

THE BEST TIMETABLES OF THE BRITISH ISLES

UPDATED 25/06/09

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. If Yorkshire Coastliner can produce a 40-page booklet for what is essentially one route, booklets can certainly be made available by most operators! 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 SHOWN IN RED ARE THOSE THAT I CONSIDER TO BE OUTSTANDING IN THEIR FIELD

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 has 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. Town maps were, as always, superb, especially for a county that does not have many large towns at all. The overall System Map was a separate publication, which makes sense as it stands alone as a general guide. Cornwall's 23 ferry services and its air routes were included and the whole was a massive 160-page perfect-bound A4 book, reduced to around 150 pages in winter editions. Summer 2008, however, saw this split into four volumes, each A5 in size, and this has continued. Whilst there is inevitable duplication this has made the volumes much more useful for portability on day trips – and indeed the four together are not all that bulky for a holiday. It is good to see standards being maintained at a time when other authorities are (wrongly) starting to think printed timetables are no longer needed.

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; an indication of the publication date of the next volume; a subscription form for future issues; an inserted system map; 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.

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 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.

Essex

For some years Essex has produced an excellent series of five A4 timetables, also covering the unitary authority of Southend. This has been even bettered with the introduction of a single volume publication, to be brought out three times a year. Everything seems to have been thought of: details of bus rovers; a calendar showing school days; contact details for operators; a very comprehensive index of places served; a separate index for places served from the main towns; details of changes since the last edition; and 23 high-quality town plans (produced by FWT, a sponsor of this site). A full system map is available separately. These maps also show what can be achieved simply with red and black – not only cost-effective but some of the clearest I have seen. There is also a black & white plan for Colchester town centre and a rail and tube map (the latter there as the Central Line serves Essex). They charge a mere £1 for this 508-page volume, plus £2.50 post & packing. It is also available on CD Rom for only £2 inclusive of postage. This is one of the finest timetables produced by any authority.

Hampshire

The timetables published by Hampshire do not cover the entire county but the eleven volumes that are produced are of a fair standard and re-issued quite frequently. They each have maps and an index and the set is complemented by various separate additional maps.

Herefordshire

Herefordshire has carried on the excellent work of the latter days of Hereford & Worcester – sadly Worcestershire has not! Its three volumes always have termination-dates and are updated with cumulative supplements - and the dates of these are specified in advance, something few other authorities do. System and local maps are superb. Tables have route-descriptions and the front always has details of changes since the last edition. The index has sub-divisions for main places. September 2006 editions saw the start of a new format in landscape style. As well as retaining all the previous copious information even more is added in the early pages and the print size is larger. Altogether excellent for such a rural county.

Isle of Wight

It was very disappointing when, in March 2006, Southern Vectis gave up its long run of excellent comprehensive timetables in favour of showing only its own services, and minus all other modes of transport. How welcome it was, therefore, to see the Isle of Wight Council taking this over and producing its first ever timetable in April 2007. There are three editions a year and the latest is for April 2009. It is an excellent publication (produced by one of my sponsors, 'pb bus marketing') with an index, high quality local maps and a system map. Timetables are coloured green for SV and blue for Wightbus. There are 10 pages for school buses alone. The full Island Line rail timetable appears, as do details for the six main ferry links plus other occasional sailings and the East-West Cowes Chain ferry. There are also details for onward services on the mainland. Time will tell whether it replaces the Southern Vectis book too, for who wants something showing only SV's routes when this – the same format as SV's, but rather thicker – shows everything? An excellent and most welcome publication.

Medway

Here we have another example of a unitary council within a county producing an excellent timetable when the county itself has given up effective publicity. Some years ago Kent produced booklets but subsequently gave these up in favour of just leaflets for tendered services, plus a few

maps. Medway, however, has produced an excellent 217-page timetable with an index of places served, full details of schools services and plans of bus stops in the centre of Chatham, Gillingham, Rochester and Strood. There is also map of high frequency bus routes – defined as running at least every 10 min. A separate system map is available which complements this timetable so a system map is not reproduced here. Altogether a very high-quality publication.

Milton Keynes

Another high-quality publication comes from unitary Milton Keynes, consisting of two books plus a separate system map. All routes are covered including long-distance services. Each book has an excellent index and sectional maps together with copious miscellaneous information including how to join a three-year mailing list for future editions for only £5. My only slight criticisms are the pointlessness of having rail timetables that terminate on the 13th December in a timetable that only started 30th November, and also I am unhappy with the way routes on the main map ‘disappear’ when they enter the central area – a common fault with maps that use a different colour for each route then ‘cop out’ when it gets too complicated. However these are minor niggles and many another authority could learn from these publications.

Northamptonshire

What a dramatic transformation from one of England’s worst counties for publicity to one of the best, and in such a short time! Scrappy 12-hour booklets were confined to history and four new area books took over, produced to a very individualistic style. They opened landscape (that is, bound along the shorter edge) permitting a superior layout for tables. However, they are currently out of print but will be re-issued in A4 format. No fewer than an initial 48 pages are allotted to the introduction, service-lists and index of places served, plus other general pages of information, and clarity is first-rate throughout. Each is accompanied by a separate map & guide, which is sometimes updated at different times and is freestanding.

Peterborough

This is an amazing work! After a period with no timetable Peterborough has come out with something really unconventional but very detailed. The timetable is loose-leaf to benefit updating, and is on sale for £5 to include a year’s updates, but it is also available on-line for downloading as a free alternative. A 24-page introduction details what has changed, has a very comprehensive index to places served, a numerical list of services, a plan of Queensgate Bus Station and a list of operators. The next 23-page section has details of tickets, school and hospital transport together with information about train and coach travel and a good deal of tourist information. Another 8 pages of miscellaneous information appears in a section of its own. Then comes 138 pages of timetables, very clearly set out. Finally the maps – no fewer than 38 pages of them, covering the city at large scale and showing not only every bus stop but also the text code for each for obtaining information on a mobile phone. Once again another unitary doing work that puts many a shire county to shame.

Portsmouth

Valid from July 2008 we have yet another unitary council publishing a very high quality timetable (produced by one of my sponsors, ‘pb bus marketing’). With over 100 pages it shows all bus, ferry, train and coach services that operate within or to and from the area. There is a good index, details of each operator, information on fares and a very clear system map plus relevant blow-up. Altogether one of the best timetables available and once again from a unitary authority.

Rutland

Once again one of the country’s smaller counties joins many a unitary authority in producing an excellent timetable just at the time many a larger county is ceasing production of timetables. This volume is produced by one of my sponsors, ‘pb bus marketing’ and is only 28 pages plus a pull-out system map on the rear cover, but it has everything needed: an index to places served, school term dates and a summary of train departures from its only station, Oakham. The book is also interspersed with small colour pictures of the relevant areas. A first-rate publication.

Slough

Yet another unitary authority with a superb timetable – indeed two-thirds of English authorities in this section are now unitary. It is now an 80-page A4 book for 2008 with several pages of detailed general information, an index subdivided into in town, out of town, hospitals *etc*, and six blow-up maps for parts of the town as well as a centrespread system map and a diagrammatic version on the rear cover. Each table has a route map as well as a full route description and train timetables are added too. Two pages are given over to travel information in five other languages, not one of which I even recognise, but this shows that the ethnic backgrounds of the local population have been properly catered for. An excellent publication. That’s three of the six unitaries that make up

Berkshire with award-winning timetables. Perhaps the other three (Bracknell Forest, Reading and Windsor & Maidenhead) could give reasons as to why they do virtually nothing.

Surrey

Like Derbyshire, Surrey has also been producing first-rate timetables for years. As well as a system map and town plans each has local area maps that show superb detail for several towns together. Details of changes since the last edition are shown. The only slight downside is that the index is always only from main towns rather than being comprehensive, but as each area is relatively small this is not too much of a drawback.

Torbay

When unitary authorities were created there was disappointment within 'Glorious Devon,' for the county had for many years produced excellent timetables (see above) yet its two new unitaries of Plymouth and Torbay did little. The latter had a small publication it sold, then that disappeared, and Plymouth had some timetables, but there was little of quality. Things have changed! Torbay has a superb book, which initially appeared for Winter/Spring 2005/6 and made it qualify for an entry here, and this has continued (now with a Jun-Sep 2009 version). With 106 pages, and additional town maps, it has a great deal of general information regarding fares, an index of places served split into three subsections (local areas, hospitals and schools) and a system map. The timetables have superb route descriptions and a post-paid card is stapled in to allow users to go onto a free mailing list for future editions. A novel feature is that there are two versions of the book available, differing only in size: one described as 'pocket' (one-third A4); and the other 'large print,' measuring 14cm x 30cm. This is probably the finest timetable produced by any unitary authority in the country – no mean feat seeing no fewer than six appear in this section out of a total of 16 English authorities!

West Berkshire

This authority produces five (A6) booklets, complemented by a general guide to using public transport in West Berkshire, which contains a system map. Each booklet contains town plans and clarity of the tables is excellent as each uses separate colours in headings to denote days of the week applicable. Other producers of small booklets should study these to see that it is perfectly possible to have a decent index and other general information pages in an A6 booklet.

Wokingham

Berkshire was unusual in not having some unitary authorities created within it, but in being split totally into six unitaries. As the 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, each having an index to places served and town plans, as well as a system map. They also have little extras like a plan of the stops in Reading which, despite being outside the area, is nevertheless a main destination for many users in the area.

WALES

Caerphilly

South East Wales should have been Britain's eighth PTE but instead the area is one of the worst in Britain for public transport information with many counties producing nothing. The timetable from Caerphilly would therefore stand out as a giant among a lot of pigmies anyway, even if it were just 'rather good', but the fact that it is one of the finest timetables ever to have been produced in Wales makes it look the more amazing! It has just had a February 2008 edition, is A4, bilingual, has a full index at the rear and a splendid A3 system map in the centre complemented by blow-ups of large chunks of the area on other pages. It should be compulsory reading for all local authority transport staff throughout Wales so each can see what can be done where the will exists.

Denbighshire

Here we have two fully-bilingual A5 timetables with the staple on the shorter side so the book opens landscape, as with Northamptonshire's, above. It is strange that a landscape format is adopted by so few authorities, yet it allows a much better presentation of tables. Each book has an excellent introduction, a numerical list of services and a separate index of places served. Details of changes since the last edition are added, plus copious advice on rover tickets. Font sizes used are generous so clarity is excellent. The centre pages offer a system map, but a novel feature at the rear is a series of town maps, which are actual aerial photographs with bus routes overlaid in colour and road names and route numbers added. Each town has a guide to its tourist attributes added. A great deal of thought has gone into these timetables and they are among the best produced in Britain.

Flintshire

Flintshire is much more rural than Caerphilly but there are many similarities with the timetable (and Flintshire's came first!). It too is A4 and with an index, system maps and appropriate blow-ups of sections of the area. Quite a few pages have empty space, which could be utilised to advantage, but it is nevertheless a fine publication. Of special interest is the fact that there are now two versions available. Both have the same bilingual introduction but the rest of the timetable is then either English or Welsh.

Pembrokeshire

Pembrokeshire's timetable is bilingual as one would expect - even for an area always considered less Welsh in outlook than its neighbours – but the arrangement is different from most others in that the book has an English introduction and Index at the front and Welsh versions at the rear, but each table has English names on left-hand-side table banks and Welsh appearing as right-hand banks. System and town maps are on the inside rear cover and it is to be noted how many town maps are included (eleven) for a county that might be considered to have few major towns.

Swansea

A newcomer to the field of timetables, Swansea published little in the past, but in 2004 it introduced a new network for the Gower and accompanied it with its first timetable book. This is now in its April 08 edition and is a splendid publication for a small tourist area with full index and a good system map. Particularly useful are summary tables for corridors shared by several services. How well this shows the advantages of a small book over a handful of leaflets!

Vale of Glamorgan

Matching Caerphilly for quality, the new Autumn 2005 timetable for the Vale of Glamorgan was superb in every way and this quality has been maintained since. It is now in its Summer 2009 edition. With 96 pages the front opens out into a full system map whilst the rear has town plans of Barry and Penarth. A detailed index is added, plus a list of routes and operators. The road-by-road route descriptions for each service are most impressive and each service shows its last revision date. As with Caerphilly's timetable, above, this should be compulsory reading for all local authority transport staff throughout Wales so each can see what can be done where the will exists.

SCOTLAND

Argyll and Bute

This is by far the largest and most diverse area of any covered by timetables in this section, stretching from north of Oban to the Mull of Kintyre (south of Campbeltown) on the mainland (120 miles) and going south-east to Helensburgh but also including the islands of Coll, Colonsay, Gigha, Islay, Jura, Kerrera, Lismore, Luing, Mull and Seil – plus a few others with no public transport! A series of high quality books is available covering most of the area, with a few parts having only leaflets. However, an excellent system map of the full area brings it all together. Each of the books has good maps and an index. When many a tiny area of England can't manage to produce any decent publicity one wonders how they would cope with an area of this size! This council is to be congratulated for doing such a good job. One interesting point is that the Helensburgh area has its timetables published by Strathclyde Partnership for Transport.

Dumfries & Galloway

This large area was covered by seven area books but December 2008 has seen them merged into a single 140-page publication. It has a good index and benefits from a very clear layout for each table, despite only being two-colour. It has a very attractive cover and all standard notes appear at the front together with school term dates. The whole area is complemented by a separate system map which itself has an excellent blow-up of Dumfries.

West Lothian

This is a very high quality book. The index is a model of clarity, tables well laid out, local maps are superb and extra information on bus stops, hospital visiting hours *etc*, most useful. It is now in its 17th edition (May 2008) and is accompanied by a separate System Map.

BEST BUS OPERATORS' TIMETABLES:

ENGLAND

Blackpool Transport

To show that books and booklets are not the only way of producing a high quality timetable under one set of covers, Blackpool Transport, now trading as *Metro Coastlines*, produces an excellent system map and guide to its network as a complement to the folders it has for each individual route. Quite a few operators have such guides but where they fall down is in only showing a general pattern without any indication of first and last services or, indeed, what happens all evening between the end of the off-peak pattern and the last service (and Sundays). Blackpool shows all this information for each route in its Guide together with a very clear map of the system with each route colour-coded for extra clarity. The Guide is published twice yearly and each edition also shows a termination-date.

First in Berkshire & the Thames Valley

The Bracknell timetable from the above is the best such book First produces in the country. Of 68 pages, no fewer than 14 are given over to general information and marketing. It has a most comprehensive run-down of all the various types of day, week and monthly tickets available, and the exact areas of validity. It then has a map showing how this area fits in with their other areas showing ticket zones; more maps showing the precise boundaries of each town's ticket zones; an inside rear-cover map shows the full routes for this area in detail; then the rear outside cover is a slight blow-up of Bracknell; and there's a route map for the London routes (still marketed as Green Line); and finally many of the timetables carry their own route maps! There is also an index of places served. This is a very high quality book indeed and is matched by a volume for Slough & Windsor that is let down only by its lack of an index.

Metrobus

A new timetable was issued by Metrobus for West Sussex in May 2007, produced by designers 'The Image Team'. It was updated in September 2007 and again in May 2008. With 52 A5 pages it has a full index, a centre-spread full-colour map of the whole area, blow-ups for Crawley, East Grinstead, Haywards Heath and Horsham town centres, copious information on fares and lots of small pictures of places of interest served. Details of changes since the last edition are added. I personally don't like the use of 'Your Monday to Friday services' (ditto for other days) for every table. If anything it should read 'Our Mon-Fri services' but far better to avoid this rather twee usage – but it's a minor matter. The tables themselves are excellent, retaining the old London Transport style of bold digits for the hours, but looking very clear. This is by far the best timetable produced by any Go-Ahead company – indeed one of the best operators' timetable books in Britain.

Stagecoach in Devon

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. Indeed, as with First in Somerset & Avon, above, it implies the operator could cease all publications of its own bar general marketing. This would apply to Stagecoach in Devon. It does indeed produce very high quality folders detailing of 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 the Devon and Torbay council publications.

Thamesdown Transport

Thamesdown has a first-rate timetable for its town services (Swindon). It starts with general details regarding Bank Holidays *etc.*, lists changes since the previous edition then has an excellent index showing separately route numbers for daytime and evenings. It then has two pages of 'FAQs' before showing its timetables. Each is printed in the colour by which it is shown on their maps. The rear cover opens out to show a full colour map in A4, showing all bus stops, the rear of which has a blow-up for stops in the town centre, together with details of rover tickets (all of which offer unlimited travel on both Thamesdown and Stagecoach in Swindon services).

Transdev Yellow Buses

Transdev having bought this company, July 2006 saw the launch of its totally revised network and a most welcome new timetable that moved to A5 format. Subsequent versions improved on it, the latest being for May 2009. Timetables appear in order with a summary table preceding each route

showing first and last buses and frequencies as a 'quick lookup' reference. Each route then has its own route map, with every stop shown. The rear cover carries a system map of high-frequency routes and a map of non-core routes precedes it, whilst a centre-spread has the full system. There is also copious general information and a full index of places served. Another summary table shows cumulative frequencies over core stretches such as the 31 buses per hour between the town centre and Bournemouth railway station. Blow-up plans of Bournemouth town centre plus nine other parts of the conurbation are added. As a Bournemouth resident of long standing I can certainly say this is the finest timetable the area has ever seen – indeed one of the finest in the country.

WALES

Newport Transport

Not many years ago Newport Transport, which uses the *Newport Bus* fleetname, had poor timetables renowned for far too few timing points, and no map was available. The situation could not be more different today with a 54-page slim book (produced by one of my sponsors, 'pb bus marketing') containing a system map on the inside rear cover plus a plan of the bus station and surrounding stops and details of places of interest within Newport. There is copious information on using the timetable and using the buses themselves, details of what has changed since the last edition, ticket prices with a list of outlets for purchase and an excellent 4-page index of places served. There is also a good plan of Newport railway station showing surrounding bus stops. The whole timetable is also made more pleasant with the addition of various colour pictures, which breaks up the text well. An excellent publication.

SCOTLAND, IRELAND, ISLE OF MAN, CHANNEL ISLANDS

Nil

How disappointing that I can find no timetable of quality produced by any operator in these countries.

BEST RAIL TIMETABLES:

National Rail

South West Trains

Most large operators seem short on information in their timetables, too selective in what they show (as if they're in competition with other operators rather than with the car) and most use print which is far too small. However just one stands head and shoulders above all others – that from South West Trains. Here we have a 304-page book showing their entire network – and including all other operators' services plus times of ferries to the Isle of Wight – with a full system map. There is an index of places served, details of services over holiday periods and lists of other pocket timetables and mini-guides. Full timetables are added for many bus links (Winchester-Romsey, Dorchester-Axminster, Bournemouth-Hurn Airport, Petersfield-Waterlooville, Woking-Heathrow, Honiton-Sidmouth, Axminster-Seaton, Yeovil Junction-Town, Exeter-Exeter Airport and Feltham-Heathrow) plus a table giving frequency and contact details for many other bus links. Ferries included in addition to those to the Isle of Wight are Southampton-Hythe, Poole-Channel Islands and Portsmouth-Gosport. In short, nobody does a better timetable and SWT are to be congratulated for producing such a high-quality publication. It now costs £4 and is available at Basingstoke, Bournemouth, Clapham Junction, Guildford, London Waterloo, Portsmouth & Southsea, Richmond, Salisbury, Southampton Central, Surbiton, Wimbledon, Winchester and Woking stations. Alternatively it may be obtained for £5 inc postage & packing by credit/debit card from SWT's Customer Service Centre on 0845 6000 650 between 0600 and 2200. This should be compulsory reading for every other operator.

Light Rail

Nottingham Express Transit

This operator previously had a high-quality large folder showing a full timetable, as well as a frequency guide, details of fares, a line diagram plus a full proper map and details of local attractions. It has now gone one stage further, however, and produced a 52-page book which

allows the timetable to be shown in greater detail. All the previous information is there in expanded form. This is the best tram/metro timetable produced in Britain.

**Please email any comments
regarding this page to:
update@barrydoe.co.uk**

Now go back to:

[Home Page](#)

[Introduction](#)

[Special Announcements](#)

or on to:

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

[Links Page](#)

[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](#)