



Dear Member

My apologies for the long period of “radio silence” on APTU newsletters. Here, at last, is one - a bumper edition to update you all on our lobbying and Thameslink news.

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## Recent performance

Both my personal experience and the statistics show that performance has not been as good recently - and that this pain is being experienced both in an increase in significant problems (and ineffective responses to them) and in more regular problems.

This is not reassuring, as we enter the winter period, which historically results in a drop in performance (last graph overleaf). Optimistically, this year’s plan [dotted line] assumes a much smaller drop off in performance - however, some of this optimism has a good basis with the December timetable changes.

There are, I think a number of reasons for this:

## Driver shortage

This was particularly problematic over the summer as drivers took their holidays and did not want to work rest days (to spend time with their children etc). This problem culminated most recently with a large number of drivers not wanting to work on Sunday 20 September due to a railway related social event.

The latest improvement plan update notes that Thameslink have 33 new drivers qualified and this is undoubtedly good news. However the number of drivers needed has also increased, in part because of more services and will also increase further once training on Class 700s starts. I am hopeful, however, that we will not see the service deterioration we saw in the run up to Christmas last year due to diversionary route training (the bigger user of driver time) and Class 387 training.

The Thameslink update on this is here:

<http://www.thameslinkrailway.com/your-journey/live-travel-info/recruiting-more-drivers/>

A couple of other key points:

- The way the driver rotas work, there is the risk of a peaks in cancellations every two to three Sundays.
- Following on from similar problem in July, our feedback was twofold:
  - That it was better to publicise high cancellation levels in advance, as travellers can then re-plan their journeys
  - That very long gaps really are not acceptable - there have been 100 minute gaps in the service over the summer

It is not entirely clear when the problem will be fully over. Although we do seem to be past the worse, there are still increased need for drivers and the risk that more drivers than expected will leave (eg Crossrail is recruiting for drivers). It seems to me that it could be 10 months before there are “plenty of drivers”; ie once next summer’s Driver holidays are out of the way - and that there is the distinct possibility of an increased cancellation rate over the Christmas / New Year period, although I am not expecting it to be at the rate experienced last year.

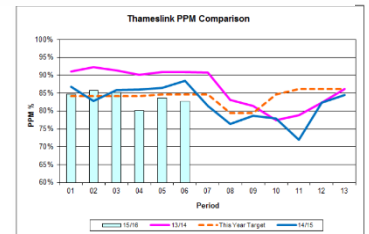
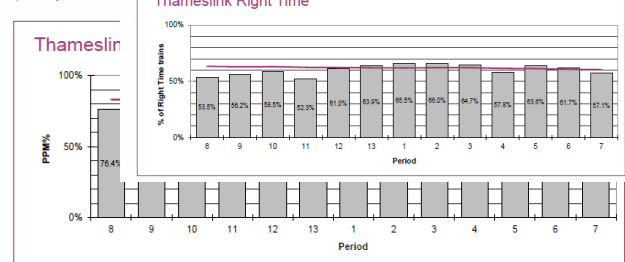
## Network Rail planning

Network Rail’s planning for the London Bridge changes was poor - both in direct mistakes and in communicating with Train Operators (such as Thameslink). More at:

- <http://www.transportfocus.org.uk/news/articles/passenger-voice-september-2015/passenger-voice-september-2015-network-rail-performance>
- <http://orr.gov.uk/news-and-media/press-releases/2015/regulator-issues-new-industry-guidance-on-handling-passenger-complaints>

## Public Right Time

(% of planned train services that arrived at final destination on time)



Bars: Recent  
Lines: Historic + Target

One more update, year on year we are running in the region of 30 to 40 extra services per day on TL, so in real terms, whilst the massive recruitment and training programme presses on, the driver to service ratio we have as a legacy still remains a challenge and in times like these of high leave periods we remain susceptible to driver cancellations.

We are also still suffering from these over optimistic assumptions for the Southern and Thameslink services at London Bridge in the December 2014 timetable change. Although things have got better, almost all available capacity is in use - and as soon as there is a problem, it ripples down the line to East Croydon and causes problems there, which in turn impacts our services. Hopefully the December 2015 timetable changes will help address this.

### **Network Rail performance**

This is still patchy and an area that is likely to be problematic for some time - a simple recent example are the problems of Tuesday 6 October when the central London core between St Pancras & Blackfriars was closed during the evening peak. From what I can see, the problem was discovered, probably on Monday 5<sup>th</sup> October or possibly before, and an emergency closure arranged for overnight Tuesday 6<sup>th</sup> / early morning. This closure was then brought forward at very short notice (I understand that around 5 minutes notice was given). As always (it seems) with the rail industry there is no consistent story as the faulty component - variously, the 'overhead' and an 'electrical panel'.

### **The move to Three Bridges**

The move of operations control to the new Three Bridges Railway Operating Centre ("ROC"), whilst undoubtedly a good move for the longer term, has meant that there have been initial teething problems with this - the loss of experienced staff (who did not want to move), reorganisations and new working practices (we are aware of at least one incident made much worse because of a lack of contingency within the ROC).

### **One off problems**

There have been a number of significant incidents including a train failure at the start of the evening peak, which we (and the BCA) used as a basis to discuss performance and incident recovery with Thameslink management. We expressed our concerns and the need to:

- Recover the service as soon as possible
- Consistently communicate the latest up to date travel information
- Refrain from making late changes to train stopping patterns

### **The forthcoming winter period**

As we enter the winter period, with an increased severe weather disruption risk, a recent report from Transport Focus may prove an interesting read. As well as covering customer expectations on the approach to the service to be provided and on communications, it details some of the constraints all train operating companies face on making short notice timetable changes. The report can be read here: <http://www.transportfocus.org.uk/research/publications/reacting-to-extreme-weather-on-the-railways>.

### **Disruption Management: Passenger Information Disruption Plan (PIDD)**

Govia Thameslink Railway (GTR) has recently published its PIDD, covering all 5 of their brands. This sets out how they will manage communications when an incident is assessed as 'Major Disruption: (Red)' or 'Major Disruption: (Black)' [these are defined in the document]. To me, this is important as it gives us something to measure against and enables us to be clear about whether the problem is the specification or delivery against it. GTR noted to me:

We have today received acceptance from the ORR for the combined GTR action plan ...We are monitored against the document and I regularly get questions from the ORR as to what we did/didn't do during any disruption

The document can be found at: <http://www.thameslinkrailway.com/about-us/transparency/> (link at bottom of the page).

## December 2015 timetable

There will be very significant changes to the Brighton Mainline timetable from Sunday 13 December. North of East Croydon the impact is very limited [except for overnight services - see below], with some minor timing changes. The details of the changes are as follows:

### Summary

The service changes should bring increased reliability for those travelling north on Thameslink services from Central London and from East Croydon. However this is at the downside of a worse service to Gatwick. The overnight service increases in frequency.

The Thameslink briefing is at: [thameslinkrailway.com/December2015](http://thameslinkrailway.com/December2015).

### Improvements

1. Reliability and 2018 preparation. The entire timetable re-cast is designed to improve reliability on the Brighton Main Line and assuming it delivers this, then this will be a big plus - northbound trains should leave East Croydon on time more often and extended turnaround times will also improve reliability. The timetable change also sets up the service pattern in readiness for the completion of London Bridge works and the opening of Canal Tunnels and the commencement of Thameslink services on Great Northern in 2018.
2. Overnight services. Overnight services change from one all stations service per hour to one all stations and one fast (stopping at West Hampstead and then St Albans and stations north thereof). We asked that consideration be given to stopping the fast service at Elstree & Borehamwood, but this has not been taken up, and we will look to reactivate our lobbying for this in due course. We thought this a good idea as it has a high passenger count and should have a large catchment area. As with the current timetable, there is no service in the early hours of Sunday morning.
  - Note that the service pattern is uneven and this is driven by the need to allow for single line working overnight in the Core in Central London to allow Network Rail maintenance time.
3. More direct services to stations between East Croydon and Gatwick (Purley, Coulsdon South, Merstham and Redhill), which will now get a 30 minute interval service (see below).

### Losses

1. The big loss is the effective reduction in the service to Gatwick to every 30 minutes. This is because each hour there will be a pair of trains that run non-stop between East Croydon and Gatwick and a pair that make 4 stops (as per above). Going south, the following fast train normally arrives 1 minute later than the stopping train, and going north the fast train overtakes the stopping service.

East Croydon	↓	10:49	11:04	11:19	↑	11:55	12:08	12:25
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	↓	Non stop	4 stops	Non stop	↑	Non stop	4 stops	Non stop
Gatwick Airport	↓	11:04	11:33	11:34	↑	11:40	11:38	12:10
Brighton	-	11:39	(terminates at Three Bridges)	12:09	↑	11:05	(starts at Three Bridges)	11:35

At the heart of this is preparation for Thameslink services running through to Great Northern destinations from 2018. There will be 8 services per hour from Gatwick to the Thameslink core - 4 to Bedford, 2 to Cambridge and 2 to Peterborough, with the Cambridge services and 2 of the Bedford services calling only at East Croydon between Gatwick and London Bridge. GTR have identified strong commercial benefit for the Cambridge services to run fast, and, whilst I have not seen the evidence, I believe they are right. We questioned Thameslink as to the options for running all 4 Bedford services fast until 2018, including observing the damage this could cause to the services reputation immediately before the full delivery of Thameslink, but have received good explanations as to why this is not practical, and could damage overall performance. Our lobbying has now switched to trying to demonstrate that they need to run 6 fast services per hour from Gatwick to the Thameslink core (with the single stop at East Croydon) in view of increased demand from Farringdon from Crossrail - with 4 of these services continuing to Bedford and 2 to Cambridge.

In the interim:

- We have asked that careful consideration be given to announcing and displays at Gatwick for northbound services (perhaps the 11:38 in the example above need to be displayed as a service to Purley).
- Do note that this is a problem unique to Gatwick Airport - it does not impact East Croydon.
- Going south, when services are running normally, there is no benefit in getting off the stopping service at East Croydon and changing to a non-stop service as the next service is the following Thameslink service - and you will need to change platforms via the footbridge or ramp.

Thameslink have prepared a response to the many responses that they received to their consultation and this can be read at [thameslinkrailway.com/about-us/news/govia-thameslink-railway-publishes-results-on-the-december-2015-timetable-consultation/](http://thameslinkrailway.com/about-us/news/govia-thameslink-railway-publishes-results-on-the-december-2015-timetable-consultation/).

## Christmas & New Year service changes

The most notable changes over the Christmas / New Year period are:

1. No Thameslink services south of East Croydon, with a total line blockage from South Croydon to Redhill. Passengers for Gatwick will mainly take Southern services to East Grinstead and then a bus.
2. No South Eastern services to London Bridge, Cannon Street and Charing Cross. This could make Thameslink services a bit busier.

The core Thameslink service to/from London from the north is as it has been in recent years; ie

- Service ceases around 9:30pm/10:00 pm on Christmas Eve.

- No services Christmas Day or Boxing Day.
- Off peak service pattern from Sunday 27 December through Sunday 3 January 2016, with additional morning and evening services Tuesday 29 through Thursday 31 December and extra services in the early hours of Friday 1 January.
- Following a request from APTU, City Thameslink will now open earlier at 07:00 Tuesday 29 through Thursday 31 December, closing at 21:00 (possibly closing slightly earlier on New Year' Eve).

More details at [thameslinkrailway.com/christmas2015](http://thameslinkrailway.com/christmas2015).

### New Class 700 trains

We were invited to the opening of the new Three Bridges Depot last month, and had a chance to inspect a 'real' class 700 as part of the visit. My impressions are as follows:

- Generally: The units are impressive and seemed to be very solidly built, such that they should be well placed to survive day to day use. When empty, there is a good vista down 6 carriages through the wide coach interconnections (you cannot see from one end to the other due to the disabled toilet in the middle).
- Seating: Good news here as spacers have been added between pairs of seats in standard class - when we saw the mock-ups in Germany and at Excel, our view was that the seats were too close together (and that only quite a small change would make all the difference)
  - As with all recent suburban trains, the seats are quite hard and have high backs. Personally, I don't find them too bad, but it is very much a matter of personal taste. Fortunately FCC and GTR have been able to select a design that is less claustrophobic than many, with an inward slope at the top.
- Tables: Bad news here as there has been no movement to install these other than those already planned for the first class sections at the ends.
- Wifi: There were no announcements on this. Some 12 months ago there were announcements that this was to be provided, to be paid by a Network Rail 'Fine', and whilst we have heard little official, there is a brief article in the November 2015 Modern Rail (page 92) about a company called Icomera, noting that (a) they are bidding to equip 4,000 carriages for Go-Ahead, including the Class 700s; and (b) that Siemens included passive provision - which is something we asked for when we looked at the mock-up in Germany, so perhaps we were listened to.



## Compensation improvements

We are continuing with our efforts to obtain improved compensation arrangements - one that recognises many small delays, which are not covered by DelayRepay.

At the moment, the status is follows:

1. We (and others) have got the Industry to recognise that the DelayRepay approach doesn't work terribly well when travellers are faced with many small delays, rather than a mostly a good service, with occasional significant disruption. This also seems to have been accepted in principle by the Government - eg <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/uknews/road-and-rail-transport/11701802/Ministers-could-force-train-companies-to-pay-compensation-for-15-minute-delays.html>.
2. We have been able to show that the current 'Enhanced Compensation' offer is no such thing on a route like Thameslink where there would have to be a significant drop from current performance levels.
3. Via the Thameslink Stakeholder Reference Group, we have got the attention of the Department for Transport (DfT) and they are presenting options to DfT Ministers for their consideration. This is particularly relevant for Thameslink, as the DfT will effectively pay for any increase - all revenue on Thameslink flows to the DfT and Compensation is treated as negative revenue, not a cost. We have asked that this includes back payment for past problems such as the poor service before Christmas 2014 and the Farringdon flooding earlier this year, but obtaining this has to be a very optimistic outcome and, to be honest, I would be happy with a change in the rules that only impacted journeys after the announcement date. There is another meeting of the Group this Friday (13<sup>th</sup>) and I have asked for an update then.

## Other compensation developments

1. The Government has announced a consultation on the applicability of the new Consumer Rights Act to the Rail industry. They propose exempting the industry from the delay and cancellation elements of compensation requirements on the basis of the existing arrangements. The consultation closes on 30 November. APTU will respond to at least observe that the current schemes are not necessarily equitable (see above) and therefore whilst exemption might be reasonable (on the basis of alternative industry arrangements) those arrangements need improvement first. You can read more about the consultation at <https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/rail-aviation-and-maritime-applying-the-consumer-rights-act> - please let us have any comments for our submission by Friday 26<sup>th</sup> November.
2. Compensation Vouchers can now be taken as a cash payment by taking them to any National Rail station. The cut-off date is vouchers dated 19 July or later.
3. Virgin trains have announced automatic refunds in some circumstances - for advance tickets purchased online - amounts due will be automatically refunded to the payment card. This is an easy first step and also, practically, what they can do - they know when you travelled (as your ticket is only valid on a single train) and have your contact and payment details (as you booked with them online). Hopefully this will encourage other long distance operators, but it is of limited use in the South East if you are travelling on a paper ticket (so the operator does not know when you travelled). This highlights why Smartcards such as The key are important to better compensation arrangements.

4. The Office of Rail and Road has just issued updated guidance on handling passenger complaints. Key items include:
  - a. Distinguishing between Complaints and Feedback, particularly on Twitter.
  - b. Rail Companies must coordinate responses about their suppliers (most notably on Thameslink is car parking).
  - c. Establishing an appeals process with Transport Focus and London TravelWatch (if they ask for it).
  - d. Improvements to monitoring and data publication.

### The key – the new Smartcard

Thameslink have now launched this Smartcard service for season tickets at present, and I have used it for the last week with a weekly Travelcard. Personally, I found it very pain free, and if you buy online, there is no stop at the Ticket Machine to pick up your paper ticket. I have seen feedback on some of the forums complaining it doesn't work on buses and of problems at Moorgate (I think this is for GN users) and City Thameslink.

A key point to note is that the touch at a reader takes very marginally longer to be accepted than on Oyster, so at locations like DLR stations that do not have barriers, do watch for this.

More information at [thameslinkrailway.com/tickets-and-fares/the-key-smartcard/](https://thameslinkrailway.com/tickets-and-fares/the-key-smartcard/). The website is confusing in a number of areas and here is the response I received back to my questions:

**Question:** The instructions include the comment to always touch in and touch out, which is a more onerous requirement than with paper tickets. Whilst I can see that this is best practice, what is the practical consequence of failing to do so when travelling on traditional periodic season tickets (other than on the first occasion, to upload the ticket on to The Key)? I can see that as new types of ticket become available, tap in & tap out will become essential and it will also be needed for automatic refund systems – and that it is a very good habit to get into, however I am curious as to why it appears to be 'mandatory' for the current Thameslink product set – it seems excessive to talk about Penalty Fares for these.

**Answer:** We encourage all passengers to touch in and out on all their journeys as it is good practice, particularly when passengers hold more than one ticket on their card to activate it. Also for period tickets on the key, we can verify whether you have been delayed on a journey. We are working to automatically notify key customers if they are eligible to make delay repay claims, as you mentioned it is essential for passengers to touch in and out in order for us to do this.

**Observations:** I think it is definitely a sensible habit to get into now, even if not technically required by your ticket, as habits form early and it will matter with further product types. As per the below, if you buy any ticket, there is a mandatory step – go first to a Thameslink station outside the TfL zones and load your ticket.

**Question:** Paper tickets are now available 15 minutes after ordering, but Smartcard products take 2 hours – why is this?

**Answer:** We have many suppliers involved in delivering our smartcard and it can take up to two hours for the messaging for online purchases to reach the specified gate for collection. We are working to reduce the collection time but two hours is the maximum amount of time it will take for the ticket to be ready for collection on the gate. If tickets are purchased from a TVM, it is loaded and ready to use immediately.

**Question:** The map also comments "To use the key you'll need to start journeys and buy tickets from the highlighted locations outside the shaded area." Presumably with a period travel card:

- I can (say) drive to a LUL station like Stanmore and use my valid key from there, without starting in Harpenden? (I've done that in the past during very severe disruption and strikes).



**Answer:** If you have a travelcard with your season ticket then you can use the key from Stanmore as long as you have already collected your ticket from your specified station outside the shaded area. This is because we are currently not able to send information to gates at stations we do not operate. Yes, during times of disruption we have agreements with other operators to pass our customers' tickets on other services if they travelling a reasonable route to their purchased ticket. However during normal times of operation, if you have a Harpenden to London Thameslink ticket, then you must travel on Thameslink services between those points.

- **Q:** If I were only to have a point to point ticket (eg Harpenden to London Thameslink), the key would be accepted by the barriers for a journey from (say) Blackfriars to St Pancras.

**A:** Yes, London Thameslink is a group of stations which includes St Pancras, Farringdon, City Thameslink, Blackfriars, London Bridge and Elephant and Castle.

**Question:** How does the key work for split tickets? Yesterday, I went from Harpenden to East Grinstead and back and with my weekly Travelcard + a paper return from Upper Warlingham to East Grinstead, I was covered. How would it have worked with a pair of tickets on the key, where I had no realistic opportunity to touch a reader at Upper Warlingham?

**Answer:** The key does not work for split tickets unless you are breaking your journey at those points to activate your ticket. It is currently not possible to start a journey from inside the shaded area so you were right to buy a paper return from Upper Warlingham to East Grinstead. We are still developing our key so while making the journey from Harpenden to East Grinstead entirely on your key is not available now; it will be available in the future.

**Question:** Are the Southern special offers going to be made available? ([southernrailway.com/tickets-and-fares/exclusive-key-card-holder-discounts](http://southernrailway.com/tickets-and-fares/exclusive-key-card-holder-discounts))

**Answer:** The offers currently available on the Southern pages are available to all key card users. We are reviewing all our offers and looking at others for the future.

If you have other questions on The key, do let me know.

## Travelling from Kentish Town

We've received the following update from GTR:

The London Underground ticket office at Kentish Town [is now] closed. .. This means that tickets for Thameslink trains leaving Kentish Town can no longer be purchased at the station.

London Underground have confirmed that the ticket machines at Kentish Town will be upgraded in January 2016 to allow customers to purchase tickets for our trains.

In the meantime, if customers require tickets that are not available from the ticket machine, then they should travel and purchase their travel tickets at the first available opportunity, be that on-board, at an interchange station or at the end of their journey.

The customer will only need to pay the fare that they would have paid if they had bought a ticket immediately before their journey, including any Railcard or other applicable discounts, and will NOT be subject to a Penalty Fare.

The above complies with Condition 2 (requirement to hold a ticket) of the National Rail Conditions of Carriage July 2015.

## 2016 Fare rises

The 2016 fare rise for regulated fares will be 1% - pegged at inflation as per commitments made during the election. The government has also removed the "flex" rule, which allowed operators to increase some fares by more than the headline number if others were increased by less (in recent years, this practice has not been used by GTR or FCC).

More at <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/earnings-outstrip-rail-fare-increases-for-first-time-in-a-decade>.

## Rail Finance

The Government has published more data on Rail Finances. This can be read in detail at: [http://orr.gov.uk/\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0006/17880/rail-fares-index-jan-2015.pdf](http://orr.gov.uk/_data/assets/pdf_file/0006/17880/rail-fares-index-jan-2015.pdf); key highlights include:

1. “Net government support to the rail industry totalled £4.8 billion in 2014-15, down 9.3% compared to last year.”
2. “The majority of government funding in 2014-15 was in direct rail support, which is the grant payment to Network Rail. This was £3.8 billion in 2014-15, an increase of £349 million on 2013-14.”
3. Govia Thameslink paid the third highest rate per passenger kilometre to the Government (at 4.5 pence per km); East Coast and South West Trains paid higher rates. Merseyrail received the highest subsidy (12.4 pence per km). However TOC only rates are of limited value as they do not fully reflect Network Rail costs.
4. A separate Government spreadsheet at <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/rail-subsidy-per-passenger-mile> shows that for 2014-15 shows a net subsidy (allowing Network Rail costs) for Govia Thameslink of 0.8 pence per passenger mile. The highest subsidy goes to Northern Rail at 34.2 pence per mile and South West Trains users are the highest net payers at 3.8 pence per mile.

## Network Rail announcements

Network Rail has been in the news a lot recently - both from bad day to day performance and project problems (these led to the postponement of the Trans-Pennine and pausing of the Midland Mainline electrifications).

A new Chairman has been appointed (Peter Hendy, previously Commissioner of Transport at Transport for London) and most recently, Nicola Shaw, Chief Executive of High Speed 1 has been appointed (as part of Budget announcements) to “[The government has asked Nicola Shaw to advise the government on how it should approach the longer-term future shape and financing of Network Rail](#)”. This includes suggestions that money will flow via train operating companies to allow them (at least in theory) to exercise more influence [see, however, the observation in ‘Other’].

## Presentations and Q&A from our AGM

The following material from the AGM is available from our website:

1. Govia Thameslink Railway presentation: [http://aptu.org.uk/pdfs/agm2015\\_gtr.pdf](http://aptu.org.uk/pdfs/agm2015_gtr.pdf)
2. Network Rail presentation: [http://aptu.org.uk/pdfs/agm2015\\_nr.pdf](http://aptu.org.uk/pdfs/agm2015_nr.pdf)
3. Answers to our questions:
  - a. Submitted in advance: [http://aptu.org.uk/memberversions/aptuagm2015\\_questionsinadvance.pdf](http://aptu.org.uk/memberversions/aptuagm2015_questionsinadvance.pdf)
  - b. Asked on the day: [http://aptu.org.uk/memberversions/aptuagm2015\\_questionsontheday.pdf](http://aptu.org.uk/memberversions/aptuagm2015_questionsontheday.pdf).

Matters of note:

- Luton station updates could start within 12 months or so, this is very dependent on a bid for funding.
- There is still hope for improvements at Mill Hill Broadway, this is dependent on developing income to pay for improvements - GTR are in discussions with the local Council; an option under consideration is double decking the car park.

### Other

- UK Rail performance vs Other European Operators: You may be interested in this report from the Boston Consulting Group:  
[https://www.bcgperspectives.com/content/articles/transportation\\_travel\\_tourism\\_public\\_sector\\_european\\_railway\\_performance\\_index/](https://www.bcgperspectives.com/content/articles/transportation_travel_tourism_public_sector_european_railway_performance_index/). Two key points they make are “Our key finding was that a railway system’s overall performance typically correlates with the level of public cost, which we defined as the sum of public subsidies and investments in the system” and “The key takeaway: countries that get the most value from public spending on railway systems also allocate the highest percentage of subsidies to infrastructure managers.”

*Neil*

Neil Middleton  
8 November 2015