



Dear Friend

I thought an update was appropriate as some of us may be about to return to their workplaces, and some of the risks of travelling by rail have become clearer (and reported as being less than car use).

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Annual meeting

It is time for us to organise an annual meeting and I am going to get this scheduled for late September through to late October (start of half term), or conceivably early November depending on availability. It will be virtual, on Zoom and consist of a combination of updates and Q&A. I will seek out questions in due course, but I think the core focus should be on the future, rather than the past.

Current travel: A Covid-19 update

I thought it would be worthwhile setting out our understanding of the current travel 'situation':

Perceptions

[Transport Focus research](#) has shown two very big gaps between those who have travelled recently and those who have not:

- 85% of those who had travelled in the last 7 days felt safe or very safe; for those who had not, it was 42%.
- Those who had travelled felt slight safer on public transport than in shops & restaurants – of those who hadn't six times as many felt public transport less safe than shops & restaurants.

For myself, when I did travel, I felt safe – the train looked clean, there was plenty of hand sanitiser at strategic points on the station and those on the train & station (admittedly only a few of us) generally had face coverings on (although this last aspect is definitely an issue – see below).

Infection Risk

This, of course, is the "64,000 dollar question". In terms of assessing the risk, I think work that the (UK) Rail Safety and Standards Board¹ has undertaken is a good start point. They conclude that "Rail still safer than road during Covid-19". [Their summary](#) includes this:

Analysis by the rail safety body has shown the risk of contracting Covid-19 while travelling by train is about 1 in 11,000 journeys. This is equivalent to a chance of less than 0.01%, based on an hour-long train journey in a carriage with no social distancing or face coverings.

The report also shows that the risk more than halves if passengers wear a face covering. These have been mandatory when travelling by train since June, unless exempt.

On safety alone, for an individual traveller per kilometre travelled, the car is 25 times less safe than rail. Cycling is 403 times, walking is 456 times, and travelling by motorcycle is 1,620 times less safe.

When the effect of the virus is taken into account and compared against the average road safety risk, the risks are almost the same (road is 1.14 times the risk of rail). Across all transport modes risks of catching the virus are very low, and certainly tolerable. Experts accept that most people will want to use a combination of different modes of transport to get around.

The [full report](#) is also available. Like any journey (rail, car, as a pedestrian etc), the factors on any one trip will vary.

Other material to help understand the risks includes:

- "Southeastern rolls out swab testing at stations to confirm effectiveness of cleaning measures during Covid-19": 'Swab tests were carried out at high touch points at five key commuter stations including Ashford International, Chatham, Lewisham, Sevenoaks and Strood, and all results came back negative with no traces of COVID-19 having been tested in a laboratory. These tests will now be rolled out across all Southeastern stations for ongoing reassurance.' Read their [Press Release](#) for the detail. Work by

Four in ten think that using public transport is less safe than visiting other places such as shops and restaurants

Thinking about public transport, which of these statements applies to you...?
I think that using public transport is more / less / equally as safe than other places such as shops, restaurants, or pubs
Base: All, 1,973

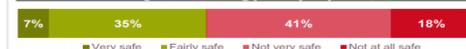


Those making train journeys in the last seven days are twice as likely than those who have not to feel safe doing so

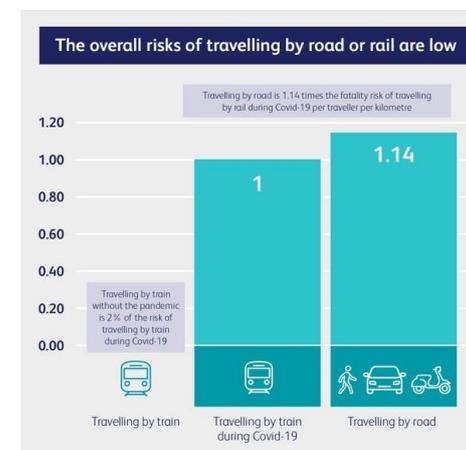
How safe do you feel using trains at the moment?
Base: All making journeys by train, 111



If you had to make a train journey at the moment, how safe would you feel?
Base: All excluding those making journeys by train, 1,862



* Denotes statistically significant difference to respondents overall



¹ Rail Safety and Standards Board Ltd - Our mission "Through research, standards and analysis we help our members deliver a better, safer railway".



[Imperial College](#) came to a similar conclusion for the Underground and Buses (I have not been able to find an original resource for this).

- Deutsche Bahn Research, as reported in [Rail Magazine](#) “We see remarkably few infections in trains. No infections occurred in persons on board with a stay of less than ten hours. Not a single contact tracing has been identified in Germany and Austria as having been triggered by an infection on the train journey.” It also found that the infection rate in air-conditioned carriages was lower than in vehicles without air-conditioning. It reported: “The air flow is essentially vertical rather than horizontal, which makes direct distribution of the virus by the airflow rather unlikely.” Again, I have not been able to find an original resource for this either (but am happy in both cases that I am reporting on ‘real’ work).
- A [University of Southampton study](#), in conjunction with the Chinese Academy of Sciences, WorldPop and others does confirm that there is an infection risk – an average of 0.32%, but with a range of up to 10% if travelling with an infected person. It goes on to observe that only 0.075% of passengers who used a seat previously used by an infected person and recommends ‘a safe social distance of more than one metre is required for one hour spent travelling together’.
- Other articles suggesting low infection rates from public transport use include this one in [The Atlantic](#) (refers to 150 infection clusters in Paris and 355 in Austria, none of which were traced to public transport use); the article also seems to have driven content in this [Video](#) from the Go Ahead Group CEO; this [Blog](#) on the World Bank website and this [Bloomberg](#) article.

Cleaning

In common with all Operators, Thameslink have significantly improved their cleaning regime; a [YouTube video](#) they have filmed covers this and more information is available on their [website](#).

As an indication of the scale of this change, I’ve had this update from Network Rail (my highlighting) “... We treat our toilets with virus blockers, and have bought 44 times more cleaning products, including antiviral sprays ...”.

Air conditioning

There has been plenty of publicity suggesting that aircraft are relatively safe to fly in. This is typically justified on the basis that modern, large aircraft air conditioning (1) includes High-efficiency particulate air (commonly known as HEPA) filters (which will capture a very high portion of particles in the air); and (2) air flows vertically, rather than horizontally. As per my infection risk segment above, we are fortunate that Class 700s are air conditioned which appears to be a benefit. I’ve yet to see any meaningful commentary that can allow travellers to understand relative performance of train and aircraft air conditioning. With my Railfuture hat on, I asked GTR for their comments (on air-conditioning on trains generally, not specifically Class 700s) and they had this to say:

In addition to the existing efforts to reassure that stations and trains are clean (and regularly cleaned) to reassure passengers on air quality on trains (eg on the effectiveness of air conditioning in removing droplets containing the virus).

Early research in Britain and across major European countries into the transmission of COVID-19 onboard trains has had some promising results and the risk appears to be low.

Newer trains have heating, ventilation, and air conditioning (HVAC) systems on board so that a comfortable temperature that's set to 21 degrees can be maintained inside the carriages. The system achieves this by taking a regular flow of fresh air in from outside and balancing it with recirculated air drawn through filters. The air then passes over kit called an 'evaporator' which removes moisture during this process.

The systems are designed to replace the air in a carriage typically every 5-6 minutes which is dependent on temperature conditions on board and outside. Our train doors open at stations across the route, some services more frequently than others and this action will naturally provide an input of fresh air as well.

We work with train manufacturers to ensure we are applying the very latest recommendations to the systems' cleaning regime and filter replacement during regular maintenance at our train depots.



Our engineers are working with others in the industry, across the UK and Europe, to ensure best practice is used in our systems and in the deep cleaning of our carriages, supporting a safe onboard environment for our passengers.

We are, as you are likely aware, working with the industry to commission further research into the risks of transmission on board trains. We know that initial research by the RSSB suggests, even without mitigations such as face-coverings, a very low risk of transmission. Our counterparts in Germany, Deutsche Bahn are reported to have shown no link through track and trace data to transmission onboard ICE intercity trains and an infection rate among onboard staff significantly below the national average. This is, in part, attributed to the high air-exchange rate on board trains compared to many other indoor environments. Similar work by SNCF on the ability of their rolling stock to replace air every nine minutes have led to capacity restrictions being removed in both countries. As we as an industry further study and understand any residual risk, we will introduce any additional mitigations as required.

The full response is on the Railfuture [website](#).

Touch points more generally

In the query above there was also a question on touch point elimination and the response was as follows:

The initiatives to reduce physical touch points, such as auto open doors and water taps using motion detection to turn themselves on.

There are no current plans to substantially change the number of functions that are automatic, although clearly, as can be seen with the hand sanitiser units fitted at stations, automatic is increasingly the default choice for new installations.

Our cleaners are briefed to focus on door controls, ticket machines and other touch points such as hand rails on trains and stations. Customers can help us to keep them safe by washing their hands before and after travelling and being especially mindful to avoid hand to mouth contact.

Face coverings

As at today (23rd August) the Thameslink message is “You must wear face coverings at all points of your journey – from when you enter the station to when you exit the station at your destination. For information on what exceptions are in place [click here](#). If you do wish to use an exemption card, our downloadable card is [available here](#). Using this card or any other card is not mandatory.”

It is clear that compliance rates (for those that should be wearing a face covering) is an ongoing challenge. Enforcement is a BTP responsibility – often the easiest way to report an incident will be to text them on [61016](#).



Thameslink staff are not expected to prevent non covering wearers (who cannot demonstrate an exemption) from travelling, nor are they in a position to fine non wearers.

We talked about this on a Railfuture Hertfordshire & Bedfordshire Zoom session earlier this evening, and the reporting from those who had travelled was of good rates of wearing face coverings on trains, but lower rates on station platforms.

Timetables

At the weekend and off-peak during the week we are now getting the full May 2020 timetable. Monday to Friday during the peaks we are getting some, but not all, of the increase from the standard off-peak 10 train per hour pattern (4 * Bedford, 2 * Luton & 4 * St Albans). Further changes are expected as follows:

1. There will be no changes on the Midland Mainline Thameslink services in early September for the start of the School term. In some parts of the country, there are specific services that are important for School traffic, and if not already in-place, these are likely to re-appear.

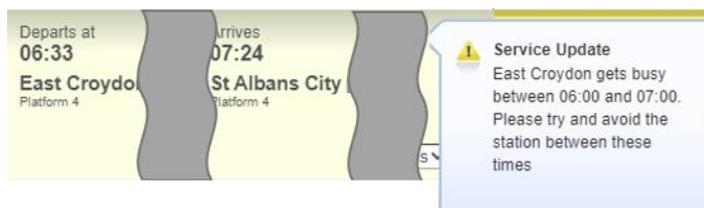


- A key point to note is that the Driver (and other critical staff) effective headcount is now below planned. This is driven by staff who have been, or still are, Shielding and the loss of training ability – much training requires the driver under instruction and an instructor in the train cab at the same time and this hasn't been possible under social distancing. Therefore, drivers who should have finished their training since March have not.
2. There is unlikely to be much of a change in December 2020. Before Covid-19 we were expecting EMR to introduce the Corby Electric service at this point, but this has now been deferred to May 2021 – See below for a separate article.
 3. May 2021 is now the due date for the reinstatement of the full Thameslink peak service with the Thameslink Express services reverting to their planned calling pattern – some at Legrave and all at Harpenden. However, this may not happen – see below for a separate article.

Busy trains

We now have the following ways to find out about busier trains:

1. The Thameslink website has an [overview](#) (towards the bottom of the page).
2. The National Rail Journey Planner shows if specific trains are expected to be busy.
 - I suspect this information doesn't change that quickly, but do note that the Journey Planner generates [URLs using relative dates](#) in some circumstances that can be bookmarked.
3. National Rail enquiries offer a variety of alerting systems – the best start point is their [summary web page](#). From what I can see, only their [Facebook Messenger option](#) includes information about busy trains.



All about fares

How much should I be paying?

There are the two challenges when travelling (1) is my ticket valid?; and (2) have I got the cheapest possible ticket?

We've put together two guides for this – for off-peak and morning peak travellers. In both cases, we have focused on a single person travelling from Hertfordshire and Bedfordshire to Central London and back on the same day as otherwise the size of the problem we are trying to explain results in an excessively complicated answer.

We have not attempted to cover the situation for Elstree & Borehamwood and stations south thereof, who are covered by London's Zonal fare structure.

Off-Peak travellers

For Off-Peak travellers – by which we mean people who leave their local station once off-peak tickets are valid: which varies between 09:16 and 09:35 Monday to Friday for 'our patch' (time per station in the detailed tables), the general rules of thumb are:

1. Buy an off-peak return ticket.
2. If you have a Railcard, if possible, wait for that Railcard to become valid – which is only occasionally the start of the off-peak.

Railcard validity start time	
Disabled Persons	No AM restriction
16-17 Saver	No AM restriction
16-25	10:00
26-30	10:00
Senior	Start of Off-peak
Gold Card	09:30
Network	10:00
Two Together	09:30
Family & Friends	Start of Off-peak
Minimum price on Anytime Travelcards. Valid before 10am, with a £12 minimum, except July & August where no minimum.	



- On Ticket Vending Machines, the front page may not give the option to buy an off-peak ticket, nor to apply a Railcard. If they aren't available, choose the option *Tickets for Future Travel*.
- And don't forget that KeyGo may be as cheap, be more convenient, and require less use of touchpoints.

A key question is whether to buy the relevant Day Travelcard or Through ticket to an Underground / DLR Zone ½ station – or buy a London Thameslink ticket and then use Oyster / Contactless on TfL services.

We have prepared:

- Table 1 to show the simple choice – Only going to London Thameslink or the convenience of buying a Travelcard. In both cases, the cost of a peak ticket is given for comparison.
- Table 2 to sets out savings that may be possible if the only travel in Central London is a single return journey by Underground or DLR to a Zone 1 or 2 station.
- A calculator to work out whether it is worthwhile to buy a London Thameslink ticket and then use Oyster / Contactless on TfL services.
 - The calculator does not cater for every possible situation – eg it does not hold or refer to all fares - eg not k for Oyster from Radlett, nor journeys to East Croydon, nor to Underground DLR Zones 3 to 6 - or Buses.
 - It is likely that there are undetected errors.

Top tip: If travelling at the start of off-peak / validity of your railcard, you may be buying your ticket before it is valid. If, so On Ticket Vending Machines, the front page may not give the option to buy an off-peak ticket, nor to apply a Railcard. If they aren't available, choose the option *Tickets for Future Travel*.



In broad terms:

Use a Travelcard (or U1/U2 ticket if possible)	Use a London Thameslink ticket + pay separately for Tfl	Use Contactless (where available)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> When travelling beyond Zones 1 & 2 Or at the weekends 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Staying within Zones 1 & 2 Have a Railcard, an Oyster card, and have registered the former on the latter. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Travelling to a TfL destination in the morning peak & do not have a relevant Railcard. Travelling to a TfL destination after the morning peak, but back in the evening peak & do not have a Railcard.

The tables are available as printable table in [PDF format](#); the tables and the Calculator in [Excel format](#).

Peak travellers

For those of us travelling to London in the morning peak, understanding the rules for cheapest travel are complex; they vary by time of travel and return (depending on the availability of Carnets and/or Contactless and/or Oyster).

In the tables below, we have summarised the options available in price order per station; '1' is the cheapest, and '5' the most expensive. For these purposes we have split the price of peak tickets into outward and return legs on a 50/50 basis – a Peak Hour Single actually costs slightly more.

	To London Thameslink: Travelling 4:30am to end of morning peak					From London Thameslink: After Morning Peak (assuming travel to London in morning peak)					
	Off Peak Contactless (to 6:30am)	Peak Carnet	½ of total or Outbound single + Return Off-Peak Single with Railcard	Peak Contactless	Anytime ticket (% of cost)	Off Peak Carnet (not 4:30/7:01pm at St Pancras)	Off Peak Contactless (not 4pm/7pm)	Peak Carnet	½ of total or Outbound single + Return Off-Peak Single with Railcard	Peak Contactless	Anytime ticket (% of cost)
Radlett	1		2		3		1		2		3
St Albans	1	2	3		4	1	2	3	4		5
Harpenden	1	2	3		4	1	2	3	4		5
Luton Airport Parkway	1	2	3		4	1	2	3	4		5
Luton		1	2		3	1		2	3		4
Leagrave		1	2		3	1		2	3		4
Harlington			1		2				1		2
Flitwick			1		2				1		2
Bedford		1	2		3	1		2	3		4



	To London Underground/DLR Z1/Z2: Travelling 5am to end of morning peak					From London Underground/DLR Z1/Z2: After Morning Peak (assuming travel to London in morning peak)									
	Off Peak Contactless (to 6:30am)	Peak Carnet + Contactless in Z1/Z2	1/2 of total or Outbound single + Return Off-Peak Single with Railcard + Z1 Contactless	Peak Contactless	Anytime Z1 / Z2 ticket (1/2 of cost)	Contactless Cap	Anytime Travelcard (1/2 of cost)	Off Peak Carnet (not 4:20/7:01pm at St Pancras) + Contactless in Z1/Z2	Off Peak Contactless (not 4pm/7pm)	Peak Carnet + Contactless in Z1/Z2	1/2 of Total of Outbound single + Return Off-Peak Single with Railcard + Z1 Contactless	Peak Contactless	Anytime Z1 / Z2 ticket (1/2 of cost)	Contactless Cap	Anytime Travelcard (1/2 of cost)
Radlett	1		2		3		4				2		3		4
St Albans	1	2	3		4		5						5		6
Harpenden	1	2	3		4		5						5		6
Luton Airport Parkway	1	2	3		4		5						5		6
Luton		1			2		3				2		3		4
Leagrave		1			2		3				2		3		4
Harlington					1		2						1		2
Flitwick					1		2						1		2
Bedford		1			2		3				2		3		4

From cheapest to most expensive:

- Off-Peak Contactless is the Cheapest, if available, and ends (based on tap-in time) at 6:30am. For Radlett, Oyster is also a possibility. This can be combined with a Carnet return (not Radlett). If you haven't already, you might want to set up a [TfL account](#) and link your Oyster and/or Bank accounts.
 - Off-Peak Contactless has two key advantages over National Rail Fares; (1) the morning peak doesn't start until 6:30am and (2) it gives access to 'proper' half-price off-peak fares.
- Carnets are next cheapest, again if available. Off-Peak Carnets are available, but require a start before 4:30am, so aren't listed in the table for the morning as every conceivable possibility would result in an enormous table.
- Two Singles can offer a small saving over an Anytime Return – but only for Railcard holders. This option probably only makes sense where Carnets are not available – or they are, but peak travel is very irregular. The Saving from this option is typically around £1 – £1.50 per return journey.
- For those travelling only travelling to a London Zone 1 or 2 Underground or DLR station – and back again, a Zone 1/2 return might make sense; these are cheaper than a Travelcard.
- An Anytime London Thameslink ticket or an Anytime Travelcard are the most expensive. From stations with Contactless enabled, using Contactless is the other possibility when travelling to TfL destinations as the Contactless cap (including Peak travel) is set to the same as an Anytime Day Travelcard.

When does a season ticket make sense?

The other key question is the break-even vs a season ticket. There is no simple answer to this; some very generic rules of thumb are:

- If travelling off-peak, day tickets are likely to be cheapest, particularly if you can wait for your Railcard to become valid (eg 10am for a Network Card).
- If you hold a Railcard that gives discounts during the Morning Peak (possibly with a minimum price cap), Day tickets are likely to be the best option. This applies to Disabled Persons, 16-25, 26-30 and 16-17 Saver Railcards.
- If #1 & #2 do not apply and you are travelling 3 or less weekdays, then day tickets are likely to be cheapest.
- With some day ticket combinations, it is possible to travel 5 days a week and still be cheaper than a Season ticket.

We have **created a [calculator in Excel](#)** (which contains fare tables [which are available [separately as a PDF file](#)]) for you to work out what is best for you. As regards 'Health warnings':

- It **does not cater for every possible situation** - it does not hold or refer to all fares - eg there is no option to price up journeys to East Croydon, nor to Underground DLR Zones 3 to 6 - or Buses. It **does not allow for the benefit / cost of additional journeys** (eg to evening entertainment, or at the weekends).
- It is **likely that there are undetected errors**, and in the case of season tickets from 1 month 1 day to c 10 months, it uses an approximation to price them.

Ticketing

KeyGo (Post Pay) and Railcards

Thameslink have announced that for KeyGo, their Post Pay product, they are adding Railcard discounts. This is an important / essential change as it means that most travel will be at least as cheap, and more convenient, than paper tickets. To recap, you tap-in and out on each journey and at the end of the day the central system works out the cheapest combination of ticket(s) and charges you the cost. Key points note are:

- It delivers flexible pricing – when travelling off-peak you don't need to decide whether or not you might be coming back in the evening peak. If you do, you will be charged the Off-Peak fare; if you don't, the Super Off-Peak fare.
- It doesn't cover travel on the Underground or TfL. For this, you should either use Contactless or Oyster (and remember that for Oyster [only], you can [register](#) a National Railcard).

This is currently being rolled out and are now available on Thameslink for existing KeyGo users – you will need to start by going to your Account on the [website](#) and uploading your Railcard details.

Carnets on the Key

Existing Carnet station will be enabled for the Key next month (based on a late June update to us). Although 'just' a change of technology, I actually think this a critical improvement, as we, the passenger, will be able to reliably and easily demonstrate that we have a valid ticket. I have no details of how it will work, interact with KeyGo etc, and when available they will be included in a newsletter.

This change will not impact Radlett, nor Harlington as the paper product is not available there (see below).

Changes to ticket refund arrangements from Today

Thameslink (and presumably the entire Rail Industry) are reverting to their standard refund arrangements with effect from today. This means less flexibility and more administrative fees. Details on the Thameslink [website](#).

To me, the key reason not to have made the decision to change now is 'local lockdowns'. If you are travelling between areas not subject to them, then it is hard to argue that the reversion to business as usual creates any great difficulty. However, if our area becomes subject to one, or there was a plan to travel to an area that becomes subject to one between purchase and travel, then there are good arguments for retention of the current policy (and the same argument applies for tickets to airports, given Government short notice impositions of quarantines and do not travel advice). There is a particular exposure when purchasing Advance tickets for other operators.

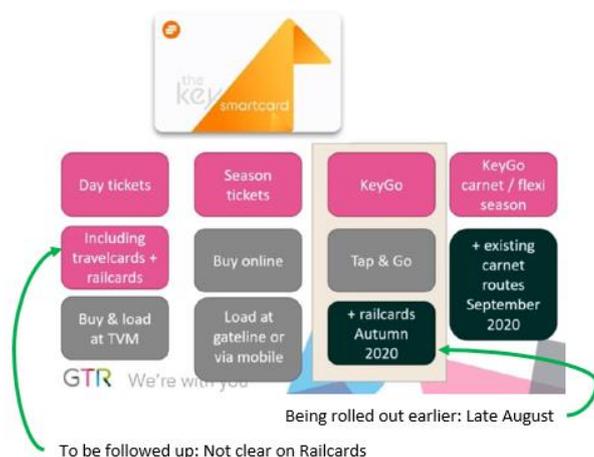
I do not rank this as an important issue for us and therefore will not be giving it specific attention, although any opportunities to highlight the above will be taken.

Ticketing roadmap

GTR have shared an overview of Smartcards & ticketing. GTR are currently deploying two important and one useful change to the Key, their Smartcard.

Season ticket loading via Phone

Until now, after purchasing a Smartcard Ticket on the website, you then needed to wait up to two hours before it could be collected (typically by tapping on a gateline). Now, if your phone has NFC capability (a good test is you can use Google or Apple Pay), you can buy your ticket on the App and load it immediately.





Influencing future travel

Fare increases

Recent normal practice would be for a fare increase of 1.6% in January, being the July RPI inflation measure – and that this would have been announced last week on the day the inflation data was released. This didn't happen, and the rumour mill is that the government is a bit hesitant, partially from the desire to encourage the return to rail and partially recognising that the days of the 5 day a week traveller in many (but not all) industries (and jobs) is over and therefore there is a need for a part time season ticket.

Now would be a good time to write to your MP on the topic. If you use Radlett or Harlington, you might wish to address the next topic as well.

Carnets for Radlett & Harlington

A key point on the availability of existing paper Carnets to the Key is that they are not available from all stations. At present, they are available from St Albans, Harpenden, Luton Airport Parkway, Luton and Leagrave (and Bedford). They are not available from Radlett (although partially mitigated there by the availability of Oyster and Contactless), nor Harlington (and not at Flitwick).

Once Thameslink formally announce that Carnets are available on the Key, APTU will work with the Bedford Commuters Association and Rail User Groups on Great Northern (where there are around 20 stations that don't support Carnets) to campaign for extensions. The target will be MPs and other politicians as this will be a political decision.

Active consultations

There are three live consultations that could impact our rail services in the longer term:

1. Network Rail's [Croydon Area Remodelling Scheme](#): This is for a re-build of East Croydon station and a substantial remodelling of the junction immediately to the north. The aim of this is to both increase capacity and to remove conflicts. As regards the former, this is probably of greatest interest in terms of ensuring the two slower services per hour to Gatwick Airport continue to run – there is substantial 'competition' for train paths on the Brighton Mainline; the latter for general improvements in reliability – delays around East Croydon are a common cause of trains running late at St Pancras heading northwards. Respond by 20 September.
2. England's Economic Heartland [Draft Transport Strategy](#). EEH is an 'arc' around London running from Swindon to Cambridgeshire. The strategy focuses less on Thameslink per se and more on de-carbonisation and how to connect people. From the Thameslink perspective it is about creating a transport design in which Thameslink can thrive. This one closes on 6 October.
3. Transport Decarbonisation: This is input into the [national de-carbonisation plan](#) through to 2050 – "Request for ideas about the next steps to reducing emissions in transport and creating a decarbonisation plan ensuring we are net zero in emissions by 2050.". This closes on 31 August.

Future Timetables

Longer term timetable

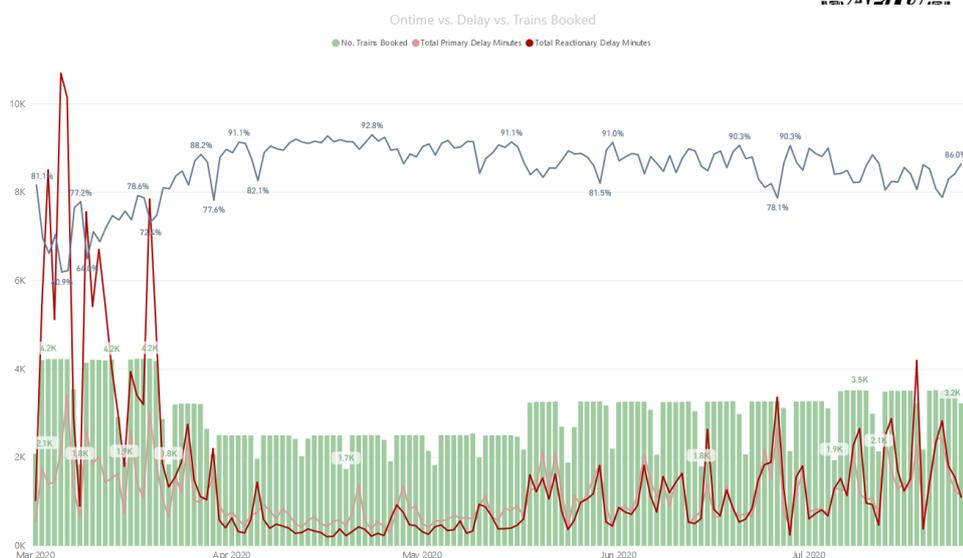
There are probably two key messages coming out for train travel from the Covid-19 service since the end of March:

1. Performance can be significantly improved if just a few trains are removed from the schedules. This graph of performance since the start of Lockdown shows it; a really noticeable impact is how much reactionary delay is removed with just a slight thinning out of the service.

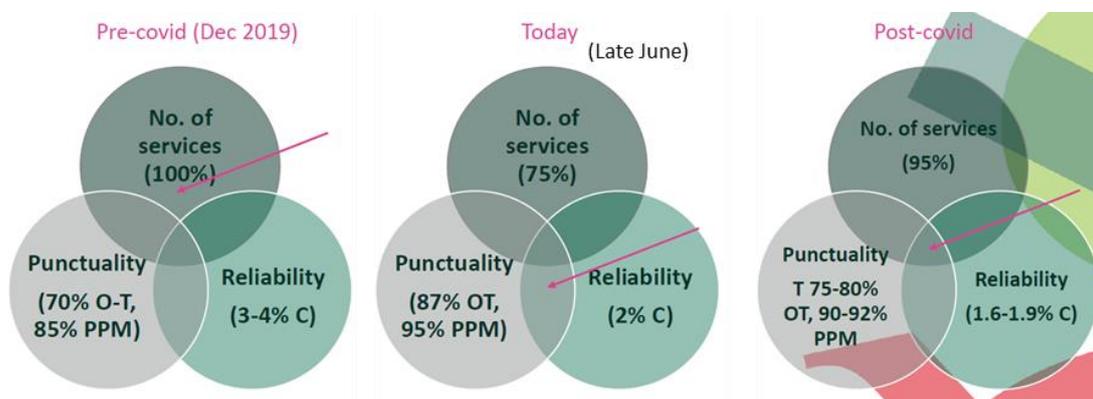
a. The increase in performance is also noticeable, and although there has been some impact of increased numbers of train journeys, the relationship does not appear to be linear.

2. At a late June webinar, Thameslink shared some thoughts on the future timetable, showing that the previous bias had been towards Capacity and the then current bias was towards Punctuality and Capacity.

3. It is clear that there are permanent changes and reductions in travel to the workplace for many industries. At present many of us have gone from 4 or 5 days per week to zero days. As to what it will be in the longer term, it seems safe to see a substantial reduction, but as to what that will be is a bit



of an unknown. I've certainly seen quite a bit of talk in the media about the benefits of being together to work and how we are using up the "social capital" (of togetherness) built up before 23 March.



Thameslink have suggested that the 'sweet spot' might be around 95% of services – but do note that there are no formal proposals for this. At this stage, I believe the APTU stance should be:

1. That the principle of a little reduction in services for better punctuality and reliability is the right one to take.
2. That we would not support any reduction in the standard 15 minute interval (eg Bedford to/from East Croydon and beyond) and 30 minute interval (eg Luton to/from Rainham) services, including earlier finishes.
3. We are sympathetic to some reduction of the extra 4 trains per hour that run Bedford to/from East Croydon and beyond in the peak, but we would definitely not want to see these running as Thameslink Expresses and we would want to see some evening out of the spacing (pre Covid-19, the TL Express services caused 2 problems: loss of capacity and uneven service gaps; the capacity issue is reduced, but the service gaps remain a problem).

Delay of East Midlands Railway's new timetable to May 2021

It has been a long running sore that the peak hour Thameslink Express services have operated, not stopping at Harpenden & Leagrave (and Flitwick). These services came into being to provide a faster peak hour service for Bedford passengers given that East Midlands Trains (as it was then) felt unable to stop at Bedford and Luton in peak hours due to capacity and train pathing issues.

This has always been a temporary arrangement, pending the introduction of Electric services to Corby (in the mists of time, this was to occur before Thameslink, but has been heavily delayed due to overhead electrification delays). Pre Covid-19, these services were due in December 2020, but in the early part of the year we already saw that the timetable for their arrival was at risk, at that stage due to expected late arrival of new rolling stock at Greater Anglia (required to release the Class 360 Trains to be used on the Corby service).



We have now been advised that this will be delayed to May 2021; the full letter advising us of this is [here](#);
We (and the BCA) challenged EMR over this decision, including the possibility of peak hour electric services and received a good explanation from EMR as to why this isn't possible:

Regarding the use of Class 365s, the availability of Class 360s is not an issue that is precluding the introduction of the 6 trains per hour timetable. The first Class 360s have been modified for 110mph running, and are on track to be complete by November this year. The first units are now ready to be released to us, but need to wait until the new infrastructure is commissioned (more on this below), so we expect the first tranche of units arriving in January.

Driver training, as referenced in the letter from Will Rogers & Gary Walsh, is an issue that is precluding the introduction of the 6 trains per hour timetable. Driver training cannot currently commence with the restrictions in place with Covid-19, though we are working with trade unions to facilitate this as soon as we can.

Finally, the infrastructure is due to be fully commissioned over the Christmas period this year. It is already substantially complete, with several sections of OLE in various stages of completion. One of the last areas to be brought into use will be Kettering Electric Sidings, and until this is done, we have nowhere to store the Class 360s and therefore no ability to start training. In short, we expect the first trains just after Christmas, with training commencing before in Anglia.

Considering the above factors, the use of Class 365s would not achieve anything – the infrastructure readiness and ability to train Drivers are the key enablers, rather than the rolling stock itself.

The driving reason why the 6 trains per hour timetable cannot be introduced any sooner than May, including peak time 'preview' services, is that the two timetables are fundamentally incompatible with one another (despite being superficially very similar). To amend the current timetable to accommodate them would be tantamount to a full recast, involving EMR, GTR, Northern, XC, TPE, Arriva Rail London & Freight services, which we have discounted as a viable option to adequately manage the risk of introduction, and manage the compressed timescales that we now find ourselves in to deliver three significant timetable changes. This is before we consider that we are continuing to amend the current Covid-19 timetable, and managing with reduced train planning resource, reduced functionality working from home, and reduced contact with industry colleagues.

By way of context:

- There are Class 365 Electric units currently in store; they spent most of their recent life running services to Peterborough & Cambridge, but some of them also spent a short time in Scotland when there were problems with new Hitachi units there.
- Greater Anglia are making progress on their introduction of the Class 720s – they have received permission to run single 5 carriage Class 720s in passenger service; they still have the hurdles of permission for running 10 carriage units and pairs of 5 carriage units to go. There must still be some risk that release of Class 360s will still be a challenge.
- See also the references to Driver Training above.

News round up

Bank Holiday travel

Be aware that:

- There will be no trains to London St Pancras from 23:30 on Saturday 29th (through Sunday) until 05:45 on Bank Holiday Monday 31st – Rail replacement buses will run Luton to Stevenage and Mill Hill Broadway and St Pancras.
- There are no through services south of St Pancras for the rest of the weekend.

More details on the [Thameslink](#) website.

St Albans Station redevelopment

We have received another update on progress with this, which can be read [here](#). Key points are:

- Overall project delayed due to Covid-19 – now December 2020, with the retail units opening in early 2021.
- Recent deliverables include opening the accessible toilets on Platform 4; the toilets on platform 1 are now closed for refurbishment and additional CCTV cameras are being installed for the cycle shelters on Station Way.

The second footbridge has now received the formal [go-ahead](#).

Luton Airport Parkway Lifts not available

Just a reminder that the lifts at Luton Airport Parkway are currently being refurbished, so there is no step free access to Platforms 2 (most northbound Thameslink services), 3 & 4 (both mainly used by East Midlands Railway). Platform 1 (most southbound Thameslink services) continues to have step free access from Kimpton Road (the A505) on the east side of the station (not the main access), but note that vehicle drop off is c 150 metres away. The general message is if you have heavy luggage, continue to use Luton Airport Parkway and we'll give you help and if you can't manage stairs (and remember that it is a double height plus drop/gain from the footbridge to the exit level), use Harpenden and we will take you direct from there to/from the airport. We recommend [booking this](#). More in the [Network Rail](#) and [Thameslink](#) Press Releases.

Amazon lockers to be available at Stations

We have received this update:

Thanks to a new partnership between Govia Thameslink Railway and Amazon, customers will soon be able to pick up parcels using Amazon Hub, an automated click and collect service making online shopping even easier for customers travelling on the Southern, Great Northern and Thameslink routes.



Offering a delivery alternative and greater convenience for rail users who are not at home during the day, close to 150 Amazon Hub Lockers will roll out over the next six months starting at stations on the Southern network. Installation at Thameslink and Great Northern stations is to follow in the autumn with all Lockers to be installed by December 2020.

Amazon Hub Lockers are secure, self-service kiosks that provide customers of the online retailer an alternative delivery option to pick up and return their Amazon packages.

In brief

- Be aware that there is a limited Abbey Flyer service at present; from 24 August, some peak hour services were reintroduced. More on the Abfly (the Rail User Group) [website](#).
- The [Spectator magazine](#) has an interesting article on the subject of uncomfortable train sets and what caused them, which includes mention of APTU.

Regards

Neil

Neil Middleton