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The Curious Case of Platform 14 at Paddington

By Jack Kent | Jul 21, 2021 | 10 min read

If you go to Paddington main line station and follow the signs to platform 14 you will find yourself in a dimly lit tunnel with a single train in it. This is the Heathrow Express station. All of Paddington's other platforms are long and, for the most part, straight. However, they are easily directly accessible from the main concourse providing building work is not going on (which it currently is offering platforms 7 and 12).

There is not much point in going to platform 14 because, as far as we can tell, no passenger train has ever been scheduled to arrive there. Platform 14 is a dead end with no regular tracks. Yet this odd and I note, this platform is numbered, it is signalled and it appears in the Timetable Planning Rules for Wales and Western (Spanning 2018-2021) along with its Timetable Planning Rules should for a reliable train to alternate platform. It will officially in use. So, why does it exist and why is it not separately used?

To add to the mystery, the platform appears to be in very good shape but of such practical benefit can be as passenger trains. According to the aforementioned timetable planning rules, the entry to platform 14 at Paddington is:

Length in Metres	Comments
147	Length from the buffer stop to signal
163	Length from the stop block to signal

Relevant notes and columns from the Timetable Planning Rules are:

This would suggest that it is also short of any passenger trains that uses Paddington other than a Great Western (GW) station to Heathrow Express Train.

At this point we have to remind you that we have recently had occasion to on how correct the platform length quoted in the Timetable Planning Rules for Wales and Western are. These are seriously good reasons to believe that platform 14 can actually accommodate a 163-metre-long train which is the length, a GWR Class 387 EMU consisting of two units.

To find the length of a platform required to the support of a metre is surprising. This does seem to be a measurement that is particular but probably not all accurate.

Great Western Railway Rolling Stock Diagrams Section Appendix showing Paddington Island and Platform 14

However, calculation, or Kent's another Network Rail document which can be considered the definitive source for details of the railway layout. This gives the length of platform 14 as 175 metres which is almost exactly the correct value.

History and The Answer to This "Unused" Platform

To understand how and why we are in the situation we are in now, we need to look at a surprising amount of railway history. For those who wish to skip this and get to the reason for why the short, awkwardly located platform still exists, we are going to be discussing the Great Western Railway's (GWR) Paddington Station, the Metropolitan Railway and what they got from and how but for one or two probably disastrous issues, a platform 14 could serve a useful purpose.

We also discover if platforms 12 are needed and, if it did, what happened to it.

The Start of It All

The story goes of the way back to the beginning of the Metropolitan Railway and the opening of the first underground railway in the world. Paddington Station was the Great Western Railway's terminus and it is about the original Great Western that we need to make our way towards.

In 1863 the Metropolitan Railway opened between Bishop's Road station and Farringdon Street. At this stage it is important to realise two things. Bishop's Road station was a completely separate station to Paddington main line station with its only entrance in Bishop's Road, Bayswater. The Bishop's Road station, that opening the railway between Bishop's Road and Farringdon Street was not the same.

We also discover if platforms 12 were needed and, if it did, what happened to it.

Bishop's Road Station

Bishop's Road Station was the original two platform terminus of the Metropolitan Railway service running from there to Farringdon Street. However, it was not a terminal station in the usual sense of the word. It was a station on the Great Western Railway (GWR) and not of Paddington station. This connection was essential, in the first place the connection was needed to remove steam from the running tunnels being built. Subsequently, on opening, GWR provided the trains that formed the services on the Metropolitan Railway. The station was never intended to be the terminus hence why there were only two platforms and no carriage shed.

The description of how the original station was taken over unadmirably shortchanged into a terminus station is interesting and, it is important to understand the reasons why it was only ever the Heritage Railway website – amongst the only here but a category of "Trial Heritage".

Bishop's Road occupied an awkward position between the main line station and the Great Western Railway coal depot alongside Paddington canal basin. Further restricted by an approach road to the Great Western goods depot, Bishop's Road bridge was partially demolished to make room for the station building, set back behind a forecourt for cabs and omnibuses.

Bishop's Road Station page on the Heritage Gateway Website

The Intended Original Underground Railway

GWR features either a lot in the part of our story concerning today's Hammersmith & City line or it is not in the story much at a digression to have a short look at their involvement from the outset.

Put a list of the original history of what is now the Hammersmith & City line and of Paddington and you do little better than read a previous article by guest author Reg entitled The Unknown Hammersmith & City Construction Calamity.

In essence, it was intended that Hammersmith & City would be a line from Farringdon Street to a new station at Hammersmith. Hammersmith & City would, however, be a joint venture between three separate railway companies:

- The Metropolitan Railway to a location close to Bishop's Road station
- GWR from its boundary with the Metropolitan Railway joining the Great Western at Westbourne Park. This would be a new station at Bishop's Road and then on to Westbourne Park and leaving the GWRM, to the south side
- The Hammersmith, Paddington and City Junction Railway which, despite its name, would run from the GWRM at Westbourne Park to a station at Hammersmith

Track Ownership and Arrangement 1865

As is common at the time, the Hammersmith, Paddington and City Junction Railway was basically set up by another railway, actually two railways in this case, the Metropolitan and GWR. The two companies behind it did not provide the investment but did provide the impetus behind it.

Subsequent Independence from the Great Western Main Line

Not surprisingly, relying on running trains along the Great Western Main Line for the two miles between just east of Paddington and the Westbourne Park junction of today's Westbourne Park station was slightly complicated. GWR was prevailed to provide two tracks to the south of the GWRM, so that the Metropolitan service to Hammersmith was not so dependent on the GWRM. These two tracks operated in 1871.

Track Ownership and Arrangement 1871

By now the Metropolitan Railway was running over not only its own tracks but also over those belonging to the Hammersmith, Paddington and City Junction Railway. The Hammersmith Junction Railway which itself was only partly owned by the Metropolitan Railway and GWR.

The Owners of Bishop's Road Station

Not made clear earlier is the fact that in 1863-GWR also actually owned Bishop's Road station. It was, in fact, a station on the Great Western Railway (GWR) and not of Paddington station. This may seem a bit ridiculous but, as explained, Bishop's Road was never intended to be a terminus and also GWR owned the land on which the station was built.

More difficult to explain is why the GWR operated the underground section for 15 years seaward of Bishop's Road station. A partial explanation can be ascertained by the fact that it appears that in London Underground Ltd (the Metropolitan and District) which the railway is built under the public highway at a level is South Wharf Road is all the property of the Great Western Railway. It is, therefore, possible that the Great Western railway under the public highway so that right would have been conferred only on the Metropolitan Railway under the relevant act of parliament.

Track Ownership and Arrangement 1878

GWR owned

Although there were occasional service disputes, the Metropolitan and GWR settled closely together for many years and GWR had substantial running rights over the Metropolitan Railway. There were not restricted to passenger trains and included freight and horse-drawn carriages.

The ownership of GWR trains specified in the Metropolitan Railway Act of 1864. As the running rights, in the East-North Bishop's Road to Farringdon Street, the Metropolitan Railway agreed that it would only provide carriages (lower 1 to 1860 the comparatives were upheld in the courts in 1866).

In fact, getting ahead of ourselves, GWR trains continued to pass through Bishop's Road station all the way to the City terminating beyond Farringdon Street until shortly after the outbreak of World War II. As soon as the Metropolitan Railway was electrified these trains were hauled on the Metropolitan Railway electric locomotives.

Meanwhile at Paddington...

As we would expected, alterations have been made in Paddington station over the years. Of some, but not much, significance is not since 2 the 1900-1910 alterations which included a Paddington opening platforms 14 Kensby linking 13 platforms at western platform 1 and 2 platforms at eastern platform 2 and 3 platforms at eastern platform 3 by changing direction and continuing to the direction of Bishop's Road where but there was no connection, for the public at least, between the two stations. This lack of connection, for the public at least, between the two stations. Platform 14 also appears to show that there was no desire to amalgamate with the two stations.

1924 map

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Map showing 1900 Extension

The 12 long platforms under the arched roof at Paddington were now much as they are today although the trains slightly shorter and they have been equipped with electric lighting in time. This, with the two platforms at Bishop's Road, gave a total of 14 platforms.

Further Alterations at Paddington...

PADDINGTON STATION
Bishop's Road
Paddington
Great Western Railway
Metropolitan Railway
Hammersmith, Paddington and City Junction Railway
Hammersmith Junction Railway
Hammersmith Junction Railway
Hammersmith

Paddington (Suburban) 1933
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