



Response to GWR's Downgrading of the Bedwyn – Paddington Direct Train Service

Bedwyn Trains Passenger Group

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Executive Summary

From May 2022 Great Western Railway (GWR) plan to remove the off-peak direct service between Bedwyn, Hungerford, Kintbury and Paddington, along with the severe reduction of the evening peak service, replacing significant trains with a diesel shuttle service between Bedwyn and Newbury.

Although morning direct peak trains will be retained the resulting service will, in terms of journey time and missed connections at Newbury, be unacceptable to Bedwyn, Hungerford and Kintbury passengers.

This in turn will cause passengers to drive to Newbury, contra to the government's green agenda. Additionally it will hit the leisure market, both to people wishing to travel from local stations and to those wishing to visit local attractions, such as the Kennet & Avon canal.

The cuts are because GWR plan to withdraw the three five car Intercity Express Train (IET) trains that are assigned to provide the direct Bedwyn to Paddington service.

Although the Bedwyn Trains Passenger Group (BTPG) would, in the first instance, request this entire decision to be reversed we, pragmatically, propose the following solutions:

- 1) The immediate retention, from May 2022, of one five car IET train to run with the diesel shuttle service between Bedwyn and Hungerford. This will give a workable timetable shown in Appendix 2 (including a workable evening direct peak service, a three hourly off-peak service filled in with a diesel shuttle service on the missing hours).
- 2) Investigation into the battery enhancement of the class 387 trains (currently serving Paddington to Newbury) to allow them to serve Paddington to Bedwyn direct. If deployed this would allow the diesel shuttle, between Bedwyn and Newbury, to be retired and give Bedwyn, Hungerford and Kintbury an hourly direct service to and from Paddington. Although this would be at least two years away it would, with the immediate adoption of point 1, lead to a return to a fully direct Bedwyn to Paddington service.

The History of the Current Service

Having survived the 'Beeching Axe', during the 1960s Bedwyn developed as a terminus for stopping trains from Paddington, Reading or Newbury. At this time, most of the trains serving Bedwyn terminated at the station. A newly sited turn-back siding was added in 1976, which remains in place and subsequently extended in 2018.

In 1992, class 165/166 'turbos' were introduced on Bedwyn services, with a gradual increase in the number of through trains to and from Paddington. As a result, at the beginning of the 21st Century, there were fifteen Monday to Friday through trains to Paddington out of a total of twenty.

In 2006, it was proposed to extend most trains to and from Westbury which, in principle would have been an improvement to the service. Unfortunately, it was decided that Bedwyn and Kintbury would only be served every two hours, which was totally unacceptable to users of these stations. As a result, Bedwyn Trains Passenger Group was formed in order to fight against these cuts.

After due consultation the decision was made to reinstate Bedwyn and Kintbury stops. However, the extension of trains to Westbury was dropped. Whilst BTPG were pleased that an hourly service level was maintained, it was disappointing that opportunities to travel further west were denied.

In 2009, a decision to electrify parts of the Great Western network was made. It was decided that the wires should stop at Newbury, which was a strange decision as the vast majority of trains from Paddington calling at Newbury continued their journeys further west, including to Bedwyn. This decision has had a serious effect on service patterns and stock utilisation ever since.

In 2013 Arup were asked to carry out a study into the extension of electrification from Newbury to either Bedwyn, Westbury, Bathampton Junction (the junction with the Great Western Main Line) or the quarries beyond Westbury. BTPG took part in the consultation regarding this study. The conclusions were that extension to Bedwyn produced a Benefit Cost Ratio (BCR) of 2.58. However, the other options produced very poor BCRs. But this was hardly surprising, as the study was only asked to consider the handful of trains that started from or terminated at Westbury at that time, rather than taking into account a possible increase in service levels. In any event, despite the positive BCR for Bedwyn, the extended electrification was never carried out, presumably on costs grounds.

The electrification to Newbury was delayed and, as part of the franchise extension, in 2015 GWR were asked to consider adding batteries to their class 387 EMUs. This, if implemented, would have enabled these trains to run through to Bedwyn on the thirteen miles of track beyond the wired section. However, after consideration, this was not taken up. Instead, a

further order of IETs was sanctioned, with three five-car units allocated to cover the core Bedwyn to Paddington off-peak service. This decision necessitated an extension of the turn-back siding at Bedwyn, which was duly carried out, at a cost of £1.2m

As a result, and following input from BTPG, the December 2019 timetable offered the best service Bedwyn, Hungerford and Kintbury had ever enjoyed. This was to last just three months until the advent of the pandemic, whereupon service levels were reduced and passenger numbers plummeted, mainly due to the instructions not to use public transport unless absolutely necessary.

GWR's Proposal for May 2022

On March 2nd 2022 GWR informed BTPG that a decision has been made to transfer the three IET units allocated to the Bedwyn service further west in order to replace the service provided by Castle Class trains (reduced length, old stock HSTs). If the intention is to run £200m of bi-mode stock (i.e. electric and diesel) on a non-electrified route, this appears to be a questionable use of trains.

More significantly, to the users of Bedwyn, Hungerford and Kintbury this decision will result in all off-peak Bedwyn - Paddington services ceasing, to be replaced by turbo shuttles to and from Newbury. These will, supposedly offer connections to either Class 387 EMU trains between Newbury and Paddington which will replace the current IET services, or IETs operating between Paddington and Exeter St. David's which call at Newbury. However, draft timetables which we have been given, show many serious flaws, including poor or non-existent connections and much lengthened journey times. These timetables are shown in Appendix 1 as a comparison between the December 2019 timetable, the current timetable (December 2021). In summary it indicates quite clearly how much the Bedwyn service level is being reduced with the direct services to Paddington being reduced from 19 to 6 and the return journey directs from 16 to 3.

In reality connections at Newbury suffer from the following problems, causing stress and anxiety for passengers:

- 1) The inbound services are often late and the Bedwyn shuttle service is not held. This leads to passengers frequently being stranded at Newbury for an hour, waiting for the next service.
- 2) There is no west facing bay at Newbury, causing the Bedwyn shuttle service to often be shunted between sidings and platforms to keep the platforms available for other services. This makes it difficult to hold the connecting service and often requires short notice platform alterations. This in turn requires passengers to use the overbridge,

often running to try and get to a service that could leave at any moment.

Although GWR have tried, on numerous occasions, to resolve the connection issue at Newbury it still remains as a serious flaw to GWR's proposal. Passengers are already stating that, if brought in, these changes will cause them to drive to Newbury which, in turn, could make the hourly off-peak service financially unviable and will cause parking issues in Newbury.

In the GWR proposal the morning peak offering is unaffected, though the evening peak return has several clear gaps. The problem lies with the off-peak service and also the Saturday service, though this does show a slight improvement in connection and journey times when compared to Monday to Friday. Hungerford does have a few calls on Paddington – Exeter trains, but this in no way would make up for the loss of the direct Bedwyn services.

At a time when greater emphasis is being placed on leisure travel, it is inconceivable that the off-peak and weekend offering is to be downgraded, given that these trains would be used for most leisure travel. In addition to the loss of through trains to and from Paddington, with the exception of the aforementioned Hungerford calls, there is no opportunity to travel further west.

This decision was made abruptly and without any prior consultation whatsoever. Given that it will have a major effect on users of Bedwyn, Hungerford and Kintbury stations, this is clearly an unacceptable state of affairs. A very good service will be reduced to a level that will be hardly fit for purpose, outside of the morning peak. Despite the efforts of the timetable team, it is obvious that, with the loss of the three allocated IETs it is impossible to provide a service that is fit for purpose using only one turbo operating as a shuttle.

In addition to the removal of through trains to and from Paddington, the draft timetable will make it difficult for passengers from the three stations west of Newbury to travel to Thatcham or Theale during the off-peak period, and all but impossible to reach Newbury Racecourse, Midgham, Aldermaston and Reading West without a wait in Newbury of nearly an hour. Currently, all of these stations can be reached either using a direct service or by a quick change at Newbury.

It should be noted that for the year immediately before the start of the pandemic, the combined ticket sales for Bedwyn, Hungerford and Kintbury were just over 585,000 and that this figure was likely to be an underestimate due to all three stations not having barriers, which could lead to a certain amount of ticketless travel.

In the short period since this downgrade was announced, BTPG has received a large number of emails, which all condemn this decision. They are highly critical of the decision to remove the ability to travel to and

from Paddington without having to change trains during the off-peak period. In March 2021, as part of a survey about the possible opening of a new Devizes Gateway station, a large number of responses were received which also stressed the importance of through services for stations west of Newbury being maintained.

We therefore call upon the DfT and GWR to reinstate the service to a level as near as possible to that enjoyed prior to the pandemic under the December 2019 timetable. We are aware that this would involve reversal of the decision to redeploy the three units forming the core off-peak service. We would urge this course of action, but we understand that this may not be feasible due to the short timescale before the May timetable comes into effect.

In that event, we would ask for consideration to be given urgently to the suggestion in the following section, which we feel should be workable and would soften the blow which is being felt by a large number of train users in the local area.

BTPG's Suggestion for May 2022

Our short-term suggestion involves just one five-car IET being retained, which could then operate a single diagram between Bedwyn and Paddington. If carefully allocated, such a unit could operate five round trips, taking over from a single EMU on just those occasions. Whilst not returning the service to December 2019 level, it would offer a significant improvement over the draft timetable and provide something that is workable. During the pandemic it has been shown that through IETs can operate alongside a single turbo shuttling between Bedwyn and Newbury.

We would envisage that the most effective use of such a single IET would be a diagram commencing with the 0707 Paddington to Bedwyn. This could then form departures from Bedwyn at 0831, 1141, 1441, 1741 and 2042. With further departures from Paddington at 1007, 1307, 1608 and 1907. The last two of these are important, as they would bolster the severely reduced evening direct peak service in the draft timetable. It should be noted that, as part of the current timetable, the 0707 Paddington departure is formed out of the 0534 Bedwyn to Paddington (which is retained in May), which in turn has run empty stock from Stoke Gifford depot near Bristol. Therefore, the above proposal is not actually a change, but a continuation of the current situation.

This should also have the effect of enabling the single turbo to offer much better connections throughout the day. This is particularly relevant for the evening post-peak service, which should be able to operate to almost the same timings as per the current timetable, which is in stark contrast to the timings in the draft timetable. The most obvious other examples should be the option of retaining the 0924 timing from Bedwyn to Newbury, which would reduce the journey time to Paddington from two

hours, four minutes (in the draft timetable), to one hour, seventeen minutes (as provided currently). It should also help to provide a credible solution to both of the two-hour gaps proposed for Kintbury and between Hungerford and Bedwyn around the middle of the day.

The proposed Saturday service does at least offer better connections at Newbury, but it is composed almost entirely of turbo shuttles. We would ask if there is any possibility of deploying IETs to supplement these, particularly as in the current Saturday timetable they form the majority of services. To illustrate, as things stand, the number of through trains on Saturdays from Bedwyn to Paddington will drop from fifteen to just one and from Paddington to Bedwyn from fourteen to none at all.

We have produced a summary of our suggestion which can be found in Appendix 2. This has been produced from information in the public domain and, as far as we are aware is feasible. Most of the timings feature paths from either the December 2019, current or draft timetables, though we understand that there may be some factors of which we are unaware, that could impact upon this. We therefore ask that serious consideration be given to the aforementioned requests.

BTPG also suggest that, while we have to put up with diesel shuttles, they are regarded as a continuation of the 387s they connect to at Newbury. Thus the shuttle is always held for the incoming 387. To achieve this the driver of the 387 and the diesel shuttle could be the one and the same person. Thus the driver switches trains along with the ongoing passengers. This would ensure the trains are held. We request the Dft and GWR to look into the feasibility of this.

BTPG's Longer-term Suggestions

Since the pandemic and cracks in the IET fleet, GWR have relied on a mix of IETs and diesel shuttles to serve Kintbury, Hungerford and Bedwyn. It was always the understanding that these three stations would eventually get their IETs back, reducing considerably the use of diesel shuttles with their attendant problems of missed connections at Newbury.

To now rely heavily on a diesel shuttle service is a retrograde step and will lead to passengers driving to Newbury and make it appear that Kintbury, Hungerford and Bedwyn are not relevant for off-peak travel.

Given the situation has now come to a head, BTPG would like to state their long-term objective of phasing out diesel shuttles and instead rely on the Class 387 trains, currently serving Paddington to Newbury, to be battery enhanced such that they form a direct Paddington to Bedwyn service supplemented at peak times by stops on through IET services.

Again we ask GWR and the Dft to look into the feasibility of this.

Appendix 1: Comparison of December 2019, December 2021 and Proposed May 2022 Timetables

Weekday Bedwyn to Paddington Services

December 2019 (Our normal service) 27 departures, 19 direct				December 2021 (Current timetable reduced due to IET cracks) 20 departures, 10 direct				May 2022 (Proposed) 20 departures, 6 direct			
Bedwyn	Paddington	Journey Time	Changes (*)	Bedwyn	Paddington	Journey Time	Changes (*)	Bedwyn	Paddington	Journey Time	Changes (*)
0534	0638	1:04	0	0534	0638	1:04	0	0534	0638	1:04	0
0601	0708	1:07	0	0601	0709	1:08	0	0600	0709	1:09	0
0626	0735	1:09	0	0651	0801	1:10	0	0626	0736	1:10	0
0651	0801	1:10	0	0729	0834	1:05	0	0651	0801	1:10	0
0700	0836	1:36	2	0750	0919	1:29	1	0729	0835	1:06	0
0729	0836	1:07	0	0831	0934	1:03	0	0803	0901	0:58	0
0750	0919	1:29	1	0924	1041	1:17	1	0849	1024	1:35	2
0831	0935	1:04	0	1041	1152	1:11	0	0948	1152	2:04	1
0924	1037	1:03	0	1141	1252	1:11	0	1055	1206	1:11	1
1041	1152	1:11	0	1248	1407	1:19	1	1157	1324	1:27	2
1141	1252	1:11	0	1340	1450	1:10	0	1252	1407	1:15	1
1241	1357	1:16	0	1445	1614	1:29	1	1347	1512	1:25	2
1341	1452	1:11	0	1546	1708	1:22	1	1457	1614	1:17	1
1441	1552	1:11	0	1643	1752	1:09	0	1550	1729	1:39	2
1541	1654	1:13	0	1753	1949	1:56	1	1655	1807	1:12	1
1641	1750	1:09	0	1903	2019	1:16	1	1855	2019	1:24	1
1741	1854	1:13	0	2042	2152	1:10	0	1955	2152	1:57	1
1753	1912	1:19	1	2114	2229	1:15	1	2055	2229	1:34	1
1840	1952	1:12	0	2219	0013	1:54	2	2219	0016	1:57	2
1903	2022	1:19	1	2317	0113	1:56	1	2317	0114	1:57	1
2000	2152	1:52	1								
2042	2152	1:10	0								
2110	2229	1:19	1								
2141	2245	1:04	0								
2219	0012	1:53	1								
2317	0115	1:58	1								
0006	0113	1:07	0								
Averages:		72.7	0.333	Averages:		79.7	0.55	Averages:		85.5	0.95

(*) Connections at Newbury are frequently not held for late inbound services. Therefore changes affect journey times more than shown.

Weekday Paddington to Bedwyn Services

December 2019 (Our normal service) 25 arrivals, 16 direct				December 2021 (Current timetable reduced due to IET cracks) 20 arrivals, 6 direct				May 2022 (Proposed) 21 arrivals, 3 direct			
Paddin gton	Bed wyn	Jour ney Time	Chan ges (*)	Paddin gton	Bed wyn	Jour ney Time	Chan ges (*)	Paddin gton	Bed wyn	Jour ney Time	Chan ges (*)
0334	0544	2:10	1	0334	0544	2:10	1	0334	0544	2:10	1
0459	0641	1:42	2	0504	0641	1:37	2	0505	0641	1:36	2
0550	0740	1:50	2	0550	0740	1:50	2	0550	0740	1:50	2
0707	0810	1:03	0	0707	0811	1:04	0	0707	0840	1:33	1
0807	0911	1:04	0	0732	0914	1:42	2	0806	0930	1:24	1
0907	1021	1:14	0	0908	1021	1:13	0	0937	1042	1:05	1
1007	1116	1:09	0	1007	1118	1:11	0	1035	1145	1:10	1
1107	1213	1:06	0	1118	1230	1:12	1	1107	1242	1:35	1
1207	1314	1:07	0	1207	1314	1:07	0	1233	1335	1:02	1
1307	1413	1:06	0	1307	1431	1:24	1	1307	1432	1:25	1
1407	1513	1:06	0	1436	1539	1:03	1	1436	1542	1:06	1
1507	1615	1:08	0	1507	1622	1:15	0	1507	1636	1:29	1
1608	1723	1:15	0	1636	1741	1:05	1	1636	1744	1:08	1
1638	1741	1:03	1	1736	1846	1:10	1	1736	1844	1:08	1
1708	1818	1:10	0	1836	1930	0:54	1	1808	1917	1:09	0
1737	1846	1:09	1	1907	2012	1:05	0	1836	1930	0:54	0
1807	1917	1:10	0	2004	2106	1:02	1	1907	2048	1:41	1
1837	1937	1:00	0	2104	2210	1:06	1	2007	2142	1:35	1
1837	1946	1:09	1	2128	2302	1:34	2	2104	2302	1:58	1
1907	2011	1:04	0	2220	2351	1:31	1	2128	2302	1:34	2
1936	2042	1:06	1					2222	2351	1:29	0
2006	2109	1:03	0								
2104	2210	1:06	1								
2133	2302	1:29	2								
2220	2351	1:31	0								
Averages:		74.4	0.48	Averages:		78.7	0.9	Averages:		85.6	1

(*) Connections at Newbury are frequently not held for late inbound services. Therefore changes affect journey times more than shown.

Appendix 2: Bedwyn Trains Passenger Group Proposed May 2022 Timetable

Notes:

1. The timetable retains the already promised stops on the peak IET through services.
2. The rest of the timetable gives a workable evening peak and off peak direct service by retaining one dedicated five-car IET (for Bedwyn to Paddington) supplemented by one two-car diesel turbo shuttle between Newbury and Bedwyn.
3. The timetable only shows services east of Bedwyn.
4. Some stations are omitted for clarity.
5. Most of the trains shown in this suggested timetable have either already operated in the December 2019 version, are operating currently, or appear in the draft timetable.

Key (top of the tables):

E – Class 387 EMU.

I – Class 800 or 802 IET (Bi-Mode).

T – Class 165 Turbo

Key (bottom of the tables):

A – to Exeter St. David's

B – to Paignton

C – to Plymouth

D – to Frome

E – from Plymouth

F – from Paignton

G – from Exeter St David's

H – from Bristol Temple Meads

I – from Frome

Weekday Bedwyn to Paddington Services

	I	I	I	I	T	E	I	T	I	I	T
Bedwyn	0534	0600	0626	0651	0700		0729	0749	0803	0831	0924
Hungerford	0540	0606	0633	0657	0706		0736	0755		0837	0930
Kintbury	0545	0611	0638	0702	0710			0759		0842	0935
Newbury (a)	0551	0617	0644	0708	0717		0744	0806	0813	0848	0941
Newbury (d)	0552	0618	0645	0710		0724	0745		0814	0849	
Thatcham	0556	0623	0650	0715		0730				0853	
Theale	0605	0631	0702	0723		0742				0901	
Reading	0614	0641	0708	0731		0751	0801		0830	0909	
Paddington	0638	0709	0736	0801			0835		0901	0934	
			H	I					E		

	E	T	E	E	I	T	I	T	E	I	I
Bedwyn		1042			1141	1252		1352		1441	
Hungerford		1048			1147	1258		1358		1447	1524
Kintbury		1053			1152	1303		1403		1452	
Newbury (a)		1059			1158	1310		1410		1458	1531
Newbury (d)	0950		1106	1123	1159		1327		1422	1459	1532
Thatcham	0956		1112		1203				1427	1503	
Theale	1004		1124		1211				1434	1511	
Reading	1012		1136	1138	1222		1342		1444	1522	1547
Paddington	1041			1206	1252		1407		1524	1552	1614
				E			F				G

	T	E	T	I	I	T	E	T	I	E	E
Bedwyn	1550		1655		1741	1755		1855		1955	
Hungerford	1556		1701	1717	1747	1801		1901		2001	
Kintbury	1601		1706		1752	1806		1906		2006	
Newbury (a)	1608		1713	1724	1758	1813		1915		2012	
Newbury (d)		1632		1724	1759		1847		1938		2017
Thatcham		1639			1804		1853				2023
Theale		1646			1813		1905				2035
Reading		1655		1742	1825		1915		1954		2044
Paddington		1729		1807	1854		1954		2019		2124
				G					E		

	I	E	T	I	T	I	I	T	E	T	I
Paddington	1035	1107		1233		1307	1436		1507		1608
Reading	1101	1137		1301		1337	1502		1537		1637
Theale		1144				1345			1545		1644
Thatcham		1152				1352			1553		1656
Newbury (a)	1115	1200		1315		1357	1516		1602		1703
Newbury (d)	1116		1208	1316	1320	1358	1517	1522		1615	1707
Kintbury			1215		1327	1404		1529		1623	1713
Hungerford	1126		1220	1325	1332	1408		1534		1628	1717
Bedwyn			1228		1340	1414		1542		1636	1723
	A			A			B				

<u>STATION</u>	I	T	I	T	I	I	T	I	I	T	I
Paddington	1636		1736		1808	1836		1907	2003		2104
Reading	1702		1803		1838	1901		1936	2029		2129
Theale					1846			1943			
Thatcham					1854			1950			
Newbury (a)	1716		1817		1859	1915		1955	2043		2143
Newbury (d)	1717	1724	1819	1824	1900	1916	1924	1956	2044	2048	2144
Kintbury		1731		1831	1907		1931	2002		2055	
Hungerford	1726	1736		1836	1912	1925	1936	2006		2059	
Bedwyn		1744		1844	1917	1930	1944	2012		2106	
	C		C		D	C			C		C

	T	E	T	I
Paddington		2133		2222
Reading		2210		2301
Theale		2219		2310
Thatcham		2231		2326
Newbury (a)		2239		2334
Newbury (d)	2152		2244	2336
Kintbury	2159		2251	2342
Hungerford	2203		2255	2346
Bedwyn	2210		2302	2351