

Melksham Rail User Group

**Minutes****25th April 2018 at 19:30****Melksham Town Hall****Present**

Peter Blackburn	<i>Chairman</i>	Peter Chidley	
Graham Ellis	<i>Vice-Chair</i>	Geoff Elwell	
John Hamley	<i>Secretary</i>	John Glover	<i>MWPC</i>
Paul Alford	<i>WC</i>	Kevin Hayes	
Peter Colegate		Paul Johnson	<i>TWCIC</i>
Julie Colegate			

Apologies

Paul Carter	<i>MWPC</i>
Judith Gradwell	
David Phillips	<i>WC</i>
Horace Prickett	<i>WC</i>
Eddy Watts	

1. Minutes of meeting 28th February 2018

- Minutes were agreed. Proposed PB, seconded GE.

2. Melksham Station Master Plan for Station Infrastructure

- TransWilts are bidding for money and facilities to upgrade Melksham station.
 - The plans to relocate Melksham Tyre Services (MTS) to the former Reeds area are relatively long term, partly as the additional platform space will not be needed immediately.
- Several options for use of the former Reeds area were considered in the 1st phase submission.
 - Previous expectations that the warehouse could be let to generate an income are not being pursued as the building requires significant upgrade to provide heat insulation etc.
- A second phase submission (with detailed costings) is under preparation based on one of these options.
 - The submission is likely to cost £4,000 + vat and will be written by Atkins (under contract to WC).
 - ACoRP have agreed matched funding for half of the cost.
 - It was agreed that MRUG will provide £600 towards the remaining cost.
- This option provides for two car park areas as they are on different levels, making 20 + 22 spaces including disabled and electric charging spaces. A further 15 spaces would be available if the warehouse were dismantled.
 - To generate an income and cover the lease of the area (to WC), car parking charges would be introduced including for the existing spaces (proposed at the same rate as at Westbury).
 - There were a number of alternatives to collect this income and maintain the car park, *but (Post meeting) GWR had agreed to take over the lease and collect all car parking charges (probably via a contractor).*
- Conversion of the hut into a community café, with toilet, together with a passenger advice service (and leading perhaps to ticket issue in the future) would form part of a longer term strategy.
 - Critical to the success of such a project would be a reliable rota of volunteers to run the café.
 - As requested at the previous meeting, MRUG had written to TW indicating an expectation of sufficient volunteers.
- The area needs to be leased as soon as possible to create an income for WC.
 - Network Rail will lease for a few months until July, for use of platform building stores etc.
 - Use as a paying car park is needed as soon as possible afterwards to ensure that the lease is kept available for station purposes.
- Further upgrades are now covered under a holistic approach by TWCIC. The first draft of a '**master plan**' covering all enhancements is being prepared. Currently the following works are being considered, in addition to the arrangements for car parking (see above).
 - 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 would facilitate 5 car trains. (This is likely to be on a much longer timescale).
 - 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.

3. Melksham Station Improvements, and Related Infrastructure Upgrades

- The **platform lengthening**, anticipated for early 2018, is now scheduled for June/July 2018.
 - Reprofiting of the platform to slope away from the track may not now happen at the same time.
- Removal of the **cycle houses** is desirable.
- The **TVM** is invaluable but
 - is difficult to use in bright weather
 - offers overpriced tickets prior to the first off-peak train, not differentiating Off-Peak and Super-Off Peak.
- As the station does not implement penalty fare rules, **tickets can be bought from the train conductor**.
 - Cases have been reported where the TVM and the conductor were both unable to accept card payments.
- Better taxi services are desirable perhaps with peak trains being met on a routine basis.
- Routing **local buses** through the station is desirable.
 - Revised bus arrangements are due to be implemented soon.
- The **station information display** has now been upgraded and has been found to be more reliable, although there are still times when it is not working.
 - A loudspeaker, remotely controlled from Chippenham or Westbury is desirable, to advise of a delay or cancellation, and provide guidance on alternatives.

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.

- The trains on the TW service now usually have 3 cars, although this will become 2 cars later in the year. Overcrowding in peak times is now less of an issue.
 - The trains do not have appropriate selective remote opening and the guard needs to manually open the doors, which increases the dwell time. However, the faster trains can make up for this.
- The new trains' performance has been very poor in the first quarter 2018.
 - This has been made worse by substitution due to the use of the line for diverted long distance trains
 - In some cases an alternative routing to Chippenham is possible via Bath rather than direct, normally considerably more expensive. However whilst the service is disrupted, the 'via Melksham' fare is allowed via the alternative routing.
 - It is noted that where a change is required, reliability in arrival timings is needed to ensure that the connection can be made. This could be more important than quicker journey timings.
 - It was noted that if a last train connection was missed, it should be possible to get GWR to provide a taxi.
- TW is still pressing for an hourly service in each direction (by 2020) and also to extend the route to Southampton via Southampton airport
- The new timetable (starting May 2018) has some changes to times. However
 - 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) are 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.
 - There is a further need for later trains from Bristol/Bath to Chippenham on weekdays.
- The TW live trains 'app' for mobile phones has been very successful.

5. 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).
- The GWR community rail review will be in Swindon on 15th June 2018, a chance to demonstrate the value of a good TW service.
- ACorp are due to visit Melksham in the next few weeks.
- MRUG will again support the 'Community Rail in the City' initiative at Waterloo on 15th May 2018, (This will be the second year).
- MRUG will support the Carnival on 28th July, at which First Bus intend to provide one of the new D3 yellow branded buses.

6. Finance

- The current situation not clear due to ill-health of treasurer. However alternative arrangements to use a cheque based account were considered at the AGM and adopted (see minutes of 25 April 2018 AGM).

7. AOB none

8. Further meeting dates

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