



Dear Friend

Welcome to this newsletter – and with apologies for the ‘radio silence’. As always a variety of topics, but this time a timetable focus, including Monday’s breaking news on East Midlands Trains planning on not stopping at Bedford and Luton in peak hours:

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Malcolm Howe

APTU sadly reports that our Treasurer, Malcolm Howe, passed away over the summer from Cancer. If there is anything pleasant to note, at least Committee members were able to pay our respects at his funeral.

We’ve recently managed to get his APTU material from the Executor of his estate and are going through this at present – this includes a number of out of date cheques (we’ll be in contact about these) and still in date cheques (we’ll cash these). For now, please send correspondence to me at:

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New Committee Members wanted

The APTU Committee is down to three and we would like to expand it back up to a reasonable number – so we can be more proactive, rather than reactive. I’ve spoken to some members who have confirmed an interest (I’ll be in contact again imminently), and we would like more.

I propose to hold a few ‘get to know you’ sessions so anyone interested can meet existing committee members, hear about how we work with Thameslink and the wider rail user groups etc. I will circulate some dates in early January – however if you are definitely interested – do let me know now.

The main qualifications are an interest in improving the service and working constructively with Thameslink management; you do not need to travel daily.

May 2018 & East Midlands Trains

On Monday, it was announced that East Midlands trains would stop calling at Bedford & Luton during peak hours (ie to St Pancras in the morning and from St Pancras in the evening) between May 2018 and May



2020. Calls at other times will remain unchanged, as will stops at Luton Airport Parkway. The explanation given is that there is insufficient capacity on EMT Trains due to inefficiencies brought about by the increased Thameslink service. APTU is working with the BCA on this, and at present are very unconvinced by the explanations given; EMT's franchise agreement is being varied to allow them to hire 3 extra 6 coach HSTs¹ and we are struggling to see why the impact is so great – there will only be around 1 extra Thameslink train per hour on the fast lines.

We have released a press release calling for East Midlands Trains to continue to stop at Luton & Bedford. Assuming this goes ahead, the main impacts on our stations will be (as compared to the expected May 2018 situation):

1. Luton will lose around 1 EMT service per hour and have a slower fastest journey (overall around net plus 1 train per hour, as compared to now).
2. Leagrave and Harpenden will get two less fast services per hour, as these stops (and the Flitwick ones) will be removed from two services an hour which will run Bedford, Luton, St Albans, St Pancras then central London stops. I am still trying to determine the precise impact, but, for instance, in a High Peak hour, Harpenden typically gets 6 fast trains now and was due to get 8 fast trains; this will now stay at 6 (so overall around no change from now).
3. St Albans will get the same number of trains (so around plus 2 per hour from now).
4. There will be one less peak train (over the 3 hour peak period) for Radlett, Elstree & Borehamwood, Mill Hill Broadway and West Hampstead Thameslink – but in this case only to December 2018. Officially this reduction is part of the phasing of service increases (see next but one item), but we understand that the reduction occurred to this service group rather than Bedford fast services because of this change.
5. Trains will be busier. It is slightly unclear how significant this will be as there will be many more 12 carriage trains in use on fast services – as all destinations they serve south of the Thames are also 12 carriage compatible (at present fast services to/from Kent and the Wimbledon loop have a maximum length of 8 carriages). For instance, St Albans commuters might be better off in the mornings if the new flyer services do not fill with travellers from Luton & Bedford. It seems reasonable, however, to assume there will be more standing than originally anticipated.
6. We expect these service changes to remain until at least December 2020 – the official line refers to electric services to Corby being able to run from May 2020 – but that makes no allowance for driver training, nor has the rolling stock been confirmed.

We will continue to lobby for this change to be reversed, **and encourage you to write to your MP – the press release has been sent to all MPs on the line between Hendon and Bedford.**

Press Release are here:

- APTU: <http://aptu.org.uk/pdfs/emptpeakhourstoppingbedfordluton.pdf> (also available as a [Word document](#)).
- EMT: <https://www.eastmidlandstrains.co.uk/information/media/news/Introduction-of-new-Thameslink-timetable-results-in-changes-to-East-Midlands-Trains-services/>
- Thameslink: <https://www.mynewsdesk.com/uk/govia-thameslink-railway/pressreleases/major-changes-to-rail-services-announced-between-bedford-luton-and-london-2326686>.

¹ Previously used by Grand Central (who are getting Adelante trains from Great Western, where they are being displaced by the new Hitachi Class 800 bi-modes).



Third & final round of 2018 Timetable consultations

Phase 3 of the consultation has now been published and asks for comments on the Saturday, Sunday and last train services.

In summary:

1. **Good news:** Saturday service mirrors Monday to Friday off-peak service, with the same extension later of the standard service pattern – ie full off peak service until around 11pm.
2. **Good news:** Sunday service sees 4 trains per hour for Radlett, Elstree & Borehamwood and Mill Hill Broadway from around noon, with the introduction of a semi-fast service. It is not possible to start this earlier on Sunday as until around noon 2 of the 4 tracks are allocated to Network Rail for engineering works and the remaining pair have to handle East Midlands Trains services, the 4 Bedford to St Albans services as well as two all stations.
3. **Bad news:** The central London Core (Kentish Town to London Bridge / Elephant & Castle) will open later on Sundays, at around 9:30am. Until then trains on Thameslink north will terminate at (or start at) St Pancras. Network Rail have asked for more time for maintenance – they reasonably point out that Monday to Saturday (and most of Sunday) there will be more trains running through the core and additional time is needed for maintenance.
4. **Good news:** Nothing changes as regards last trains – the overnight services continue, with good news that it will remain at every 30 minutes (driven in part by the need to provide a service to Gatwick Airport during the overnight closure of London Victoria).

APTU will make a response to the Consultation, with two key messages:

- There should be a review after a year to see if less maintenance time is needed for the Core maintenance on Sunday morning.
- Likewise, the needed duration of the Sunday morning 2 track railway on the Midland Mainline should be reviewed after a year to see whether it can be shortened.

In neither case will we seek a reduction in the proposed engineering hours 'now' – the potential downsides to lower reliability during the week are considered too high.

For phase 3, as with the earlier consultations, members should go to the dedicated website www.tranformingrail.com; there are full timetables available, as well as search for specific times on a journey planner (note: we have heard of instances where these have proved unreliable). We urge all members to respond individually to the consultation. The consultation closes on Wednesday 20 December at 1200.

If you have any comments, please can I have them by Tuesday (19th December) early evening (or Monday evening if they are very significant).

You can get in touch with the consultation team direct at gtr.timetableconsultation@gtrailway.com (please cc APTU).

Phasing of enhanced Thameslink service introduction

You will probably have read about this in the media. Instead of introducing the full Thameslink service in two stages, it will now be introduced in 4 – spread between May 2018 and December 2019. Parochially, we get most of the benefit (at least as regards Thameslink services – see above on East Midlands trains changes) in May 2018, with full benefit from December 2018. Nevertheless, taking a whole of railway perspective, it still makes (in our view) sense, as a more gradual build up can allow reliability to be sustained – we do, however, believe it right that in around January / February 2019, by which time there will be some experience in Automatic Train Operation, that consideration is given to accelerating the December 2019 changes (eg to September 2019, for the post summer return to work / school).



In summary:

1. The full service for St Albans to St Pancras non-stop services operates with effect immediately (the subtle change is that for 7 months there will be a very limited peak hour Bedford to Rainham service, rather than the full Bedford to Littlehampton service).
2. There is one less Luton, stations to Mill Hill Broadway, West Hampstead, St Pancras and stations to Rainham service until December 2018.
3. Services will start running via London Bridge again before May 2018 – see below.

The best way to see the build-up to the full timetable is if you have PowerPoint (or PowerPoint viewer). If so, this [PowerPoint slide show](#) will describe it.

Otherwise, this [PDF file](#) summarises the end point of each phase. We've also received a letter on the [background to the decision](#) from Nick Brown, Chief Operating Officer at GTR.

London Bridge stops before May 2018

Thameslink plan to start routing some Three Bridges and Brighton services via London Bridge soon after January 2018. There are three reasons for this – it will aid driver training, it will allow drivers who have learnt the route to retain their knowledge and it will aid recovery as it is faster.

We are keen that these trains publically stop at London Bridge – and that this be announced in advance. We recognise that initially this may only happen as the train real time – as it just so happens that one of the relatively few drivers with relevant route knowledge is driving the train, but are keen that this be publicised in advance, at least for a handful of peak hour services, as soon as possible. We continue to lobby Thameslink Management on this.

A question for you: When are your critical decision points for a train that is going to go via London Bridge?

For instance, for me, going south I would like to know the night before (might choose a specific train), or failing that as it arrives in Farringdon (as I often need to go to Canary Wharf and Farringdon is my usual first option to change to the Tube); going north in practice around 45 minutes is needed – so I know whether to head from Canary Wharf to London Bridge or Blackfriars.

New East Midlands franchise consultation

You may have read about this consultation, which generated a lot of publicity and complaints about proposals to restrict Bedford and Luton stops to the planned two train per hour Corby service. There was definitely some confusion about the proposal:

- The painful bit of the proposal is that it would have extended journey times and required an additional change for anyone heading north from Thameslink stations via Luton or Bedford travelling to Market Harborough or beyond.
- The less painful bit is slightly extended journey times on a less comfortable train between Bedford and St Pancras.

This document suggests that the Corby service is to up to 12 carriages long, so it is credible that once it starts it will call at Bedford and Luton in peak hours.

The APTU response is available here:

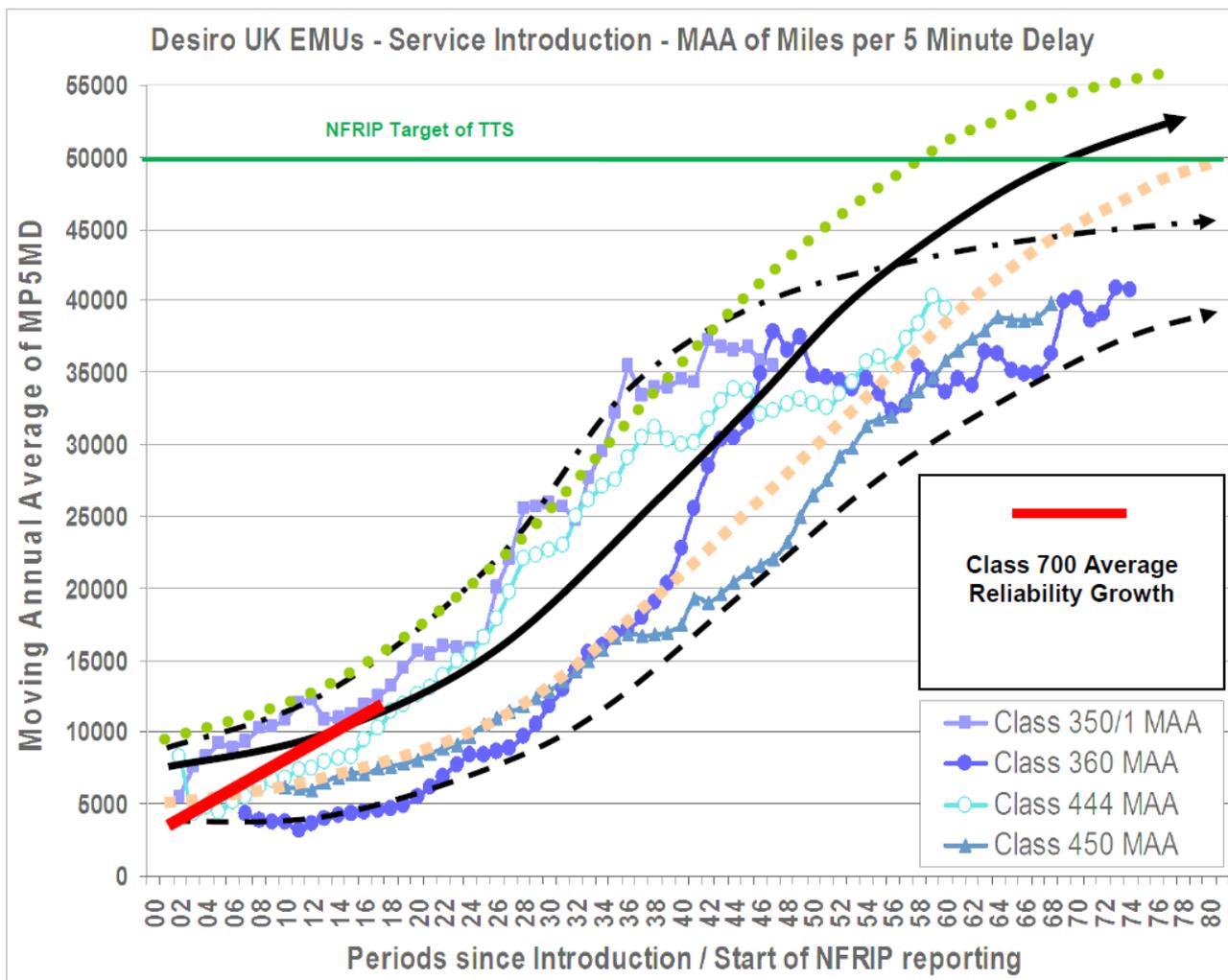
http://aptu.org.uk/pdfs/em_franchise_autumn2017consultation_aptufinalresponse.pdf.

Class 700 performance

Class 700 performance does seem to be on an upward trajectory. The subject was covered at the most recent Stakeholder update. I suspect there is a bit of 'lies, damn lies and statistics' in the graph as it masks



the truly terrible performance right at the beginning, but it is, perhaps, reassuring that Class 700 performance is middle of the pack.



We were also updated at the meeting that a software modification has been rolled out to improve air conditioning performance.

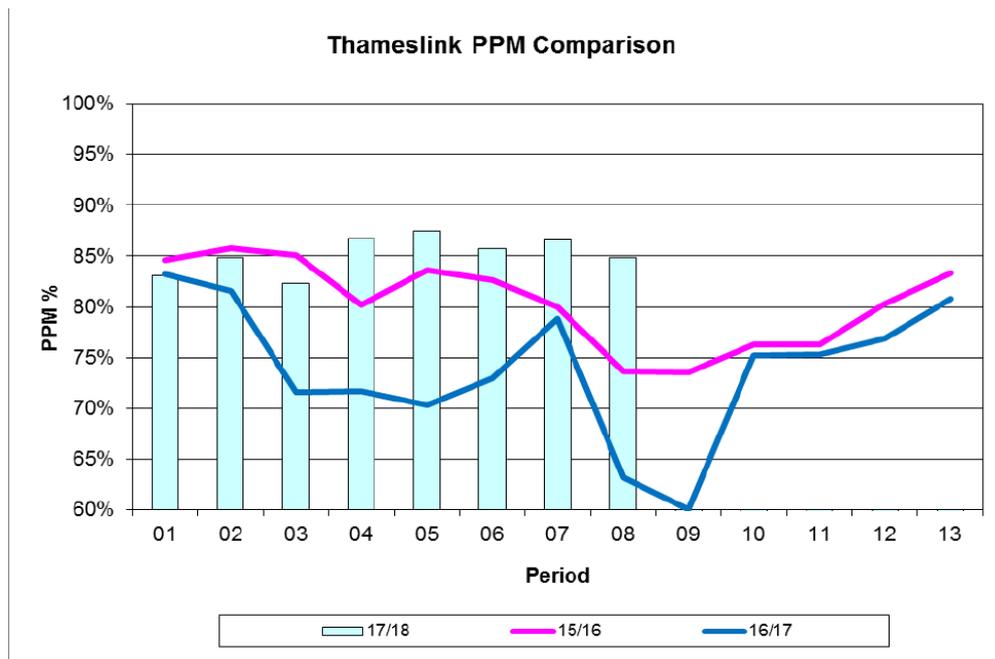
So far as I can tell of recent times:

1. The air conditioning is performing better.
2. The autumn leaf fall period seems to have gone well (Class 700s have part clasp brakes, which press against the wheel surface).
3. The recent cold and snowy weather does not seem to have presented particular problems.
4. The Passenger Information Screens continue to have problems very regularly.
5. Siemens and Thameslink seem to be getting better at handling problems – but there are still the very occasional major screw ups.
6. 12 carriage trains seem to be cancelled much more regularly than 8 carriage ones – for instance today the 0658 Bedford – Three Bridges has been cancelled “due to a problem with the on-board safety systems (M0)”.

Performance generally

Performance has, at least, moved back into tolerable territory – the latest statistics showing every month since May better than last year (and generally very noticeably better) and the autumn being noticeably better than 2015/16 as well.

I suspect the next noticeable up tick will start to occur around March when noticeable number of trains start to be routed via London Bridge, thus meaning that late arrivals on



northbound services at East Croydon are more consistently turned into on-time northbound departures from Blackfriars.

Other matters from the Stakeholder update

The main presentation used at the update is here:

<http://aptu.org.uk/pdfs/tlgnstakeholderforumnovember.pdf>

Matters of note include:

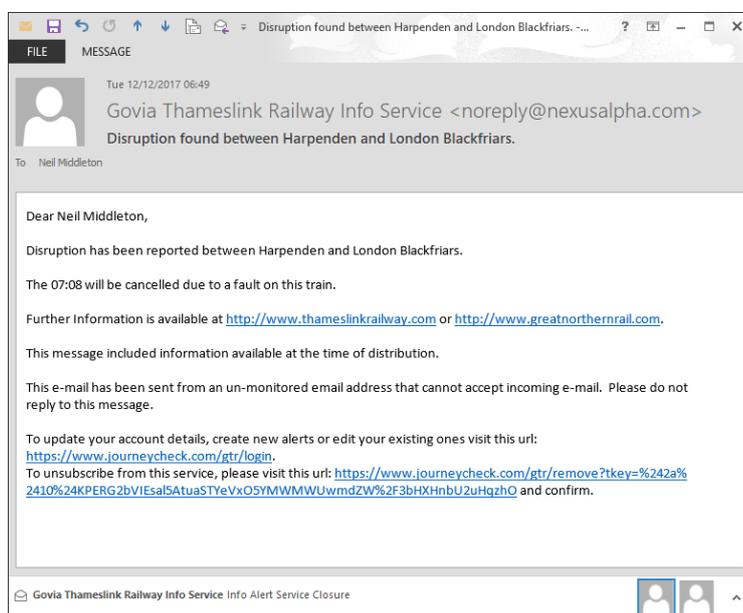
1. Lots of work to prepare for the Post 2018 Thameslink frequencies (eg slides 20 – 22 on station performance).
2. Key challenges ahead (slide 10).
3. Action being taken to improve ticket machine performance (slide 23)
4. Improvements at Elstree & Borehamwood (slide 25).

Cancellation of Info Alert Service

I recently received an email advising of the cancellation (from 30 December) of the GTR Info Alert Service. This provided:

1. Emails confirming no known disruptions
2. Emails detailing specific disruptions - eg delay trains
3. Text message alerts about train cancellations and major problems.

I must admit I have not been using these alerts as ‘front and centre’ to manage my journeys – in part because of other alternatives and in part because of delays in delivery to Gmail (caused by Gmail throttling the volume they will





accept). The quoted alternative is the National Rail service:

<http://ojp.nationalrail.co.uk/service/travelalert/search>. This seems to have very similar functionality in terms of updates provided. It adds a Twitter Direct Message feature, but critically adds a charge (of 25p) for each text alert sent; for me the text alert feature was the most useful bit as it was delivered to my phone and visible on the lock screen as I got ready for work.

I'd be interested to know of any member who finds the text message functionality useful and cannot easily switch to Twitter direct messaging (eg does not have a smart phone or tablet to quickly access them).

Smart ticketing

I will cover this in more detail in our next newsletter, but three key points are:

- When using Season tickets on the Key I have had an occasion when I was delayed by 15 minutes, but didn't get an Auto Delay repay. This was investigated by Thameslink who tell me that configuration changes have now been made.
- Key Go will be launched for Thameslink in early 2018. This provides a form of Pay as You Go ticketing, calculating the price at the end of the day.
- Key Go will not support railcards for some time as new Ticket Office software has to be rolled out first in order to provide the functionality to record the existence of a railcard.

Christmas & New Year blockade

As part of the Thameslink Programme upgrade there will be no Thameslink cross London service from Saturday 23rd December to Monday 1st January inclusive. Trains from Bedford will terminate at St Pancras International Low Level and trains from Brighton will terminate at London Bridge (platforms 10 to 15). Tickets will be accepted on the Tube and London buses to complete your journey. We have been advised that the following service will operate:

Four trains per hour will run from Bedford to St Pancras International Low Level calling at all stations to St Albans then West Hampstead Thameslink and St Pancras International Low Level and vice versa. Please note that the number of trains operating early morning and late night may be less than four; we have been told that most of these trains will be 12 carriage services.

Two trains per hour will run from Luton calling at all stations to St Pancras International Low Level and vice versa.

Non Thameslink Programme engineering work will also take place at the same time to replace some concrete slab track in the Kentish town area. As a consequence of this East Midlands Trains will be operating a reduced timetable for the whole of this period. This work does not directly impact Thameslink as it occurs on a section of track between the point that Thameslink trains head for the Platforms at Kentish Town and St Pancras high level.

Government Rail Strategy

The Government has issued an updated rail strategy: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/a-strategic-vision-for-rail>; again this will be covered in more depth next time, but of note are the near term



goals:

Our vision for rail

Near term

Our near term priority is for **better customer service and delivering planned upgrades**, with the industry getting a grip on cost.

- **Modern customer service for passengers:** smart technologies for ticketing, improved compensation arrangements, a new ombudsman to resolve disputes, improved Wi-Fi and mobile connectivity, and better accessibility.
- **Committed network upgrades:** Thameslink, Crossrail, Great North Rail Project and others, and improvements delivered via franchises: new trains, upgraded stations and new services.
- **Improving efficiency, increasing value and tackling cost.**
- **Building on the railway's record of safety and security**, including emerging risks.

As regards Thameslink, APTU will focus on three of these:

1. Getting the Wifi refit to the Class 700s – currently promised, but not timetabled
2. Accessibility improvements
3. Smart technologies for ticketing

I believe the improvements to compensation arrangements refers to Delay Repay 15 and Auto Delay Repay – already in place for us ~ and the other initiatives are national in nature – if there are any local initiatives, then, of course, we will show an interest.

The Evening Peak fare restrictions

There is no news on this – and we will reactivate our lobbying in the New Year. By way of context this is what we said in our last newsletter:

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.



The last Class 319 on Thameslink

The last Class 319 ran on Thameslink on Sunday 27 August – part of the formation was 319 435 – at one stage named “Adrian Jackson-Robbins 1987–2007 – Chair of the Association of Passenger Transport Users” – I guess the APTU can claim to have looked after passengers to the very end of the Class 319 era!



Neil

Neil Middleton
13 December 2017