

TransWilts

The TransWilts line serving Melksham was the fastest growing line across the Great Western Railway area in the financial year ended April 2017, with 247,000 passenger journeys - that's compared to around 18,000 in the year to April 2013 before the service was improved, and compares to the air of around 120,000 we had for last year. The service is now a permanent part of the franchise and "designated" which gives us some additional levers and potential (small) funding opportunities. Demand is now exceeding capacity, and delays in electrification of the main line mean that rolling stock is not available to increase the length of our train, or the number of services (quite apart from cost issues). Melksham Station itself has passenger numbers that have risen from around 3,000 journeys per annum to over 60,000 and that also creates issues away from the railway line, with regards to getting all those people safely through the industrial area in which the station is located and to/from final destinations. It's noted that - although there's a bus stop at the station - no scheduled buses call there any longer. It is used on days when engineering works are taking place on the railway, and buses replace trains.

The platform at Melksham should be lengthened next January (2018) and at around that time there will be a cascading of 2 car trains to replace the one car train. Planning for further significant upgrade to Melksham Station is being funded by GWR, WC, area board and town and parish grants; forecasts are that - given capacity - traffic will rise from the 60,000 to around 300,000 journeys per annum. The TransWilts team met with GWR a week ago to discuss handling this extra growth prior to the provision of additional stock, and are exploring ideas of using a train that's parked at Swindon in the late afternoon for an extra shuttle run to Melksham to fill the gap from 15:12 to 17:36 in trains from Swindon (with at 16:48) and in trains from Melksham to Swindon (gap from 16:35 to 18:45) with an extra train at 17:20. We are also looking at the possibility of a later evening service, but this may have further cost implications while we're just a one car service (expensive staffing costs for tiny train!)

Melksham's supported bus services, including the town bus, are due to be retendered from next January, and I look forward to presenting this further at the Area Board, as invited at the previous meeting. We have been invited to make community inputs for an option that's different to a repeat of the current routes and times (but perhaps with cutbacks due to funding issues) and times of the essence - inputs needed by mid June by Wiltshire Council. See <http://mbug.uk> for some details of that - in summary we feel that services can be retuned to make use of new opportunities that weren't available when the current services were set up, at no extra cost but and can set us up for better used (so more self-financing) services. Lots of technical work going on there!

Melksham Rail User Group (the Melksham-specific partner of TransWilts meets at 19:30 on 23rd June at the Town Hall - all welcome Graham Ellis