

Monday 4th December 2017

Peter Blackburn – Chair
John Hamley – Secretary
John Money – Treasurer
Graham Ellis – Vice Chair

Melksham rail user group

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Dear Melksham Railway Station User,

Melksham Rail News

The Melksham Rail User Group met last Wednesday - here's a news update from that meeting, together with late breaking news you will probably have seen in the press and how it might effect us in Melksham.

On Friday, the Office of Road and Rail released ticket numbers station by station for the year to April. An eagerly awaited statistic, this shows a grown at Melksham from 60,676 to 74,666 journeys in a year - at 23% the fastest growing station in Wiltshire, and a far cry from the days of 3,000 journeys per annum.

SERVICE CHANGES and train events during this winter

From next Sunday (**10th December 2017**), the first northbound train moves from 09:20 to 08:46 and runs through to Swindon - arriving there over an hour earlier than the current connection at Chippenham.

Within the next 10 days, we expect to hear what's planned for Melksham's Town Bus services from next Spring. Options including station links have been proposed by our community groups and put out for tender pricing by Wiltshire Council who have been very helpful indeed in ensuring that our timings are robust and good.

Santa will be on the train on **Sunday 17th December**, but is nearly sold out. Check with Melksham TIC if you are interested in the final few tickets. No trains on 25th and 26th December. Please check online for service changes between 23rd December and 1st January. In the new year, fares will increase roughly in line with inflation. Tickets bought for use in the New Year will reflect the new prices in the next week or so.

From **Monday 2nd January 2018**, the 15:12 from Swindon to Westbury runs 5 minutes later throughout. This will allow much more reliable connections into this train at Chippenham from the train from Bristol (at 15:00) and Bath Spa (at 15:13). A change to the Portsmouth connection at Westbury means that passengers WILL be able to connect forward to Warminster, Salisbury and stations beyond.

Also from the first few days of the new year, the class "153" single carriage trains that have served us so well on the trial extra services for the past years are moving to pastures new, to be replaced by 2 carriage trains. Once the change settles in, we'll have class 150/2 trains through to the spring, and these are WiFi and accessible toilet equipped. Later in the year, the trains will change again - this time to 2 car "turbos".

Please keep a careful eye out at Swindon for your train; Westbury services have used platform 2 almost exclusively until now, but in the future they will vary between platforms 1, 2 and 3 as the new trains won't fit into platform 2 along with a Cheltenham train any more. Please listen carefully for announcements as your 2 carriage train approaches Melksham - until the platform is extended during 2018, some trains may not be able to open all their doors.

This summer and autumn, severe trained staff shortages at Great Western have lead to a significant number of cancellations of our trains. New crew are being trained, and established team members are learning of how to drive the trains that will be new to the area in January. We are assured of a significant improvement back to a reliable service in the New Year. Your community rail team can only plead with GWR to retain our trains, bearing in mind that a cancellation causes a 2 hour service gap here where elsewhere it would lead to a 30 minute or less delay. We have no authority to back our plea with any form of enforcement, and need to rely on GWR's goodwill at all times. We appreciate the tough spot the duty controller is placed in when he has insufficient resources to staff the services that GWR are contracted to provide.



[Our 2019 Proposal - see over](#)

LOOKING FORWARD - Informing the Government and Great Western

There are no fewer than three public consultations open at present, together with private discussions on more fronts. All could effect / influence the station and train services from December 2018 onwards.

The most immediate **public consultation** is from **South Western Railways asking about their services for 2019**. As operators in the south of Wiltshire, this consultation may appear to have limited significance in Melksham, but looks can deceive. By joining up three local services, a through Swindon to Southampton service could be created that would allow more services to be run with fewer trains - this being an efficiency dividend available now that our trial service is permanent and can be incorporated into other services in the area. This consultation closes on 22nd December, and draft inputs worked out between TransWilts, Three Rivers CRP and user groups are online:

technical document at http://twcrp.info/technical_2019

presentation online at http://twcrp.info/presentation_2019

Our Melksham trains will in any case change for 2019 as new timetables for long distance trains will change when the main line is available for us, and also from that date through train to / from Gloucester and Cheltenham will cease and all the trains vis Stroud and Kemble will continue to London. We have seen an embryonic GWR timetable for the TransWilts for 2019, and significant work is needed on it to ensure it works for everyone - [the Southampton service link offers a better way forward](#).

A key player on the line through Melksham is the TransWilts Community Rail Partnership - Community, local council and rail operator working together to make the railway more useful to the community, and to help fill trains (often by helping to inform the other parties about what's needed). The Department for Transport is running a **consultation on the future of community rail**, and we are taking a detailed look. We believe (but then we're biased) that our community has helped significantly in the growth of the current use of Melksham Station, and are looking to make positive inputs to ask for a future system that will allow us to continue this work.

Quick link to consultation at <http://twcrp.info/communityrail>

Finally, the public **consultation on the Great Western Rail Franchise** was launched last Wednesday, with a closing date of 21st February 2018. This is perhaps the most important of the consultations as the outcome of the re-letting of this franchise in the early 2020s will shape the future of Melksham's rail service for decades to come. We are mindful that the consultation prior to the 2006 franchise drew limited inputs from Wiltshire, and that the subsequent franchise slashed train services calling at Melksham. With the growth in recent years, a similar outcome this time would be unlikely, but we still need to make inputs to point our government towards what's appropriate for us. Having come out in just the last few days, our team is still digesting the documents. You can find links to them via:

<http://twcrp.info/gwrf>

Work proceeds on the Melksham Station Master Plan, on a line capacity study, and on SWR's franchise requirement to analyse the corridor through Melksham to Swindon. Also on the planning for a new station at Wilton. The first three of these are informed by the passenger survey you would have been asked to complete on 19th 21st and 22nd October if you travelled from Melksham, as will consultation responses.

Public meetings to help us inform the consultation process (help you and us know what to write) are planned as follows:

15th December 2017 - Melksham Rail User Group, Whitely Methodist Church Hall, 19:30

Really a meeting of Santa's elves to get ready for the Santa train but all welcome and we will be talking futures.

10th January 2018 - Melksham Rail User Group, Melksham Town Hall, 19:30 (venue to be confirmed).

Presentation of both consultations still running, and seeking further inputs to help us finalise community responses - and your responses.

Other public sessions are on 7th January 2018, probably in Didcot, being arranged by the Great Western Coffee Shop Forum, and on 15th January 2018 in Exeter, for groups to co-ordinate (so that's one for you if you represent a special interest group). In both cases, please contact the undersigned for details.

This was intended to be a brief note (!) to update Melksham train users on what's going on - but there's so much that it's anything but brief. Thank you for reading this far - PLEASE get involved in anything or even everything above, but especially thank you for using the train service today!

Graham Ellis
as Vice Chair of Melksham Rail User Group

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