

Melksham Rail User Group

Melksham
rail user group

Minutes

16 October 2019 at 19:30

Whitley Methodist Chapel

Present

Peter Chidley	Kevin Hayes
Peter Colegate	Roger Witt
Julie Colegate	Eddy Watts
Graham Ellis	Vice-Chair
Judith Gradwell	Alan Wheatherly
John Hamley	Secretary

Graham Ellis took the chair for this meeting.

Apologies

Peter Blackburn	Chairman
Paul Carter	MWPC
George Ewell	
John Glover	Cllr MWPC
Paul Johnson	TWCIC
Sophie Martin	TWCIC
David Phillips	WC
Horace Prickett	Cllr WC
Peter Tapscott	

Abbreviations:

ACoRP - Association of Community Rail Partnerships
 CCIF - Customer and Community Improvement Fund
 LEP - Local Enterprise
 MTC - Melksham Town Council
 MWPC - Melksham Without Parish Council

SNTB - subNational Transport Bodies
 TWCIC - TransWilts Community Interest Company
 TWCRP – TransWilts Community Rail Partnership
 WC – Wiltshire Council
 WWRUG-- West Wilts Rail Users Group

1. Minutes of meeting 24th July 2019

- Minutes were agreed - Proposed Eddy Watts, seconded Roger Witt.

2. Melksham station improvements

- (TWCIC activity) Upgrades to the car parking arrangements and other hub activities are awaiting rectification of the site water supply, before the lease can be finalised.
- Training for on platform tidyng activities is being chased. (*Post meeting. Training for a limited number of volunteers has been organised for January 2019.*)
- Illuminated poster frames have been funded. The timescale for installation is not known at present.
- Taxi companies would like to be able to display a simple 'card' giving telephone numbers etc. *Currently there are some cards displayed informally.*
- A yellow line has been added to the platform as a reminder to keep away from edge.

3. Service changes

- The major timetable changes planned for December, to reflect the electric upgrades, make limited changes to the TW service through Melksham, which remains diesel operated. However connecting services will change, and the following were noted:
 - Existing timetables with faster trains have resulted in longer dwell times on the mainline. This will be reduced in the new timetable, and hence there will be less contingency against late running.
 - Chippenham will see 3 trains per hour, with the TW service slotted in, resulting in some small timing changes
- In early drafts of the timetable, the most heavily used TW train, the 17:36 ex SW1, had been retimed earlier. This has now reverted to 17:36 making commuting easier for passengers who leave work at 17:00.
- The last weekday train from Swindon is now 40 minutes later.
- One train has been removed from the timetable.
- It is understood that a potential Co-Op service has been deferred for two years due to a lack of rolling stock.

4. Service issues

- Train cancellations in the summer were frequent, making the service unattractive for regular users. This appeared to have improved in the late summer/autumn, but significant cancellations are still recorded.
 - The car park appeared to have lower usage on weekdays after the school holidays finished, implying there may have been passengers who reverted to car usage. (Note this observation is subjective and not the result any formal survey.)
- In spite of the poor service, passenger numbers seem buoyant, perhaps surprisingly so.
- On occasions, when a train has been cancelled, travel via Bath where viable, has been authorised at no additional fare.
- Unfortunately, a passenger was struck at Melksham in early October and the relevant service was terminated there. It is understood that no serious injury occurred but such an event has severe impact on the timetable.

5. Promotion

- MRUG supported several local fetes in the summer including Shaw and Semington.
 - The Carnival, Food and River Festival and ‘Over 55s’ event were also attended.
- The 2019 Santa trip will be held on 15th December (running from Melksham (15:05) to Swindon and back), supported by GWR.
 - Details will be finalised at the next meeting (27/11/2019)
 - 80 tickets will be available from the TIC from 28th October. Tickets will be £10 adults, and £5 children.
 - Present wrapping will take place at 48a Spa Road on 12th December. Thanks to Graham for use of his room there.
 - Help from members to hand out presents etc would be appreciated.
- A separate trip, organised by TW will be held on 8th December, picking up at Westbury and Trowbridge. Contact Sophie Martin sophie@transwilts.org for more details.
- A Melksham orientated timetable leaflet is being finalised, and will be distributed at the station to coincide with the new timetable in December (distribution from 29th November through 1st December).
- The December revised timetable may be circulated through the local newspaper and possibly be included in a display advert.
- A new timetable poster for use with the presentation ‘ladder’ will be purchased for use in the New Year promotional activities.
- The MRUG website has been favourably received, but more active work is needed on Facebook and Twitter.

6. Buses

- Changes to the D3 service to/from Bath during the day are likely, with the half hourly service reverting to hourly.
- There is still a possibility of the Community Bus providing a commuter facility to the station, perhaps driven by volunteers.

7. Finance

- A grant (£350) has been received from or from Melksham Town Council, which is much appreciated.
- Application for a grant from MWPC will be made prior to the January 2020 closing date.

8. Other Organisations

- TransWilts <https://transwilts.org/> activities have been covered elsewhere in these minutes.
- MRUG had two representatives at the ACoRP awards in Telford
 - Our vice-chair Graham is to be congratulated on being awarded second on a personal basis (for many railway activities including MRUG)
- When platform training (see 2 above) is complete, MRUG may apply for membership of ACoRP as a station ‘friend’. This could open new avenues of funding to MRUG.
- The Coffee Shop forum covers many issues of interest to Melksham rail users, and may be accessed at <http://www.firstgreatwestern.info/coffeeshop/index.php>. The ‘meet the manager’ session with Mark Hopwood (GM GWR) on 5th November 2019 may be of particular interest.
- Several MRUG members will attend the next Travelwatch SW open meeting on 18th October 2019 <http://travelwatchsouthwest.org/>.
- The Railfuture conference on Accessibility issues was attended by MRUG members. Details of main presentations:
 - Matt Barnes - Great Western Railway - www.railfuture.org.uk/display2168
 - Lorna Brown-Owens - Network Rail - www.railfuture.org.uk/display2169
 - Jon Harris - West Midlands Trains - www.railfuture.org.uk/display2171
- Similarly West Wilts Rail Users Group (WWRUG) <http://www.wwrug.org.uk/> meetings will be of interest.

9. AOB

- Disruption in the Bristol Parkway/ Filton area is expected at weekend in late October, early November.
- Bristol to Portsmouth trains are expected to get more 5 car sets to improve capacity.
- Details of the new timetable (and the leaflet and any other significant promotions) should be circulated through the local Talking Paper service.
 - Material should be sent to Alan Whetherley who can pass to the service.

10. Next meeting and diary

- **Wednesday 27 November 2019 at 19:35 to be held at a meeting room in the Melksham United Church.**
 - The church is located opposite the town hall. There is limited parking at the church. The King St / Church St car parks are close.
 - Access for vehicles or pedestrians is through the archway between the bridal shop and opticians to the left of the church frontage
- For advance notice, the provisional schedule for meetings in 2020 is
 - 22 January 2020, where we plan to concentrate of fares with an expert speaker
 - 18 March 2020
 - 20 May 2020
 - 22 July 2020
 - 16 September 2020
 - 18 November 2020

- Other meetings/significant dates which may be of interest are:
 - 5th November 2019 17:00 **Mark Hopwood** responding to questions on the Coffee Shop <http://www.firstgreatwestern.info/coffeshop/index.php?topic=22275>
 - 6th November 2019 19:00 **Westbury transport issues**, at Laverton, Westbury. Graham Ellis will be speaking.<https://www.wiltshiretimes.co.uk/news/17987478.transport-agenda-westbury-public-meeting/>
 - 11th November 2019 - First bus times change
 - 18th November 2019 13:00 **Trans Wilts 6 monthly stakeholders and members meeting** (attendance limited to members/stakeholders and registration via EventBrite is required) <https://www.eventbrite.co.uk/e/transwilts-6-monthly-meeting-for-stakeholders-and-members-tickets-72501364533>
 - 21st November 2019 19:30 **WWRUG ‘Great Western Railway Update’**, Dan Okey will be speaking <http://www.wwrug.org.uk/flyer.html>
 - 29th November 2019 through 1st December 2019 - distribution of new timetables at the station.
 - 12th December 2019 19:30 **Present wrapping** for Santa outing on 15/12/2019
 - 15th December 2019 15:00 Santa **special** from Melksham to Swindon <http://www.mrug.org.uk/santa.html>
 - 14th January 2020 - Station briefing (attendees by invite only).

Brought forward items for the record

11. Brought Forward Station Issues

- A loudspeaker, possibly 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
 - offers overpriced tickets prior to the first off-peak train, not differentiating Off-Peak and Super-Off Peak (which could give the passenger a saving of £18),
 - Advice should be displayed describing what passengers should do when the ATM is not working.
- Better taxi services are desirable perhaps with peak trains being met on a routine basis.
- The underpass to town could be promoted as it is a good facility. It could be used for community advertising etc.
- During significant planned disruptions, MRUG would like to see a manned assistant to provide help to users. GWR have been unable to provide this due to the lack of ‘welfare’ facilities.
 - Taxis are often made available from the manned stations but only after a long delay. At Melksham where there is no manning, getting a GWR provided taxi is much more difficult. (Note taxis using a station rank are obliged to accept railway business if requested, as part of the agreement to use the rank)
 - Given the 2 hourly schedule, provision of road transport automatically (without chasing the helpdesk) is desirable when cancellations occur.
 - Lack of communication when the train is late or is cancelled is seen as a significant problem.

12. Brought Forward Service improvements desirable

- The following changes to the train service are desirable (in advance of a more general hourly service)
 - 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
 - There is a further need for later trains from Bristol/Bath to Chippenham on weekdays.
- Desirable service improvements are being sought by TWCIC for the next few years.
 - an hourly service in each direction. The LEP may be able to assist but would probably need matched funding.
 - Extension of the route to Southampton (and the airport):- Currently Bournemouth airport is seen as the hub by the Western Gateway subnational transport body, not Southampton. It is suggested that MTC/MWPC are requested to write to the sNTB to state the case for Southampton airport as the rail/air hub.
 - In the other direction Oxford is seen as a desirable destination. Oxfordshire CC have been promoting the case for a Bristol/Oxford service reinstatement, which also assists a case for a Corsham station.

13. Brought Forward Bus Issues

- The 21:30 ex Bath D3 goes empty stock to Westbury after Melksham, partly due to driver hours limitations, Proposals to run this via Bowerhill (which is almost on the same route) are being pursued.
- A bus timetable should be displayed at the station.
- Bus routes 14&15 are being looked at in detail. By some minor changes to the route and retiming, a service from the new housing estates to the station in peak (and other hours) would be possible.
 - Use of the community bus to provide a station service, perhaps with volunteer drivers, is being considered.