

Update from Bedwyn Passenger Trains Group

Weekday Travel After 1900

Thank you to all those who contacted us, following our request in our August 4th newsletter. You gave us great feedback on your use of the post 1900 Paddington trains. Based on this, GWR have decided not to make any alterations as they appreciate our need for the direct 1906 off-peak.

Penalty Fares

We are following up an issue with GWR where a passenger was fined £91 at Paddington when:

- 1) The ticket machine at Bedwyn was broken.
- 2) There were cancellations and short formations making his short formed direct Paddington train packed, thus unable to purchase a ticket on-board.

The GWR rules are clear: "Where a station isn't staffed, or the ticket machines aren't working, you must pay for your journey at your earliest opportunity; either on-board or at the first available station." The passenger in question had followed this to the letter, including trying to pay online (rejected because the train had already departed).

Our advice is (i) if the ticket machine is broken, photograph it (ii) if the train is packed photograph that too (iii) if you do get fined we'll take it up on your behalf.

Fortunately such incidents are very rare, but very unsettling.

Meeting with GWR

On September 27th, Bill Wells and I met with senior GWR managers. Here follows the main topics, and outcomes, of discussion:

1. **Poor Performance:** We discussed this at great length. There are some particularly poor performing trains (both directs and connections). Factors causing this are strikes, working to rule, infrastructure failures, trains failing, human error and lack of available IET trains. Lack of staff is not a significant issue, they do have reserve staff on standby (apart from on work to rule days), but sometimes, due to knock on effects of disruption staff, are in the wrong places. The IETs are 'cut to the bone' with Hitachi (who maintain them over night) not releasing enough on a day by day basis. GWR are improving their working practises with Hitachi so they are aware of what trains are needed where and when of a morning. Human error is a factor – e.g. releasing the shuttle from Newbury before the Paddington train arrives. Bill and I were shown around the Control Centre. It's an impressive setup with staff clearly dedicated to their jobs. But the systems are prone to human error. E.g. when Control request the shuttle to be held they have to (i) contact platform staff to tell the driver to hold and (ii) contact the signaller to keep the shuttle held on red. There's no automated method for Control to force a hold. It must be stressed that the signalling system is more robust, so when we say 'human error' we are not referring to safety issues. One of the major problems with IETs (especially when in service) is door failures. Hitachi are working on this and installing upgrades.
2. **Wrong information given the passengers.** Like point 1, the staff in the Control Centre know what's happening. However, getting it to the ground is an issue. For example, they can contact Paddington to put a message out, but it's then down to the staff at the station to

implement that. This again is prone to human error. Personally, I was rather surprised at how unintegrated the systems are. The bodies of people and IT are: Drivers, signallers, platform staff, Customer Information System (CIS), Control Centre and train staff. These are all loosely coupled so it does explain a lot of the problems we see.

3. Poor CIS information. The CIS is automated, working out messages to display based on electronic information. Control Centre staff have limited opportunities to override this. They don't have access to station PA systems, instead all they can do is instigate pre-recorded messages or put short text messages on the CIS screens. Also they don't have access to the PA systems on trains, instead they can only contact the train manager. For driver only, they can only contact the driver if the train is stationary and, even then, it's just a message to ask the driver to contact Control (this is to not distract the driver).
4. Getting our three IETs back. This is the tough one. GWRs relationship with the DfT is very good. However, behind the DfT sits the Treasury pulling the strings. The Treasury keep pressing for more cost savings. So, even though our three IETs have been taken away, the Treasury are pressing for even more cost savings. This means we are way down the pecking order. GWR described the situation as 'A nationalised industry with shareholders'. GWR were more responsive to the possibility of getting one IET back to give us a three hourly direct off-peak Paddington service (supplemented on the other hours by the shuttle). GWR also said that we, as a passenger group, have had quite a few 'wins' in the past year. Aware of that as we are, this has come on the back of our off-peak direct trains (and some of our evening peak direct trains) being taken away. It is clear, however, that we do have quite an impact and GWR clearly do read and act upon all the customer complaints that we send in – so keep them coming. We also asked again whether we could have some of the IETs used on the Paddington/Cardiff route in exchange for class 387s used on the Paddington/Newbury route. This would mean the IETs could come to Bedwyn, removing the need for the off-peak shuttle. GWR have promised to look at this again.
5. A series of complaints from passengers which are currently unanswered. We went through these and have emailed the passengers individually.
6. Reduction in availability of the £12 pre-booked fares. The number of discounted tickets and their price is based on a dynamic flow algorithm. There has been no deliberate reduction in the price and availability. Instead the services are being used more so the algorithm will not offer so many at the low fares you have previously been used to. i.e. a less frequented service will have more discounted fares than a not so popular one.
7. The 0954 off Bedwyn does not allow the use of a Network Railcard. GWR have now resolved this.
8. Request for an electronic train information board at the foot of the bridge on the Newbury downside platform. GWR have asked for this to be done.
9. Request to have Newbury station staffed until the last connection is made (including bus replacements). There's no money to do this. We protested, saying that the shuttle has caused passengers to be left stranded late at night. We asked if more could be done, lighting, police patrols, CCTV etc. GWR have pointed out that Newbury has Secure Station Status. <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/apply-for-the-secure-stations-scheme/secure-stations-scheme-guidance-notes>
10. The poor quality of the rail replacement (buses) service. We discussed this at great length with the manager in charge of rail replacements (i.e. buses). It was explained to us that the rail replacements are expected to work. GWR contract to First Transport who then get independent bus operators to bid. Unfortunately, given it is late at night, only one operator ever bids for Newbury. And they aren't very good. A big factor is the lack of money to fund it, thus you pay for what you get. We stressed all the complaints you have sent us (some of which are almost beyond belief). The drivers are poorly briefed, sometimes don't turn up, don't wait for connections, don't know where they are going and the customer helpline isn't

able to actively resolve issues. We said it needs somebody on the ground from First Transport to make it work and to be a point of contact for passengers on the ground. After a very lengthy conversation GWR have agreed to get a co-ordinator for the next rail replacement, but subsequently have said only where there are a large number of buses involved. We have said a co-ordinator is needed to all rail replacements, but we would accept having a telephone number of a First Group duty manager made available to passengers. GWR said having co-ordinators might set a precedent for other rail replacements on the network. One of the reasons we are getting priority is that we complain so much. So it shows the passenger group (Bill, me and all of you who complain via us) is effective.

11. We asked for the hold times of the shuttles. GWR supplied us with the following. The left hand column is the normal train departure time, the right hand column the number of minutes the departure time can be delayed by. We hope it helps you to have it.

Newbury to Bedwyn		Newbury to Reading	
06:24:00	00:06:00	07:24:00	00:05:00
07:22:00	00:04:00	08:14:00	00:00:00
08:20:00	00:04:00	09:20:00	00:04:00
09:10:00	00:03:00	10:26:00	00:04:00
10:22:00	00:04:00	11:23:00	00:00:00
11:29:00	00:04:00	12:21:00	00:04:00
12:22:00	00:04:00	13:32:00	00:00:00
		14:20:00	00:04:00
13:21:00	00:04:00	15:32:00	00:00:00
14:12:00	00:10:00	16:34:00	00:00:00
15:22:00	00:04:00	17:25:00	00:00:00
16:16:00	00:04:00	18:47:00	00:00:00
17:24:00	00:06:00	19:38:00	00:00:00
18:24:00	00:04:00	20:17:00	00:04:00
19:24:00	00:04:00	21:41:00	00:00:00
20:49:00	00:04:00	22:47:00	00:06:00
21:53:00	00:10:00		
22:45:00	00:10:00		