

Melksham Rail User Group

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Minutes**28th November 2018 at 19:30****Melksham Town Hall****Present**

Peter Blackburn	<i>Chairman</i>	John Hamley	<i>Secretary</i>
Rolf Brindle		Kevin Hayes	
Paul Carter	<i>MWPC</i>	Paul Johnson	<i>TWCIC</i>
Peter Chidley		Phil McMullen	
Peter Colegate		Sophie Martin	<i>TWCIC</i>
Julie Colegate		Horace Prickett	<i>WC</i>
Graham Ellis	<i>Vice-Chair</i>	Eddy Watts	
Judith Gradwell		Roger Witt	
John Glover	<i>MWPC</i>		

Apologies

David Phillips	<i>WC</i>
Adrienne Westbrook	<i>MTC</i>

1. Minutes of meeting 4th July 2018

- Minutes were agreed - Proposed Paul Carter, seconded Paul Johnson.

2. Membership issues

- Cllr Adrienne Westbrook (Mayor - MTC) has been assigned to support MRUG by MT and is welcomed to the 'team'. Unfortunately, private issues prevented attendance on this occasion.
- Sophie Martin has been appointed CRO at TW, following the resignation from the TW board of Graham Ellis, and was also welcomed.
- Our treasurer, John Money, sadly passed away in the late summer. John Money had been a founding member of MRDG/MRUG since the late 1990s and had bad health in the past few months. A memorial event will be held at the Seaton Tramway, where John had been a driver, on 28th April 2019.
- Graham Ellis has resigned as board member and CRO for TW. Richard Gamble (WC councillor) has been appointed to the board, and Sophie Martin has been employed as the new CRO.

3. Melksham station community café etc

- TransWilts are reviewing options for conversion of the Reeds hut into a community café/toilet/advice centre for travellers.
 - The first phase may be limited by funds to conversion of the existing Reeds building (estimated at approx. £77k).
 - The café could be operating before planned car park changes, possibly in 2019.
 - Changes to the lease arrangements are envisaged, allowing GWR to take over the car park. This is however only likely to happen after the refranchise award has been finalised.
- Ideally the refurbish building would include
 - Solar heating and other environmental features.
 - Office for community rail volunteer
 - Small café with seating for 6+
 - Real time train information displays in the facility
 - Accessible and unisex toilet (maybe combined)
 - External seating area
 - Preferably 'highly' visible from train to emphasise Melksham station
- Matched funding from GWR CCIF to support this project has been applied for.
 - A decision is due to be announced January 2019.
- Some other funds will only be available after April 2019.

4. Melksham station master plan (except café)

- Further **upgrades** are now covered under a holistic approach by TWCIC. A 'master plan' covering all enhancements is being prepared. Currently the following works are being considered
 - Improved access via Murray Walk.
 - Northern pedestrian access to Foundry Close (which will also provide a better interchange route with the Chippenham / Melksham buses).
 - 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.

5. Melksham station improvements

- The station platform has been lengthened to support three car trains.
 - The work included reprofiling the entire platform to slope away from the track, and removal of the cycle house.
- A need has been identified to keep posters etc up to date. GWR have been very proactive in advising of engineering works, but when the works are cancelled (so that trains can still run), revised information is not always displayed
- 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.
- Better taxi services are desirable perhaps with peak trains being met on a routine basis.
- Routing local buses through the station is desirable, and will be promoted by MRUG in 2019.
- Hopefully MRUG will be able to 'adopt' the station, allowing us to undertake some basic duties, such as maintenance of the flower beds.
 - Judith Gradwell offered to help with the flower beds.

6. Trans Wilts and Service Issues

TW issues consider the services and general issues for the entire TW corridor. The following summary lists key issues that relate directly to the Melksham service.

- TW is still pressing for
 - an hourly service in each direction (by 2020) which needs a loop to provide timetable resilience.
 - A design solution for the passing loop will be needed, hopefully funded in CP6. The LEP may be able to assist but will need matched funding.
 - Extension of the route to Southampton (possibly the airport), which is being viewed positively by the TOCs and DfT.
- The following changes are also desirable (in advance of the more frequent 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. 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.
 - No timetable changes till end 2019.
- Timetables are difficult to interpret unless the user is familiar with the service, especially to identify through trains, or where connections are to be made.
- For the first year since our current viable service was introduced, passenger numbers have not grown (forecast for 2018).
 - This is the result of service reliability issues and bus-titution when the TW line is used for diverted long distance trains
 - Current expectations are for a small increase in patronage in 2019, and again in 2020.
- During significant planned disruptions, MRUG would like to see a manned assistant to provide help to users. GWR were unable to provide this due to the lack of 'welfare' facilities.
- There will be two TW stakeholder meetings per annum, at which members can attend and submit questions, The most recent was on 26th November 2018. (*See attached Q/A document. For the next meeting, see events list below.*)
 - Jane Jones of GWR apologised for the poor service and reliability issues.
 - Disruptions going forward should be significantly reduced
 - Rolling stock failures may be resolved with new stock (expected by end 2018).
- The Wilts Rail Strategy review, funded by LEP and WC, will review funding for infrastructure.
- A new platform at Chippenham, originally promoted by TW, is now really only needed if (Bristol) MetroWest terminates there.
 - Platform 4 at Westbury is more critical to our services, and it is regretted that the engineering works at Christmas do not make passive provision for this.
- The TWCIC may become accredited.

7. Promotion

- MRUG had a presence at the Carnival on 28th July, at which First Bus [provided one of the new D3 yellow branded buses. Thanks to Graham Ellis for coordinating this promotional activity.
- An promotional summer event to the seaside may be held in 2019.

8. Santa Trip

- This will be held on Sunday 9th December from Melksham to Swindon, out at 14:50 and returning on the same train.
 - Hopefully a separate carriage will be reserved for the event. Ticket numbers have been limited to seating in one carriage.
- Presents will be wrapped on 4th December at WHM, 19:00.
- A Risk assessment has been prepared and agreed with GWR.
- A leaflet (being prepared by Graham Ellis) will be handed out, including bus and train times over the Christmas period and for the start of 2019.
- An anticipated Westbury/Trowbridge to Swindon Santa event will not now be run.

9. Finance

- As an interim until the AGM, following John Money's death, John Hamley will act as Treasurer.
- Funds will be held with the TW account and the Coventry account, which will be kept open for cash access. Signatories will include John Hamley, together with the existing names, i.e. Peter Blackburn, Graham Ellis and Rolf Brindle.
- It was agreed that travel costs for John Hamley attendance at TravelWatch SW would be payable by MRUG.
- Total balance going forward is £1,976.05 with some existing commitments
- A grant has been gratefully received from MTC, and an application will be made in January 2019 to MWPC.

10. AOB

- MRUG members supported the need for more through trains to the North (e.g. Oxford), to complement extensions to Southampton.
- The GWR coffee shop covers many issues of interest to Melksham rail users, and may be accessed at <http://www.firstgreatwestern.info/coffeeshop/index.php>.

11. Next and subsequent meetings

Wednesday 23 January 2019 at 19:30.

- For advance information, meeting dates for 2019 have been set as follows. All meetings at 19:30, in the Town Hall.
 - Wednesday 23 January 2019
 - Wednesday 20 March 2019
 - Wednesday 22 May 2019 regular meeting plus AGM
 - Wednesday 24 July 2019
 - Wednesday 18 September 2019
 - Wednesday 27 November 2019

- Also of interest to members are the following. Locations/times will be advised when confirmed:
 - 27 April 2019 TW AGM (location tba)
 - Sunday 28 April 2019, Seaton , allowing both a seaside outing and (optionally) attendance at John Money's celebration
 - 20 May 2019 TW stakeholders meeting (TW members only), location tba
 - 29 June 2019 TW conference (public invited)