

Melksham Rail User Group

Melksham rail user group

Minutes

29th November 2017 at 19:30

Whitley Methodist Chapel

Present

Peter Blackburn Chairman
 Peter Colegates
 Julie Colegates
 Graham Ellis Vice-Chair
 Judith Gradwell
 Kevin Hayes
 John Hamley Secretary
 Peter Chidley
 Eddie Watts

Apologies

Lee Fletcher
 Paul Carter MWPC
 John Glover MWPC
 Bob Morrison TWCIC
 Paul Johnson TWCIC
 David Phillips WC
 Tom Steward
 Paul Taylor MWPC
 Roy White WC

1. Minutes of meeting 29th September 2017

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

2. Melksham Station Improvements, and Related Infrastructure Upgrades

- The platform lengthening**, anticipated for early 2018, is now probably delayed. This will not prevent the use of 2 car trains, as the scheduled 150 units have two doors centrally located.
 - 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 will 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. A '**master plan**' covering all enhancements is being prepared as a basis for discussions with WC and 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. 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.
 - This is being actively pursued as it appears to be getting worse.
 - 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 planned for Chippenham**, at which time this problem may be mitigated.

- 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.
 - 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
- **A station audit** has been carried out between WC/GWR and MRUG/TW
 - One result identified is that the 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.

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.

- 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 (held this year in Barnstaple) 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 closes on 22nd December 2017
 - TW have proposed that the two hourly WSB to Salisbury service be extended to Swindon.
 - It was agreed that **Graham Ellis should reply** on both the GWR and SW consultations on behalf of MRUG.
- 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**
 - The summer Sunday early train is now year round and will be extended to Swindon (from Chippenham) from 1st January 2018
 - 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
- **MKM station usage has increased by 23%** (post meeting note) in the current year over last year.
- A 3 day **passenger survey for MKM** was held in October, supported by TW and MRUG.
 - This is being analysed but currently shows a wide range of destinations from MKM.
- TWCIC and attended Travel Watch SW on 7th October.

4. Promotion

- Good contact has been maintained with ACoRP including attending meetings.
 - Peter Blackburn was shortlisted for an ACoRP award for his sterling work supporting the station and TW services.
 - ACoRP is becoming a major force in the industry and now employs 15 staff
- Mini-timetables covering Melksham and the TW services have been circulated widely via the local newspaper and include the current GWR Famous Five branding
- RailFuture has awarded the Melksham station promotion '**Best Campaign in 2017**' (see certificate).
- 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).

5. 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.

6. Santa Special

- This will be held to the same formula as previous years, on 17th December, hopefully with a strengthened train as before, but currently only a one car train, is scheduled shared with general public.
 - Tickets have been limited to 45 people
- It will be on 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.**

7. **AOB none**

8. **Further meeting dates**

- The final meeting for 2017 is now scheduled for **Friday 15th December 2017 19:30 at the Whitley Methodist Chapel** for Santa present wrapping.
- 2018 meetings (all in the Melksham Town Hall) are scheduled as follows:
 - Wednesday 10th January 2018 (to concentrate on the consultations)
 - 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