

August 24 update Bedwyn Trains Passenger Group

Forthcoming Bus Replacements

Network Rail is planning the following engineering works:

- Replacement of track in the Newbury area.
- Flood alleviation work at Newbury station.
- Level crossing improvements at Kintbury, Thatcham and Midgham.

This will affect train services between Reading and Westbury in three separate blockades:

Tuesday 17 to Thursday 19 September and Tuesday 10 to Thursday 12 December

No train services between Newbury and Westbury. Trains between London Paddington and Devon or Cornwall will be diverted between Reading and Taunton via Swindon – some will continue via Bristol Temple Meads and some via Melksham. Trains between London Paddington and Bedwyn terminated at Newbury. Reduced trains between Swindon and Westbury due to diverted services.

Replacement buses planned:

- Newbury – Bedwyn via Hungerford
- Newbury – Hungerford via Kintbury
- Pewsey – Swindon

Monday 11 to Thursday 14 November

No train services between Theale and Westbury. Trains between London Paddington and Devon or Cornwall diverted between Reading and Taunton via Swindon – some will continue via Bristol Temple Meads and some via Melksham. Trains between London Paddington and Bedwyn terminated at Theale. Reduced trains between Swindon and Westbury due to diverted services.

Replacement buses planned:

- Theale – Bedwyn stopping at all stations except Kintbury
- Newbury – Hungerford via Kintbury
- Pewsey – Swindon

Following complaints from us, GWR are putting more bus coordinators in place. If, during these bus replacements, you find confusion at Theale or Newbury, with no coordinator to speak to, please let us know.

New Service from Paignton

With the summer upon us, please don't forget about the new 2131 stop at Bedwyn on the weekday 1904 from Paignton. This is something we requested of GWR. Hungerford and Kintbury passengers can make use of this by changing at Bedwyn onto the 2137 shuttle.

Changes to Advanced Fare Tickets

A decision has been taken to withdraw the very cheapest Advance Purchase tickets from the 0729 and 0824 services from Bedwyn, and the 1736 off Paddington. Advanced Purchase tickets on the 0729 and 0824 will now start, from Bedwyn, at £38.00 and on the 1736 at £26.50.

This is to help address crowding/capacity on these services, as well as to minimise split ticketing. The 0600, 0626 and 0651 services to Paddington will continue to have the £12.50 fare available for up to 9 weeks before date of departure. Similarly, the 1635 and 1808 from Paddington will continue to have the £12.50 fares available too.

Change at Hungerford or Newbury

Bedwyn passengers will note that, when booking a Paddington ticket, the train planning applications sometimes recommend a change at Hungerford. This has caused issues with passengers alighting at Hungerford only to find the connecting service cancelled. It's always best to stay on the shuttle to Newbury and change there.

Elizabeth Line Ticket Validity

Following our recent recommendation on how to travel back with an off-peak ticket, during the evening peak, we have been asked if GWR tickets are valid on the Elizabeth Line. The answer is, yes they are. The only exception is if your ticket states specifically that it's for a specific GWR service.

Cancellations, Delays, Missed Connections and Overcrowding

Recently, complaints from passengers to us have dropped back. However, we note that there are still some cancellations. Please do let us know if your journey is disrupted. It always helps our case if we can cite actual passenger complaints to GWR.

We note, following our protests, that GWR are more prepared, where possible, to put in substitute trains than to cancel a service (e.g. replacing an IET with a Turbo or a nine or ten-car IET with a five-car IET). However, this does lead to overcrowding and we have made GWR aware of this. GWR have been pressing Hitachi (who maintain the IET fleet) to improve the number available on a daily basis. Additionally, GWR has appointed a new member of its Executive team who is tasked with getting Hitachi to deliver the right number of trains every day

We are also pleased, again following our complaints, GWR have amended the driver's diagram to make the 1822 shuttle departure for Bedwyn more reliable. This connects with the 1736 off Paddington and, with driver shift changeover, was vulnerable to cancellation.

We have also asked if the 1906 is shown as cancelled, and if you are early enough to catch the 1836, whether your off-peak ticket will be valid. GWR replied saying passengers should ask GWR staff on a case by case basis. We have requested a more robust policy.

Visit to Thames Valley Signalling Centre at Didcot

On June 18th Bill Wells and I visited the Thames Valley Signalling Centre at Didcot. This is run by Network Rail staff.

Because it controls a strategic part of the rail network, we were struck by the level of security, including multiple layers of security fencing.

It was interesting to understand the complexities of a signaller's job and the challenges they face. We were particularly interested in the desk used to control the signalling at Newbury and how much jiggling around they have to do to operate our shuttle while allowing the through trains to have access to the platforms.

We also learned that the Network Rail signallers do not implement the holds of our shuttle at Newbury. Instead, a hold is requested by the Swindon based GWR Control Centre or Newbury platform staff. This is somewhat disappointing as it means a hold (whether requested by the GWR Control Centre or platform staff) request is made to the Didcot signallers who then hold the signals and/or contact the driver. It would be easier if the signallers operated the holds policy but the nature of the industry is that the request has to be manually made by GWR staff for the signallers to then consider.

We also learnt that recent issues with failure to couple five-car IETs together, to form a ten-car set, have been hampered by i) five-car sets not being on the same software revision level and refusing to recognise one another and ii) dips in the track at Paddington's Platform 10, causing the couplings to not align.

Getting Our Direct Trains Back

Following our request, thanks to all of you who wrote to councils and the MPs backing our campaign to get our direct Paddington services reinstated. We were due to meet with Danny Kruger and Laura Farris, but then the election was called. However, quite a few councils wrote on our behalf.

We noted that the winning MPs did not make the reinstatement of our trains a campaigning issue and neither has been in touch since the election.

Therefore Bill Wells and I are continuing the campaign with GWR. A glimmer of hope is that GWR look to be taking on twenty-seven class 175 trains (capable of replacing the displaced IETs, returning them to work out of Paddington). We have requested GWR take this opportunity to reinstate our full IET hourly timetable.

Bill spotted an online document detailing The Secretary of State's Business Plan Commitments (2023 – 2024) for GWR. In it GWR are requested to set out the proposed reintroduction of through trains between London and Bedwyn. This is positive and we put in a Freedom of Information Request to ask how GWR responded. Unfortunately, our request was declined due to it being commercially in confidence.

With 95.4% of passenger journeys going beyond Newbury, it's imperative we get our direct trains back.

Best wishes

Steve Smith

Bedwyn Trains Passenger Group