



Dear Friend

Welcome to this mini newsletter. We focus on the recent Off Peak Fare changes; the headings are:

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### Thameslink Off-Peak Fare increases

Thameslink increased some off peak journey prices from 21 May – and introduced new tickets allowing Off Peak outward tickets and Peak returns.

#### We disagree with

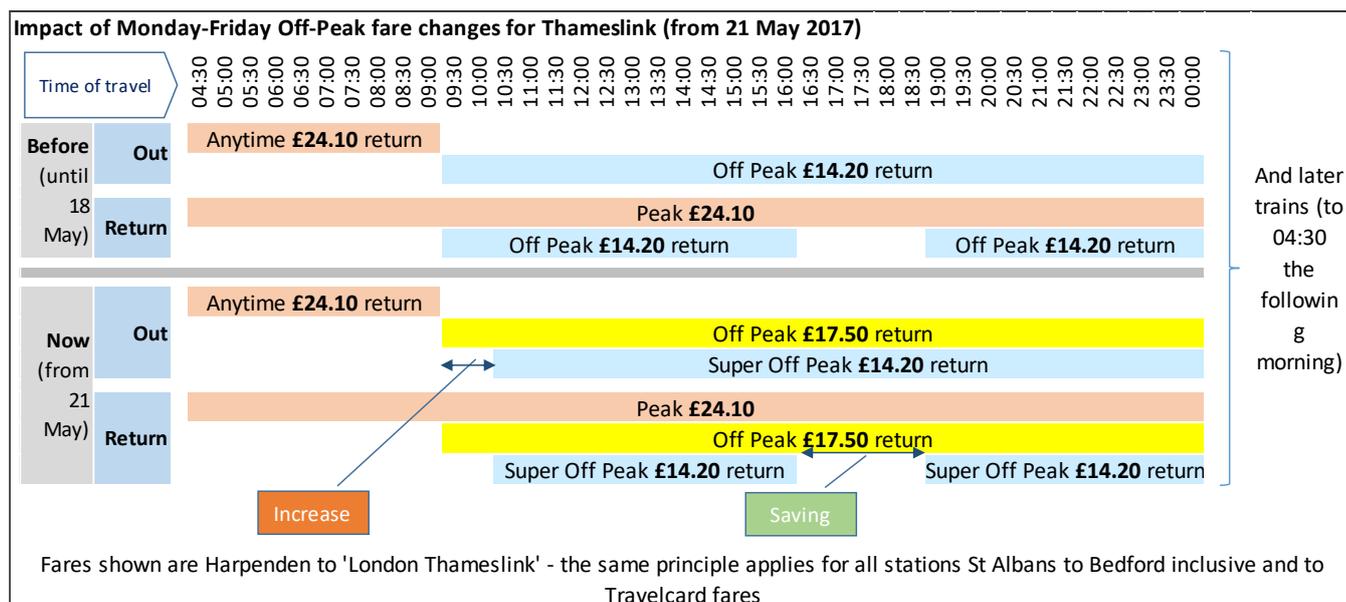
1. It now costs more to arrive in London between 10am and 11am Monday to Friday for travellers between St Albans & Bedford.
2. There was no consultation.
3. It has been badly implemented on the ticketing website.
4. It has been badly implemented on Ticket Vending Machines.
5. We hear it has been badly communicated to ticket office staff (including Network Card validity).

#### We agree with

6. The availability of a ticket that allows off-peak outward travel and peak return travel.

### What has happened

Thameslink have abolished the previous “Off-Peak” ticket and replaced it with a choice of two new tickets – “Off-Peak” and “Super Off-Peak” (note: Weekend fares are unaffected).





The core result of this is that:

1. Travellers who want to arrive in London between 10am and 11am and return outside the evening peak pay more (£14.20 > £17.50 in the case of Harpenden).
2. Travellers who want to arrive in London after the morning peak (post 10am arrival) and return during the evening peak pay less (£14.20 + £3.90 [note 1] or £24.10 > £17.50 in the case of Harpenden)
3. There is no change for travellers who want to arrive after 11am and return outside the evening peak (£14.20 in the case of Harpenden).

Note 1: We believe that an 'old style' off peak ticket is valid in the evening peak if accompanied by an off-peak single from Radlett to St Albans. We were holding off publicising this pending a definitive clarification from Thameslink.

For further complexity some Railcards have two Monday to Friday restrictions: An after 10am departure and a minimum fare – so, for instance, a Network Railcard holder purchasing a Harpenden to London Thameslink Day Return, pays £17:50 between 09:22 and 09:59 then £13:00 – the post 10:00 fare is effectively unchanged (indeed actually better as a peak return is now available for the same price).

### **The increased fare for 10am to 11am Central London arrivals**

We do not like this change – we are of the view that post the peak, the goal should be to maximise the number of travellers. In particular, the new fare is a significant discouragement for anyone who had planned to arrive in London around 10am and wanted / needed to return before the evening peak – now, they either pay around 25% more for their journey or pay the same and have around 16% less time in Central London.

We therefore find it quite credible that, rather than increasing fare revenue, it will decrease revenue.

It is not clear whether this was a Department for Transport (DfT) or Thameslink initiated change (remember that all revenue from the franchise flows directly to the Government and does not benefit Govia). Whilst I do not know what actually happened, I see two credible scenarios – The DfT said “[South Western Trains and Southeastern trains charge a shoulder peak fare, lets apply that to Thameslink as well](#)” or the DfT said “[in view of the revenue shortfall caused by strikes,] [how can we get more revenue from non-regulated fares](#)” and GTR responded with “[An option would be a shoulder peak fare](#)” [no doubt, the real story is something else!]

We have already released a press release calling on the reversal of this change – see <http://www.aptu.org.uk/pdfs/may2017fareincrease.pdf> - this got us some stories in the local papers – eg <http://www.hertsad.co.uk/news/rail-user-groups-respond-to-price-hike-in-trains-from-st-albans-to-london-1-5045980>. After the election, we'll be continuing this campaign.

**Once they have been elected, please do write to your MP as I believe only political pressure will get this change reversed.**

### **The lack of consultation**

I have written to the GTR COO about this – there is also a separate complaint from south of the river concerning the short notice announcement of the cancellation of post-midnight Southern departures from London Victoria in the early hours of Tuesday to Friday mornings. We will continue to pursue the need for proper consultation.

Separately, we have asked for a post implementation review of the change in order that the sorts of issues consulted upon can still be considered. Again, we will continue to pursue this.

## Bad implementation on the website

The change has been badly implemented on the website – we have discovered the following errors (as at 1 June) – and believe there must be more:

1. The 19:02 from St Pancras is incorrectly designated as an Evening Peak train.
2. The Off-Peak fare may be offered with a post 11am arrival, if a return time just after the evening peak is chosen (or a peak return time is chosen and the later button then used).
3. Railcard prices are not always correctly selected.
4. The text on the main website had not been updated.

My main recommendation is to:

1. Work on the basis that “Super Off-Peak” tickets are valid on the 19:02 from St Pancras
2. If you know you want to travel soon after Super Off-Peak tickets are valid, instead specify travel times on the website that are in the middle of the day (to London) and return late evening.

Station	Off-Peak Outward from	Super Off-Peak Outward from	Super Off Peak return
Harlington	09:24	10:24	Not valid on trains timed to pass through London St Pancras International after 16:29 and before 19:02 regardless of where you join or leave the service. <u>(note the ‘before’)</u>
Leagrave	09:29	10:29	
Luton 0914	09:14 Note 1	10:14	
Luton Airport Parkway	09:16 Note 2	10:16 Note 2	
Harpenden	09:22	10:22	
St Albans	09:29	10:29	
Radlett: No change – Off Peak only, valid 09:34 Elstree & Borehamwood to West Hampstead – bound by Transport for London rules if using Oyster, Contactless or a Travel card			

Note 1: But not valid on 09:19 East Midlands service

Note 2: but not valid on 09:32 / 10:32 East Midlands Trains services

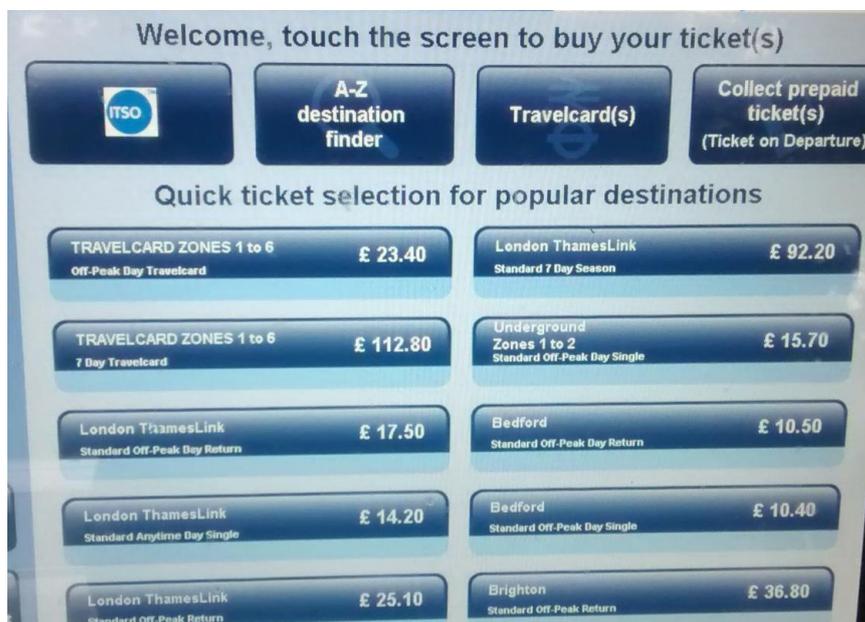
## Bad Implementation on Ticket Vending Machines

The change has been badly implemented on at least some (and quite possibly most / all) ticket machines. On the machine I tested this on (at Harpenden [after 10:30]), the front screen was offering:

1. The ‘New’ “Off Peak” fare
2. The “Off Peak Period” return (come back within one month)

The replacement “Super Off-Peak” fare was hidden away and has to be obtained by:

1. Press A-Z destination finder (new screen)





2. Key in Destination
3. Select Destination new screen)
4. Choose Return
5. Select Super Off Peak

We have asked Thameslink to (1) make the “Super Off-Peak” fare available on the home screen when valid – dropping the “Standard [Periodic] Off-Peak Return”; and (2) to take a more general reassessment of what should go on the home page.

Two questions for you: Have you ever (or know someone who did) wanted to buy:

1. A Standard [Periodic] Off-Peak Return ticket from a machine – because you were returning tomorrow or later?
2. Have bought a Standard [Periodic] Off-Peak by mistake

### **Bad communication to ticket office staff (including Network Card validity)**

We have heard of both anecdotal and reliable examples of bad / late briefings on this topic being issued to Ticket Office staff. In particular, some staff have mis-understood the briefing to mean that Network Cards are now not valid until the start of the Super Off-Peak ticket. This is incorrect – the start time remains unaltered at 10am.

### **The Good news**

Having set out above all the things we don't like about the concept and its implementation, it is fair to acknowledge that the creation of a ticket that allows Off-Peak travel into London together with Peak Hour return to London is welcome – some passengers will find this a benefit (ie saving) and it also simplifies ticket purchasing

### **The Evening Peak**

Separately, we are lobbying for removal – or reduction - of the evening peak restriction. Long term travellers will recollect that this was introduced as a ‘temporary’ measure at the start of the FCC franchise to alleviate over-crowding on evening peak trains.

With the ongoing delivery of the Class 700 fleet, there is a very significant increase in capacity available, which does mean that the test applied to introduce the restriction is much less likely to be valid.

The logical way forward is to seek a review – I cannot see there being any decision made without some analysis of data and recommendations – we will need to be able to show that the removal is either revenue neutral or even revenue improving – I cannot see the Department for Transport (who receive all the revenue from this franchise) agreeing to an un-costed proposal or one that involves revenue reduction.

As part of that review, we will also want options that include a reduction in the time the restriction is applied considered – we see two reasons for this:

1. Trains just before and after the evening peak time restriction are more crowded than the first / last within the peak
2. It will better align capacity in the 2018 timetable with demand – it seems somewhat illogical that the train capacity reduces around 7pm – and you then ramp up demand by allowing travel with off-peak tickets. Much better the other way round.

The data GTR is collecting from Smart Card travellers will help bring some clarity in this area.



## Off Peak fares: Our priorities

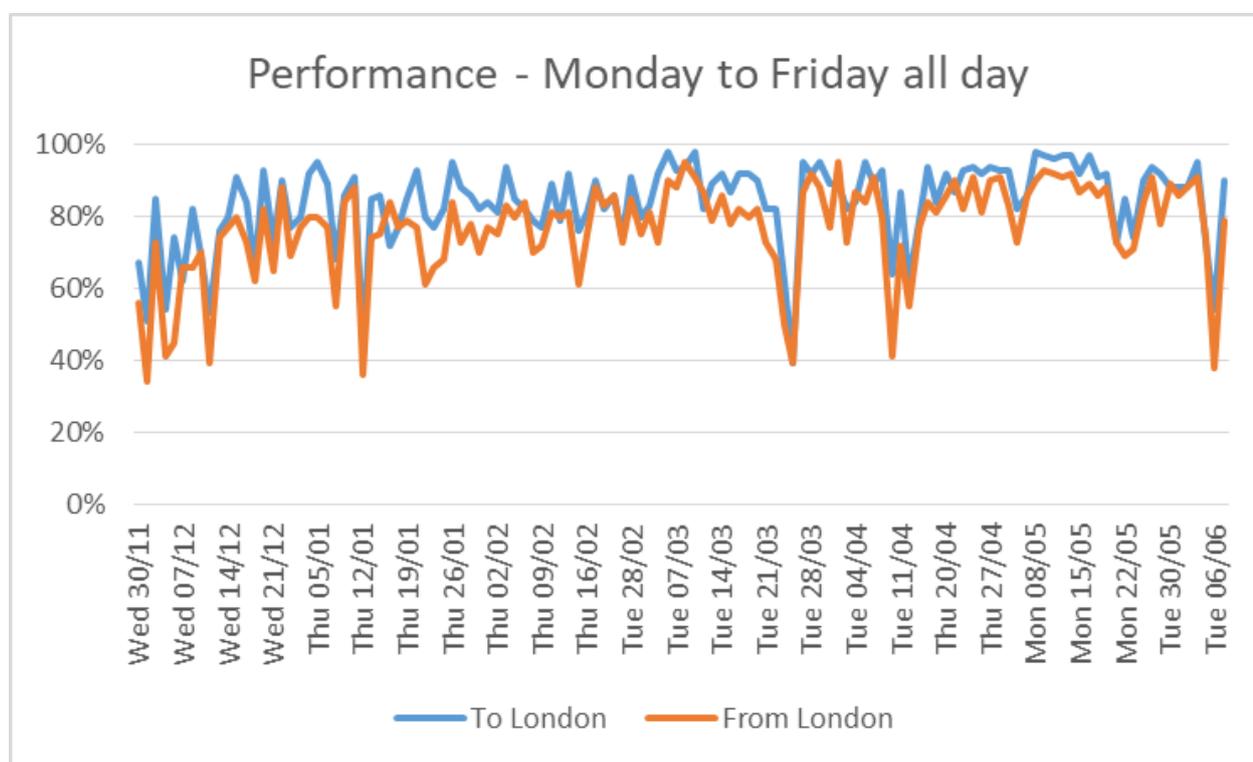
We will be tackling these issues in this order:

1. Fixing all the implementation issues (websites, ticket machines, words etc)
2. Seeking a post implementation review of the change
3. Together:
  - a. Getting commitment to a proper consultation process
  - b. Seeking a review of the evening peak.

## Performance

Performance seems to be following the following broad trends:

- Noticeable increase post Christmas / New Year compared to before
- More bad days in March / April, but 'good day' performance sustained
- In late April and May, an improvement in days that are bad, but not awful
- A bit of a tail off recently



Harpenden to London, excludes Bank Holidays and 22 – 24 February (this was not captured).

Data from [recenttraintimes.co.uk](http://recenttraintimes.co.uk)

Regards

*Neil*

Neil Middleton

7 June 2017