



Dear Friend

A brief update in view of the imminent deadline for Passenger Benefit Fund submissions this coming Wednesday.

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### Passenger Benefit Fund

To recap, the Passenger Benefit Fund (PBF), is GTR’s penance for the service failings last Spring and Summer. A total of £15m is available, which has been split by station (for all GTR stations). All stations on APTU’s patch have been allocated the top amount - £80,000, other than West Hampstead Thameslink & Kentish Town, both allocated £30,000. The metric used for setting the ratio was the same as for the additional compensation that was paid last Summer and Autumn.

My views on what money can / should be spent on are as follows:

- The money isn’t for maintenance backlogs etc – GTR should be funding all these sorts of things to deliver their responsibilities under the franchise / management contract (but see below).
- If there is a very specific commitment to an improvement in the GTR contract already, then it isn’t sensible / appropriate for the PBF to pay for it, but more generally, the commitment is less to spend X on deliverable Y, and more about spend X making improvement type Z – so, for instance, if the PBF pays for n passenger waiting shelters, the pre-existing GTR commitment will pay for yet more, rather than disappear.
- In the decision making, there is a difficult balance to be struck between these three types of expenditure:
  1. Actual improvements at stations – eg a new waiting shelter
  2. Enabling works / starting on bigger improvements at stations – eg at Harpenden, there is strong desire locally for an extra footpath from [Aysgarth Close](#) ~ however these works are likely to be more than £80,000.
  3. Whole of Franchise improvements, such as better information systems or standard facilities such as defibrillators that are provided at all stations (that meet criteria X).

Generally, my view is that submissions should be ‘shopping lists’ – don’t at this stage worry too much whether the expenditure is sensible for the PBF or not – it is better that it is on a list and then doesn’t make it through prioritisation or is identified as not appropriate during the review & filtering phase.

If you haven’t already done so, then I recommend you make your own submission; if you have any thoughts on whole of franchise improvements and/or simple things that should be made available at all, or many stations then please do let me know.

GTR’s website on the PBF is here: <https://www.passengerbenefitfund.co.uk/>; there is a link to the survey on the home page, or it can be accessed directly here: <https://www.surveymonkey.co.uk/r/PassengerBenefitFund>. **The deadline for submissions is this Wednesday (31<sup>st</sup>).**

APTU’s submission will concentrate on possible system wide improvements, in order to ensure that they get enough ‘airtime’.



## TL Express calling patterns: Harpenden & Luton consultation

GTR are currently consulting on the calling pattern of TL Express services. To recap, these were introduced when East Midlands Trains decided they could not call at Luton and Bedford in the peak hours. Thameslink services scheduled to stop at St Albans, Harpenden, Luton, Flitwick and Bedford were speeded up by dropping the Harpenden & Flitwick stops (which in addition to the time directly saved offered more time savings as the fast lines between Harpenden & Bedford can be used). Initially this applied to 6 services each peak; subsequently low levels of demand have resulted in a reduction to 5 services each peak.

As we reported back in [January](#), there are considerably more travellers from Harpenden than Luton:



A consultation in February resulted in no change in the calling pattern as it proved impossible to get stakeholder agreement.

A second consultation is now underway, focusing only on Harpenden & Luton; underpinning this one is a recognition that the only certain solutions available are trade-offs – Service X stops at Harpenden or Luton. The survey is therefore designed to see where the greater benefit / pain is for each of the 5 services for each peak.

Some regular travellers, including myself, are quite flexible on timing of the services we choose to use, but for others this isn't the case. Often combined with care responsibilities, and work requirements to be in the office between X & Y, the service gaps currently at Harpenden, and possibly soon to be at Luton (note: St Albans changes have not been totally excluded), can be a real challenge.

The current phase of the consultation is a survey, available in paper and (preferably) online forms. The survey home page is here: <https://www.thameslinkrailway.com/about-us/our-commitments/improving-your-railway#consultation> and the survey itself at: <https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/LUTHPD>. **It closes at 2pm on Tuesday 10th September 2019.** If you are a Harpenden or Luton traveller, please make sure you complete the survey in time – and ask friends, family and colleagues to complete as well.

## TL Express: Other developments

APTU continues to be active in two other areas:

1. Lobbying for East Midlands Trains – and East Midlands Railway (Abellio – who take over the Franchise next month) to see if they can add a stop (or two) at Luton & Bedford during peak hours given (1) the constraints of the current timetable; and (2) existing passenger loadings
2. Gaining reassurance on contingency planning for the December 2020 timetable – Network Rail seem to have matters well in-hand for electrification, 4 tracking etc, but I believe there is more risk with the trains: all the following has to happen by December 2020: New trains for Greater Anglia have to be approved to run, enough of them have to be delivered, their drivers trained, the trains they displace (Class 360s) refurbished – and East Midlands drivers trained. The training activity can happen in parallel, but everything else is a basically sequential activity.



## Implications of Corby Electric services for APTU stations

From December 2020, Corby services are scheduled to be all electric. Here is what we know:

1. The Thameslink Express concept will cease, and these services will switch to the intended calling pattern of St Albans, Harpenden, Luton, Flitwick and Bedford.
2. They will not be new, but Class 360 trains – 4 carriage units currently running out of Liverpool Street with 3 & 2 seating in Standard Class.
3. They are apparently going to be refurbished first – we hear talk of 2 + 2 seating in Standard Class and becoming capable of 110mph running.
4. They will stop at Bedford, Luton and Luton Airport Parkway. St Albans Council would like them to stop at St Albans as well.
5. There will be a reduction (possibly to zero) in through services from Luton and Bedford (and, to a degree Luton Airport Parkway) to Leicester and further north.
6. There will be some small changes to Thameslink services consequent to the differing running characteristics of Class 30 trains.

APTU is supportive of #4 above (including investigating St Albans stops) and of #5, continuing through services from Luton (and Parkway) to Leicester and further north, and will continue to lobby for these (but as a lower priority than the cessation of TL Express services).

On possible changes to Thameslink services (#6), we are interested in:

- More stops at West Hampstead on fast peak services
- Swapping so pm peak Luton services are semi-fasts (currently they are all-stations)
- Speeding up slow and semi-fast services
- Fine tuning the recovery time concept just north of St Pancras of St Pancras (but not removing it)

We expect to have a session with GTR next month to discuss these.

## Oyster & Contactless Pay as You Go

GTR have updated us on their plans to rollout Oyster and Contactless Payment options. The current plans are as follows:

- Radlett: Oyster & Contactless: “This Summer”
- St Albans, Harpenden & Luton Airport Parkway: Contactless: “By end of 2019” (it is already available to on the Airport bus).

It is important to be aware that the Contactless functionality will come from TfL using an extension of the service already operated for TfL services. Therefore, this functionality:

- Might include weekly capping
- Is unlikely to support railcards
- Is unlikely to support Carnets
- Is unlikely to support Season tickets

... and that other than the first of these, getting these features will be difficult as a cash strapped TfL will need to make the necessary software features.

My suspicion is that if you are a regular traveller, using GTR’s Key Smartcard will still prove a better option.

The briefing we have received from GTR is [here](#).

## Key Smartcard developments

There are two news items:



1. KeyGo (the Pay as You Go Feature) will support Railcards sooner rather than later. Whilst we don't have a date yet, we understand it to be a confirmed feature, with a key need being to roll out new ticket office software and train staff (we believe you will need to go to a GTR ticket office with your Key Smartcard and your railcard and ticket office staff will then update the KeyGo database)
2. The rumour mill is that Carnets are coming to Key. We don't know if this will extend to stations that don't have Carnet tickets but will lobby for this to happen (and to seek official confirmation and timings etc).

## Problems since Thursday

If you have attempted to travel on Thameslink since Thursday, you will be aware of the severe problems caused by the overhead wires coming down near Belsize Tunnel.

Repairs are still not fully completed, so there will be a reduced service tomorrow (Monday).

I'd be interested in feedback on the following:

- Good and bad experiences in communications from Thameslink
- Good and bad experiences on the services they did run, including those arranged for the period before the wires came down
- Good and bad experiences in claiming compensation

## Other updates

1. Services over the Bank Holiday weekend are likely to be very busy as Kings Cross is closed and passenger's who would normally use this station will be on rail replacement buses to Thameslink stations (unless they follow the 'do not travel' advice).
2. Access for All funding for 2019-2024 has been announced, covering 73 stations, including 3 on Thameslink North – Luton (re-confirming deferred plans), Mill Hill Broadway and Cricklewood. For stations that were not successful, there is this:

*£20 million of the funding to re-launch the Mid-Tier Access for All programme. This will be focused on stations where accessibility improvements can be delivered with between £250,000 and £1 million of government support.*

A debate at the [House of Commons \(Westminster Hall\)](#) provides some good hints for factors that will help a successful bid.

Regards

*Neil*

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28 July 2019