Peter Blackburn	<i>Chairman</i>	Jonathon Gale	<i>British Transport Police</i>
Rolf Brindle	<i>MWPC</i>	& colleague	
Graham Ellis	<i>Vice-Chair</i>	John Glover	<i>MWPC</i>
Lisa Ellis		John Hamley	<i>Secretary</i>
Lee Fletcher	<i>TW CIC</i>	Mary Jarvis	
		John Money	<i>Treasurer</i>
		David Phillips	<i>WC</i>

Apologies

Kevin Hayes	
Paul Johnson	<i>Chair TWCIC</i>
Bob Morrison	
Tom Steward	
Eddy Watts	

Actions in bold.

1. Minutes of meeting 6th June 2016

- Minutes of previous meeting approved (proposed John Money, seconded Peter Blackburn).
- The draft new constitution will be refined over the next few months, but provides a basis for ongoing activities.
- Other matters arising covered in body of meeting.

2. Passenger Usage

- Usage still rising (it has been noticed that the most crowded train (17:36 ex SWI has probably reached saturation point and further passengers are unlikely until it becomes a 2 car unit)
- From a survey held over the weekend of 16 July 2016 (which proved to be one with considerable disruption and substitution by road transport), an extrapolated annual carrying of 250k can be determined, (and later assessments indicate 400k possibly)
- Usage is buoyant on most trains including off-peak and weekends.
- GWR manager Mark Hopwood has stated recently that this is the fastest growing line in the UK.
- The busiest section of the line is Melksham to Chippenham.
- Many users use this service as a feeder to towns south of Westbury, (Southampton and Salisbury) supporting the case for a Swindon – Southampton regular service, and the need for regular long distance trains to include a Westbury stop.
- Requests for earlier and later trains in each direction indicate that additional passenger generation could be created at those times. In the evenings, a late train could provide travel security for passengers that use earlier trains, and hence even if lightly loaded, are still desirable.

3. Service Status - Designation

- The 3-year trial of TW services to 2016, extended to 2019, has created the 'fastest growing line' in the country (GWR general manager). This has been achieved by a partnership between the TW CRP, local authorities and GWR. The service is now secured, as the line has been 'designated', one of 19 designated lines with community rail input. Designation was announced formally at the ACoRP awards presentation at the end of September by Paul Maynard, Under Secretary of State at the Department of Transport.
- Designation provides a number of advantages to the service, such as
 - Access to additional funding streams
 - Some local control over services and fares.
- Further details at http://www.thisiswiltshire.co.uk/news/14774844.More_say_over_TransWilts_line_handed_to_community_by_rail_minister/

4. Major Station Improvements, and Related Infrastructure Upgrades

- As passenger numbers had increased to a level where standing was necessary on peak services, additional capacity is needed. Current extrapolations forecast 300,000 journeys to/from Melksham in the next five years.
- To accommodate this, GWR propose the use of cascaded 2 car trains from 2018. This will necessitate platform extensions at Melksham in 2017. GWR and TWCIC will visit the station on 17 October 2016 to review this.
 - There are two alternatives under active consideration
 - Extension North by a new platform build
 - Relocation of Melksham Tyre Services to the vacated Reeds site, allowing the existing South platform to be recommissioned. This would have the H&S advantage of separation of passengers flows from car movements at MTS, allow reinstatement of the steps from Bath Road and provide additional bus turning space
- Whilst extending the platform, other enhancements should be actively pursued (at least passive provision made for them), including

- Improved access via Murray Walk
- Northern pedestrian access to Foundry Close (which will also provide a better interchange route with the Chippenham / Melksham buses).
 - This could later be the basis of a local bus route.
- Routing other local buses through station (currently thought to be difficult due to turning space) or provision of a bus stop on Bath Road near station near the traffic lights
- Additional signal midway between Thingley and Trowbridge to allow two trains in the same direction
 - Later - provision of a passing loop at the station sufficient for passenger trains, subsequently extended to a longer loop for freight trains (probably mid/late 2020s).
- Improved subway access, and making the underpass more inviting
- Expanded waiting facilities

5. Station Issues

- Information presentation
 - Station display not often working
 - Banner displays typically found at other stations would be ideal, and ideally a remotely driven PA should be provided.
 - Display boards are still showing out-of-date information such as past engineering works
 - Conflicting signage states that tickets are not available at the station, and that a TVM is available.
- The (unused) 'bicycle houses' should be removed, to make space for another station bench.
- The yellow safety line on the platform needs repainting
- Rolf Brindle and Eddy Watts continue to maintain parts of the station in their role as 'friends'. The flower tubs are well maintained and a very attractive addition at the station.
- The TVM is invaluable but
 - is difficult to use in bright weather (in which case, users should purchase tickets from the train supervisor)
 - offers full fare tickets when the next train is the first off-peak train and cannot differentiate between Off-Peak and Super-Off Peak
- TWCIC are also considering use (on a short term basis) of the empty Reeds office as a station 'welcome' facility, manned by volunteers who could provide help to passengers informally. Other possibilities include provision of Wi-Fi, toilets, defibrillator and the sale of cakes etc,
 - Outline costs for conversion are estimated at sub £2,000 (e.g. painting etc), but operational costs have not been reviewed.
 - It was noted that council support might be possible if a WC was provided as part of a more general scheme for business's to offer toilet facilities to the public
 - The facility would not provide manned ticket sales unless volunteers were specially trained and liability issues could be resolved.
- A new station manager has been appointed (James Wilcox) who will meet us at the station next month

6. Trans Wilts Rail Partnership (TWCRP) and Community Interest Company (TWCIC)

TW issues consider the services and general issues for the entire TW corridor. The following summary lists the key issues that relate directly to the Melksham service.

- TWCIC is no longer funded by WC, although Melksham Area Board, MTC and MWPC do provide support.
- Overcrowding on the rail service at times has led to criticism of the service, although this can be seen as a reflection of the high demand from passengers.
- Go-Coop, an open access rail company, propose an open-access service from Taunton to Nuneaton via the TW corridor. This company suggested a similar service some years ago. It would provide more no-change opportunities from Melksham. Target date for service provision is December 2017.
- Other key targets that improve the benefits of Melksham station that are being addressed include:
 - Station opening/enhancement at Wilton Parkway and Corsham.
 - Through trains from Swindon to Salisbury/Southampton airport/Southampton.
 - Hourly trains in each direction by 2020.
 - Provision of trains to fill gaps, and for later/earlier services (such as 5:20 and 17:20 up, 7:36 and 20:36 down)
- Further disruptions to services is foreseen in Easter 2017 with services not running between Bath and Bristol. This will result in the Cardiff – Portsmouth service again being diverted as a Swindon-Portsmouth service, with a two hourly stop frequency at Melksham. There is a possibility that 'via Melksham' tickets will only be valid for trains that stop at Melksham. This is under review.

7. Promotion

- On 9 September, GE gave a review of the services to WWRUG near Westbury station. As a trial for a later train, GWR ran a service from Westbury to Chippenham after the meeting finished. This included 4 passengers who were not connected to the talk.9/9 talk
- TW ran a promotional survey at the Melksham River and Food Festival. Potential (but not current) passengers indicated that lack of later trains, and a more frequent service were reasons for not using the trains.
- A proposal for mini-timetables covering Melksham to Bath and London are being considered.
- A number of one-way dog walking outings, with return (or outward) by train have been held.

- A more active website is needed as it can be the first source of travel information to the general public.
- In addition to the announcement of designation, TW CRP had nominated 10 categories of activities/people for ACoRP awards. 6 were shortlisted, and one for the Weymouth Wizard summer promotion was awarded 'first' (for TW and GWR together).
- Creation of a Wiltshire Rover is desirable.
- A 'Explore Swindon by Rail' leaflet promotion has been funded by GWR.
- A Santa Special will be run again this year, see 8.

8. Santa Special

- Two Santa trains will be run on 4 December 2016, to Westbury and back
 - 13:54 MKM – WSB, back 14:49 (25 mins turnround at WSB)
 - 17:44 MKM – WSB, back 18:54 (35 mins turnround at WSB)
 - *There will be no Santa special on the 15:54 to Westbury.*
- It is hoped that the normal one car train will be replaced by a 2 car, and that we can effectively reserve one car for the special.
- British Transport Police will travel on each train, and speak to the children about the dangers of railway lines (probably working the carriage in the opposite direction to Santa)
- **Paul Johnson will be Santa as before**
- This year we will only provide for Melksham, with ticket sales from the T.I.C, with children ages collected as previously.
- Presents will be obtained by GE, and wrapping will take place on 2nd December at WHM.
- Mince pies, soft drinks and wine for adults will be included as previously
- Numbers to be limited to 80 per train
- Fares probably similar to last year, but with better presents due to the shorter journey. **GE to determine the most appropriate fare.**

9. Finance

- A grant award of £300 has been gratefully received from MTC.
- Applications are now being sought for MWPC grants for 2017.
- Payment of £268 from Westbury TIC for the Santa trip 2014 has yet to be received.
- **Rolf Brindle is proceeding with opening a regular cheque based account at HSBC.** Ideally all cheques would require two signatures, although a low limit value for single signed cheques might be possible.
- Current banking regulations require considerable paperwork to ensure the account is being used for legitimate purposes, and this is taking some time.
 - **Both HSBC and the Coventry BS will be advised of our new name in due course (John Money – Coventry and Rolf Brindle HSBC).** At a suitable time, bank accounts and other relevant documentary changes would be implemented

10. AOB - none

11. Next meeting date

- Friday 6 December 2016, Melksham Town Hall

Note also

- 8 October 2016 *Travelwatch South West, Taunton*
- 2 December 2016 *Santa Special present wrapping Well House Manor*
- 4 December 2016 *Santa special from Melksham to Westbury*
- 6 December 2016 *MRUG meeting*
- 13 May 2017 *TransWilts members meeting*
- 3 June 2017 *Transwilts AGM*

MRUG extend grateful thanks to Well House Manor for use of the Meeting Room and also for the informal get-together and snacks prior to the meeting, where the 20 years of MRDG/MRUG and the success of the TW service, was celebrated.