

1st May 2020

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Melksham rail user group

Dear Members and Supporters of Melksham Rail User Group,

Melksham Rail User Group newsletter – Issue 2 - May 2020

These are extraordinary times, and it's heartbreaking for us to stop promoting travel by public (or private) transport. We are reminding you instead to stay home if you possibly can. We hope this will be a temporary measure, but as we write this newsletter for publication at the start of May, we have no definite indication of how long the current restrictions and advice will last, nor how they will be relaxed when the time comes.

- * Only travel if you must - as a key worker, for essential shopping trips or medical reasons.
- * Observe social distancing and other hygiene rules when using public transport.

Current public transport services operating in Melksham

Service to, from, through and within Melksham as of the start of May are:

- * Trains about every 2 hours to Chippenham and Swindon (Monday to Saturday only)
- * Trains about every 2 hours to Trowbridge and Westbury (Monday to Saturday only)
- * A bus every 2 hours, 7 days a week, to Bath (Faresaver route 273)
- * A bus every 2 hours, 7 days a week, to Devizes (Faresaver route 273)
- * A bus every 60 to 90 minutes, Monday to Saturday, to Chippenham (Faresaver Route x34)
- * A bus every 60 to 90 minutes, Monday to Saturday, to Trowbridge & Frome (Faresaver x34)
- * Town bus (routes 14 and 15) one vehicle service, Monday to Saturday (Fromebus)
- * 3 buses a day, Monday to Saturday, to Trowbridge via Holt (Faresaver and Libra Travel)
- * 2 buses a day, Monday to Saturday, to Corsham (Faresaver route 69)

The following services are NOT running at present:

- * National Express (route 402, London - Melksham - Frome)
- * Buses of Swindon (route x76, Marlborough -Calne -Melksham -Bath -Royal United Hospital)
- * Sunday trains (but Monday to Saturday are running)
- * 271 and 272 bus services (but service 273 is running)
- * Evening buses (final buses at 19:10 from Bath, 19:12 from Devizes)
- * Morning buses from Bath until first service at 11:10.
- * First Bus D3 has ceased running and been deregistered and **it will NOT resume.**

No buses to Bath at present from:

Mallory Place, Melksham Hospital, Coronation Road, Market Place (use King's Arms stop), The Bear, New Broughton Road, stops on Shaw Hill, and The Swan (Kingsdown). Either these are 271/272 only stops, or buses are diverted because of Town Bridge works.

No buses to Chippenham at present from:

Market Place (use temporary stop on Spa Road), The Bear, New Broughton Road - due to Town Bridge diversions.

Pictures of change – then and now

Here are some pictures reminding us how **much** things are changing at the moment. We're bringing you some pictures ... and will ask some questions after the Melksham News section

The need for social distancing on public transport



Fewer people travelling – only travel if you have to



Far fewer flights in the sky



But it's now just about transport – its about our whole lives and environment

People are working from home and that changes their travel pattern



A dividend – the air is cleaner and the congestion has gone



And 'wild'life returns to the towns



MRUG Meetings, events and anniversaries

We cannot hold "real life" meetings at present; it's probably best to describe them as "suspended until further notice". The MRUG officers (Peter, John, Judith and Graham) are in regular touch by phone and email between themselves and with others, and we're aiming to produce a monthly newsletter - this is the second (May) edition. As news breaks it will be updated on the web site, and for members who wish to take a wider view of the public transport news, many of our members and supporters are around, commenting and filing news at <http://www.passenger.chat>.

The Melksham Rail User Group AGM, due on 20th May 2020, won't happen. Your current officers in these exceptional times are carrying on in post as usually happens at our AGMs anyway. If we're able to hold our September meeting, we'll bring AGM business forward there; if not, we'll look to an online meeting with interactive facilities for members (not just showing you a video)

On 13th May 2020, we had planned to celebrate 35 years since the re-opening of Melksham Station with a trip to Swindon, and afternoon tea there, with a history display at Melksham Station and taking in the TransWilts "Community Rail in the City" stall at Swindon which was planned as part of the Community Rail Network (formerly ACoRP) nationwide "Community Rail in the City" event. Clearly, that's all cancelled now. We have pencilled in Saturday May 22nd 2021 for an alternative event.

The Melksham Carnival on 4th July is cancelled too, as are many of the summer series of fairs and fetes. Realistically, it would be a surprise if any happen this year. There is a question mark over autumn events too. The same applies more widely to area community rail events.

At the end of April, we would have had **a new summer timetable** leaflet at the printers. Without certainty of service, without leaflet distribution channels, and without encouragement to travel (quite the reverse!) we have not produced such a leaflet.

Yet in amongst all these cancellations, we have been busy. The reduction of train services and the decimation of bus services has taken us to a low point from where we will, surely, grow back in due course. It's a time with many unknowns, with many opportunities to rebuild better, but also with opportunities for operators to loose awkward though useful services. And we don't have clarity of knowing what societal changes there will be, so what service changes will be needed in the future.

Consideration is needed on how services start to be reinstated after the lockdown. There are suggestions that train services might step back up to around three quarters of the old Monday to Friday level in the not too distant future, and discussions as to what such a service might include and not, with speculative preparation and individual services ongoing. For Melksham, where we have lost exceptionally few trains, a logical step up would be the **restoration of Sunday two morning and two Sunday late afternoon / early evening round trips.**

As / when / if services start to accept additional passengers, we will schedule new events, probably including a **station clean**, a "**meet the customers**", and if we're able **a visit from Santa.**

Keeping in touch

We will circulate a further news letter next month, and in the meantime update you online via <http://www.mrug.org.uk>. You can get in touch via info@mrug.org.uk or phone 0797 4 925 928 (Graham Ellis, Vice Chair). Or ask on Facebook - <https://www.facebook.com/MelkshamRUG> or use our chat (shared with the Great Western Coffee Shop) at <http://www.mrug.org.uk/chat> .

News from GWR

First Group / GWR were awarded a management contract to run the trains for a further three years, possibly extended to four, from 1st April 2020. And at the same time, GWR operated services are taken under emergency government measures. This is for a concurrent period of six months; there's no way they can make money or cover costs with half the trains or less running, and many long distance trains reporting loadings of less than one person per carriage.

The award headlines do talk of extra capacity in the Bristol and Exeter area, but are unclear on detail as yet. For Melksham services, the need has been more rather than longer trains as we're still working on building passengers on the trains that doubled or trebled in length less than 2 years ago; that need may change if there's a continued need for social distancing on trains but with the majority of people travelling again.

GWR have cancelled their June Community Rail conference but continue to liaise well online.

News from TransWilts

The AGM, Stakeholders meeting and annual conference have been cancelled, but the annual report was published (28th April). It includes chair and community rail officer reports; the copy for our members is online at http://www.mrug.org.uk/TransWilts_Annual_Report_2020.pdf

Progress continues on the "White Horse Room" at Westbury Station and the Melksham Masterplan, growing station and facilities.

A press release on 27th April announced a new sponsorship deal from Knorr Bremse: "Working with GWR and Wiltshire Council, TransWilts has developed an ambitious and detailed Master Plan for the Melksham station site. Phase 1 of the Plan has received planning permission and includes new platform signage, destination indicators, increased parking, electric vehicle charging, cycle storage and even a community café! Phase 2 would see further improvements in the layout at the station including northern pedestrian access.

The TransWilts Chair, Paul Johnson, commenting on the new Knorr-Bremse package said, "I'm delighted to have secured this three-year stakeholder partnership with Knorr-Bremse Rail Systems UK. TransWilts and GWR can now work together with a major local employer to transform the Melksham Station facilities. The Knorr-Bremse involvement is a great example of a company taking an innovative approach in support of its local community. ""

MRUG supports and encourages TransWilts (of which we are a member, and our chair is on their board) in the long term enhancement of Melksham Station and its services which are getting to be more important with every passing year as passenger numbers grow towards the sort of numbers for a typical town of our size.

Our partners

All of our partners find themselves in new territory; their websites are:

GWR - <https://www.gwr.com>

Faresaver Buses - <http://www.faresaver.co.uk>

Fromebus - <http://www.fromebus.co.uk>

TransWilts CRP - <https://transwilts.org>

TravelWatch SouthWest - <http://travelwatchsouthwest.org>

Wiltshire Council (Transport) - <http://www.wiltshire.gov.uk/transport>

Melksham Town Council - <https://www.melkshamtown.co.uk>

Melksham Without Parish Council - <http://melkshamwithout.co.uk>

RailFuture - <https://www.railfuture.org.uk/Welcome+to+Railfuture>

Transport Focus - <https://www.transportfocus.org.uk>

Passenger forum (Coffee Shop) - <http://www.passenger.chat>

Community Rail Network (formerly ACoRP) - <https://communityrail.org.uk>

Wiltshire Council (Transport) - <http://www.wiltshire.gov.uk/transport>

Looking forward to future public transport services

Even public transport group meetings have changed ...



And some things we are considering at those meetings

Questions ... (general ones) ...

- * What has changed for the moment, and what (if anything) has changed for ever?
- * How will the UK and the world move forward from its current position?
- * How can we help inform and influence to make best use for our new world?
- * How do we look after the regional and local elements in the national and global picture?
- * Are there opportunities to improve as we (re)develop, and to loose things that weren't good?
- * Are there risks of loosing things that we should keep, and of missing opportunities?

We "need" / it is desirable to ...

- * Look after the planet (climate and clean)
- * Look after people's lives (mental and physical)
- * Look after the economy (macro and micro)

Questions ... (transport ones) ...

- * How long will lockdown last and how will it be released?
- * Clean Air and climate change - how can this agenda be driven forward too?
- * At what returned levels will travel be required - public and private?
- * What is the need for speed, for frequency, for capacity, for journey start / end points?
- * How will public transport be safe with regards infection control?
- * What will be the economic model for public transport?
- * Life style changes - working from home, order and deliver?
- * Will people want to travel, staycation "levels" - abroad, own country, own home?
- * What early restrictions and what is "early"?
- * How far ahead do we look?
- * Are there opportunities to restart better?

Questions ... (for Campaign and support groups in the community) ...

- * How do we support and advise our members?
- * How do we co-ordinate?
- * How do we implement the macro ideas into the micro of individual services?
- * How do we campaign?
- * How do we resist the extreme dogma (if indeed we do)?

And finally – please take care of yourselves and your loved ones. We look forward to seeing you all at date some time in the future.

Peter Blackburn - Chair John Hamley – Secretary
Judith Gradwell – Treasurer Graham Ellis – Vice Chair