

Notes for Westbury Town - 15th July 2019

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I was at a meeting of TravelWatch SouthWest earlier this week ... and Westbury as a travel hub is of such importance, and with so much in a state of flux, that it took up a great deal of our discussions. And next Monday I'm filling in the Town Council's Highways, Planning and Development meeting on what's coming up (that I know about) on public and strategic planning that will effect the Westbury Hub.

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 - * Station Bridge, etc
 - * WWRUG, TWSW, RailFuture.
 - * Buses
- ... *not sure which are common knowledge* ...

** Sub National Transport Bodies - Western Gateway STB

- Things like Transport for the North - Ours is Western Gateway

The aim of the Western Gateway STB is to produce a long-term Strategic Transport Plan to identify and prioritise transport infrastructure, which will improve strategic connectivity between major centres and ports in the region.

Once the strategy is adopted the Western Gateway STB will actively lobby Government and work closely with Highways England, Network Rail, train operating companies and other key bodies to improve connectivity across strategic travel corridors in the region.

Currently the Western Gateway SSTB is working to respond to the Governments request to identify our investment priorities for the major road network over the period of 2020 to 2025.

Diagram – shows strategic transport corridors as mapped in the report.

We aim to make our submission to Government over the summer (2019) and the submission will be accompanied by a Regional Evidence Base that will provide the basis of our long- term transport strategy.



Schemes suggested for north and west Wiltshire:

- * A350 Chippenham Bypass Improvements – Phases 4 & 5 Wiltshire Council 2020/21
- * A350 - M4 J17 Improvement Wiltshire Council 2022/23
- * A350 Melksham Bypass scheme

Above from:

<https://www.gloucestershire.gov.uk/media/2090049/western-gateway-sub-national-transport-body-frequently-asked-questions.pdf>

** SWLEP - Rail review

A Vision for Rail in Swindon & Wiltshire

The outcomes of this study provide the component parts to deliver a vision for the development of the rail network in Swindon and Wiltshire over the period to 2036 that achieves the following:

A rail network that supports the economy and improves quality of life for residents and businesses within Swindon & Wiltshire

A rail network with enhanced connectivity to other key regional centres

Improved access to the rail network for residents and businesses through new stations and better integration

Maintaining and improving existing links to key regional and national centres

On the basis of the assessment and evidencing process the top 5 priorities for SWLEP stakeholders to consider developing may thus be: -

Bristol – Oxford and extension to East-West Rail when commissioned

Southampton – TransWilts – Oxford, Birmingham and restructured TransWilts Corridor

New GWML stations – Corsham, Swindon West, Swindon East

Paddington-Westbury-Trowbridge-Bristol services plus Devizes Parkway

New West of England stations and Salisbury-Waterloo journey time reductions

Above from:

<http://gwr.passenger.chat/swlep-rail-strategy-final-09-05-2019.pdf>

** Timetables, December 2019

Timetable rewrite -

"No paths remain unchanged" to accommodate quicker journeys on new trains

London - Westbury - Exeter (some beyond) semi-fast.

Every 2 hours - +1 on current train count, plugging gap

London - West Country expresses

Hourly (so some extra)

Cardiff - Portsmouth.

Every hour,

now 5 carriages not 3,
3+2 seating.

Bristol - Westbury locals; Weymouth

line services; Warminster and

Southampton extras

little change.

Swindon - Westbury.

Some significant retimings.

Reduced by one train

Longer Gap between trains.

SWR / Waterloo and Yeovil services

remain slotted into the mix



- * Government spec and speed and regularity of London services are key drivers
- * Connections at Westbury - some improved, some broken - pretty well random
- * Opportunities to make small changes that would make a big difference have not been taken
- * "Curious and perverse" services remain as such, and even curiously in some cases
- * Customer rep "consultations" more a damage limitation exercise.
- * Zero visibility on weekend plans as yet

Above from:

http://gwr.passenger.chat/tmb_201905.pdf

Recent addendum suggests that some new services will be phased in.

That is probably on London - Bristol corridor but could also effect London via Westbury additions.

** Bristol Metro

Plans are to provide an extra hourly service from Avonmouth / Bristol to Bath Spa

It would / will extend to Westbury to reverse giving 3 trains an hour (2 stopper, 1 semifast) to / from Bristol

Expected in a couple of years; WECA funding, unsure of any Wilts Council financial involvement
Extending to Westbury in place of capital spend to add turnaround at Bath or of a Chippenham (via Corsham) extension

** Go-op

Potential open access operator applying to run extra services -

- * around 5 a day, from Taunton via Westbury to Swindon, various other options on service
- * Been around as proposals for a while. Sensible cases but repeatedly slipped
- * Current suggestion is trains to start in late 2020.

See:

<http://www.go-op.coop>

** DA3 and beyond

"Direct award 3" - currently under discussion between DfT and First Group

(But note instability at First Group)

For period 2020 to 2022 or 2024 - what will the government buy? Westbury-centric, hope for:

- * Increase of 2-hourly semi fast London to Exeter to hourly
- * Linkage of Swindon - Westbury, Westbury - Warminster / Salisbury, Salisbury - Southampton services
- * Potential improvement as far as Yeovil on Weymouth line

These latter 2 already subject of study by SWR to DfT

However, key drivers are what is costs HMG and what is best business for First.

** Timetables, a longer term view

- See December 2019 changes
- See "Bristol Metro"
- See Go-op
- See DA3
- See SWLEP report, hourly Swindon - Southampton

** SWR franchise in trouble

SWR is 70% First and 30% MTR.

Major problems experienced and it's likely that First will hand over/back the keys

Not uncommon in the franchising world - effect of competition

Existing services carry on no doubt; less clear on future development

**** Great West Way**

VisitWiltshire is promoting overseas independent tourism to Wiltshire under Great West Way brand.

Significant Government funding.

Looking to get visitors for secondary sites not just Stonehenge / Bath / Windsor honey pots "Great West Way Discoverer" tickets - East, West and Global meet at Westbury.

Discoverer tickets include a significant bus element but only certain routes (just D1 at Westbury)

Initial data suggests that takeoff has been slower than hoped.

Tickets available at much lower cost and without peak restrictions if bought outside the UK.

See

<https://www.gwr.com/plan-journey/tickets-railcards-and-season-tickets/great-west-way>

**** Williams and fares**

Major review of structure of rail, franchising, etc - consultation closed, results in late autumn.

Rail Delivery Group, fares review ("fairer fares") last year - report became input to Williams?

Short section in this report but huge potential, especially when mixed with wider politics.

**** Freightliner and stone**

New contract for stone train operation from early November 2019

There will no longer be an "operational base" at Westbury

Unclear to me on effect on rail jobs at Westbury or on local contracts for support services

**** Dilton Marsh**

Trains by SWR that were in May 2019 timetable to call - calls removed shortly before due to start.

Andrew Ardley of SWR says the calls got in "by mistake" and were "never intended" (26.6.2019 / TW conference).

"New business case would be needed to add them."

I have my doubts / believe someone is stretching or being economic with information.

Great interest at Dilton Marsh on 6th April / Railfuture AGM there.

No follow up from Railfuture branch or from WC Portfolio holder (and TransWilts director) who were present that day in spite of requests to do so.

Swindon - Westbury - Salisbury - Southampton service calling at Dilton Marsh remains excellent potential

Current services hardly change in December 2019

Expect some trains to be quieter (less through passengers) due to future running mainly to meet franchise not connection needs.

From tone of answers at TW conference, some clearly still regard Dilton Marsh as a joke; we were once in the same position with Melksham. In my opinion, with an hourly Southampton - Westbury - Swindon service calling in place of current services, passenger numbers could rise ten-fold

**** HS2 construction traffic**

1. Construction of track panels at the old cement works
2. Carriage of spoil to Quidhampton Quarry
3. Stone from Mendip quarries as ballast

**** Platform 4 and doubling via Melksham**

At times Westbury Station is already limited in capacity
More pressing need to add back track along 4th platform as more services added
Currently just about OK if everything running to time and lack of decent scheduled connections accepted

Last Christmas work was purely renewal - no enabling work done for extra track (?)
For future - some mitigations such as extending Metro West and Swindon services to turn back at Frome?

With HS2 construction and call for appropriate (not poor) service from Westbury via Chippenham ...

With a requirement for further freight from Southampton up to the midlands and north

With a requirement for alternative routings to the Berks and Hants

With future services from the South West to East/West rail

... a need for extra capacity between Trowbridge and Chippenham.

Could be a good dynamic loop and perhaps lay-by, could be almost complete redoubling

Both of these key items in SWLEP report

**** Community Room and Community Rail Office**

£20,000 from GWR / CCIF plus undisclosed match funding being spent on ex Buffet on platform 1 this year

Room has been used as meeting room and store in recent past by community groups. Unclear if it will remain free to use.

Plans also for refurb to include office for Community Rail Partnership.

Note that room is very noisy when trains idling over at platforms 1 or 2. Hope issue is considered in work being done.

**** Community Rail changes**

Community Rail Partnerships "have the community bring people to local lines" - history and good job done.

Changing (DfT guidelines) to partnerships of rail, local authorities and the communities they serve.

Looking at a wider reach than just "bums on seats".

Heart of Wessex / Community Rail Officer retired a few months ago; unsure of any replacement. Lack of line brochure for this summer and suggestions that Westbury - Weymouth section of route will be combined with Blackmore Vale which it crosses (but without a common station) at Yeovil to make a Somerset CRP.

Sevenside CRP - formerly running out to Westbury - said to be cutting back and concentrating on WECA area (last station in WECA area on the line is Freshford)

TransWilts CRP - formerly designated with specific interest in Swindon service and in Chippenham and Melksham stations now taking an active interest in Westbury in general (note their lead on community room). Their chair states they are "accredited" rather than "designated" now - an area not a line. The Community Rail Officer lives and works from home in Wiltshire, but her home station is not on the Swindon - Westbury - Salisbury section, and the Community Rail Officer is no longer a familiar face on the train. None of the original community based directors remain with TransWilts - all now have local government connections.

An update after 20 years of successful Community Rail was undoubtedly due - a new direction. On some specific though - Dilton Marsh and Melksham - the old community role of getting bums on seats, and seats at the times that bums want to use them, remains.

**** Proposed Stations - Wilton, Devizes Parkway, Ashton Park**

The project for a simple station on the line from Westbury at Wilton has grown into a plan for "Wilton and Stonehenge Junction" on both the Westbury - Salisbury and London - Salisbury - Exeter lines. And with that growth of scope comes a growth of price tag.

Proposals for a Devizes Parkway station on the A342 are being pushed forward and look like a good case. This would be served by the 2 hourly London to Exeter semi-fast and would help provide impetus for that service to be stepped up to hourly - a big benefit to Westbury too.

New in the SWLEP report - a station at "Ashton Park" between Westbury and Trowbridge. I suspect it wouldn't be located too far from a previously suggested "White Horse Business Park" station - though suggestions are for it to be far more there to service residential development than employment. Twice an hour Bristol Metro and hourly TransWilts service to call perhaps; unlikely that an extra stop on Cardiff / Portsmouth would meet with approval!

**** Station Bridge, etc**

Not sure what the status on the bridge / its safety and weight limits are at present.

Noting that car parking at Westbury station has been dramatically improved. Does that make it easier for connecting buses and / or rail replacement to work; previously it was less than ideal.

New residential building between the Westbury avoider and the line through the station - my audience will be far more in the picture on this than I am. I suspect it closes the footpath over the avoider and changes the issues of walking from the station across to Oldfield Park via the field. New road bridge over the avoider to where the current road from Westbury Leigh runs out.

**** WWRUG, TWSW, RailFuture.**

A note not to overlook these organisations / features. With Community Rail moving far more in a local (Unitary) government direction across the UK, perhaps WWRUG, TWSW and Railfuture are now the remaining voice, even if a weak one, of the community.

**** Buses**

Mentioned a bit above - but be aware of town buses, difficulty of financially sustaining. Also be aware of the network of more occasional / rural buses that do / could / should be serving / hubbed via Westbury.

**** In summary ...**

Personal view / pulling together much of the stuff I know about to help provide a "checkpoint" on travel and transport issues for Westbury. I have provided many links but they should be checked and weighted as you feel appropriate.