



Dear Friend

Welcome to this newsletter. We cover off our rescheduled annual meeting with GTR (now **Tuesday 11 September [7:15pm for 7:30pm, in St Albans]**) and also other news.

In addition to the meeting (and the request for questions [ideally by Friday 31/8, and definitely by Sunday 2/9]), I particularly draw your attention to:

- Today’s news of an extension in the compensation offer to include day ticket users who travel 3 or more days per week.
- A request for comments on APTU’s planned response to timetable inquiries (by Thursday 30/8, early evening)
- A request for comments on APTU’s planned response to the Rail Industry’s review of rail fares (by Saturday 8/9)

The full topic list is as follows:

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Annual Meeting

We have managed to reschedule our annual meeting with GTR for **Tuesday 11th September – 7:15pm for 7:30pm at the Friend’s Meeting House (St Albans Quakers)** (Main Hall), 7 Upper Lattimore Road, St Albans, Herts, AL1 3UD; we’ve been there before; from the station, head down Victoria Street[Ⓜ] towards the centre of St Albans and turn right at the second set of traffic lights (where there is a Cotswold Outdoor Sports shop) and the Friends Meeting house is approximately 4th on the left – see <https://goo.gl/maps/b2sCnZ4XZ3p> . The hall is accessible by the disabled and has an accessible toilet.

Ⓜ Victoria Street is straight ahead from platform 4; from platform 1, turn right and cross the bridge over the railway.

The usual GTR offer that Season Ticket Holders whose journey does not include St Albans can travel to/from St Albans free by showing both their ticket and this newsletter will be available.

I am planning that the meeting will have the usual format, so we will have brief presentations from GTR and Network Rail followed by Question and Answer. From GTR we expecting Stuart Cheshire (Thameslink Passenger Services Director), Phil Hutchinson, (Head of Head of Strategic Planning), Larry Heyman (Local Development Manager, Thameslink) and others, including, I hope someone from the ROC (the Railway Operating Centre, which makes the day to day decisions, including skip stopping and extra stop orders). As yet I am not sure who will be attending from Network Rail.

If you have any questions, then these should be sent to me, ideally by Friday night (31 August), and definitely by Sunday early evening (2 September).

May Timetable Inquiries

There are currently two timetable inquiries underway: - by the House of Commons [Transport Select Committee](#) and the [Office of Rail & Road](#). The former has a deadline for comments of 5 September.

APTU will send the same core content to both inquiries. Because of the nature of each of the inquiries, our response has focused on our interaction with the process, rather than the consequences to travellers of the lines on the bad outcomes we are currently suffering from. The fact that these bad outcomes are not front and centre of our



submission doesn't mean that we regard the bad outcome as in anyway wanted, acceptable, can continue etc. Simply that these are national inquiries about the way timetabling is undertaken, rather than an inquest into service levels on the Midland Mainline.

These inquiries do need to be (and are) made aware of what those outcomes are, but the primary method for getting these fixed is either direct lobbying of politicians or of Thameslink.

Because of holidays, APTU will submit its response on the evening of 30 August. Any comments should be made by 6pm on Thursday 30th. Our current draft is available as a [PDF](#) and [Word](#) document.

You are, of course, encouraged to make your own submission; if you do so, feel free to re-use our comments.

The May timetable: What went wrong?

There now seems to general consensus that the most immediate cause was that the entire timetabling process ran out of time – for instance timetabling steps that should have been finalised 12 weeks (84 days) before the 20th were actually finalised 16 days before hand – and a key rostering (allocating driver diagrams) that normally requires 12 weeks only had 3 weeks available.

The root cause of all this seems to be driven by three key factors:

1. A collective failure to understand that taken as whole the timetable change was undeliverable.
2. The late imposition of supposedly risk reducing decisions such as the timetable phasing. By the time they were decided upon, the increase they caused in changes needed may well have been detrimental.
3. Late decision making (for instance apparently GTR proposed phasing delivery in April 2017; the DfT didn't approve until October (and stakeholders were not briefed until November)).

The Inquiries referred to above will need to work out who did what when; personally, I have two core expectations:

1. That fault needs to be found with many parts of the industry.
2. Any conclusion that primarily blames operational staff, either in Network Rail or GTR will suggest a white wash – this is a problem that needs to land on the desk of senior staff (and quite probably politicians) ~ the key question is which ones and in what proportion.

As regards reading more, the following are useful:

- Railfuture: Ian Brown's opinion article '[Murder on the Thameslink - Northern Express](#)'.
- Roger Ford of Modern Railways: his free, abbreviated, [preview](#) and also the September edition.
- London Reconnections: Their article '[Holy Grails and Thameslink Fails \(part 2\): The plan that went wrong](#)'.
- City Metric: Their article '[The Georgian vicar whose ideas could have saved Thameslink passengers from misery](#)'.
- London TravelWatch [letter](#) to the Transport Select Committee.

Additional Compensation

GTR announced additional compensation for Season ticket holders for the disruption since 20 May and have, **today**, extended it to include day ticket users (see <https://railcompensation.thameslinkrailway.com/faq>). This is a refund of up to 4 weeks travel. If you are a monthly (or more) ticket holder or use the Key Smart Card, Thameslink should be contacting you around now. Otherwise (weekly season ticket holders with paper tickets and day ticket users), you will need to register to make your claim. Details are awaited.

We [wrote](#) to Thameslink to complain that the original season ticket holders only offer was unfair to regular travellers who do not have a Season Ticket (eg off-peak travellers, or someone only travelling 3 days a week) and initially received back a refusal to extend. At least some MPs have complained (eg [Oliver Dowden](#)), also without apparent success. However, today' announcement shows that collectively, we have been successful.



APTU Priorities

I think it worthwhile setting out what I think our priorities are at present: In each case, I have labelled who I think are the principal decision makers

1. Lobbying for reinstatement of the full May timetable for peak hours (due by end Sept) **{GTR}**.
 - An update at today's Thameslink Stakeholder Reference Group confirmed that services are due to be added back on the 3rd, 10th and 17th September. Which services these will be, and whether post any services added back on the 24th, this will represent the full peak or not, is at present unknown.
2. Lobbying for reinstatement of the full off peak May timetable (due by the December timetable change) **{GTR}**.
3. Lobbying for the reinstatement of services taken out at Harpenden and Leagrave for Thameslink Express services. There are a number of strands to this:
 - Lobbying for EMT to make a prompt full return to Bedford and Luton **{DfT}**
 - Lobbying for EMT to make a partial return to Bedford and Luton. This could include a reduction in their 'no calling' time, calling to be in the afternoon, but not morning (the platform layout at Bedford means that a southbound call for an EMT service takes considerably longer than a northbound one) **{DfT & EMT}**
 - Lobbying for extra stop(s) on the Thameslink Express Service, either continuing to achieve the current 47 minute goal for the service **{GTR}**, or with a marginal increase **{DfT}**.
 - Lobbying for a revision of the calling pattern of TL Express Services to better align the service with station usage **{DfT}**
4. Feeding back on operating decisions that seem particularly perverse and/or very much not in the passenger interest **{GTR}**.
5. Lobbying for day ticket users to receive additional compensation along the lines offered to season ticket holders **{DfT}**. ✓

Whilst APTU and fellow Rail User Groups can have success with those priorities tagged for GTR, the greater the number of people that lobby politicians (local and national) to take the issue up with the DfT, the better.

Fares review

The Rail Delivery Group (the umbrella group for Network Rail, Train Operating Companies and Freight Operating Companies [and others]) is undertaking a review of fares. It is important to understand that this is only tackling three of four broad questions:

In scope

1. How should fares be structured?
2. What is the relevant balance in terms of price etc between different communities (eg peak vs off peak)
3. How should the technology of ticket selling change?

Out of scope

4. Should the taxpayer (local, regional or national) pay more (or less)?

There is more at:

- The RDG website: <https://www.britainrunsonrail.co.uk/fares>; the survey itself is available at <https://www.smartsurvey.co.uk/s/EasierFaresConsultation>.
- A set of presentations given by the [RDG](#) (note: 2.4mb) and [Transport Focus](#) to Railfuture Surrey & Sussex Divisions.

APTU has drafted a response and will submit this on 9 September. You can read our draft at ([PDF](#) | [Word](#)); please let me have any thoughts by the evening of Saturday 8 September.

You are, of course, encouraged to make your own submission; if you do so feel free to re-use our comments.



Recent performance

We're currently receiving a weekly update from Thameslink. The following content is of note:

Friday 24th:

We continue our efforts to run a stable service with 200 extra trains a day compared with the pre-May timetable. Services ran relatively well during the week, with strong performance across the network on both Monday and Tuesday when PPM exceeded 90%. Both teams are working hard so that customers have a reliable service that they can depend on, day in day out.

These are the key issues that affected services this week. You may find this useful if you receive passengers' enquiries about their journey:

- 22/08: Fatality at Earlswood during the evening peak
- 23/08: A person hit by an EMT train near St Albans affected the evening peak

I travelled on the 23rd in the aftermath of the person being hit by a train, and whilst I actually arrived in Harpenden a few minutes early (as a stop order had been added to a TL Express service), there was a downside, an upside and a thought:

- Upside: The driver was proactive and communicative. He spotted that the service was now not expected to call at St Albans via the Information Screens at London Bridge (we'll skip lightly over why that was how he found out) and then both spoke to the signaller and kept us (the passengers) up to date.
- Downside: The ROC and associated processes cannot communicate with the driver – he was first told his train was to be an all stations and then, whilst at St Pancras that the service was to be first stop Harpenden then all stations to Bedford. An ability to communicate with drivers with a 'right first time' approach seems to me a core requirement.
- Food for thought: The train I was on didn't stop at St Albans (as it was still closed) and the advice given out at Harpenden was to take the 321 bus or wait for a rail replacement bus. A question I will ask is when the advice should be to wait at another station in the area for the affected station to re-open and then take the next service.

Thoughts from anyone else travelling that night would be appreciated.

Friday 17th

Below are the latest performance figures available for the first four weeks that the interim timetable has been in operation, compared with the two weeks prior to that.

Thameslink	PPM
2 July - 13 July	59.25%
16 July – 27 July	76.15%
30 July – 12 August	81%

Looking at recenttraintimes.co.uk, this is supported (skip past the individual train times to the daily summary):

	Morning	Evening
Outers	HPD>STP	STP>HPD
Inners	ELS>STP	STP>ELS

To me, a key message from these is that we would now like attention to turn towards frequency and capacity; we would prefer a slightly less reliable service with more trains than more reliability from the same number of trains (we would, of course, prefer both...).



The expanded APTU Committee: A reminder

Adrian Slimmon (St Albans), Charles Ballin (Leagrave; also Treasurer) and myself (Harpenden, also Chair) – the remaining members of a long serving APTU Committee are all willing to continue in post. The following have kindly volunteered to join us:

- Bryan Hanlon (St Albans)
- Paul Grossman (Elstree & Borehamwood)
- Roger Butterworth (Harpenden)
- Sam Leighton (Leagrave)

There is no absolute limit on the Committee membership, so we remain interested in expanding our number.

Regards

Neil

Neil Middleton

28 August 2018