

Bedwyn Trains Passenger Group – Requests for Interim Improvements

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1 Introduction

From May 2022, instead of the restoration of the pre-pandemic off-peak Paddington through service for Bedwyn, Hungerford and Kintbury, the stations were demoted to a Class 165 DMU Turbo shuttle between Bedwyn and Newbury. The three 5-car Class 800 bi-mode sets (IETs), purchased in 2019 specifically to operate between Paddington and Bedwyn, were reallocated to operate in the West Country, giving Bedwyn, Hungerford and Bedwyn the worst off-peak service since June 1992.

Since May 2022, we have received a large number of complaints, particularly regarding connections not being held at Newbury or the inbound train being so delayed that the connection is missed. This causes passengers to suffer 'connection anxiety' and, when the connection is tight, causes them to run.

We've worked closely with GWR to improve the situation and acknowledge that GWR have implemented a series of our requests, including a 'connections hold policy', the restoration of the 1906 Paddington to Bedwyn and changes to the shuttle timetable to better connect with trains running between Paddington and Newbury. However, delayed services and human error still cause passengers to miss connections at Newbury. This in turn has been detrimental to the Bedwyn, Hungerford and Newbury passenger counts. In particular since the pandemic, Bedwyn and Kintbury are (using Office of Rail and Road data) the worst recovered stations between Reading and Bedwyn. Hungerford, with its additional stops on West of England services fares slightly better.

We are heartened that GWR and the DfT are committed to restore the direct off-peak services. However, due to financial constraints with other schemes being prioritised, there is presently no timescale. Therefore, this report sets out a series of requests to make the current situation more bearable for passengers. We acknowledge that some of these options will require funding, however this must be taken in the context of the savings and gains made by redeploying the three IETs originally purchased to serve Paddington to Bedwyn off-peak.

2 Gaps in Westbound Weekday Services

Given that only one Turbo operates the shuttle between Newbury and Bedwyn, it is all but impossible, with the current Paddington to Newbury timetable, to create an hourly connecting service. This, since the introduction of the shuttles, has led to the following gaps in the Paddington departures for connections to Bedwyn:

- 1) A 90-minute gap between the 0906 and the 1036 Paddington departures
- 2) An 83-minute gap between the 1112 and the 1235 Paddington departures
- 3) A 91-minute gap between the 1305 and the 1436 Paddington departures
- 4) An 84-minute gap between the 1512 and the 1636 Paddington departures

Section 2.1 details our suggestion to resolve these. Should this not be possible, sections 2.2 and 2.3 should be considered to resolve points 4 and 3, above, respectively. Alternatives for point 4, are dealt with first as we get a considerable number of complaints about the late afternoon 84-minute gap. We get fewer complaints about point 3, but it remains a significant problem.

2.1 Preferred Solution

The return of our three 5-car IETs would solve this and other issues. In the event of this not being possible at the current time, we would propose sufficient 5-car IETs are found to operate services from Paddington to Bedwyn at 1012, 1213, 1406 and 1605. Return services would operate from Bedwyn to Paddington at 1141, 1341, 1541 and 1741. In each case these would replace Class 387 services between Paddington and Newbury.

Later afternoon off-peak passengers could catch the 1548 departure from Paddington, arriving in Reading at 1611, then pick up the 1605 Paddington service.

If implemented, this would offer a clear improvement for users of Bedwyn, Hungerford and Kintbury. It should also increase capacity, as only one Newbury to Paddington diagram is currently operated as an eight car. It should also result in a reduction of connection issues at Newbury in both directions.

This would offer a level of service similar to that provided immediately prior to the May 2022 downgrade.

2.2 Alternatives to Fill the Late Afternoon 84-minute Service Gap

2.2.1 Alternative 1: A Bedwyn Stop on the 1603 Paddington to Penzance

A solution is for the 1603 Paddington to Penzance to call at Bedwyn at 1651 and for the 1655 Bedwyn to Newbury to be slightly re-timed to 1658¹, allowing Hungerford and Kintbury passengers to double back. If implemented, we request that this is a recognised route so no additional fare is payable by Kintbury and Hungerford passengers. Also, this solution might, if the 1603 is delayed, require a holds policy at Bedwyn.

Off-peak users would use the 1548 off Paddington, then pick up the Penzance train at Reading.

The late afternoon timetable would become:

Paddington	1436		1512		1548	1603		1636	
Reading	1501		1538		1611	1629		1702	
Newbury	1515	1527	1602	1623				1717	1724
Kintbury		1534		1630					1731
Hungerford		1539		1635				1725	1736
Bedwyn		1547		1643		1652	1658		1744
Hungerford							1704		
Kintbury							1709		

We should imagine that Bedwyn, as the only stop on the 1603 between Reading and Castle Cary, will raise a few eyebrows. However, if the preferred solution (switching the 1605 off Paddington from a Class 387 to a 5-car IET) is not possible, then this request needs to be regarded in the context of the state of the rail industry. Since May 2022, Kintbury, Hungerford and Bedwyn have been relegated to a mishmash of hybrid service, consisting of other services connected to the Newbury to Bedwyn shuttle. Passengers have been disadvantaged for over three years, with no end in sight. This request will resolve the main weekday timetabling issue.

¹ Ideally, due to the potential late running of the Penzance service, the 1655 should be re-timed as late as possible. However, when this service arrives at Newbury it has to be shunted from platform 2 to platform 1 to form the 1724 shuttle from Newbury to Bedwyn.

2.2.2 Alternative 2: An Additional Shuttle to meet the 1603 off Paddington

A variation on 'Alternative 1' is to put a Newbury stop on the 1603 Paddington to Penzance and run an additional Newbury to Bedwyn shuttle. This would require a second Turbo for this service. Off-peak passengers could catch the 1548 from Paddington and pick up the service at Reading.

The mid to late afternoon timetable would become:

Paddington	1436		1512		1548	1603		1636	
Reading	1501		1538		1611	1629		1702	
Newbury	1515	1527	1602	1623		1642	1650	1717	1724
Kintbury		1534		1630			1657		1731
Hungerford		1539		1635			1702	1725	1736
Bedwyn		1547		1643			1710		1744

2.3 Alternatives to Fill the Early Afternoon 91-minute Service Gap

2.3.1 Alternative 1: A Bedwyn Stop on the 1403 Paddington to Penzance

A solution is for the 1403 Paddington to Penzance to call at Bedwyn at 1451, allowing Hungerford and Kintbury passengers to double back by catching the 1457 from Bedwyn. If implemented, we request that this is a recognised route so no additional fare is payable by Kintbury and Hungerford passengers. Also, this solution might, if the 1403 is delayed, require a holds policy at Bedwyn.

2.3.2 Alternative 2: An Additional Shuttle to meet the 1406 off Paddington

Retain the Class 387 to Newbury for the 1406 from Paddington and add a Newbury to Bedwyn shuttle. This would require a second Turbo for this service.

2.3.3 Alternative 3: An Additional Shuttle to meet the 1403 off Paddington

A variation on 'Alternative 1' is to put a Newbury stop on the 1403 Paddington to Penzance and run an additional Newbury to Bedwyn shuttle. This would require a second Turbo for this service.

3 A Direct Paddington to Kintbury and Bedwyn Saturday Service

Before the pandemic, and since 1992, Bedwyn, Hungerford and Kintbury have had an hourly direct Saturday service to and from Paddington. Currently, for Bedwyn, there is one direct train to Paddington at 0910 and nothing returning. Kintbury has no direct service.

We request that Kintbury be given a stop on the 0910 off Bedwyn.

Returning from Paddington, Hungerford currently has a stop on the 1903. We request that Kintbury and Bedwyn be given stops on at least one of the 1635, 1903 or 2003 off Paddington.

4 Newbury Station Improvements

4.1 Newbury to Bedwyn Westbound Shuttles to be platform dispatched

When Mark Hopwood informed us of the introduction of the off-peak Newbury to Bedwyn shuttle service, we, understanding that given the financial pressures, there was no negotiation, said that GWR need to make the shuttles work. Mark agreed and set a directive that trains must not depart while connecting passengers were on the station. GWR further agreed to the introduction of a holds policy.

However, over three years later, there are still occasions when shuttles do not get held within the agreed framework. Also, there are occasions when shuttles depart with connecting passengers on the station.

The two main factors for the failure of policy are:

- 1) For a hold to be implemented, Newbury station staff have to put in a request to Control, who, in turn, phone Network Rail signallers who, if in agreement, implement the hold by signalling and radioing the driver. If Newbury station staff miss putting in the request to Control, then the driver is at liberty to depart irrespective of the position of the connecting service.
- 2) The driver is responsible for dispatching the shuttle. This is known as Driver Only Operation (DOO). To dispatch, the driver needs a green signal and to see that it is safe to close and lock the doors. The driver isn't required to take into account passengers other than those who have reached the train doors.

We request that the obligation for dispatch be switched from DOO to a platform dispatcher. The dispatcher would be able to see the 'bigger picture' and not release the shuttle until all passengers have boarded. Additionally, the dispatcher would, for the given service, be dedicated to its dispatch and less likely to miss requesting Control to hold the service.

4.2 Driver shift change-overs at Newbury

One of the issues with the shuttle between Newbury and Bedwyn is there has to be driver shift change-overs at Newbury. Occasionally, this causes problems with the relief driver not having

reached Newbury to take over. We accept that, while shuttles remain in place, there is nothing that can be done about this.

However, we are aware of occasions when there has been no driver available to run the Class 387 Newbury to Paddington service. An example of this was the 1425 on 09/06/2026.

We request that no driver shift change overs are made at Newbury for services travelling east. Instead change-overs should occur at Reading or Paddington where there is (i) less chance of the relief driver being delayed (ii) options for alternative drivers.

4.3 Later Staffing Times at Newbury Station

With the loss of our direct services, the staffing of Newbury station became critical for passengers transferring to the off-peak shuttles between Newbury and Bedwyn. However, the shuttle connections now exceed the staffing times of Newbury station. This creates a two-factor problem:

- 1) Reduced chance of GWR spotting the need to hold the shuttle.
- 2) Safety of passengers, especially lone females travelling late at night.

Newbury station is staffed as follows:

Monday to Friday: 06:00 - 20:00

Saturday: 07:00 - 19:00

Sunday: 08:30 - 17:00

For Monday to Friday, the following Newbury to Bedwyn shuttle departures are not staffed: 2049, 2157, 2247

For Saturday, the following Newbury to Bedwyn shuttle departures are not staffed: 1903, 2006, 2055, 2148, 2245, 2341

Therefore, we request that Newbury station be staffed until 2300 on weekdays and until midnight on Saturdays. As Sunday connections are made at Reading, there is no need to extend the staffing times on a Sunday.

4.4 Signage and Advertising of Help Points at Newbury Station

Bedwyn Trains Passenger Group receive complaints from customers where the use of the help point may have facilitated a better outcome.

We request that additional signage be placed at Newbury station, directing customers towards help points. These should be on the station exits and the overbridge. Additionally, the signage should state that if you have missed the last connection of the day, then you are entitled to a taxi.

4.5 Taxis from Newbury

As far as we are aware, when a taxi is arranged for passengers stranded at Newbury, it has to be sent from Reading.

We request GWR arrange a contract with a Newbury-based taxi firm. The details of which should be accessible to both platform staff and the operators staffing the help points.

4.6 Additional Customer Information Screen (CIS) at Newbury

Passengers alighting on Platform 1, Newbury, looking to transfer to the Bedwyn shuttle, need to quickly know whether they should remain on Platform 1 or cross the overbridge to Platform 2. Due to the placement of the departures board, passengers end up having to head away from the overbridge to find out the information, losing vital seconds.

We request that an additional departures board is mounted at the foot of the overbridge on Platform 1.

4.7 Public Address Announcements

GWR has improved the PA announcements at Newbury and, during staffed hours, the station staff do announce information. However, we request the following improvements:

- 1) Control to ensure correct information is relayed to any train coming into Newbury such that an on-board announcement can be made. This includes (i) the time and platform of the connection (ii) whether passengers need to cross the overbridge (iii) whether a connection is being held.
- 2) Control has access to the PA system at Newbury for use when the station is unstaffed.

5 Review of Holds Policy

5.1 Review of Hold Time on the 2049 Weekday

The Newbury to Bedwyn connections policy states that the 2T31 2049 Newbury – Bedwyn (the shuttle connection for the 2003 off Paddington, arriving Newbury at 2042), can be held for up to six minutes.

The limit of six minutes is because the 2042 off Bedwyn needs the platform at 2058. This train is lightly loaded, whereas the 2T31 is an important train.

We request the 2042 off Bedwyn be re-timed to increase the connection hold time of the 2T31. An alternative is the train forming the 2049 Newbury to Bedwyn service wait in the Racecourse platform 3, then follow the Plymouth train out of Newbury platform 1.

5.2 Saturday Holds Policy

There is a weekday holds policy which tells Control by how many minutes connections can be held at Newbury to await late incoming trains.

We request that a similar policy be drawn up for Saturdays.

5.3 Sunday Holds Policy

Given the two-hour gaps in Sunday service, a holds policy for the Reading to Bedwyn service is essential.

We request a westbound holds policy be drawn up for Sundays.

5.4 Software to alert Control of missed connections.

There have been occasions when Newbury platform staff and Control have failed to adhere to the holds policy, mentioned above.

We have developed software to automatically spot where holds could be applied. By way of example, the following are alerts the software raised for 15/06/2026:

13:11 Please can 2T17 be held at Newbury due to inbound 1C81 delayed by 10 minutes.

14:03 Please can 2K39 be held at Newbury due to inbound 2T18 delayed by 1 minutes.

17:09 Please can 2T25 be held at Newbury due to inbound 1C89 delayed by 6 minutes.

18:03 Please can 2T27 be held at Newbury due to inbound 1C91 delayed by 5 minutes.

18:44 Please can 2T29 be held at Newbury due to inbound 1C93 delayed by 6 minutes.

We request this software is used in Control to alert staff to consider implementing a hold. The software is generic, allowing for holds on other parts of the network.

5.5 Adding a Stop Order policy to the Holds Policy

Some of the westbound connections at Newbury are IETs from Paddington, which run beyond Newbury to the West Country. In such cases, where the connection is missed at Newbury, stop orders can be added such that the IET service then stops at Kintbury, Hungerford and Bedwyn.

We request that this be formalised and added to the holds policy, such that GWR staff have a fixed set of rules to work to when a connection from an IET is missed.

6 Changes to Journey Planners

6.1 Hungerford as an Eastbound Interchange Station

There are some services, from the West of England, that don't call at Bedwyn but do call at Hungerford before calling at Newbury, Reading and Paddington. Journey planners for Bedwyn to Paddington, requiring use of the Bedwyn to Newbury shuttle, favour a change at Hungerford rather than Newbury. At the time of writing, the 1550 weekday Bedwyn departure is such an example.

There have been occasions where passengers have followed this advice, alighted at Hungerford, only to find that the connecting service is severely delayed or cancelled. In these circumstances, remaining on the shuttle to Newbury and catching an alternative Newbury eastbound departure would have given a better outcome for the passengers.

Therefore, we request that changes at Hungerford for eastbound travel are not advertised when it is for the same train that can be connected at Newbury.

6.2 Saturday 1505 Paddington to Newbury

The 1505 is the advertised connection for the 1601 Newbury to Bedwyn shuttle. We request that the faster 1503 service is also given as an option. Should the 1503 be delayed at Paddington, and the 1505 is running on time, then passengers should be advised to catch the 1505.

6.3 Saturday 1905 Paddington to Newbury

The 1905 is the advertised connection for the 2000 Newbury to Bedwyn shuttle. We request that the faster 1903 service is also given as an option. Should the 1903 be delayed at Paddington, and the 1905 is running on time, then passengers should be advised to catch the 1905.

6.4 Off-Peak Journey Planner

Since May 2022, Kintbury, Hungerford and Bedwyn have been relegated to a hybrid service, made up of other services connected to the Newbury to Bedwyn shuttle.

Journey planners always show the fastest service, not allowing for an off-peak. For example a search for afternoon services between Paddington and Bedwyn gives:

Dep	Arr	Chg	Dur
15:12	16:38	1	1h 26m
Dep	Arr	Chg	Dur
16:36	17:44	1	1h 8m

This does not include the following off-peak option:

Catch the 1548 from Paddington, arriving Reading at 1611. Then catch the 1633 Reading to Newbury, arriving 1654. Then catch the 1724 for Bedwyn, arriving 1744. Although this is slow, it

does allow for a later Paddington off-peak departure without having to wait for the 1906. When we made passengers aware of this option, there was significant uptake.

We request that the journey planners be adjusted to allow for off-peak options, including use of the Elizabeth Line. This could be achieved by an 'Off-peak only' checkbox on the search options screen.

7 Delayed 1836 and Kintbury Connections

The 1836 weekday Paddington departure does not call at Kintbury. Instead, passengers alight at Newbury at 1915 and then catch the 1924 shuttle. A tip that we give passengers is that if the service is delayed and the shuttle is missed, then remain on the 1836, alight at Hungerford and catch the shuttle back to Kintbury. GWR have agreed that, in these circumstances, tickets are valid to double back via Hungerford.

We request that, when these circumstances arise, staff onboard the 1836 make Kintbury passengers aware that they should stay on board and double back.

8 Cancellations of the 1906

The 1906 is vulnerable to being cancelled. This is the first off-peak evening direct train and the penultimate of the day, with the next direct service not until 2230.

We request that, when the 1906 is cancelled and sufficient notice is given, passengers with off-peak tickets are allowed to use the 1808 or the 1836.

9 First Class Travel

Concern has been raised that lack of first class seating, on the Bedwyn to Newbury shuttle, may be affecting revenue and reducing the business case for reinstatement of our direct Bedwyn to Paddington services.

We request a comparison is made and, if there is grounds for concern, the Bedwyn to Newbury shuttle is provided with a first class seating area.

10 Final Thoughts and Looking Ahead

All of the above suggestions are necessary to improve the shuttles and close the timetable gaps – making life more bearable for passengers. However, nothing substitutes for the reinstatement of the direct service between Bedwyn and Paddington. Therefore, although we request that all of the above be implemented, we will continue to campaign for a full reinstatement.

The proposals in this report include the option of reinstating 5-car IETs for the 1405 and 1605 Paddington departures. This, of course, assumes that 5-car IETs are available. This might be possible when the Class 175s free up 5-car IETs.

We have previously proposed two timetables: i) for the return of one 5-car IET ii) for the return of two 5-car IETs. Should GWR find itself able to reallocate one or two 5-car IETs, we would be delighted to update and resubmit either of these two timetables.

Finally, we need the DfT and GWR to consider the reinstatement of our direct Paddington services in any future rolling stock purchases. In particular, not to replace the ageing Class 165s, operating between Newbury and Bedwyn, with trains unsuited to run between Paddington and Reading. With the advancement of battery hybrid trains, we would request that these be considered as a solution for the Paddington to Bedwyn (and eventual Westbury, including the proposed new Devizes Gateway Station) service.