

Melksham Rail User Group



Minutes

28th February 2018 at 19:30

Melksham Town Hall

Present

Peter Blackburn Chairman
 Peter Chidley
 Peter Colegate
 Julie Colegate
 Graham Ellis Vice-Chair
 Judith Gradwell
 John Hamley Secretary
 Paul Johnson TWCIC
 Anne Lock
 Horace Prickett WC

Apologies

Paul Carter MWPC
 John Glover MWPC
 Kevin Hayes
 John Money
 Bob Morrison TWCIC
 David Phillips WC
 Eddy Watts

1. Minutes of meeting 10th January 2017

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

2. Melksham Station Proposal for Former Reeds Site

- TransWilts are bidding for money and facilities to upgrade Melksham station. The plans to relocate Melksham Tyre Services (MTS) to the former Reeds area are relatively long term partly as the additional platform space will not be needed immediately.
 - The proposed 2 year lease of the area has not yet happened, which provides an opportunity to make use of the site on an intermediate time basis until the 'master plan' changes are possible.
 - TW have a 3 month window in which to make a business case for use of the area for railway related purposes.
 - The potential rent for the site would be typically £16,000 and this would need addressing in the plan.
 - ACorp have offered match funding for preparation of the intermediate plan (£3,000) and this will in part be used to prepare an architect's plan for the area.
 - ACorp are also able to help with match funding for the first annual rent.
- TW see three main revenue generating uses of the area, (and another uses that provide valuable services without revenue generating directly):
 - Bus turning space (not revenue generating)
 - Additional car parking (how this is administered needs consideration, it could be by WC, GWR or the TWCIC itself)
 - Warehouse sublet for use by a community organisation; day care was identified as one possible use
 - Conversion of the hut into a community café, with toilet, together with a passenger advice service (and leading perhaps to ticket issue in the future)
- Critical to the success of such a project would be a reliable rota of volunteers to run the café.
 - Volunteers would need to be sourced from outside MRUG as there are insufficient members to provide a consistent service. Volunteers could perhaps be provided by local companies as a promotional exercise.
 - Initially opening times might be limited but **must be consistent** so regular users could rely on the facility and services.
- A thriving 'hut' would make the station more welcoming which would encourage additional users
- MRUG felt that a **viable volunteer force could be found**, and the need for the intermediate plans to be furthered was important to the future of the expanding station capability.
 - With this conclusion, it was agreed that MRUG would write to TW confirming this (**JRH to action**).

3. Melksham Station Improvements, and Related Infrastructure Upgrades

- There has been reports of the station forecourt and surrounding area **being used for used car sales**. This will be investigated as it takes up space needed for rail users.
- The platform lengthening**, anticipated for early 2018, is now scheduled for quarter one 2018.
 - Reprofiling of the platform to slope away from the track may not now happen at the same time.
- Removal of the **cycle houses** is needed.
- Currently, parking charges have not been implemented at the main station car park after a recent review by WC.
- 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.
- 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 at Trowbridge which does not have ticket gates). Chippenham now has operational gates which will help contain this problem.
 - Cases have been reported where the TVM and the conductor were both unable to accept card payments.
- 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 is desirable.
 - Revised bus arrangements are due to be implemented soon.

- **Information posters** at the station could be improved.
- The **station information display** is frequently unavailable. A revised facility using 4G is expected to be installed, but the timescale is currently unknown.
 - 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.
- Further upgrades are now covered under a holistic approach by TWCIC. The first draft of a '**master plan**' covering all enhancements is being prepared. 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 would facilitate 5 car trains.
 - 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.

4. **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.

- The trains on the TW service now usually have 3 cars, although this will become 2 cars later in the year. Overcrowding in peak times is now less of an issue.
 - The trains do not have appropriate selective remote opening and the guard needs to manually open the doors, which increases the dwell time. However, the faster trains can make up for this.
- The new trains' performance was good in January but seems to have **deteriorated in February**.
- Fares to a number of key locations now have **reduced off-peak day returns**.
- TW is still pressing for an **hourly service** in each direction (by 2020) and also to extend the route to Southampton via Southampton airport. In addition
 - **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.
 - There is a further need for **later trains from Bristol/Bath to Chippenham** on weekdays
 - There is a need for earlier trains to/from Warminster
- Timetable changes
 - 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.
- MRUG and TW have both submitted responses to the **consultations** on the GWR franchise and the DFT Community Rail Strategy.

5. **Promotion**

- 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).
- The GWR community rail review will be in Swindon on 15th June 2018, a chance to demonstrate the value of a good TW service.
- ACorp are due to visit Melksham in the next few weeks.

6. **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.

7. **AOB none**

8. **Further meeting dates**

- 2018 meetings (all in the Melksham Town Hall) are scheduled as follows
 - **Wednesday 25 April 2018- AGM**
 - Wednesday 27 June 2018
 - Wednesday 26 September 2018
 - Wednesday 28 November 2018
 - Wednesday 12 December 2018