

# Melksham Rail User Group

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## Minutes

10<sup>th</sup> January 2018 at 19:30

Melksham Town Hall

### Present

Peter Blackburn Chairman  
 Peter Colegates  
 Julie Colegates  
 Graham Ellis Vice-Chair  
 Lee Fletcher  
 John Glover MWPC  
 Judith Gradwell  
 Kevin Hayes  
 John Hamley Secretary  
 Horace Prickett WC  
 Eddy Watts

### Apologies

Paul Carter MWPC  
 Peter Chidley  
 Bob Morrison TWCIC  
 Paul Johnson TWCIC  
 David Phillips WC  
 Paul Taylor MWPC  
 Roy While WC

***This meeting was held specifically to address responses to the SWR refranchise consultations, and the Community Rail Strategy Consultation.***

***Outstanding Issues from the previous meeting have been brought forward and will be addressed at the next regular meeting.***

## 1. Minutes of meeting 29th November 2017

- Minutes were agreed. Proposed Peter Blackburn, seconded Graham Ellis.

## 2. 2 carriage trains and celebration

- The full 2 car service had now been implemented and was proving successful.
- GWR, TW and MRUG had organised a celebration on the station in the afternoon (of 10<sup>th</sup> January) with an impressive 2 carriage train cake.
  - This had been well attended and provided an opportunity for promotional articles in the local press.
  - GWR has several representatives, notably Jo Graham (GWR Forward Planning and Business Strategy). Their inputs and time were much appreciated.

## 3. Melksham Station Improvements, and Related Infrastructure Upgrades

- The platform lengthening**, anticipated for early 2018, is now delayed.
  - As there is insufficient length in the bay at Swindon for the two car TW trains when the Cheltenham train is also stabled there, TW trains now normally use one of the through platforms.
- When platform extensions eventually do happen, reprofiling of the platform to slope away from the track will be provided.
- Removal of **the cycle houses** is needed to clear unused furniture from the platform.
  - Storage for cleaning materials might be possible instead, so that MRUG volunteers could possibly provide a regular tidy up service.
- WC is reviewing whether **parking charges** will be applied at Melksham station, and if so at what level. TW/MRUG have responded to the consultation.
  - The proposed charges would be greater than many day return fares and this is clearly not desirable.
  - A time-based charge is proposed, with a one hour charge. As most journeys would require longer than this, the time-based structure needs review.
  - TW/MRUG in general have no issue with charging at a reasonable level, providing this is matched with maintenance of the car park (e.g. for litter clearing).
  - Provision of /clearing of a waste bin in the car park may need to be addressed in the future.
- Further upgrades are now covered under a holistic approach by TWCIC. The first draft of a '**master plan**' covering all enhancements is being prepared. The anticipated budget is in the region of £1m. Currently the following works are being considered:
  - An additional platform extension to the South, in the area currently occupied by Melksham Tyre Services. MTS would then relocate to the former Reeds area and the Bath Road steps reinstated. This plan is now postponed for at least two years as the ex-Reeds area has been let for that time.
  - Improved access via Murray Walk.
  - Northern pedestrian access to Foundry Close (which will also provide a better interchange route with the Chippenham / Melksham buses).
  - Provide an additional signal midway between Thingley and Trowbridge to allow two trains in the same direction, or (preferred) provision of a passing loop at the station (or nearby at Broughton Gifford) sufficient for passenger trains, to be 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.

- The **station information display** is frequently unavailable. A revised facility using 4G is expected to be installed, but the timescale is currently unknown.
  - Recently there have been reports that the 'help' call facility has not worked, not acceptable given the remoteness of the station from the town centre.
  - A loudspeaker, 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 (in which case users should purchase tickets from the train supervisor).
  - offers overpriced tickets prior to the first off-peak train, not differentiating Off-Peak and Super-Off Peak.
  - Will not issue group save tickets.
  - Will not accept cash even though many journeys are relatively inexpensive.
- As the station does not implement penalty fare rules, **tickets can be bought from the train conductor**.
  - Due to the number of travellers, the train conductor cannot always issue everyone tickets, and there would appear to be a number of lost fares as a result (e.g to Chippenham or Trowbridge which do not have ticket gates).
  - **Gates are currently being installed at Chippenham**.
- Better taxi services are desirable perhaps with peak trains being met on a routine basis.
- Publicity is needed to advise **what to do if a MKM train is cancelled** (or overcrowding means that passengers could not board a train)
- Routing **local buses** through the station (currently thought to be difficult due to turning space) is desirable.
  - Town bus services are being retendered, and TWCIC has submitted a proposal that provides for several buses to be routed through the station.
  - A case for revised bus services in Melksham to provide better integrated transport and to encourage more usage has been submitted by TW.
  - The chosen solution will be announced by end 2017 with a probable implementation in March 2018
    - Competition between bus operators is expected when the chosen service is tendered
  - Signage at station not good - the poster external to the station boundary does not show Melksham trains. The posters should cover the TW route or at least advise that MKM info is available on the platform.

#### 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.*

- TW still pressing for an **hourly service** in each direction (by 2020) and also to extend the route to Southampton via Southampton airport
  - Both the GWR and the South West franchise requirements will request proposals for the TW route, including (for the South West) the section to Southampton.
  - **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) still urgently needed
  - User 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.
- The GWR community rail review will be in Swindon next year, a chance to demonstrate the value of a good TW service.
- TW responses to consultations for the obligations under the new franchises (expected 2019 or 2020) have emphasised:
  - A need for **later trains during the week**, and late trains at the weekends
  - A further need for **later trains from Bristol/Bath to Chippenham** on weekdays
  - Earlier trains to/from Warminster
- The SWR consultation closed on 22<sup>nd</sup> December 2017
  - TW have proposed that the two hourly WSB to Salisbury service be extended to Swindon.
- Train services, particularly at the weekend, have been very unreliable.
  - This is a key issue which needs resolution as cancellations after heavy promotion could have a negative effect on new users.
- **Timetable changes**
  - Further recasts of the GWR timetable can be expected in 2018 as the revised services on the Bath to London route are updated to reflect the IEP trains.
- A bid has been made to relocate the TW office to the unused platform at Chippenham

#### 5. Consultation GWR refranchise

- Both TW and MRUG need to make responses to the consultation document. (See [https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/663801/great-western-rail-franchise-consultation-web.pdf](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/663801/great-western-rail-franchise-consultation-web.pdf)).
- GE will prepare the initial response and PB/JRH will review prior to submission.
- The Heart of Wessex CRP are also preparing responses, where no doubt many answers will correspond with MRUG/TW as our routes overlap.
- A brief outline of the questions to respond to, and the basis of MRUG's final answer follow:

**2: Do you agree or disagree with the proposals outlined above for splitting the Great Western franchise into smaller franchises?** ANSWER: Local interests are best served by a single entity.

**4: a) What do you think are the main challenges that might be addressed through greater co-ordination and integration between the train operator and Network Rail? b) What do you think should be the future priorities for strengthened partnership working between the franchise operator and Network Rail?** ANSWER not applicable

**5 (a) Which routes do you believe could benefit from improvements to train frequencies?**

**(b) What times of the day or week are these improvements needed? (c) Why?**

**(d) If the only way of achieving earlier first trains or later last trains was to curtail services at other times of the week or year so Network Rail can carry out essential maintenance, what times would you suggest?** ANSWER:: See question 8, but infrastructure improvements are needed to achieve the service frequency required.

**6: a) Are you promoting a scheme for a new station or line which has a realistic prospect of being funded? If so, please provide brief details here**

**b) What actions would you like the franchisee to undertake in order to support the development of this scheme?** ANSWER MRUG none -,although Wilton will be important for TW.

**7a) Do you agree or disagree with reducing journey times to destinations in the South West by reducing stops at intermediate stations? b) Which services or stations would benefit or be disadvantaged by this approach?**

**c) Are there any specific locations or routes elsewhere where it could be appropriate to reduce station stops in order to speed up longer-distance journeys?** ANSWER : Melksham users need all the stops currently offered.

**8a) Which direct services such as those described above should be preserved in the next franchise?**

**b) Are there any other stations between which you feel direct services should be provided?**

**c) At which locations should connections between different services be improved?**

ANSWER: we need (i) an effective hourly service with guaranteed connections at each end, (ii) new late evening / early morning services in both directions and on 7 days a week, (iii) priority should be to target overall journey times rather than minimization of changes, (iv) in the event of cancellation, greater clarity on how to continue a journey, e.g. by taxi.

**9: What additional seasonal train services do you consider to be particularly important to retain or improve in the next franchise?** ANSWER Seasonal seaside services are excellent, but we see no reason why they aren't provided year round.

**10: What other train service enhancements do you believe should be considered for inclusion in the next franchise?** ANSWER: Ultimately an extended service beyond Swindon North and East to Oxford and beyond are desirable. Provision should only be made when the more local services from Swindon to Southampton are suitable.

**11: If you are a freight operator or represent the freight industry, please set out your expectations of likely future demand for freight capacity across the routes served by the franchise.** ANSWER: We are not a freight operator, although we encourage the use of freight on our corridor, provided the infrastructure is improved to ensure our timetable objectives are met. This might for example require a passing loop North of Melksham.

**12 a) What do you think are the main priorities that we should seek to address in relation to rolling stock?**

**b) Are there any routes which do not currently have First Class accommodation where you think it should be provided?**

**c) Should the franchisee provide specific services and facilities for a) business travellers or**

**b) families travelling with children or c) other passengers?**

**d) If yes, please provide more information on what you think should be provided**

**e) What benefits or disadvantages do you think innovative technologies for rolling stock, e.g. hydrogen or battery power, could bring?**

**f) Are there any routes which would be particularly suitable for these types of innovative technology?**

ANSWER: The rolling stock should be adequate for the numbers of passengers expected in the next few years (the usage has increased dramatically and unexpectedly in the past 4 years), such that standing is an exceptional situation rather than routine.

**13a) Which stations do you think should be a priority for improving accessibility? c) What other improvements could help to make rail services easier to access and use for all passengers?** ANSWER: At Melksham, platform height makes assisted travel difficult. Accessibility must be such that people unfamiliar with the station can still use the facilities easily.

**14 a) Do you think these are the right priorities for stations in the new franchise?**

**b) Which priorities would you change or add, and why?**

**c) At which stations do you think co-ordination between transport modes could be improved?**

**d) How do you believe these areas could be improved, e.g. through timetabling connections or through physical works at the location?**

**e) What do you believe are examples of best practice elsewhere which could be relevant for stations on the Great Western franchise network?**

ANSWER: Service provision and facilities at Melksham should focus on the needs of the local community.

**15a) Do you agree or disagree with these priorities for i) fares and ii) ticketing?**

**(a) Which priorities would you change or add, and why? b) What changes to the fares structure could be of benefit to you?** ANSWER: Fares can be inconsistent, but it is important that the TVMs should offer the most appropriate fare. At Melksham Super Off-Peak is not offered until after the first applicable train has run.

**16 What more do you feel that the franchisee could be doing to help the Community Rail sector increase its contribution to society and the railway, for example in harnessing local community relations and outreach into the community? ANSWER needed.**

## 6. Community Rail Strategy Consultation (for DFT)

- Both TW and MRUG need to make responses to the consultation document (See [https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/656805/community-rail-consultation.pdf](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/656805/community-rail-consultation.pdf))
- GE will prepare the initial response and PB/JRH will review prior to submission.
- The Heart of Wessex CRP are also preparing responses, where no doubt many answers will correspond with MRUG/TW as our routes overlap.
- Answers need to encompass:
  - Funding for community rail needs to be made available outside of the franchising cycle
  - Community rail should not detract enthusiastic support by too many red-tape regulations
  - Community rail should address local and regional issues, but not national services.
- The topics are:
  - **Question 1a: What role can community rail play in improving end- to-end journeys?**
  - **Question 1b: How can community rail help to: Make Journeys more sustainable? Encourage more healthy travel?**
  - **Reduce the environmental impact of travel?**
  - **Question 2: How can community rail help: Communities have a voice in influencing the provision of rail? (2) Complementary transport services and development of the rail network?**
  - **Question 3: Where should the Government encourage community rail to develop on parts of the network currently without active CRPs or other community participation?**
  - **Question 4a: What is the role of community rail in supporting: Community cohesion? Promoting diversity? Enabling social inclusion? Question 4b: How is this best achieved?**
  - **Question 5: How can community rail help to make sure that the railway is accessible to as many people as possible?**
  - **Question 6: How can community rail support local economies and railways grow through: Increasing employment? Education and training opportunities? Supporting small businesses? Social enterprise development?**
  - **Question 7: What role can community rail play in making best use of Station buildings? Railway land?**
  - **Question 8: How can community rail be best supported to act Innovatively? Effectively?**
  - **Question 9: What opportunities are there to secure a: Diverse income base for community rail? Sustainable income base for community rail?**
  - **Question 10: How can community rail designation be developed to more fully realise its potential?**
  - **Question 11: How can community rail Support the development of rail line and stations improvement?**
  - **Contribute to the development of rail line and station improvement? Make greater use of heritage railways?**
  - **Question 12: Do you have any other comments on how Government can best support the future of community rail?**

## 7. Promotion

- An updated MRUG website is being developed providing first source of travel information to the general public, including timetable and fares information. (See [www.mrug.org.uk](http://www.mrug.org.uk)).
- A new Mobile phone App has been developed for users of the TW service.

## 8. Finance

- 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.

## 9. Santa Special

- This was successful although numbers had to be limited due to the provision of a single car, shared with passengers using the trains other than as part of the Santa Special.
- A provisional profit of £50 was made.

## 10. AOB none

## 11. Further meeting dates

- 2018 meetings (all in the Melksham Town Hall) are scheduled as follows:
  - **Wednesday 28 February 2018**
  - Wednesday 25 April 2018- AGM
  - Wednesday 27 June 2018
  - Wednesday 26 September 2018
  - Wednesday 28 November 2018
  - Wednesday 12 December 2018