

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 GOOD PUBLICATIONS

BEST LOCAL AUTHORITY TIMETABLES:

ENGLAND

Cornwall

Making a welcome return again is the relatively-new single timetable book for Cornwall. It's rather a hybrid as it is not a straight Council publication as in the past, but is part-funded by Cornwall Council, Go Cornwall Bus (who run virtually every contracted service in the county) and (First) Kernow. However, it does include all services (the others being run by Hopley's, OTS, Stagecoach South West and Travel Cornwall). Oddly, the town services in St Ives run by Royal Buses are not mentioned. Even more strange is the fact that the Cornwall Council website makes no mention of this publication, despite part-funding it, instead referring people to Traveline for bus times – quite extraordinary apathy! The timetable itself has been published for a few years but lacked maps and, until recently, had no index of places served. The April 2022 editions were in three volumes, but moved to one 122-page book with a System Map in the centre in April 2023. Contact details are quoted for the three main operators and details of school terms are added. 14 towns are called Town Zones and travel in each is fixed at very low rates – however, the prices have been removed and indeed there is no general information on tickets at all, despite the book having plenty of spare pages. The Town Zones are shown as small separate maps close to the System Map, though they only show the boundaries and not routes. This is a welcome publication, but lacks the comprehensive information shown before. The volume was re-issued in September 2023. **REVISED**

09/09/23

Devon

Devon has for some years produced an excellent series of six books and this is no mean feat for a county that is predominately rural in nature. Each volume has an excellent index of places served and adds the main changes since the last edition. The table layout is a model of clarity, each has 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 have taken the lazy way out and merely abolished 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 major changes to Stagecoach services, the complete set was reissued dated 31 October 2022. In January 2023 a new volume was added for Exeter and this was re-issued in May 2023. This is joint with Stagecoach South West and shows all City services, longer-distance frequent Stagecoach services and lists all other services. The other books were re-issued in June. These are timetables of the very highest quality. [REVISED 14/07/23](#)

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 First Portsmouth, Fareham & Gosport's book (though that is not currently produced). The whole is then complemented by a very high-quality 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 07/07/22](#)

Milton Keynes

A high-quality publication comes from unitary Milton Keynes with a superb single volume timetable, the latest being for August 2021. With 120 pages, all routes are covered including long-distance services that go out of the area. It has an excellent index of places served. A high-quality separate system map is 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. Sadly, however, in its wisdom Milton Keynes Council has decided that the timetable can only be collected locally and will not be sent out by post, even if users enclose an appropriately-stamped SAE. A major disappointment and a wholly-negative move. The next edition is expected October 2023. [REVISED 06/10/23](#)

Rutland

Being the smallest county in England hasn't prevented Rutland producing an excellent timetable. With 30 pages, the November 2022 version has lots of general information such as school dates and market days. It also has an index of places served and a system map is contained in a pull-out flap on the rear cover. It is interesting to reflect that Rutland is surrounded by three large counties – Leicestershire, Lincolnshire and Northamptonshire – all of which once had excellent timetables, yet all three of which do nothing whatever now (aside from a few maps in Lincolnshire). Yet here we have Rutland making every effort to disseminate details of its public transport network and they deserve praise for that. [REVISED 22/12/22](#)

Surrey

Surrey has produced a fine series of six books for some years. Each volume has a high-quality index of places served which uses sub-divisions to show routes from the main towns. Details of what has changed since the last edition are always included. The inside front cover of each has a (full-colour) map of a section of the respective operating area and the rear cover opens out to show other larger sections, whilst the internal pages have various 'Where to join your bus' town centre plans. Summary details are added for dedicated school services and contact details shown for all the operators in each area. The volumes range from 40 to 105 pages. Sadly, Surrey has not produced a county-wide system map for some years and this is a significant drawback in trying to piece the books together. Nevertheless these are high-quality publications. For those not living in Surrey it is a major disappointment that Surrey won't send out books by post, even if you offer to send an appropriately-stamped envelope. This is very parochial, for many people visiting from further afield might wish to have one or more of these volumes to plan journeys. Is their assumption that nobody ever wants to visit Surrey? The books are produced according to change and current volumes range from December 2021 to May 2022 but with just one (Blackwater Valley) remaining a 2020 production. [REVISED 11/06/22](#)

West Berkshire

It was really a welcome surprise to receive a copy of a West Berkshire book which was last printed in February 2018 and subsequently only updated on the council's website. It was always unusual in being A6 in size – but in fact that is an excellent size for portability as it will fit a lady's handbag as well as a briefcase. This edition has seen the contents re-arranged. Previously timetables were grouped under four headings: West of Berkshire; Newbury & Thatcham; East of Thatcham; and Reading area. This meant that tables were not in numerical order as you had to know which area a service was in – and, after all, 'Reading' is not even an area of West Berkshire, but a separate authority. Services are now simply in numerical order from 1 to 154, which takes you up to page 69

of this 102-page book. Then follows over 30 pages of marketing – an amazing endeavour for such a small book and a relatively small geographical area. This includes Reading Football Club services, details of PlusBus (Newbury & Thatcham), a detailed list of Community Bus Operators, School Term dates, operators' details, and copious information on ticket prices. Pages 88-91 have an index of places served, and finally there are 11 pages of maps: Newbury town centre; Thatcham Broadway stops; Newbury & Thatcham area; Reading area; Royal Berkshire Hospital; East of Thatcham; West of Newbury; Hungerford town centre; Lambourn village centre; Theale village; Tadley area; and Pangbourne village. There is much here that hardly any other authorities in Britain ever bother with and it is an extraordinarily high quality book for which the authority should be proud. **REVISED 06/10/23**

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 four of the six unitaries do little or nothing is a major disappointment, but at least the other two excel (see also West Berkshire, above). Wokingham has three excellent books, the latest dated November 2022. Each has 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 (actually dated October) 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, the most recent being September 2022. These are very high-quality publications. **REVISED 22/12/22**

WALES

Pembrokeshire

It is quite a disgrace that not one of the excellent timetable books that used to be published in Wales – Conwy, Denbighshire, Flintshire & Isle of Anglesey (Ynys Môn) – has appeared post-Covid, despite 2022 being a major summer for tourism as many people take British holidays to avoid the problems of flying. These authorities all offer weak excuses of 'changing networks' but they won't even give a likely date for the next edition. It certainly won't be 2022. Yet in England we have excellent work done by so many authorities, as can be seen above. It is particularly good, therefore, to see that just one Welsh County has once again produced an excellent small timetable, albeit covering just a part of its area. Its title is Pembrokeshire Coastal Bus Services which they market as Greenways. There is a system map showing the extent of the services, which operate between Amroth and Cardigan (in Ceredigion). Each service group has a sectional map too, showing railway stations, places for refreshments, information centres and youth hostels. There is copious information on walking-distances between points all along the coast. This 48-page booklet is excellent and shows that Pembrokeshire alone in Wales has an interest in tourism. **REVISED 11/06/22**

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 complete set of booklets and the map are likely to be updated in early 2023. **REVISED 02/01/23**

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. The next edition is expected in March 2023. [REVISED 02/01/23](#)

BEST BUS OPERATORS' TIMETABLES:

ENGLAND

Compass Bus

A 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 had three books, one for East Sussex, another for West Sussex and the few Surrey services in a third, but then went to a single book for all Compass Bus services from April 2017 – except for those in the Brighton & Hove area, which only appeared in the Brighton & Hove Bus & Coach book. The latest edition is for July 2023, valid until Spring 2024. It has an excellent 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. Owing to the recent shameful demise of the Brighton & Hove Bus & Coach book, the Brighton service is now a separate leaflet. This is one of the most outstanding bus timetables in the country. [REVISED](#)

[31/07/23](#)

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 winter timetable is from the end of October 2023 to the end of March 2024 and is a very high-quality production. It has details of what has changed, followed by a numerical list of its 19 services, then an index of places served. Many 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 30-page production is the most outstanding timetable in the country produced by a Community Bus service and they are to be congratulated. [REVISED 28/11/23](#)

First Dorset

It is good to see this excellent publication, entitled 'Weymouth & The Jurassic Coast', back with a summer edition, from June 2023. With 60 DL pages it has a map of the Greater Weymouth area, plus a detailed one showing all bus stops in the town centre, but the real bonus is that almost every table that follows is accompanied by its own detailed route map. This is a very high quality publication, covering First routes over a large area from Axminster in the west to Poole in the east, including Weymouth town services. [REVISED 25/05/23](#)

First Somerset (Buses of Somerset)

Buses of Somerset produced timetables throughout the pandemic. Its latest edition is cover-dated 'Autumn & Winter times from 3 September 2023' with 75 DL-sized pages. The front cover opens out to show a system map (spread over three pages) and a major bonus is that it has town plans for Bridgwater, Taunton and Yeovil. A fine publication. [REVISED 17/09/23](#)

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 October 2023 edition. It has an index of places served and several pages devoted to its rovers, plus copious tourist information - 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. Full details of what has changed since the last edition are included. Most of the services run by other operators are added, but it's disappointing a few in West Wight remain excluded. In

addition full timetables for the frequent services that run on five routes on Christmas Day appear (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 2323. 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 90-page DL-size publication.

REVISED 02/10/23

Wilts & Dorset (Morebus)

A new W & D timetable covering Bournemouth, Poole, Wimborne & Purbeck has been published, dated September 2023. The More brand is used for all except Unibus services. The book has 150 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 services to Lymington, Salisbury, Blandford and Purbeck. There are, however, detailed blow-ups of Bournemouth town centre, the Lansdowne & Bournemouth station and Poole Bus Station. This is a superb publication and the BCP area is indeed fortunate in having a single timetable book covering all bus services since the demise of Yellow Buses in August 2022. There is also a separate 'Breezer' book dated May until mid-September, showing all services in the Purbeck area, which are usually Open Top. All of these services are included in the main book, above, but there is a Purbeck area map which is unique to the Breezer book. **REVISED 22/09/23**

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

Not a single bus operator in Wales, Scotland or Ireland produces a timetable of quality to match those above in England. However, putting them all to shame is the one below from the IoM, which I consider the overall best-quality timetable of the British Isles:

Bus Vannin

A 2023/24 edition of the Isle of Man timetable has been published (dated Summer 2023) and it is one of the most outstanding timetables of the British Isles. The IoM is not in Great Britain nor the UK, but it can teach so much to British operators and local authorities as to what is needed in a true high-quality timetable. This has everything that any timetable could wish for. After an introduction which includes all Public Holiday and school terms dates, there is firstly an index of places served, then a contents page for the remaining 82 pages. A great deal of information on its large range of rover tickets follows, covering various combinations of bus and rail services from one-day bus-only for £7 up to annual bus & rail for £880. Town maps of Douglas & Onchan (with a separate town centre plan of Douglas), Peel and Ramsey follow, plus a System Map. There is also a map showing all Douglas hotels and the relevant nearest bus stops. Not a single timetable in the whole of the UK has this sort of detail! All bus timetables are arranged more like a railway timetable – that is, rather than having several separate timetables for bus routes in an area, they are combined to more-clearly show common corridors. Finally full timetables are shown for the IoM Steam Railway and the Manx Electric & Snaefell Mountain Railways. Congratulations to all those responsible for producing this publication. **REVISED 07/06/23**

Buses GG (Guernsey)

This fine timetable covering Guernsey has a complicated pedigree. Without going into its detailed history, the actual owner is the Australian company Tower Transport UK, but it trades using the name CT Plus, once part of the HCT Group, which disappeared last year. To complicate things a little more, the fleetname used is buses.gg. So you have a 90-page book which refers to buses.gg and Tower Transit on the front cover and CT Plus on the rear but doesn't really make clear anywhere that this is the timetable for all buses on Guernsey! However, given the fact there aren't any other operators then the name of the island tends to be rather irrelevant! There is a lot of general information about fares and methods of paying. Incidentally, concessionary free travel is only available to residents of the Bailiwick of Guernsey (Guernsey, Alderney, Sark and Herm). At the rear is a system map, a blow-up of St Peter Port and an evening route map. The evening services run until approx 0100 Fridays and Saturdays and 2130 other nights. The Airport is served on a wide variety of routes up to seven buses per hour. All-in-all quite impressive for such a small island. The timetable lacks a proper index of places served, however. **REVISED 26/08/23**

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