

THE BEST TIMETABLES OF THE BRITISH ISLES

All the printed editions of my Directory contained this section, and it always seemed to stimulate great debate! In those days I merely listed the best without comment, except to say that for a timetable to qualify for consideration it had to be in 24-hour clock, have an index of places served and have decent maps. However, in those days, whilst the Directory attracted advertising it did not have sponsorship as such and I feared on switching to the internet with sponsorship it might be difficult either to expect sponsors to possibly have their own products ignored, or to have the confidence of users that the choices were indeed not dependent at all on any such sponsorship. I received, however, many requests to restore the section and so felt the time had come to do so. I sincerely hope all users accept that my choices are those that I would make whether or not any sponsorship of this site existed. A benefit of the new listings is that I now give reasons for my decisions and I hope this might spur on some who are not there, and wonder why, to realise that it is often the omission of something small that disqualifies them. One thing I consider essential: leaflets are fine as an extra but no replacement for an area booklet, or combined map and guide, showing the network. Sadly this is why, for example, not a single Arriva operation appears below. Finally a word about size. I consider only the content of a timetable, as it is reasonable to accept that an A4 volume permits greater clarity but on the other hand an A5, or even smaller, book lends itself to portability. Comments below regarding size are therefore mere facts and have no bearing on my decision to include a publication.

ENTRIES IN RED ARE THOSE I CONSIDER TO BE OUTSTANDING IN THEIR FIELD
ENTRIES IN BLUE ARE THOSE I CONSIDER TO BE VERY GOOD PUBLICATIONS

BEST LOCAL AUTHORITY TIMETABLES:

ENGLAND

Cornwall

Cornwall has been publishing a comprehensive timetable summer and winter without a break for as long as any authority in Britain. In recent years, whilst it kept this up, the quality of the publication slipped as it followed a policy of obtaining significant financial contributions from its main operators. The problem was three-fold: firstly it tended to be a 'First' book with the others tacked on, leading to an Index that was largely First-oriented; secondly each operator appeared in its own house-style of font, leading to an inconsistent appearance; and thirdly it was consistently 24-hour apart from the then Truronian input, where that operator alone insisted on its times appearing in 12-hour. In Summer 2006 every one of these problems was corrected and the publication once again became first-rate. The style became the same throughout with various operators merely delineated by various coloured headings, the index was much improved and became 'neutral' and well sub-divided too, and the whole went 24-hour – and all this with the financial contributions from major operators maintained, though this ceased in 2013. Summer 2008 saw this split into four volumes, each A5 in size, and this continued until April 2012 when it returned to a single volume. Then, in June 2015, it changed again – a major change in policy to keep costs down – and this has continued with the June 2018 edition. It now shows full timetables for 'minor operators' (and train services) with detailed summaries for bus services operated by First, Plymouth Citybus and Stagecoach. It is a 156-page A5 book and town maps are, as always, superb, especially for a county that does not have many large towns at all, covering Bodmin, Bude, Camborne & Redruth, Falmouth, Fowey, Hayle, Launceston, Liskeard, Looe, Newquay, Penzance, Perranporth, Saltash, St Austell & St Blazey, St Ives, Torpoint, Truro, and Wadebridge. These maps show all operators' services as does the overall System Map, which itself is spread over 8 pages. Cornwall's 16 ferry services and its air routes are included. There is an excellent index of places served. The publication would benefit from having details of what has changed since the last edition - something its neighbour Devon has always included to good effect – however the whole publication is very high quality indeed. REVISED 09/07/18

Derbyshire

It is difficult to find words to adequately extol the excellence of this county! They have always produced the most excellent books, updated with cumulative supplements as required. There are so many refinements: always a main index of places served, plus at least one other to show access just from the main towns; a subscription card for free updates; an inserted system map; very-high-quality local town maps; and copious information regarding access to places of interest. Each timetable is, where possible, shown with 'up' and 'down' services facing each other. Incidentally, no nonsense here about omitting unitary parts of the county: Derby City is treated as is the rest of the county, with full details shown. For long-term consistent excellence, these have to be some of the finest county timetables in Britain. [REVISED 12/08/18](#)

Devon

Devon has for some years produced an excellent series of books, both summer and winter, and this is no mean feat for a county that is predominately rural in nature. Despite the volumes being relatively small, each always has an excellent index of places served and always adds the main changes since the last edition. The table layout is a model of clarity, there is always a system map and town plans are excellent. What is more, the timetables are always out well before implementation date. In recent times there has been the inevitable need to save money. Too many authorities are taking the lazy way out and merely abolishing timetables and/or maps. Not so here. The May 2011 timetables abolished spot colours and hence all are now black & white only (which personally I prefer anyway), removed some optional information, slightly revised some table banks to save pages and are now usually published just in May. However, owing to quite major changes, the East Devon book has been reissued in September 2018. Each volume retains its colour system map and all the town plans. These are timetables of the very highest quality. [REVISED 14/09/18](#)

Hampshire

Hampshire publishes a series of five books, two folders (each with full timetables) and one map & guide (for Basingstoke) that only contains summary timetables. Taken together, yes it does mean the publicity is not comprehensive for the whole of the county, but it is for the vast majority of its terrain. Where some urban areas are not covered they're either shown in an adjacent Surrey book or in the First Portsmouth, Fareham & Gosport book. The whole is then complemented by a system map. Each of the five books has an index of places served and local maps. This is a very effective set for a large county showing a good use of resources and the quality is very high throughout. [REVISED 23/03/19](#)

Milton Keynes

A high-quality publication comes from unitary Milton Keynes with a superb single volume timetable, the latest being for May 2019. With 160 pages, all routes are covered including long-distance services that go out of the area. It has an excellent index of places served. A blow-up map of Milton Keynes centre is included in the separate system map placed inside the rear cover. The introduction offers a great deal of information on fares, operators' addresses and contact details. Many another authority could learn from this excellent publication. [REVISED 03/05/19](#)

West Berkshire

This authority produced five (A6) booklets, complemented by a general guide to using public transport in West Berkshire, which contained a system map. In November 2009 the booklets were replaced by one large volume for the whole area, but still A6 and with a system map and index of places served. It then went over to five books again, owing to a lack of stability in the network, before finally returning to a 162-page single volume in January 2011. The latest, for February 2018, has 100 pages. A plan of central Reading is included – not in the area, but very useful as many services inevitably go there. There is copious other detail added including operators' addresses, an index of places served, details of ticket types, a map of Newbury and three system maps: one each for West of Newbury, Newbury & Thatcham and East of Thatcham. There are also plans of where buses stop in Hungerford, Lambourn, Pangbourne, Tadley, Thatcham and Theale. Clarity of the tables is excellent and each uses separate colours in headings to denote days of the week applicable. Other authorities should study these to see that it is perfectly possible to have an excellent publication in an A6 format. [REVISED 26/02/18](#)

Wokingham

Berkshire was unusual in not having some unitary authorities created within it, but in being split totally into six unitaries. As the original county produced comprehensive information the fact half of the unitaries do little or nothing is a major disappointment, but at least the other half excel. Wokingham has three excellent books, the latest all dated September 2018, each having an index of places served and a system map. The Twyford & Woodley book also has a blow-up of the

Woodley area, the Western book a blow-up of Lower Earley and the Wokingham book one of Wokingham. However each also has town plans showing stops in Reading and Wokingham town centres - despite the former even being outside the authority's area, but nevertheless a main destination for many users. There is also an excellent introduction in each book giving copious information on fares, whilst details of what has changed since the last edition are added. Finally a separate system map complements the three books. These are very high quality publications.

REVISED 29/09/18

WALES

Conwy

Conwy has been producing good timetables for many years but they did not feature here as they were let down by the 'over-schematic' map of its most important town: Llandudno. However the summer 2010 edition upgraded all its maps to full colour and included a proper map of Llandudno and this has continued with subsequent issues. Indeed, the town plans are now substantial in number: for Abergele, Betws-y-Coed, Colwyn Bay, Conwy & Llandudno Junction, Deganwy, Dwygyfylchi, Kinnel Bay, Llandudno, Llanfairfechan, Llanrwst, Old Colwyn, Penmaenmawr and Tywyn. There is also a system map, a full index of places served, details of rover tickets, school term dates, places to visit and what's changed since the previous edition – and, needless to say, everything is bilingual. The latest version is January 2019 – altogether an excellent publication.

REVISED 17/05/19

Denbighshire

After having produced quite good timetables for some years Denbighshire produced an excellent volume in July 2013 and this quality has been continued, with the latest edition being February 2019. It has an excellent introduction with the left-hand pages in Welsh and the right in English, including details of relevant telephone numbers, full details of the North Wales Rover and what has changed since the last edition. There is a very good index of places served. At the rear is a high-quality system map and excellent town plans for Corwen, Denbigh, Llangollen, Prestatyn, Rhyl and Ruthin, all in colour. The book has 96 pages and the timetables are very clear in presentation. This is possibly the best timetable produced in Wales.

REVISED 02/02/19

Flintshire

Flintshire produced an excellent A4 timetable for some years, but reverted to A5. The latest, May 2017 edition, has an index of places served and good general information, including for tickets, a very good system map, plus blow-ups of Buckley, Connah's Quay, Mold & Shotton, Flint and Holywell. The whole is bilingual and clarity is excellent throughout. The paper quality has been reduced but this is perfectly acceptable to keep costs down and has not affected the quality of the production.

REVISED 18/01/18

Isle of Anglesey (Ynys Môn)

The Isle of Anglesey has had good timetables for many years and these have got even better of late. The latest, for April-September 2018, is a 72-page book which has a good index of places served, separate details of places to visit (including rovers), a good system map as a pull-out flap to the back cover and town plans of Amlwch, Beaumaris, Holyhead, Llanfair PG, Llangefni and Menai Bridge. Of course everything is bilingual. A very fine publication.

REVISED 14/06/18

SCOTLAND

Argyll and Bute

This council covers a huge area stretching on the mainland from Helensburgh to Bridge of Orchy and, on the coast, from Oban to Campbeltown, but including around 30 islands, of which Bute, Islay, Jura, Mull and Tiree have bus services and others are also served by some of the 31 ferry services in the council area. In an era when many small authorities with simple networks make excuses not to publish timetables, it is so refreshing to see Argyll and Bute not only doing so in eight booklets, but ensuring they are all of a high standard. Each has details of bus and ferry operators together with information on ticketing, an index of places served and high-quality coloured maps including blow-ups of the relevant towns. The Mull & Iona booklet even has a map of electric vehicle charging-points and details of cycle hire outlets and taxi offices. There is also a separate system map and summary of services (currently 2017/18) and this also has blow-ups of Campbeltown, Dunoon, Helensburgh, Oban and Rothesay. Note that services in the Helensburgh and Lomond area are contracted to Strathclyde and so timetables for these services do not appear

in these. The booklets are also reissued when changes take place and the Council is to be congratulated for putting so much effort into producing such high-quality publicity. [REVISED 24/10/17](#)

Dumfries & Galloway

This large area was covered by seven books but December 2008 saw them merged into a single 140-page publication. It has expanded to 154 pages with the latest, August 2018, edition. It has a good index of places served and benefits from a very clear layout for each table, despite only being two-colour. It has an attractive cover, all notes appear at the foot of each page and school term dates and other general information is in a section at the front. The whole is complemented by a separate system map (May 2016) which itself has an excellent blow-ups of Dumfries and Stranraer. This is the best timetable produced by any Scottish council. [REVISED 04/10/18](#)

BEST BUS OPERATORS' TIMETABLES:

ENGLAND

Bournemouth Transport (Yellow Buses)

Bournemouth Transport produced high-quality timetables for some years but then downgraded them to a series of booklets. This was followed by a controversial renumbering system that locals never understood and usage and reliability dropped. Fortunately new management completely changed things, with a network unashamed to revert to previous numbering and far greater stability and reliability – complemented by a new single timetable book for the Winter 2018/19 period. The latest is now an April 2019 version. With 104 pages – about the maximum possible without going to perfect binding – it has, at the rear, an index of places served, together with the stands each uses in the town centre (which has a plan on the same page). A slightly larger index then appears, followed by both a diagrammatic and geographical system map as a pull-out of the rear cover. My only criticism relates to route branding. I have never been in favour, but that's not relevant here. It's just that each timetable is printed in the colour used by that route and this means it is not easy to distinguish between Monday-Friday, Saturday and Sunday sections. Many timetables now use a fixed colour for all Mon-Fri pages, another for Saturdays and a third for Sundays, so sections stand out. If YB wants route branding in the timetable it needs better headings and could take a leaf out of railway timetables in the days when they were all black & white, where the headings were plain 'Mondays to Fridays,' 'Saturdays' was always reversed out in a black box and 'Sundays' appeared in a plain box. Anyway, it's good to see such a quality publication. [REVISED 02/04/19](#)

Compass Bus

The new Compass timetable in September 2009 really showed what a small operator can do and should have put most others to shame. Having expanded it adopted three books, one for East Sussex, another for West Sussex and the few Surrey services in a third. It was, therefore, very good to see a single book for all Compass Bus services from April 2017 – except for those in the Brighton & Hove area, which only appear in the Brighton & Hove Bus & Coach book, which is disappointing as that book has a much lower standard. The latest edition is for April 2019 and has details of what's changed since the last edition, a system map and an index of places served, plus local maps for its routes in Burgess Hill, Haywards Heath, Lewes and Worthing. It has information about rovers, seasons and other fares and makes its enquiry number prominent. So many operators nowadays omit most of this – indeed cop out on enquiries altogether by using Traveline. This is one of the best small-operator timetables in the country. [REVISED 04/04/19](#)

Cuckmere Buses

Cuckmere Buses is the trading name of Cuckmere Community Bus, which operates services in the coastal area of East Sussex, ranging from rural to town services. The summer timetable is for the period from April to October 2019 and is a new, very high-quality, production. It has details of what has changed since the winter, followed by a numerical list of its 20 services, then an index of places served. Routes are accompanied by maps which show tourist sites of interest *en route* and show all stations passed too. The Seaford town network also shows a full town map. Advertisements are quite numerous, and mainly tourist-oriented, which I'm sure contributes to the costs of production. Why don't more operators do this so they can raise the standards of their publicity? This the most outstanding timetable in the country produced by a Community Bus service and they are to be congratulated. [REVISED 23/04/19](#)

First Berkshire & the Thames Valley

The Slough, Windsor & Heathrow timetable from the above is excellent. The network has much diminished in recent times, but the quality of the timetable has not been sacrificed. The latest, June

2018 edition has 40 pages, with a system map and an index of places served, plus a plan of Slough town centre, showing all bus stops. It also has excellent maps of each route, the latter clearly showing railway stations passed *en route*, something omitted by so many operators. Details of what has changed since the last edition are added. [REVISED 04/06/18](#)

First Dorset

After a break of many years this area resumed having a timetable book, which was a welcome return, not least owing to its high quality. The latest, an A5 book, is dated April 2019 and has 50 pages, details of what has changed, an index of places served and clear maps, including blow-ups of Weymouth town centre. In addition most services have excellent maps showing the route taken and all adjacent roads. The only disappointment is the lack of a system map as the one included only covers the 'greater Weymouth' area. Nevertheless this is a good publication. [REVISED 26/03/19](#)

First Kernow

First Kernow now has a large network covering Cornwall as far east as Fowey, Bodmin Parkway and Bude and their timetable is a very impressive 175-page perfect-bound DL-size book. The latest is dated 26 May to 14 September 2019 and has a 12-page index of places served. The front cover opens up to show the first three pages of a 7-page system map and throughout the book there are maps showing where to catch the bus in Camborne, Falmouth, Helston, Newquay, Penzance, St Austell and Truro, though these are rather limited in scope and often don't show any railway stations – a disappointing omission for places like Falmouth and Truro, where there are significant flows to bus by rail users from distant parts of Britain. There is also a separate contents page so allowing all these sections and maps to be easily found. Also included are several pages of marketing, explaining the various rovers available from 1-day to a month. [REVISED 13/05/19](#)

First Portsmouth, Fareham & Gosport

This operator used to have rather poor books but gave them up a few years back in favour of leaflets. However it returned to having two high-quality books and has, from the new edition dated March 2019, combined them. The excellent new volume has 108 pages with an index of places served at the rear. Each route has its own detailed map showing the roads used throughout, these being a major strength of the books. At the front are system maps plus plans of The Hard Interchange (Portsmouth Harbour), Fareham and Gosport Bus Stations, plus details of where to catch the bus in Commercial Road South (Portsmouth & Southsea station area) and Cosham and Waterlooville centres. Details of what has changed since the last edition are added, as is a list of bus services. A very fine publication. [REVISED 27/02/19](#)

Metrobus

A new timetable was issued by Metrobus for West Sussex in May 2007, produced by designers 'The Image Team'. It was updated several times and is now a single volume, dated April 2019, for their whole (non-TfL) network. With 130 A5 pages it has a full index of places served, a full-colour map of the whole area and separate maps for Burgess Hill, Copthorne & Crawley Down, Crawley & Horley, Dorking, East Grinstead, Epsom & Tadworth, Horsham and Redhill & Reigate. There are also smaller maps showing where to catch the bus in Brighton, Burgess Hill, Crawley, Dorking, East Grinstead, Gatwick, Haywards Heath, Horsham, Redhill, Reigate and Tunbridge Wells, plus copious information on fares and lots of tourist information, including small pictures of places of interest served. Details of changes since the last edition are added. The tables themselves are excellent, retaining the old London Transport style of bold digits for the hours, but looking very clear. **This is, indeed, the best timetable produced by any operator in the British Isles.**

[REVISED 12/04/19](#)

Southdown PSV

I have known of the existence of a timetable book for Southdown, but never seen one until I picked a copy up at East Grinstead. Going through it on the way home I realised it was a publication that should have been in this list for some time. The latest book is for September 2018 and shows what has changed since the last edition, has an index of places served, details of tourist attractions, information on tickets and maps of Caterham, Oxted, Redhill & Reigate, plus a full system map. Timetables are extremely clear, having different colours for Mon-Fri, Saturday and Sunday services. There are some summary timetables at the rear to make up this excellent 36-page book. **This is one of the finest timetable books produced by any small operator in the country.**

[REVISED 11/09/18](#)

Southern Vectis

For years Southern Vectis had award-winning timetables, but then they were downgraded and so SV lost its place here. A new, September 2013, edition restored the quality, and this continues with the April 2019 edition. It has an index of places served and several pages devoted to its rovers,

including those that combine bus travel with Solent hovercraft crossings – though sadly the promised restoration of catamaran, ferry and hovercraft timetables never materialised. There are 13 pages of excellent local maps plus a system map and full details of what has changed since the summer edition. It also shows an end-date (28 September 2019). As usual winter editions include full timetables for the frequent services that run on five routes on Christmas Day (Boxing Day and New Year's Day have normal Sunday services)! Indeed, these Christmas Day routes include lengthy rural services offering hourly buses to places like Ventnor up to 2300. How can Go-Ahead-owned Southern Vectis do this when hardly any mainland operators run anything these days? In fact in the south, only Wilts & Dorset (Morebus) and Bluestar run such services at present (both also Go-Ahead owned). This is altogether a first-rate 100-page DL-size publication. **REVISED**

10/04/19

Stagecoach South West

Stagecoach has a group standard for its timetables that utilises folders for most services with the occasional area booklet. In many parts of the country this is rather disappointing but if the operation is contained in a county that offers high quality comprehensive books of its own it is less of a concern as it implies the operator could cease all publications of its own bar general marketing. This would apply to Stagecoach South West. It does indeed produce very high quality folders detailing its range of day, week, monthly and annual tickets, but it also publishes quality timetable folders too and it features here for its excellent series of maps and guides, particularly for Exeter and Torbay where a combination of attractive design, quality mapping, decent frequency-guides and copious tourist information offers a very effective complement to Devon's publications. It is also one of the few operators to publish a booklet showing its Conditions of Carriage. **REVISED**

14/03/18

Whippet Coaches

Whippet has an excellent timetable as one folder and shows what can be achieved with this format. The latest, issued September 2018, has a system map, plus blow-ups of Cambridge, Huntingdon, St Neots and St Ives town centres and a full index of places served. It also has details of its various day, week and 4-week rovers. All timetables are shown in full – and all this using two sides of an A2 sheet, folded to a third-A4 size. It proves that there is no truth whatever in the comment often made by smaller operators that they 'cannot afford' to have proper timetables that include a map and an index. This is an excellent marketing tool and so convenient to carry around and Whippet is to be congratulated on producing such a high-quality publication. **REVISED 04/10/18**

Wilts & Dorset (Morebus)

A new W & D timetable covering Bournemouth, Poole, Wimborne & Purbeck has been published, dated May 2019. The More brand is used for all except University buses, which are in a second book. The main book has 120 DL-size pages and has an index of places served, with the rear cover opening to form a system map of the Bournemouth, Poole & Wimborne area. It is a pity there is no map showing the routes taken by long-distance service to Lymington, Salisbury, Blandford and Purbeck, however the main operating area is expanded over 16 pages by excellent maps down to street and bus stop level, whilst there are also blow-ups of Bournemouth and Poole town centres. The University buses are in a separate Unibus book, which also shows all other More services that pass the main University site. It has a System Map and a blow-up of stops in the Lansdowne Campus area and is dated 2017/18, covering the period up to September 2018. These are excellent publications. **REVISED 17/05/19**

WALES, SCOTLAND, IRELAND, ISLE OF MAN, CHANNEL ISLANDS

Isle of Man: Bus Vannin

Here we have the only quality timetable from an operator outside England – indeed, outside the UK! Bus Vannin is the name for what was once Isle of Man Transport and it produced a first-rate 48-page A4 timetable for both its bus system and the Heritage Railways in September 2010. This has expanded and the latest version, dated 2019/20, is A5 with 92 pages and a lot more information. There is a list of services plus an index of places served and copious information on the various multi-journey and rover tickets available for bus and for bus & train options (from one day to a year). It has an excellent system map of the IoM plus full-page town maps of Douglas, Peel and Ramsey, plus a map showing hotels in Douglas. Towards the rear are timetables for the IoM Steam Railway, Manx Electric and Snaefell Mountain Railways. Only a summary is added for the Douglas Bay Horse Tramway owing to works on the Promenade for 2019. Also included are details of Bank Holidays (which differ from those in the UK), school terms *etc.* Finally, there is also

a section covering changes during the period of the TT Race, including a map. This is a superb piece of marketing and is the equal of the best of any UK timetable. **REVISED 09/05/19**

BEST RAIL TIMETABLES:

National Rail

Great Western Railway (GWR)

GWR has re-issued its timetable book for the period from 18 May to 14 December 2019. With 440 pages the excellent introduction alone takes up 72 pages. There is copious information on tickets, engineering work, on-board facilities and even four pages devoted to a history of each of its 19 named trains. Full information on what has changed since the last edition is added. Seating plans of long-distance rolling stock are included, including layouts of its sleepers. Its station list has details of every station it serves, right down to ticket office opening-hours. Mileages are shown at the start of each rail table and every train has its internal Reporting Number shown (eg 1C77). The bus links section is very detailed and includes operator details, frequencies and journey times to 105 places. There is also a section on heritage railways in its area. Some very useful summary tables exist covering routes like London to Reading, Reading to Didcot Parkway and Taunton to Exeter. There is a good system map at the rear with table numbers shown, meaning using it is the easiest way to navigate around the book, though my only criticism is that some routes are ambiguous where the table number shown only applies to sections of the route – for example T10 shown for London-Reading when fast trains only appear in T2, which the map doesn't mention. The recently-adopted system for table numbers continues, with the B Group covering services based on Bristol, D Group within and to/from Devon, K Group for Cornwall (emulating the Cornish 'Kernow') and a large T Group for the Thames Valley, including the Cotswolds and Reading-Gatwick. This volume puts all other operators to shame. It is well worth the £8 cover price and is available from Bath Spa, Bristol Parkway, Bristol TM, Cheltenham Spa, Chippenham, Didcot Parkway, Exeter St Davids, Gloucester, London Paddington, Newbury, Newton Abbot, Oxford, Penzance, Plymouth, Reading, Slough, Swindon, Taunton, Truro and Westbury stations. It may also be obtained by post for an additional £3.90 but only by ordering online at www.gwrsouvenirs.co.uk. **REVISED 15/05/19**

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Now go back to:

[Home Page](#)

[Introduction](#)

[Special Announcements](#)

or on to:

[Summary of the use of the 24-hour clock](#)

[Links Section](#)

[English Counties](#)

**[Welsh Counties, Scottish Councils, Northern Ireland,
Republic of Ireland, Channel Islands and Isle of Man](#)**

[Bus Operators in the British Isles](#)

[Rail Operators in the British Isles](#)

