

from December, thus providing a 2tph end-to-end service.

An operating quirk was that GWR used to hire drivers from Govia Thameslink Railway to work the eastern end of the North Downs route; that practice ceased in May, potentially unlocking options for enhancement. Mr Hopwood points out that the last eastbound service is in the hands of a Reading driver, who stays at Redhill overnight to then operate the first westbound service the next day. The MD sees the potential for an overnight service, subject to agreeing access with Network Rail: 'There are flights leaving Gatwick at 06.00, so an 01.30 Reading to Gatwick could be useful, and in the other direction there are flights into Gatwick as late as midnight. It's a market we don't serve at the moment.'

BARNSTAPLE OPTIONS

A longstanding aspiration of GWR is infrastructure improvements

on the Barnstaple line. Currently, the Barnstaple and Okehampton lines run as two single lines on the old main line formation north of Crediton, parting company at the site of the former Coleford Junction near Yeoford. The aim would be to restore the physical junction here, converting the two single lines into a double-track section, providing greater flexibility.

This would take place concurrent with resignalling. Mr Hopwood says the end-to-end journey time on the Barnstaple line could be cut by as much as eight minutes if the current practice of on-train staff collecting tokens, operating the level crossing at Eggesford and stopping alongside the signal box at Crediton could be eliminated.

A further ambition is to reinstate the second platform at Barnstaple. Mr Hopwood points out that on this line most of the business is end-to-end – the station at Barnstaple is a railhead for North

Devon and the morning train into Exeter is regularly full and standing. GWR's aim therefore is to offer more capacity and provide a greater distinction between fast and stopping services.

The signalling renewal has been pushed back, so at present there is no funding for this work. However, GWR is working with Devon County Council and its transport lead Cllr Andrea Davis and there is agreement that a case should be developed. Mr Hopwood highlights the importance of having a business case prepared and ready to go: 'I learned this lesson with Swindon to Kemble redoubling – we were hopeful this would get through and had done the development work, but it didn't make it. Then one afternoon I got a call from Treasury saying the Chancellor was looking for more infrastructure schemes in his next statement, so we put Swindon to Kemble forward, and it happened.'

One Devon scheme which is in progress is the extension of bay platform 2 at Exeter St David's. The space here was vacated by train crew accommodation which has moved to the other side of the station, and the longer five-car bay will be useful for GWR's terminating Berks and Hants semi-fast services from London as well as for CrossCountry services, helping keep platform 6 clear for through services.

NEW STATIONS

GWR has a number of new stations in either development or delivery, mostly in the West.

Reading Green Park station on the Reading to Basingstoke line opened in May, serving a growing district to the south of the town. It was followed on 4 July by Marsh Barton, in the southern suburbs of Exeter ('News Front'), and Portway Park & Ride on the Severn Beach

Case for resignalling: No 150207 pauses alongside the signal box at Crediton for the token exchange on 26 June 2023. It forms the 12.27 Okehampton to Exeter Central and has just traversed the crossover which marks the end of the twin single line sections north from here, which GWR would like to restore to a double track section. **PHILIP SHERRATT**

