

Dear Friend

Welcome to this mini-newsletter. Firstly, a reminder that **we will have no presence from GTR** at our meeting on Tuesday (nor from Network Rail). This is because of a companywide decision by GTR not to attend public meetings until they have a clear message to pass on (made on Friday at their board meeting).



Our meeting will still go-ahead: **Tuesday 19th June – 7:15pm for 7:30pm at the Trinity United Reformed Church** (Main Hall), 1 Beaconsfield Road, St Albans, Herts, AL1 3RD. The [Church](#) is at the junction of Victoria Street and Beaconsfield, a very short walk from the station.

As regards non-attendance, I have written to the GTR COO to follow up on this decision; his initial response suggests that it will only be for the short term – but unfortunately this will probably span our meeting, so watch this space re a rescheduled meeting.

Our meeting on Tuesday

The Tuesday meeting will cover three main topics:

1. APTU's 'Look Forward' document
2. The extended Committee
3. A debate on what we think is the greatest priority for resolution for the current travel troubles

APTU's Look Forward

I've prepared a 'Look Forward' document based on discussions with both new and existing Committee members for a number of reasons:

1. It is generally a good idea to pause and reflect on priorities – and how we achieve them – from time to time
2. It is only fair to new (and intending) Committee members that there is some clarity on what they are signing up for
3. We haven't changed our technology for a long time – an old fashioned occasional newsletter, an old style website and just occasional twitter use.

Whilst there is a lot of what we are, and how we interact with the rail industry and stakeholders that I think is fit for purpose and will remain so, we should recognise that the campaigning landscape is changing with web centric groups coming into existence (such as Harpenden Commuters and the Association of British Commuters) and we should be learning from them and avoiding the 'not invented here' syndrome on web, Twitter, Facebook etc.

The 'Look Forward' paper is here

- PDF format: http://aptu.org.uk/pdfs/aptu_lookforwardjune2018_v1_formemberdebate.pdf

A note to non-members receiving this email: We're still interested in your observations, please do let us have your thoughts. Comments in advance of the meeting would be great, otherwise, no later than Friday 6th July, please.

Likewise, if you are a member and cannot make Tuesday, please do email us our thoughts. Again, comments by Friday 6th July, please.

The expanded APTU Committee

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 Hanley (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.

Our priorities for resolution

I'd like this session to focus more on the immediate future than the past – what we want to see changed to improve the service – and to plan our journeys. We need to recognise the need to prioritise – having a long shopping list won't really help.

Having said that, it may well be worthwhile spending a few minutes on my analysis of why we have ended up in the mess we are in. This is available via the website home page or [directly](#).

Topics we should consider include:

1. Information quality – including 'real time' and for journey planning
2. Service gaps
3. Features we want in the July timetable change
4. How to get East Midlands Trains to stop at Luton and Bedford in the Peak.

An update on the news

Thameslink continue to send us regular updates. These matters are of note:

① Service update: We continue to work on stabilising the service. We now provide a service plan by Friday for the (Monday-Friday) week ahead. This is then put into journey planners over the weekend and updated on station information systems, so should increase the level of certainty for customers. We still recommend that passengers check before they travel on the day in case of other operational or infrastructure issues, as well as any final manual amendments to the timetable which take place each evening as we work to run as many trains as possible.

We have asked that there is a move from the generic "this weekend" to a set time.

As regards our discussion on 'Priorities for resolution' above, how closely the timetable that runs tomorrow and on Tuesday is the plan will be important matter to review.

② Claiming Delay Repay: If your journey is delayed by 15 minutes or more, you can claim compensation. Whilst we work with our industry partners to reduce short notice cancellations, our passengers travelling on Great Northern or Thameslink services can claim against either the original May 2018 timetable shown on www.railplan2020.com, or the train service in place on the day you travelled.

Please only claim for the train you intended to catch and the total delay you experienced. For example if you claim for consecutive trains on a particular day you may have your claims declined.

If there are persistent delays on a route, season ticket holders are also sometimes entitled to [enhanced compensation](#).

The Government has committed to "Pay Compensation" (see this Government [Press Release](#)); it is not yet clear if the enhanced compensation scheme referred to above is considered to be it or not – APTU hopes not.

③ Ticket acceptance includes Gatwick Express: Currently, we have ticket acceptance in place for Thameslink ticket holders on reasonable routes with neighbouring operators, and this includes the Gatwick Express service

④ Charles Horton, GTR CEO has resigned: "“I recognise that passengers have been hugely frustrated at the significant disruption caused by the introduction of new timetables. It is the right time to hand leadership of GTR to a new pair of hands. I am immensely proud of my team and I would like to thank my 7,000 colleagues at GTR for all their hard work over the past four years.”"

There are a lot of news stories on the web about it – such as [this one](#) from the BBC. It quotes from a letter to staff (which I have not seen): “In my view, this was an industry-wide failure of the timetabling process. But with leadership comes responsibility and so I feel it is only right that I step down”.

Also of note is this Parliamentary answer from Jo Johnson, Minister of State to Bim Afolami (MP for Hitchin & Harpenden):

The unacceptable level of service since the start of the new timetable is not due to Govia Thameslink Railway (GTR) not having enough drivers. The significant delay in Network Rail agreeing the timetable has directly impacted on GTR’s ability to re-work train crew schedules and deliver driver training on new routes and on new trains and this has impacted on the delivery of the new timetable. To make space on the network for hundreds of extra services, the timing of all services had to be changed and all of these new journeys needed to be individually approved by Network Rail to ensure the national rail network runs safely and smoothly. Unfortunately, as a result of the sheer number of changes required, the process took longer than anticipated, approvals for service changes were delayed and some timetable requests were changed. This meant the operator had much less time to prepare than it needed – leading to a shortage of drivers trained on the right routes.

We are assessing whether GTR met their contractual obligations in the planning and delivery of this timetable change, and whether these issues could have been reasonably foreseen and different action taken to prevent the high levels of disruption passengers are experiencing. The assessment will cover whether GTR had sufficient resources and skills to deliver the new timetable, if drivers could have been trained in a faster and more effective way, and examine the contingency and risk management arrangements in place. If it is found that GTR are materially in breach of their contractual obligations, we will take the appropriate enforcement action against them.

Passengers on GTR are facing totally unsatisfactory levels of service and it is the Department’s number one priority to restore reliability to an acceptable level as soon as possible. We are in regular discussions with Network Rail and GTR and have reiterated this to them. The rail industry has collectively failed to deliver for passengers and has rightly issued a joint apology.

When this new timetable is fully introduced it will deliver hundreds more services up and down the country as part of the biggest modernisation of the railway since Victorian times, following the huge growth we have seen in passenger numbers.

<https://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/written-questions-answers-statements/written-question/Commons/2018-06-01/149033/>

Regards

Neil

Neil Middleton

17 June 2018