

Melksham Rail User Group



Minutes

12th May 2017 at 19:30

Melksham Town Hall

Present

Peter Blackburn	Chairman	Helen Couchman
Graham Ellis	Vice-Chair	Kevin Couchman
John Hamley	Secretary	Judith Gradwell
John Money	Treasurer	Eddy Watts

Apologies

Lee Fletcher
Kevin Hayes
Ann Lock
Paul Johnson

1. Minutes of meeting 24th February 2017

- Minutes were agreed. Proposed Eddy Watts, seconded Judith Gradwell.

2. Melksham Station Improvements, and Related Infrastructure Upgrades

- There had been complaints of rowdy behaviour and very bad littering (including glass and other dangerous materials) in the new station car park.
 - BTP and WC will be advised in anticipation that additional patrols could pass the station.
 - The possible replacement of locks on the station cycle houses will be investigated, so that cleaning materials could be stored there. MRUG volunteers could possibly provide a regular tidy up service.
 - Provision of a waste bin in the car park, and clearing of the bin, by GWR will also be addressed.
- GWR propose the use of cascaded 2 car 165 trains in 2018. This will necessitate platform extensions at Melksham, a basic North extension is now scheduled for build in early 2018.
 - It is anticipated that services could continue during the platform build.
- Further upgrades have been considered, but a holistic view is now needed. A 'master plan' covering all enhancements is being prepared as a basis for discussions with WC and GWR. Applications for funding to cover work in 2018 will be made. Grants of £60,000 have been obtained for the design studies etc. although the actual works are expected to be in the region of £1m. Currently the following works are being considered:
 - Additional platform extension to the South, in the area currently occupied by Melksham Tyre Services. MTS would then relocate to the former Reeds area. **(This would also allow steps to Bath Road to be reinstated).**
 - 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.
- TWCIC are 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:
 - It is hoped that sufficient height can be added to ensure visibility from trains perhaps with a pagoda style roof.
 - Outline costs for conversion are estimated at £50,000 (e.g. painting etc), but operational costs have not been reviewed.
 - Solar panels are being considered to minimise energy costs
 - Business sponsors for the works are being sought.
 - Council support might be possible if a toilet was provided as part of a more general scheme for businesses to offer toilet facilities to the public
 - The facility would not provide manned ticket sales unless volunteers were specially trained and liabilities covered.

3. Station Issues

- The station information display is frequently unavailable. It is understood that GWR are looking at this more generally as the fault seems to be with the unit design.
- 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.
- Better taxi services are desirable perhaps with peak trains being met on a routine basis.

4. 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.

- On 2nd March a special train was run from Swindon to Salisbury with Paul Maynard MP (minister responsible for rail matters) travelling, to celebrate the success of the current service. The itinerary emphasised the location of the proposed Wootton Bassett and Wilton stations.
- Co-Op are still hoping to provide an open access service from Taunton to Nuneaton via MKM, possibly at 2 hourly intervals from 2018
- TW still pressing for an hourly service in each direction (by 2020) and also for extending the route to Southampton via Southampton airport
- Lobbying is needed to minimise the effect of proposals for bypassing Westbury via the avoiding line, as this station provides a wealth of interchange opportunities.
- Publicity is needed to advise that if a train to Melksham is cancelled (or overcrowding means that passengers could not board a train) **those affected should speak to the platform team at Chippenham** (not the ticket office) to see whether taxis could be provided.
- Relocation of the TW office to Chippenham is being considered.
- Both the GWR and the South West franchise requirements will include obligations or request proposals for the TW route, including (for the South West) the section to Southampton.
- 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) still urgently needed
- Later evening trains are still needed (a priority for TWCIC), as well as an additional Southbound commuting service
- 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.

5. Promotion

- GWR will be running a service from Swindon to Weymouth on summer Sundays in 2017, always good for promoting train services.
- Good contact has been maintained with ACoRP including attending meetings.
 - Tourism leaflets for the towns on the TW route have been prepared with a grant from DOT/ACoRP, including details of the Severn/Solent railcard which covers Melksham
 - A joint promotional event is to be held at Waterloo on Wednesday 17th May.
- A number of one-way dog walking outings, with return (or outward) by train are scheduled. (The Wessex Wanderers run similar events on the adjacent Heart of Wessex route, and their next event will be on 24th May to Weymouth.)
- An article is usually prepared for the Melksham independent News each fortnight.
- A proposal for mini-timetables covering Melksham to Bath and London is being considered.
- An updated MRUG website is being developed providing first source of travel information to the general public, including timetable and fares information.
- 'Visit Wiltshire' conference has been supported by TW.
- Possible participation with a stall, **in the River Festival, and Party-in-the-Park** is being considered.
- New panels for the bus stops in the Melksham market place are needed to display railway information and timetables. It was agreed that MRUG would provide £100 towards the cost.
- TravelWatch SW was supported by a number of MRUG members on 4th March.
- PlusBus may be provided for Melksham at some stage in the future. Meanwhile a new local 'rover' ticket which provides similar coverage (at a higher price than typical for PlusBus) is being considered.

6. Finance

- A grant of £200 has been awarded by MWPC. Thanks to MWPC for their support.
- **An application will be made in June for a grant from MTC.**
- Payment of £268 from Westbury TIC for the Santa trip 2014 has yet to be received.
- As the HSBC branch in Melksham has closed, MRUG need to review whether opening a regular cheque based account is viable. Ideally all cheques would require two signatures, although a low limit value for single signed cheques might be possible.
 - Current banking regulations involve checks to ensure the account is being used for legitimate purposes, which has taken some time.
 - The Coventry BS will be advised of the MRUG name in due course (John Money – Coventry and Rolf Brindle HSBC).

7. AOB - None

8. Next meeting date

- The next meeting will be on the **23rd June 2017 at 19:30**