

Bus Changes from 6th February 2017

Melksham Town services

Initial comments – Graham Ellis, 27th January, updated 29th January

Background to what I expected:

- I. "You need not worry about bus cuts in the Melksham area during the 2017/18 year; whilst we are cutting 10% of the support budget across the county, none of the Melksham Area services will be cut" - Jason Salter to Area Board - Nov 2016
- II. "When we move facilities out of town as part in the Campus project, we'll ensure that transport is provided to the facilities no longer in the town centre so that people can reach them without a car" - Jonathan Seed - early in Campus project.
- III. "We cannot alter town buses to connect with the trains while they're a trial service liable to change" - Wiltshire Council officer Phil Grocock, 2014
- IV. "Alterations are being made to enable them to be operated in a more cost effective manner" - Wiltshire Council. Frome Minibuses over the phone last week - "timetables have only just been finally agreed and We'll have them available on the buses in the next few days" and "passengers won't notice much difference".
- V. Cabinet papers / agreement in October 2016 is to promote and market services in the 2017/18 year.
- VI. "Our Community Matters" invited conference / JSA on 18th January highlighted integrated public transport as a key local priority, overwhelmingly chosen by the room as a whole.
- VII. The car park at Melksham House and Market Square (typical usage 100 cars at a time on weekdays) are out of use for 26 weeks from 30th January, and this may lead to additional congestion around the centre of town as people go all around the roundabout to reach Central car park. As Central car park is a pay and display rather than free, this will generate extra income for Wiltshire Council and may lead to a resistance by some to driving into town.
- VIII. The Market Place (Southbound / King's Arms) bus stop was removed last week. I understand it is to be replaced (and town council promised railway / transport frames like the old one had) but at present there are no timetables and not even a "bus stop" sign. The drivers and passengers just have to know!

Summary of changes

a) the north eastern section of route 14, serving Addison Road, Dunch Lane, Avon Road and Granville Road is **reduced from 8 to 5 journeys** on a Monday to Friday, and **reduced from 8 to 3 journeys** on Saturdays

b) the south western section of route 14, serving Melksham Forest and Queensway is **reduced form 20 to 18 journeys** on Monday to Friday, and **reduced from 15 to 10 journeys** on Saturdays. Additional daytime, evening and Sunday services remain available (unchanged) serving the major roads on this route on services 271 and 272.

c) Service 15 from Thyme Road to the town centre is **reduced from 8 journeys to 6** on Monday to Friday, and from **6 journeys to 2** on Saturdays. The remaining services are diverted through Skylark Road rather than past the road end onto the Calne Road. Some route 14 services on Saturday afternoons will divert past Thyme Road and though Skylark Road to drop off if required

d) Service 15 into Berryfield is unaltered at 2 services per day (Monday to Saturday); service x34 serving the end of Berryfeld Lane remains unaltered at up to 2 buses an hour (Monday to Friday) and an hourly Saturday service.

e) Service 14 journeys via The Oak school and Bowerhill (school days only) remain unchanged. Services 271, 272 and x72 serving Bowerhill and x72 and 271 serving Sells Green are also unchanged.

Note that "Monday to Saturday" on top of route 14 (first section) should probably read "Monday to Friday". On the new leaflet, and an 11:02 (not 10:02) arrival at Asda for the second Monday to Friday service on route 15.

For comparison, I'm attaching a .pdf file showing the old and new timetables - sorry - the format provided is very different which makes it hard to compare.

Comments

1. These are significant reductions of service in Melksham North (Pat Aves), Central (David Pollitt), South (Jon Hubbard) and Without North (Skylark Road section, Terry Chivers). There is virtually no change in Melksham South Without (Roy While) and Seend and Somerham (Jonathan Seed).

2. With the first bus at 09:49 rather than 08:29 into the town from East Melksham, the opportunity for people to take the bus to work from that outlying area is removed. Their removal will also impact on buses being used for return journeys at the end of the day. It should be noted that the busiest buses in this area prior to August 2015 were at 07:00 and 07:30, to the town and station. Removal of the whole service prior to 09:30 eliminates virtually all fare paying passengers from the service, making it wholly dependent on Wiltshire Council's support and ENCTS payments.

3. The promise made by Wiltshire Council's head of public transport to the area board in November that there will be no cuts in the 2017/18 year may well be true because the cuts are being made in the current 2016/17 year. However, I can't help feeling that the comments made have proven to be extremely misleading, and they make it very hard indeed to trust what we are told - they leave us wondering where the catch is.

4. The Rugby and Football grounds - part of the facilities being provided from the Campus project budget - opened a couple of weeks ago (official opening 13th February). Last Sunday, I watched an event there finish and a continuous flow of cars leaving. A few people cycled away, and just a couple walked. I see no sign of the promised public transport services to the town - indeed quite the reverse with services no longer leaving the nearby stop at all after 12:19 on Saturday, or at all on Sunday - and I would have expected Saturday afternoon and Sunday to be amongst the busiest at the sports ground, especially during term time.

5. Using the existing resources, an opportunity has been lost to build a proper network of buses in the Melksham area. It's crazy to have 3 buses an hour running through Melksham Forest with two of them leaving the town centre at exactly the same time (12 minutes after the hour). Two buses an hour, accepting each other's tickets, would make huge sense and should be facilitated by Wiltshire Council.

6. I would agree that prior to December 2013 it would have been pointless to have the 14 call at the station with no trains between 07:19 and 19:16 - but with 18 trains a day now calling, and made permanent, and passenger journeys of over 60,000 a year, it's crazy to still not be calling there. On current timings, 8 buses a day pass the station, current last service at 16:16 - from 6th February, the last bus is there at 13:16 - a retrograde step.

7. The lack of free parking in the town for the next six months would have been an ideal opportunity to promote public transport use.

8. These are significant changes. Was there any consultation prior to 18th January? When can we expect a final timetable? Is there any change of sorting out something more positive, bearing in mind marketing to come?

Suggestion

* Can we please have timetables and a bus stop sign back at the Market Place?

* Let's the heck see if we can work together in Melksham on this - within existing (up to 5th Feb) resources.

* Can the lunatics please take over the asylum from May and organise our own system for the 14 and 15?