

Melksham Rail User Group

Melksham rail user group

Minutes**29th September 2017 at 19:30****Melksham Town Hall****Present**

Peter Blackburn Chairman
 Paul Carter MWPC
 Graham Ellis Vice-Chair
 John Hamley Secretary
 John Money Treasurer

Apologies

Lee Fletcher
 John Glover MWPC
 Judith Gradwell
 Kevin Hayes
 Bob Morrison TWCIC
 Paul Johnson TWCIC
 David Phillips WC
 Paul Taylor MWPC
 Eddie Watts
 Roy While WC

1. Minutes of meeting 23rd June 2017

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

2. Melksham Station Improvements, and Related Infrastructure Upgrades

- Rowdy behaviour and littering (including glass and other dangerous materials) in the new station car park appears to be less of a problem now.
 - BTP are aware of the situation.
- With the upgraded platform in early 2018, the reuse of the cycle houses is probably not required.
 - Some consideration is needed for storage of cleaning materials thereafter, so that 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, may need to be addressed in the future if the problem reoccurs.
- GWR propose the use of cascaded two-car 165 trains in 2018. This will necessitate platform extensions at Melksham and a basic North extension is now confirmed for build in early 2018.
 - This will include reprofiling of the platform to slope away from the track.
- Further upgrades are now covered under a holistic approach by TWCIC. A 'master plan' covering all enhancements is being prepared as a basis for discussions with WC and GWR, and £50k has been provided for this planning by GWR. 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.
 - Improved access via Murray Walk.
 - Northern pedestrian access to Foundry Close (which will also provide a better interchange route with the Chippenham / Melksham buses).
 - Routing other local buses through the station (currently thought to be difficult due to turning space). Town bus services are being retendered, and TWCIC has submitted a proposal that provides for several buses to be routed through the station. (There are other options such as 'keep as is', and reduce the service to a single vehicle).
 - 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 were considering use (on a short-term basis) of the empty Reeds office as a station 'welcome' facility providing informal help to passengers and manned by volunteers and would include provision of Wi-Fi, toilets, defibrillator and the sale of cakes etc:
 - This is now on hold as the Reeds area is to be let for two years to another organisation. As a result, the welcome facility may then be unnecessary if the 'master plan' goes ahead, but in the event that is also delayed, the plan may be reconsidered
 - Outline costs for conversion are estimated at £50,000 (e.g. painting etc), but operational costs have not been reviewed. Business sponsors for the works would be sought.
 - The facility would not provide manned ticket sales unless volunteers were specially trained and liabilities covered.
- The station information display is frequently unavailable. A revised facility using 4G is expected to be installed, but the timescale is currently unknown.
- 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.
- Better taxi services are desirable perhaps with peak trains being met on a routine basis.
- Lighting at the station has been out of service for some time, which can discourage some users, but it has now been repaired.

3. 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.

- Co-Op are still considering an open access service from Taunton to Nuneaton via MKM, possibly at 2 hourly intervals from 2018. The status is currently unknown, although there is good traffic potential. Considerable work is needed for this to progress further.
- 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.
- Publicity is needed to advise what to do if a train to Melksham is cancelled (or overcrowding means that passengers could not board a train)
- Relocation of the TW office to Chippenham is being actively pursued.
- TWCIC and MRUG will attend the next Travel Watch SW review on 7th October.
- The GWR community rail review (held this year in Barnstaple) will be in Swindon next year, a chance to demonstrate the value of a good TW service.
 - At Barnstaple, the TW service was probably the one that most frequently referred in all presentations.
- Revenue collection of the corridor can be limited at times, particularly when the train is crowded.
- Current analysis of passenger usage shows the TW route has the highest growth on community rail lines in the period from 2015/2016 to 2016/2017
 - **A Melksham station usage survey will be held on Thursday 19th, Saturday 21st and Sunday 22nd October. Volunteers are sought to help with this**
 - **Please let Graham Ellis know if and when you can help.**
 - The survey will be paper based at Melksham station with collection between Melksham and Trowbridge/Chippenham.
- A case for revised bus services in Melksham to provide better integrated transport and to encourage more usage through innovative fares has been made as part of a current wide-ranging review. (See www.mbug.org.uk).
- TW responses to requests for input to obligations under the new franchises 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
- A new Chippenham Rail User's Group has been set up, promoted by TW, although the Tw service is relatively minor at that station. It will ensure that all TW served stations have affiliated user groups.
- Train services, but particularly at the weekend, have been very unreliable.
 - Post meeting: 5 out of 18 trains cancelled yesterday, Monday 2nd October 2017 and at least 2 cancelled Tuesday 3rd October 2017.
 - This is a key issue which needs resolution as cancellations after heavy promotion could have a negative effect on new users.

4. Promotion

- GWR have run a service from Swindon to Weymouth during the summer on Sundays, always good for promoting train services.
- Good contact has been maintained with ACoRP including attending meetings.
 - A joint promotional event will be held at Waterloo in May (2018) and will be supported by TW.
 - Peter Blackburn has been shortlisted for an ACoRP award for his sterling work supporting the station and TW services
- Mini-timetables covering Melksham and the TW services have been drafted, and when finalised, will be circulated widely via the local newspaper (see item 5 below). Post meeting, we have permission to include the current GWR Famous Five branding as part of this timetable format.
- 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).
- MRUG and TW held a stall at the River Festival (1/2 Sept 2017). Unfortunately, rain prevented much of the potential support.
- New panels for the bus stops in the Melksham market place have been provided to display railway information and timetables, for which MRUG provided £100 towards the cost.
- A new local 'rover' ticket which provides similar coverage (at a higher price than typical for PlusBus) is being considered.
 - Meanwhile, the existing local train Rover for the area is to have extended coverage as far as Pewsey.

5. Finance

- MTC have generously awarded us with a grant for £300 towards our operational costs.
- Approximately £3,000 is now held.
- Approximately £500 will be spent on promotional timetable circulation via the Melksham Independent News.
- 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. Santa Special
- This will be held to the same formula as previous years, on 17th December, hopefully with a strengthened train as before.
- It will probably be 14:50 ex Melksham departure to Swindon (arrive 15:20), returning 15:28 to Melksham (arrive 15:54).
- **Volunteers are needed to help on the train, at the station and for present wrapping on 15th December. Please let Graham Ellis know if you can help.**

6. AOB

- Questions were raised on the capacity of the summer trains in the region, with little space for luggage on overcrowded trains.

7. Next meeting date

- The next meeting was scheduled for 1st December. However, this has now changed to the **29th November 2017 at 19:30**. Hopefully we can hold this meeting at the Town Hall, but venue will be advised later when confirmed.
- One further meeting for 2017 is now scheduled for **Friday 15th December 2017** for Santa present wrapping.