



Dear Friend

I thought an update was appropriate as some of us return to their workplaces, and Thameslink step up their services with effect from tomorrow.

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Key messages from Thameslink

Thameslink gave a stakeholder update on Friday in advance of the changes to the timetable that came into effect today, and also mean for Mondays to Saturdays a change to a timetable based on the Saturday timetable, not the Sunday one.

In terms of messaging the core was support of the Government’s message – *Continue to work at home if you can and only use public transport if you have no other options.*

If you have to use Thameslink (or indeed any other train, the underground or bus), the key messages were:

When planning your journey by train please follow this guidance

- Buy your ticket **online** and get it on your **mobile** or **Smartcard** if available
- Check **before** you travel
- Travel during **off-peak** hours if you can
- Allow **extra time** to make your journey by train
- Please wear a **face covering**
- Carry **hand sanitiser** and **wash your hands** before and after travelling

Can you travel another way?
Help us keep trains clear for those who really need them

National Rail

Thameslink also told us:

1. They ask us to board trains by the left hand door (as you face the train) and leave the train by the left hand door (as you face the platform)
2. That they have not closed off any seats as household groups should be occupying adjacent seats.
3. The ‘new’ peak is between 7am and 8am (i.e. earlier than normal). Whilst waiting to travel off-peak may be impossible for many, starting your journey later within the peak certainly sounds as if it could be a good move.
4. That as many trains as possible are running as 12 carriages.



5. That they have diagrammed as many trains as they can, given non available resources (eg staff that are shielding, in self-isolation or currently have symptoms). Around 6% of GTR staff are currently not available (mostly because of shielding needs).
6. Specific social distancing plans exist for 45 stations across the GTR network; these include barriers and one way markings and queuing arrangements.
7. Hand sanitisers will be available (1,000 across the GTR network).
8. That “We’ve already enhanced the regular cleaning regimes on stations and trains through extra staff, focusing particularly on high touch points such as handles and grab-rails. In addition, we’ve just completed treatment of our entire fleet of trains with a new virucide which kills the Coronavirus for 30 days, and the same is in progress at our stations. The application of this product is undertaken after areas are thoroughly cleaned.”

As part of their Covid-19 response, Thameslink have now deployed software and reporting tools that give them near real time feedback on passenger loadings and they will be using this to monitor loadings. We have already encouraged them to make this data available to everyone in near real time as it seems to us this information will very much help in spreading loads. For instance, in the seminar, they were able to tell us that on 14 May, the most loaded morning train was at 15.4% of capacity and no evening train exceeded 10%.

The Government guidance is available here: <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/coronavirus-covid-19-safer-travel-guidance-for-passengers>. In summary:

- Keep 2 metres apart from others wherever possible
- Wear a face covering if you can
- Use contactless / smartcard payments where possible
- Avoid rush hour travel where feasible
- Wash or sanitise your hands as soon as possible before and after travel
- Follow advice from staff and be considerate to others

A key message from Thameslink was “Individuals must take responsibility”.

The revised timetable

The revised timetable is based on what was intended for May 2020. From today, the Sunday timetable is as originally intended and the Monday to Saturday timetable is the Saturday timetable with some variations Monday to Friday. Fortunately, the May 2020 changes included the extension of the Rainham services to Luton on Saturdays.

Key matters of note include:

1. The Luton to Rainham service is a relatively late starter (first service from Luton at 07:18); we have asked if this can be earlier, but the initial view is ‘No’ as they have already committed the maximum resource they feel is prudent.
2. There will be additional overnight trains compared to a typical Saturday / Sunday early morning.
3. East Midlands Railway will not be calling at Bedford or Luton during Monday to Friday peak hours [in the direction of the peak] – they did so from late March to 15 May. We have asked that this be reviewed once loadings are known, but realistically this is unlikely to change.

Principles behind the timetable

GTR told us that these are:

- Demand management and behaviour guidance available for passengers.
- Step Up designed to account for our infrastructure and staff sustained availability.
- Changes have been risk assessed for impact on staff and customer social distancing including accessibility impact.



- Passenger loadings monitored in real time through gateline, on train counts and staff App
- Enhanced cleaning regime in place on trains, messrooms and in stations to reduce risk
- Coronavirus testing now in use for railway workers

Next steps

GTR gave these as:

- Timetable will operate until further notice – carefully monitoring passenger numbers
- Adapting to a new normal of changes in passenger behaviour, social distancing, and staff availability
- Intention is to build carefully into the full Summer 2020 plan with an uplift between now and December 2020, with adaptations to improve performance.
- Coronavirus to have long term implications.

Separately, we hear of significant concerns as regards the deliverability of EMR's planned December 2020 timetable. This is needed to allow (in normal times) the abolition of Thameslink Express service, including service frequency increases at Legrave and Harlington, and the restart of peak hour EMR services at Bedford, Luton, and Luton Airport Parkway. The core cause of this being delays in the release of rolling stock by Greater Anglia.

Using Contactless and the Key Smartcard

A reminder of your options here:

1. If you travel from Radlett or south thereof, you can use Oyster.
2. If you travel from Luton Airport Parkway or south thereof, you can use bank contactless cards etcetera.
3. All Thameslink stations allow season tickets to be held on the Key Smartcard.
4. The Key Smartcard also covers day tickets – but does not yet support Railcards. This operates on a Pay as You Go basis.

Key matters of note include:

- For Contactless (and Oyster), capping is now available. This is set at the price of a weekly travelcard but is only measured Monday to Sunday (whereas as a paper or Key based weekly can start any day). Capping is largely irrelevant if you only travel on Thameslink as a weekly paper / Key ticket will be cheaper.
- A couple of weeks ago, we wrote to Thameslink asking them to accelerate the release of functionality on KeyGo supporting Railcards for PAYG. We will write again in view of the current government advice.
- We will also ask that Carnets be migrated to the Key as soon as possible in view of the Government advice.

Season ticket and Carnet refunds

Season ticket refunds are available online. Two key points to note are:

1. They are back dated a maximum of 56 days and there is an on-line calculator available.
2. For Annual tickets, the calculation method is based on substituting in a series of smaller duration tickets. Thus, they have no value after around 10 months. This is a government decision (to remain with the traditional method) and is applicable nationally. There is a good case that this is unfair as real life is not to travel continuously and then enjoy almost two months free travel. Instead, regular holidays and bank holidays are taken, and the real free travel is a lot less – and taken as a much smaller reduction (for a big pre-payment) throughout the year. Only a political decision will change this, so my recommendation is (1) claim for a refund now, if not already done so, and (2) write to your MP.

Carnet ticket refunds are available.

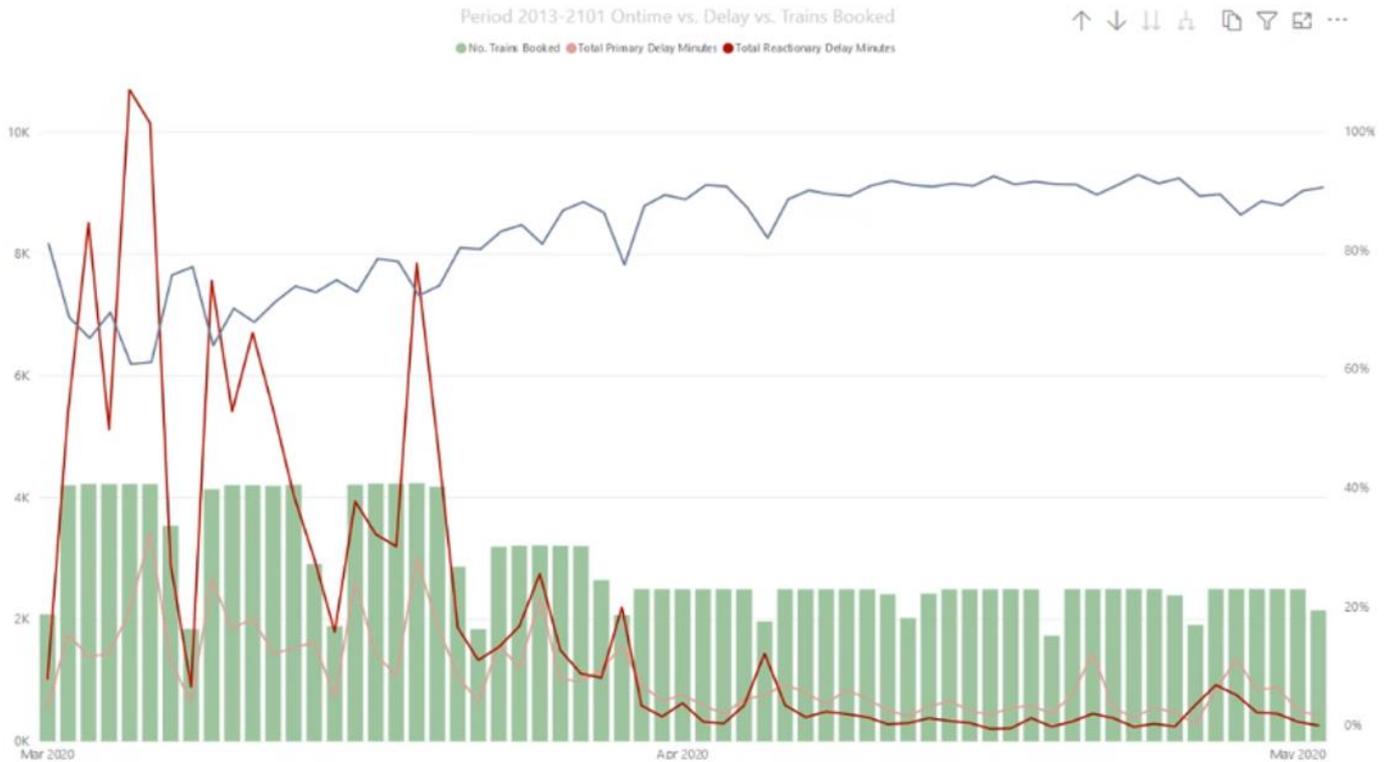
More at <https://www.thameslinkrailway.com/travel-information/plan-your-journey/coronavirus-information/coronavirus-refunds>.



Recent performance

If there is a ray of sunlight with Coronavirus, it has been recent performance:

On-time performance – studying what we can take forwards



GTR commented to us:

- 5% better due to fewer customers.
- 15% better due to fewer trains – in particular, the lack of reaction delay (i.e. train X has a problem, trains A, B & C are then delayed).
- 90% on time at all stations (i.e. within 60secs) is being achieved.

GTR have been clear that, in one way, this has been a giant experiment or learning exercise that could never have been contemplated in real life and that what they have learnt about performance factors will have long term implications for how the railways are managed.

Regards

Neil

Neil Middleton
17 May 2020