

# Melksham Rail User Group

# Melksham rail user group

**Record of Meeting 16 September 2020 at 19:30**

**Held by Zoom**

**Present:**

Rolf Brindle *Melksham Neighbourhood Plan, transport rep*  
 Peter Chidley  
 Graham Ellis *Vice-Chair*  
 Lee Fletcher  
 John Hamley *Secretary*  
 Joanna Harries  
 Paul Johnson *Chair TWCIC*

**Apologies**

Pat Aves *Cllr MTC & WC*  
 Peter Blackburn *Chairman*  
 John Glover *Cllr MWPC*  
 Judith Gradwell *Treasurer*  
 Kevin Hayes  
 Clive Jeffries *Cllr MTC*  
 Horace Prickett *Cllr WC*  
 Peter Tapscott

**Abbreviations:**

ACoRP - Association of Community Rail Partnerships,  
 -now CRN, Community Rail Network  
 CCIF - Customer and Community Improvement Fund  
 GWR – Great Western Railway  
 LEP - Local Enterprise Partnership  
 MTC - Melksham Town Council  
 MWPC - Melksham Without Parish Council

MRUG – Melksham Railway User Group  
 SNTB - subNational Transport Bodies  
 TWCIC - TransWilts Community Interest Company  
 TWCRP – TransWilts Community Rail Partnership  
 WC – Wiltshire Council  
 WWRUG-- West Wilts Rail Users Group

**Note:**

- The meeting was informal due to service restrictions and other Covid-19 constraints limiting meeting to online only.
- This document provides an outline record of proceedings only.
- Meeting slides are available at [http://www.mrug.org.uk/mrug\\_20200916.pdf](http://www.mrug.org.uk/mrug_20200916.pdf)
- Apologies to several people who were unable to connect to the session for technical reasons.

**1. Melksham station upgrades (TWCIC activities)**

- Full details on the hub website <https://melkshamhub.co.uk/home/>
- Work on site is progressing well.
  - CCTV and car parking charging commissioned and in use
  - The Hub building in progress, but will not be internally fitted until an operator is chosen and there is a business case for sufficient usage
  - New information displays (ex Chippenham) have been installed and commissioned.
  - New double sided poster boards (solar powered) (funded from a CCIF grant) have been installed and commissioned.
  - The northern extension to car park will not open until sufficient demand warrants this, but most of the infrastructure is place.
  - The groundwork for the ramp to the new Northern car park area has been installed but this area will not be brought into use until demand increases.
  - Car charging points have been installed (inc two in the existing car park area) but require additional power supplies before commissioning.
  - The TW team were complimented on the progress and quality of the work.

**2. TransWilts Accreditation**

- Accreditation of TW by the Department for Transport has recently been renewed for a year. This has required significant work. Well done TW.

**3. Station Activity**

- Currently any volunteer work at the station by MRUG members would be limited to off-platform activities, as specified by GWR.
  - If MRUG wish to undertake other activities such as litter picking, a plan of work can be applied for from GWR. Sophie Martin of TW can coordinate this.
- TW are also seeking volunteers for a variety of tasks related to the Hub, such as painting. (Contact Sophie Martin at TW).
- Train usage information recorded by Graham Ellis and other MRUG members is being collected. Any observations could usefully be sent to Graham Ellis.
- Car park usage data for TW is now collected electronically by the charging system. Current subjective observations are that the usage is very low at present.

#### 4. Timetable

- From 31<sup>st</sup> August, the morning peak train to Swindon has been reinstated
- From w/e 19<sup>th</sup> September, all previous weekend trains will be reinstated
- Commuting issues
  - On weekdays at Swindon, between 17:36 to 20:45 there is no train – a long wait if the 17:36 is missed
  - Also on weekdays, the last train at 18:39 from Westbury is earlier than pre-Covid,

#### 5. Services Future

- There is a possibility of key trains being taken out of the timetable in 2021,
- Particular concerns are
  - a suggestion to remove the first Sunday morning train from Melksham next year, (leaving the first southbound train at 12:06)
  - the lack of any proposal to fill the evening gap from Swindon back to Westbury. This is understandable in the Covid environment, but it should really be a temporary hole in the service and fixed from December.
  - Lack of morning Sunday trains, which could lose the ability for a reasonable day out
- A report on the effect of removing these trains has been submitted to GWR.
  - Graham will follow up at the end of September with GWR and if there is no review / movement will press further and perhaps call on MRUG members to help raise publicity on the issue.

#### 6. Bstitution

- There has been, and will be, significant bus replacement services from the station.
  - This has caused some problems recently and MRUG could help
  - Where necessary we could help directing people from the platform to the bus stop. Not everyone realises that the bus stop is on the station approach and does not pick up at the platform gate. In particular we will attempt to have a volunteer at the station for the first two services on Sunday every weekend whilst the bus service is running to help passengers connect with the buses.
  - Ensure bus signs are clear and point to the bus stop
  - The new departure displays only show trains departing. When replacement buses are running, the display shows "There are no scheduled departures from this platform" without reference to the buses. The old WEBtis display is not functioning. The TV screen by the pickup / dropoff area does include the buses, the top of the screen is very dim so the next 2 departures are difficult to read, and it's the third and fourth - typically over 2 hours away - that passengers see.

#### 7. Promotion

- No Santa 2020 will be held this year. Very unfortunate but inevitable.
- The MRUG website has been modified so that it works well on mobile devices as well as computers.
- The newsletter which has been distributed monthly will be continued for a few more months until we see how the train service develops with the pandemic.

#### 8. Melksham Transport Users Group

- MRUG developed as a railway pressure group in the late 1990s. Services are now viable (although considerable improvement is very desirable) and TransWilts are promoting the services and developing the Hub.
- The group has always been interested in other transport issues for Melksham and the area. It is therefore up for consideration that we rename the group to Melksham Transport User Group.
- This in no way would diminish our involvement with the railway service but expand our operation to cover the Melksham buses.
- This will be developed over the next few months and we will propose formalising our new name at the next AGM.

#### 9. Bus Issues

- Since April all bus services in Melksham have been provided by Faresaver (except the town services by Frome Buses and the long-distance coach services by National Express.)
- Although First Bus provided an excellent service, two competing companies resulted in some anomalies where the routes were similar.
- Faresaver have taken over the principal D3 route and built a new timetable (271, 272, 273) which replaces many of the previous services. Faresaver are also providing evening and Sunday services on the 272 route which they previously did not.
- MRUG wish Faresaver every success with this new venture, which complements the Melksham railway service to Chippenham and Trowbridge.

#### 10. AOB

- Network Rail have produced a suggested roadmap/ business case for carbon reduction on rail services which includes electrification for the TW line. This very commendable but unlikely to happen for many years.
  - See <https://www.networkrail.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/Traction-Decarbonisation-Network-Strategy-Interim-Programme-Business-Case.pdf>

#### 11. Next meeting

- **Wednesday 18 November 2020 19:30 (probably by Zoom)**

### Websites for Reference

- **MRUG** [www.mrug.org.uk](http://www.mrug.org.uk)
- **TransWilts** <https://transwilts.org/>
- **Station Hub** <https://melkshamhub.co.uk/home/>
- **GWR** <https://www.gwr.com/>
- **Railfuture** <https://www.railfuture.org.uk/Sevenside+Branch>
- **Coffee Shop** <http://www.firstgreatwestern.info/coffeeshop/index.php>.
- **Neighbourhood Plan** <https://www.melkshamneighbourhoodplan.org/copy-of-housing>
- **Faresaver Buses** <http://www.faresaver.co.uk/>
- **Frome Buses** <http://www.fromebus.co.uk/>
- **Travelwatch SW** <http://www.travelwatchesouthwest.org/>
- **Community Rail Network (was ACoRP)** <http://communityrail.org.uk/>