

GWR Moving to Public Ownership

Mark Hopwood, MD of GWR, has emailed us with:

You may by now have seen the news was confirming that GWR will enter public ownership on Sunday 13 December 2026. At that time GWR will no longer be part of FirstGroup and will become part of DfT Operator (DFTO), under the Government's landmark reform of the rail industry. Throughout this process, our priority remains maintaining a punctual, reliable service for our customers while continuing to support regional growth and connectivity across our network. We will continue to keep you updated on this and other matters, and as ever if there's anything you would like to raise please don't hesitate to get in touch and we will of course be happy to help.

From the Passenger Group Perspective, maintaining our relationship with GWR's senior management is imperative. In the days of British Rail, where there was no competition, rail user groups found it harder to effect change via direct contact with rail industry management. We are determined that the accountability that came with privatisation is retained as the industry moves back into the public sector.

Community Rail Partnership

On April 28th Bill Wells and I had a meeting with Andy Pope, regarding a Community Rail Partnership (CRP) for the stations between Reading and Westbury. A CRP guides initiatives to boost passenger numbers, improve stations, and enhance local well-being.

At present a CRP for our line is at the feasibility stage. We are happy to give our support and were able to put Andy in touch with various other groups (including councils) who might also be able to support the project. A CRP doesn't look at service levels, performance or reliability. Therefore nothing would change in how Bill and I operate.

Buying Off-Peak Tickets from the Station Ticket Machines

In our last newsletter we reported:

There are inconsistencies between the walk-on fares available online and those available at the ticket machines (TVMs) e.g. one can buy online an off-peak day return between Bedwyn and Luton for the 0846 Bedwyn departure. However, even after 0830, the ticket machine at Bedwyn does not offer this option. GWR informed us that there is a plan to align TVMs in mid-2026 with what is available online.

I've been asked to remind you that if you want to buy discounted tickets from the TVM you can press the 'Tickets for future travel' button, but use today's date. Then select to travel after 10am on the same day whereupon all options are presented. This workaround also applies when you want to use a Network Railcard on the 0846.

Train Timetabling to fit in with St Barts School

In previous newsletters we reported that we submitted a request for the 1522 and 1618 Newbury shuttle departures to be re-timed to fit in with the St Barts school day. These revisions are now in place (1527 and 1623 respectively).

Press Quote

Occasionally, we are asked to make comments to the press. This ranges from rail magazines, radio and TV. We were recently asked to provide a quote for RAIL magazine regarding the perceived success, or otherwise, of Project Brunel (a Network Rail program to fix infrastructure and stabilize train performance between Paddington and Reading). We responded with:

Up until recently, we had noticed an improvement with fewer complaints to deal with. This gave us real hope that Project Brunel is paying dividends. However, in recent weeks the performance of our evening trains has slipped back with frequent cancellations and delays. Where a reason is given lack of train crew and faults with IETs are often cited. Combining this with situations where a cause is not stated makes it difficult distinguish whether it is a failing of Project Brunel or reasons outside its terms of reference.

As a passenger group the bottom line is the overall performance. Whether the fault lies with infrastructure, rolling stock or staffing isn't our biggest concern. Instead, it's the overall performance that we base success on.

Automatically Spotting Potential Missed Connections

Recently, GWR went through a spate of missing holds at Newbury. We have a pre-agreed set of holds where, if an inbound train to Newbury is delayed, certain connections can, within limits, be held.

Even with these agreements, the mechanism to hold a service is archaic. For a hold to be implemented, Newbury station staff have to put in a request to GWR's Control in Swindon, who, in turn, phone Network Rail signallers in Didcot who, if in agreement, implement the hold by signalling and radioing the driver. When Newbury is unstaffed, it is down to GWR's staff in the Swindon Control centre to spot the issue. There is no obligation on the signallers or the drivers to implement a hold under their own initiative.

As I'm sure you can imagine, this system is prone to human error. To try and improve the situation, I've been developing software which queries the real time data and compares the situation with the pre-agreed holds policy. At present, I have it working and it identifies situations where a hold can be implemented. I now wish to take this a step forward and directly WhatsApp GWR in real time, requesting the hold. Past experience shows WhatsApp can be an effective means to get a hold implemented.

However, interfacing to WhatsApp is not an easy task. There's lots of information online, but nothing appears to work. So, if you have successfully interfaced WhatsApp from a C# .Net desktop application, please get in touch!

Engineering Works

Monday 1 June to Friday 5 June 2026

Monday to Thursday - The 2230 London Paddington to Bedwyn will start from Reading and will be slightly retimed. An alternative rail connection will be available from London Paddington to Reading.

Monday to Friday - The 0703, 0805, 0906, 1305 & 1406 London Paddington to Newbury will all run slightly later than usual.

Tuesday to Friday - The 0531 Bedwyn to London Paddington will be slightly retimed and will finish its journey at Reading. An alternative rail connection will be available from Reading to London Paddington.

Saturday 6 to Friday 12 June 2026

Saturday and Sunday - trains between London Paddington / Reading and Newbury / Kintbury / Hungerford / Bedwyn will not run, and will be replaced by buses between Reading, Newbury and Bedwyn.

Monday to Friday - The 0703, 0805, 0906, 1305 & 1406 London Paddington to Newbury will all run slightly later than usual.

Monday to Thursday from approximately 2145 until end of service - Buses will replace trains between Newbury and Bedwyn. The 2230 London Paddington to Bedwyn will only run from Reading to Newbury and will be slightly retimed. An alternative rail connection will be available from London Paddington to Reading.

Tuesday to Friday - The 0531 Bedwyn to London Paddington will be slightly retimed and will finish its journey at Reading. An alternative rail connection will be available from Reading to London Paddington.

Saturday 13 to Friday 19 June 2026

Saturday and Sunday - trains between London Paddington / Reading and Newbury / Kintbury / Hungerford / Bedwyn will not run, and will be replaced by buses between Reading, Newbury and Bedwyn.

Saturday 20 to Friday 26 June 2026

Sunday - The 0806 Reading to Newbury will not run and the 0833 Reading to Bedwyn will start from Newbury and run slightly later than usual. A replacement bus will run EARLIER from Reading at 0751 to Newbury. The 0804 (departing 0753) London Paddington to Penzance will be diverted after Reading and will no longer call at Newbury or Pewsey. The 0844 (departing 0831) London Paddington to Penzance will call additionally at Newbury and Pewsey.

Monday to Thursday from approximately 2145 until end of service - Buses will replace trains between Reading, Newbury and Bedwyn.

Tuesday to Friday - The 0531 Bedwyn to London Paddington will be slightly retimed and will finish its journey at Reading. An alternative rail connection will be available from Reading to London Paddington.

Saturday 27 June to Friday 3 July 2026

Monday to Thursday - The 2230 London Paddington to Bedwyn will start from Reading and will be slightly retimed. An alternative rail connection will be available from London Paddington to Reading.

Tuesday to Friday - The 0531 Bedwyn to London Paddington will be slightly retimed and will finish its journey at Reading. An alternative rail connection will be available from Reading to London Paddington.

Saturday 4 to Friday 10 July 2026

Nothing affecting our line.

Saturday 11 to Friday 17 July 2026

Saturday until approximately 0700 - Buses will replace trains between Reading, Newbury and Bedwyn. A few other trains will be subject to minor retimings.

Sunday - The 0806 Reading to Newbury will not run and the 0833 Reading to Bedwyn will start from Newbury and run slightly later than usual. A replacement bus will run EARLIER from Reading at 0751 to Newbury. The 0804 (departing 0753) London Paddington to Penzance will be diverted after Reading and will no longer call at Newbury or Pewsey. The 0844 (departing 0828) London Paddington to Penzance will call additionally at Newbury and Pewsey. The 2323 Newbury to Reading will not run and will be replaced by a bus.

Monday to Thursday - The 2230 London Paddington to Bedwyn will start from Reading and will be slightly retimed. An alternative rail connection will be available from London Paddington to Reading.

Tuesday to Friday - The 0531 Bedwyn to London Paddington will be slightly retimed and will finish its journey at Reading. An alternative rail connection will be available from Reading to London Paddington.

Saturday 18 to Friday 24 July 2026

Monday to Thursday from approximately 2145 until end of service - Buses will replace trains between Newbury and Bedwyn. The 2230 London Paddington to Bedwyn will start from Reading (and will also finish its journey at Newbury) and will be slightly retimed. An alternative rail connection will be available from London Paddington to Reading.

Tuesday to Friday - The 0531 Bedwyn to London Paddington will be slightly retimed and will finish its journey at Reading. An alternative rail connection will be available from Reading to London Paddington.

Saturday 25 to Friday 31 July 2026

Nothing affecting our line.

Saturday 1 to Friday 7 August 2026

Monday to Wednesday from approximately 2145 until end of service - Buses will replace trains between Reading, Newbury and Bedwyn.

Friday - The 0017 Reading to Newbury will not run and will be replaced by a bus.

Tuesday to Friday - The 0531 Bedwyn to London Paddington will be slightly retimed and will finish its journey at Reading. An alternative rail connection will be available from Reading to London Paddington.

Best wishes

Steve Smith

Bedwyn Trains Passenger Group