

Train service across Wiltshire.

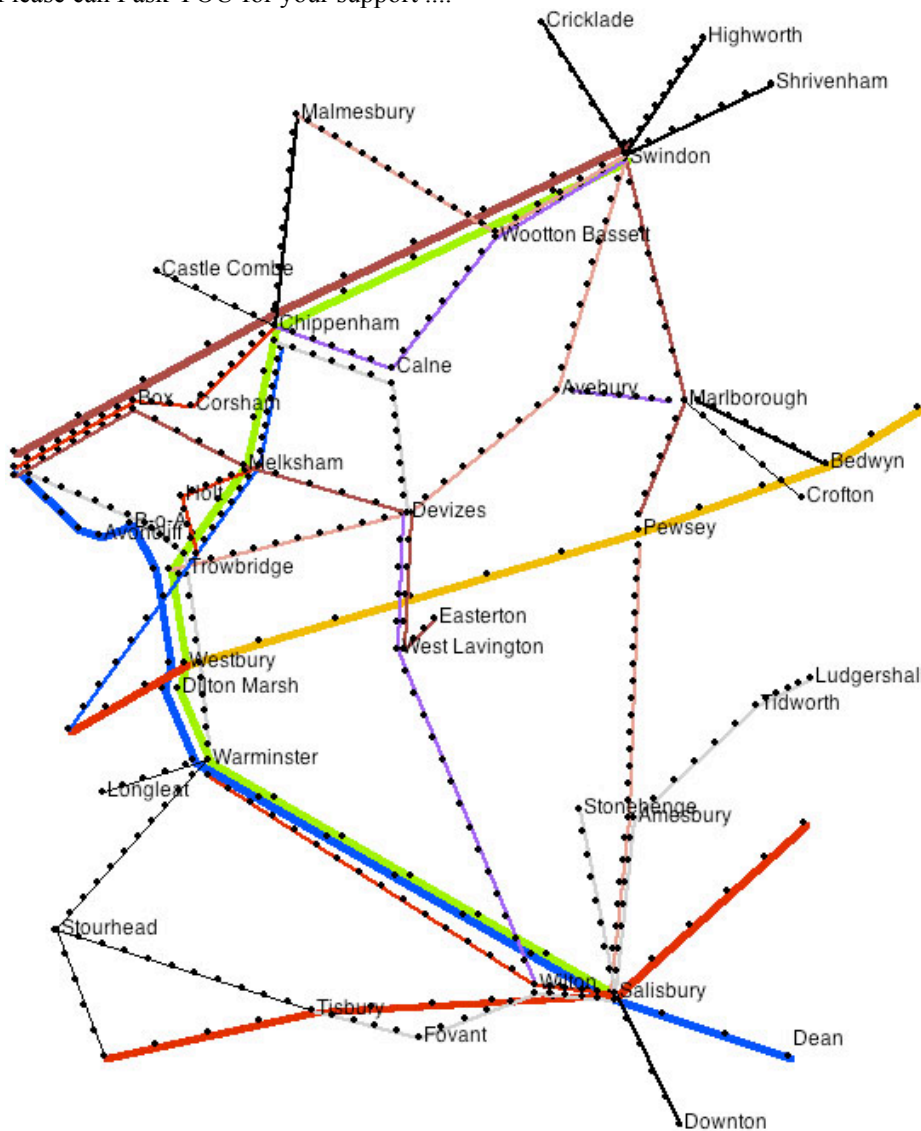
An opportunity to provide an appropriate service once again.
March 2008, prepared by Graham Ellis of "Save the Train", Melksham.

Overview

There's an opportunity to restore an appropriate train service - a backbone of fast public transport - across Wiltshire - with other major benefits too from this coming December. The cost has fallen dramatically since the "Save the Train" campaign started, and it's now a "no-brainer" that should be done.

I can report full support from all three major party candidates for the new marginal Chippenham constituency, other MPs across the county, and almost everyone else I talk to. I have discussed the matter with First Great Western at CEO level and in more detail at a managerial level, and a huge amount of real background work has been done to make it happen.

Please can I ask YOU for your support



Geography Current North / South train services

On this public transport map, 1 dot represents 3 minutes travel time. The fewer dots, the quicker! Salisbury to Swindon - 2 hours by bus, 1 hour by train

Swindon and Salisbury are the two largest towns in Wiltshire - a largely rural county until recently. They are 40 miles apart, but separated by the high ground of the Marlborough Downs and Salisbury plain. The next three towns in size are Chippenham which is in the North West of the County, and Trowbridge (the county town) and Melksham which are both in the West of the county.

Travel options East - West are excellent, with three major railway lines with regular services crossing the county, and major trunk roads (M4 and A303) at the North and South.

In the east of the county, North -

South travel options are limited; none of the roads is in any sense up to fast modern trunk standards, and in any case the areas being connected are sparsely populated.

In the West of the county, there is a strong call for North - South travel, with the A350 road via Chippenham and the A36 across from Bath to the North West both carrying trunk flows to the Westbury / Warminster area, where they coincide

onto the A36 on to Salisbury. Government figures show that both roads from Warminster to the North are heavily congested.

A rail line runs from Salisbury via Warminster, Westbury and Trowbridge to Bath then on to Bristol. South of Westbury, the service was also reduced in December 2006 and further reduced in December 2007. It is now hourly, with some extra services. North of Westbury, there are two trains per hour to Bath and Bristol. Trains on this line are heavily overcrowded, with passengers regularly being denied boarding at traditional peak times, and also at weekends; it is rarely quiet.

The former Swindon to Salisbury service (which carried on to Southampton) ran via Chippenham, Melksham (which was served only by these trains) and Trowbridge to Westbury, Warminster, Salisbury, Romsey and Southampton. The replacement service runs only from Swindon to Westbury (according to the franchise document) although in practice the same train carries on southbound from there to Salisbury at 07:02 and 19:40.

West Wiltshire (the towns of Trowbridge, Melksham, Westbury and Warminster all of which are on the Swindon to Salisbury railway line), and Chippenham, Swindon, Salisbury and Frome (10 minutes from Westbury by train connection) are all growing rapidly, and that planned growth is planned to continue under the Regional Spatial Strategy. The town of Bradford-on-Avon (on the route to Bath and Bristol) is not forecast for such high growth, although it will grow somewhat.

History

This report studies the options for an improved train service from Salisbury to West Wiltshire and Swindon. The through service along this corridor grew rapidly from its introduction in 2001 by Wessex Trains through to the end of their franchise on 31st March 2006.

Under the terms of the new franchise, awarded to the First group, the service was withdrawn in December 2006. This is in spite of growth figures between 10% (FGW) and 35% per annum (ORR) compound for those five years. The SRA reports which preceded the new specification used a growth forecast of 0.8%, which resulted in a blossoming service which had moved from a rural backwater in 2002 to busy trains in 2006 being lost.

First now run just 2 trains a day along part of the line - round trips from Swindon at a quarter past 6 in the morning and a quarter to 7 at night, when the stock that serves the Stroud Valley line isn't actually needed there and can be loaned to the "TransWilts". According to First's press release last week, this is "hardly an attractive proposition" for passengers.

Travel flows

There is major London commuter traffic flow from Swindon, Salisbury, and Chippenham by rail; those services are run by different rolling stock sets and are outside the scope of this study, which is looking at North - South and related requirements. These include:

1. Commuter traffic from West Wiltshire to Bath and Bristol
2. Commuter traffic from West Wiltshire to Chippenham and Swindon
3. Commuter / school traffic from Westbury / Dilton Marsh / Warminster to Salisbury
4. Traffic from Salisbury and beyond (Hampshire and Southampton) to West Wiltshire, Bath, Bristol and Swindon
5. Traffic to the county records office in Chippenham from elsewhere in the county
6. Long distance travel from Melksham to anywhere
7. Travel from Trowbridge to London
8. Travel from Somerset (Frome, Yeovil) and Dorset (Dorchester, Weymouth) to Chippenham and Swindon, Bath and Bristol.
9. Tourist journeys to / from Salisbury and other attractions in the county such as Longleat [Warminster], Stonehenge [Salisbury], Avebury [Devizes / Swindon], Lacock [Melksham] and Bowood [Chippenham] and out of the county to Bath to the West and Oxford to the North East - beyond Swindon.

Comment on current traffic flows

- a) Public Transport travellers along the Salisbury - Bath corridor are frequently overcrowded onto trains. Particular "pinch points" identified are Trowbridge to Bath, and North from Salisbury where many ongoing passengers arrive from Southampton and Exeter and Andover directions on South West Trains and have to crowd into the hourly service to Westbury.
- b) Travellers from South and West Wiltshire to Chippenham and Swindon have to use the same overcrowded trains from Salisbury / Trowbridge to Bath, doubling back there to complete their journeys to Chippenham and Swindon.
- c) Travellers from Westbury / Dilton Marsh / Warminster to Salisbury have a limited choice of services with trains reversing at Warmister where previously they continued to Salisbury.
- d) Travellers from Melksham have no practical train service for the most part - the few trains that run are too early or too late for long distance journeys, and the services offered provide a commuter arrival in Salisbury at 07:30 with a departure back at 19:00, or an arrival in Swindon at 07:45 with a return at 18:45 - both of which are too long a day.
- e) Good local bus services are provided, but recently routes such as the Swindon - Salisbury, Chippenham - Bristol and Bath - Salisbury have been fractured into separate sections with a change of vehicle and operator often necessary, sometimes at a remote spot.
- f) There is no direct bus service from either Chippenham or Melksham to Salisbury, Warminster or Westbury.
- g) Due to the nature of the roads in the county, longer distance bus journeys are slow. It takes 2 hours from Chippenham or Swindon to Salisbury, and 95 minutes by express route 49 from Trowbridge to Swindon (v 35 to 40 minutes by train, at 07:06 or 19:40 ONLY)



Traffic on the A350 approaching Melksham
(December 2007)



Melksham Station - the 18:45 from Swindon
(December 2007)

What is an appropriate service along the "TransWilts" corridor?

A great deal of work has been put in by professionals working for the local transport authority, the train operators, and other bodies, on this subject. There is agreement from all parties that an appropriate service would run much more frequently, and provide good ongoing linkage and connections.

An additional hourly train service from Salisbury (and perhaps beyond if it could join onto the service from Waterloo or Southampton) to Swindon is perhaps the ideal, providing an increase to half hourly from Salisbury to Westbury and Trowbridge and then a clockface onward service to Melksham, Chippenham and Swindon. Realistically, such a service is unlikely to be achieved in the short term due to rolling stock shortages and line capacity issues between Trowbridge and Chippenham, where the line has been reduced to a single track.

What can be realistically achieved?

There are three options which would be realistic and which would meet many of the passenger flows, requirements of the area and aspirations in the short term; where it would go in 5 years if we see double figure growth year on year is an interesting question.

- a) Retain the existing two trains, and provide extra services from Salisbury to Swindon and back every THREE hours during the day - so that would be Swindon arrive at 08:45, 11:45, 14:45 and 17:45 with return departures a few minutes thereafter
- b) Provide extra through services from beyond Salisbury to Swindon; logically, such services would be operated by South West Trains from their Salisbury depot, and with current turn around times at Salisbury being quite generous, a single additional unit could provide a two hourly service.
- c) As option (b), but with all South West Trains extended - alternately to Swindon and to Bristol. This would take just two additional Salisbury based units.

Option (a) - three hourly service

The operator would be First Great Western, who have done a great deal of background work including timetable and staff validation. Due to their publicly acknowledged tight rolling stock issues, there is a question mark over the provision of the critical train at 16:20 from Salisbury / 17:50 from Swindon, without which the scheme would NOT fully meet travel flow requirements 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 8 and 9.

With the 16:20 / 17:50 round trip, further travel flow requirements would be satisfied, although elements 3 and 4 would only partially be met - really an issue in the south of the county, where the option (a) provides neither a regular halfhourly service south of Warminster, nor a cross-Salisbury service to Chippenham / Swindon.

Option (a) would also provide improves service for Frome (in Somerset) - 2 additional trains per day which would break up the 3 hour gaps at present to that town of about 25000.

Finally, option (a) would provide some overcrowding relief on the Trowbridge to Bath section, where things are so bad at the moment that travellers are denied access at times. This is because the "dogleg" travellers who use this service at present to get from West Wiltshire to Chippenham and Swindon would no longer be on these train.

Option (b) - two hourly service

It would be logical for a cross-Salisbury service to be operated by South West Trains. This more frequent service would provide would provide an improve solution compared to option (a) for most travel flows. It would NOT provide additional service for Frome (although if the service stopped at Dilton Marsh, the extra train FGW shuttles to Warminster could be released to do so, DfT permitting).

It is noted that South West Trains crews already have route knowledge to Trowbridge.

Option (c) - two hourly to Swindon, two hourly to Bristol

All issues are logically dealt with, providing a full cross-Salisbury service and a half hourly train on from there to Trowbridge. There is further scope for detailed work on the extra Bristol runs as numerous other issues could be resolved (where would it stop? 2 trains per hour Keynsham to Bristol?)

Costing notes

These are edited on the public record for commercial/confidence reasons!

1. First Great Western suggest that xx xxxxx xxxx xxx xxxxx is needed xx xxxx xx run the services in option (a)

comprising xxx xxx xxxxxxxxxxx xxxxxxx xxx xx xxxxxx, and xxx to make up for xxxxxxx xxxxxx. xx xxxxx xx xxx
xxx xxxxxxx xxxxxxxxxx, x xxxxx xxxxx xxxxxxxxxxx xxxxx xxxxxxx xxxxxxxxxxx xxx xxxxxxxxxxxxxx xxx xxxxxxxxxx
xxxxxxxx xxx xxx xxxxx xxxxxx xx xxxxxxxxxxx - xxxxx xxxxxxxxxxx xxxxxx, xxx xxxxxx "ORCAT" xxxxxxx xxxxx xxxxx
xx xxxxxx xxxxxx xxx divided in proportion to the number of trains, xx xxxxx xxxxxxxxxxx.

2. The SWT trains options would xxxxxxx xxxxx x xxxxxx xxxxxxxxxxx xxxxx xx xxxxx xx xxxxx xxxxxxx xxx xxxxx
xxxxxxxx. xxxxxxx - both options (b) and (c) would be xxxxxxxxxxxxxx xxxxxxx xxx xxx xxxxxxx xxxxxxxxxx under
ORCATS xxx xx xxx xxxxxxx xxxxxxx xxxxx xx xxxxx xxxxxxxxxxx xxxxxxx xxx xxx xxxxxxxxxxx

3. There is scope for fare INCREASES on fares via Melksham which are currently unusually low. A rise of the order of
75p per local journey if accompanied by the provision of an appropriate service would be in order. At a traffic level of
150000 journeys per year (which we know would be reached based on historic data of where things were headed when
the service was cut) this would xxx xxxxxxxxxxx xxx xxxxxx xxx xx xxxxx.

Comment on traffic levels

From 2001 to 2005, ticket sales grew from 3,000 to 27,000 at Melksham (of which an estimated 20% were not actually
for Melksham travel - so the true numbr was around 20000) and adding in through passengers, first reported around
120,000 journeys in the year. That is a compound growth rate of over 20% per annum. Under the new timetable run in
2007, we estimate that under 10,000 journeys were made on the line.

* With a service that meets most of the identified flows, and that is reliable and reasonably priced, there is no reason that
passenger journey number should not return to prior levels.

* Ticket sales in Melksham, even at the height, were an order of magnitude lower than sales at the neighbouring town of
Bradford on Avon, which is half the size but enjoys a much better service. Both towns have a heavy exodus of people to
work in the morning - to Swindon, Chippenham, Trowbridge, Bath and Bristol from Melksham - so traffic from there /
ticket sales could continue to grow to many times that of the previous peak level.

* Westbury, Warminster, Trowbridge and Melksham will all grow significantly under the Regional Spatial Strategy, with
a major commuting requirement to Chippenham and Swindon.

* With the new unitary authority in Wiltshire, the county's third town of Chippenham and fourth town of Melksham will
require a fast public transport access to the county town and the county's largest population centre at Salisbury.

* New developments such as the county records office at Chippenham (opened since the train service was effectively
discontinued) are isolated from the county they serve by public transport

* There are proposals to improve the current North / South trunk road that parallels the railway in the Westbury area, but
the road is already congested to the extent of delaying traffic elsewhere - at Yarnbrook, North Melksham, Beanacre and
around Chippenham and further improvements there are not yet on the radar. Congestion will encourage further rail use.

* The railway's earthworks are suitable for double track provision, and there is also scope for the provision of a link line
to allow a Chippenham - Melksham - Bradford-on-Avon - Bath - Bristol service in the future.

* Westbury and Trowbridge stations are being improved at present to encourage more passengers. There is major scope
to develop Melksham station, which is close by the main road used by many buses, as a public transport and cycle
interchange. Land is already earmarked for improvements which would make it the hub of an integrated system rather
than have it winning the Campaign for Better Transport's least accessible station award again like it did last year.

* Community groups such as Save the Train, the Melksham Railway Development Group, the Town Council, the
District Councils, West Wilts Rail users group, More Train Less Strain, and many others are in full support.

* I cannot predict just how quickly a 1 or 2 coach train would reach capacity - but it wouldn't be many years at all ...

The TransWilts Railway line links the five largest population centres in Wiltshire - Salisbury, Swindon, Trowbridge, Chippenham and Melksham. There are significant traveller flows between all of these towns, all of which will exhibit significant growth in the next few years.

What the Train Service is - 2008

* Other services are available between Swindon and Chippenham.

* Other services are available between Salisbury and Trowbridge.

This page shows the complete TransWilts train service until December 2008

* No other regular passenger trains run from Chippenham to Trowbridge.

* No other regular passenger trains run from Chippenham to Salisbury.

* No other regular passenger trains run from Trowbridge to Swindon.

* No other regular passenger trains run from Swindon to Salisbury.

* No other regular passenger trains call at Melksham.

Some bus alternatives exist - e.g. 95 minutes Trowbridge to Swindon

Monday to Friday, Southbound

Swindon	06:18	18:45
Chippenham	06:34	19:01
Melksham	06:43	19:11
Trowbridge	06:53	19:20
Westbury	07:01	19:27
Dilton_Marsh	07:04	19:42
Warminster	07:13	19:49
Salisbury	07:36	20:13

Monday to Friday, Northbound

Salisbury	06w12	18w41
Warminster	06w32	19w01
Dilton_Marsh	06w36	n/a
Westbury	07:02	19:32
Trowbridge	07:08	19:38
Melksham	07:17	19:47
Chippenham	07:30	20:02
Swindon	07:48	20:19

Saturday Summary - Southbound

Swindon 15:29, Melksham 15:58, Westbury 16:13, Salisbury 17w09
Swindon 21:08, Melksham 21:34, Westbury 21:51, Salisbury 23w08

Saturday Summary - Northbound

Salisbury 07w23, Westbury 09:03, Melksham 09:18, Swindon 09:48
Salisbury 13w52, Westbury 15:04, Melksham 15:19, Swindon 15:46

Sunday Summary - Southbound

Swindon 18:31, Melksham 18:57, Westbury 19:13, Salisbury 20w31

Sunday Summary - Northbound

Salisbury 16w28, Westbury 17:05, Melksham 17:21, Swindon 17:48
Salisbury 18w28, Westbury 19:35, Melksham 19:51, Swindon 20:20

w - change at Westbury n/a - no connection available

* Weekend trains also call at all stations.

* Weekend trains are subject to replacement by bus due to engineering works.

Train service provided by First Great Western. Until last year, a service of five trains each way was provide every day, but this service was withdrawn by First Great Western as part of their new franchise agreement with the Department for Transport. It is now commonly acknowledged that this was one cut too many, and that an appropriate service would be a regular one, with extra peak services, between Salisbury and Swindon.

Please see overleaf for proposed details of the 2009 service, and to learn how YOU can help us bring it to fruition. Thank you.

What the Train Service *should* be

The TransWilts train service was largely WITHDRAWN in December 2006, leaving services at 6:15 a.m. and 6:45 p.m. ONLY from Swindon. It is now generally accepted that the service should NOT have been cut back to this near useless level. The following Monday to Friday service has been **validated by Network Rail at the request of First Great Western** and COULD run from 8th December 2008.

The "TransWilts" line links the five largest population centres of Wiltshire; major growth is planned, there are already significant travel flows between them with severe congestion acknowledged by the DfT's Sustainable transport study.



Monday to Friday TransWilts - 2009 proposal - Southbound

Swindon	06:18	09:02	12:02	15:02	17:55	18:45
Chippenham	06:34	09:19	12:19	15:19	18:11	19:01
Melksham	06:48	09:28	12:28	15:28	18:21	19:11
Trowbridge	06:53	09:38	12:38	15:38	18:35	19:20
Westbury	07:01	09:45	12:45	15:45	18:42	19:27
Dilton_Marsh	07:04	09:49	12:49	15:49	n/a	19:42
Warminster	07:11	09:55	12:55	15:55	19w08	19:49
Salisbury	07:34	10:17	13:17	16:17	19w33	20:11



Monday to Friday TransWilts - 2009 proposal - Northbound

Salisbury	06w12	07:40	10:31	13:31	16:24	18w41
Warminster	06w32	08:00	10:51	13:51	16:44	19w01
Dilton_Marsh	06w36	08:04	10:55	13:55	16:48	n/a
Westbury	07:02	08:09	11:02	14:02	16:53	19:32
Trowbridge	07:08	08:15	11:08	14:08	16:59	19:38
Melksham	07:17	08:24	11:17	14:17	17:08	19:47
Chippenham	07:30	08:34	11:32	14:32	17:18	20:02
Swindon	07:48	08:53	11:50	14:50	17:36	20:19

w - change at Westbury

As part of this improvement package, **extra trains would also be provided from Frome to Bath and Bristol**. Departures from Frome at 06:43, 07:04, 08:02, 09:26, 10:27 (new train), 12:39, 14:35, 15:27 (new train), 16:29, 18:27, 21:20 to Bristol and (in most cases) beyond.

How can we make this happen?

If you support the improved service shown on this page, please write to your MP to let them know. **And please send copies to the decision makers too.** Local MPs are: Michael Ancram (Melksham), James Gray (Chippenham), Anne Snelgrove (Swindon), Andrew Murrison (Trowbridge to Warminster), Robert Key (Salisbury) and David Heath (Frome).

The decision makers are First Great Western, the Department for Transport and Wiltshire County Council.

First Great Western (Andrew Haines, CEO, Milford House, 1 Milford Street, Swindon, SN1 1HL)

Wiltshire County Council (Fleur de Rhe-Philippe, Paddock Gate, Upton Scudamore, Warminster, Wiltshire BA12 0AQ)

The Department for Transport (Tom Harris, DfT Rail, Great Minster House, 76 Marsham Street, London SW1P 4DR)

Please visit our web sites - sign up and add your thoughts at:

<http://www.firstgreatwestern.info/coffeeshop> and <http://www.savethetrain.org.uk>

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