



Dear Friend

We have organised our annual meeting (virtually, of course) with Railway management for 17 November

We are pleased to have the Thameslink and EMR Managing Directors and our Network Rail Route Director attending – who will all be well placed to answer our questions.

We also have updates on a disappointing delay in the roll out of Carnets to the Key, an update on Covid-19 travel risks and imminent and longer term timetable changes – and more.

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## Annual meeting on 17 November (virtual)

We are going to hold our annual meeting with Thameslink, Network Rail and East Midlands Railway managers on 17 November at 7:30pm (to no later than 9pm) – in a joint meeting with the Bedford Commuters Association. This year we have very senior representatives from all three companies; the railway ‘cast’ is as follows

<b>Thameslink</b>	Tom Moran: MD, Thameslink & Great Northern Jenny Saunders: Customer Services Director, Thameslink & Great Northern Patrick Ladbury: Stakeholder Manager, Thameslink & Great Northern
<b>East Midlands Railway</b>	Will Rogers: Managing Director, East Midlands Railway Andrew Commons: Head of External Communications & Stakeholder Engagement Laura Etheridge: Stakeholder Manager
<b>Network Rail</b>	Gary Walsh: Route Director East Midlands Rachel Lowe: Head of Communications, East Midlands



As it will (of course) be a Virtual session, we are going to avoid presentations as much as possible and so we are going to run it in the format of a Question and Answer session. Arthur Taylor (BCA Chair) and I will start them off with a selection of scene setting questions and then we will follow this with specific member questions provided in advance (and probably blended from a number of sources) and have time for some on the night questions.

To both help us decide on the scene setting questions and the specific issues that are of interest to you, please send your questions through to [me](#) by no later than Tuesday 10 November – but the earlier, the better, please.

In terms of the meeting's practicalities, it will be held as a **Zoom Webinar**; to help manage licences et al, we are pre-registering attendees: [https://us02web.zoom.us/webinar/register/7916040640548/WN\\_UfkrvxasSEKfkY2oAw9Fgw](https://us02web.zoom.us/webinar/register/7916040640548/WN_UfkrvxasSEKfkY2oAw9Fgw); once registered you will receive a personalised link to join the webinar on the evening and the opportunity to download a Calendar file for Outlook et al if that is relevant to you.

## Current travel: A Covid-19 update

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Since our last newsletter, there have been further updates on the risks of travelling by public transport during the Covid-19 Pandemic. Generally, these have been reassuring. The following are of note:

- BBC: Covid-19: [Testing for coronavirus on London transport.](#)
- Evening Standard: [Experts found no evidence of coronavirus on Tube, London transport chief reveals as he insists: The system is safe.](#)
- Transport Focus (on 23 October): [More than four in five of those making train journeys in the last seven days felt safe doing so.](#)
- Transport Focus (on 16 October): [The appliance of science](#) (on the perceived safety of using public transport during Covid-19).
- RSSB: [Coronavirus Pandemic - How we Can Help you](#) – including an [Infection Risk assessment](#) - Using the demo model to estimate infection risk.

They may well exist, but I have not seen in recent weeks articles suggesting that being on public transport is relatively dangerous, when compared to other places lots of people are present, such as shops, restaurants, pubs and the workplace.

## Fares & Ticketing

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### How much should I be paying?

Just a reminder of the last newsletter's content

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.

The two guides are now available as standalone documents: [Morning Peak](#) | [Off-Peak](#); the respective Excel calculators and fares table extracts a can be accessed directly:

- Morning Peak: [Excel](#) (which contains fare tables); these are also available [separately as a PDF file](#).
- Off-Peak: [Excel](#) (which contains fare tables); these are also available [separately as a PDF file](#).

Where you have the opportunity, **we encourage you to share these with other Thameslink user communities.**



## Carnets on the Key

In our last email, we said that existing Carnet stations will be enabled for the Key Smartcard in September. Unfortunately, this did not happen.

At their Autumn 2020 services webinar in late August, GTR said that this launch had been deferred at the request of the DfT – so, we believe, it can be bundled with a more widespread launch of new ticket types targeted at the occasional traveller to the workplace. The timing of this announcement is currently very unclear – the two big issues seem to be cost (as discounts would be available to more people) and tension between “everyone should be in the office every day” vs “Work from home for some of the time is the ‘new normal’”. Personally, I am an exponent of the latter view, but always seek to remind myself that in many workplaces (eg laboratories, hospitals, eateries) virtually everyone needs to be at the workplace all the time, every day.

### Existing Carnet tickets

This is very disappointing, because using Carnets with paper tickets can be a very unpleasant experience (see box). We believe it is worthwhile anyone interested in supporting / lobbying for their availability ahead of any wider announcements to write to their MP to encourage them to lobby the DfT for an early release of this improvement (outline letter below). A key point is that this is not a fare change – it is just providing a new way to use an existing ticket.

#### *Member quote:*

Incidentally, barrier staff were positively hostile towards carnet users - a stance which treated me as criminal. It was so oppressive that I was close to abandoning carnets anyway for my last couple of months, despite the 10% saving.

On Thameslink, Carnets were launched for St Albans, Harpenden, Luton Airport Parkway, Luton, Leagrave and Bedford – the stations that at the time had ticket barriers.

### Stations without Carnet tickets

As further stations have had ticket barriers installed (eg Radlett & Flitwick), there has been no extension in Carnet availability. We believe that in good part this is due to higher levels of fraud with these tickets. The use of the Key Smartcard to hold Carnet tickets can be reasonably expected to reduce this risk as the quality of evidence generated about use will be much improved. On Thameslink North, in addition to Radlett & Flitwick, Harlington does not have Carnet tickets

Accordingly, it is realistic to seek an extension in coverage. We are differentiating between this extension and the conversion of existing Carnet tickets to the Key as there are different political considerations - the former is a fare change and the latter not, so can be more easily approved as a 'Business as Usual' extension in Smart Ticketing.

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 do not support Carnets) to campaign for extensions. The target will be MPs and other politicians as this will be a political decision.

### Thameslink Carnet tickets should retain at least their current features

We think it important to emphasise that Carnet tickets can have a longer term future as part of wider flexi-season ticket initiatives. As part of that, we believe that it will be important to ask that the discount offered by Thameslink Carnet tickets remain at least as good as they are at present. For instance, as compared to West Midland Railway's recently offered 'Flexi Travel' Ticket:

- They offer a greater discount (10% vs 5%).
- They are available in Anytime and Off-Peak variants - vs Anytime only.
- They do not need to be used at the same rate: 5 in three months, vs 10 in one month.



## What can I do?

All the above are 'political' matters and will be decisions that are made by Government departments – HM Treasury and/or the Department for Transport. Accordingly, we believe lobbying your MP is the best approach. We have drafted a letter (in [Word format](#)) with two options to choose from:

1. A focused letter where paper carnets are already available at your station. This keeps to the single topic of converting the existing paper product to be Smartcard enabled. It leaves wider issues well alone (other than an observation on retaining the features of Thameslink Carnets), on the basis that asking for an existing ticketing product to be delivered via a new method can be seen to be separate from new/changed ticketing products to further encourage more travel to the workplace on an all-English TOCs basis.
2. A wider in scope letter with more tailoring options, that, over and above '1' can ask for the Carnet product to be made available at other stations and suggests other changes.

Also available is a [Tweet](#) which you can retweet.

We fully support the wider launch of more flexible season tickets; the hope with this campaign is only to get something that already locally exists into earlier use. Other season ticket and discount options require design and development work and therefore cannot be "delivered (almost) tomorrow".

## Annual 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 over the Summer 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; you might wish to address Carnets as well (see above).

## Phone and paper ticket extensions (officially e-tickets)

Generally, the choice for a ticket on Thameslink outside Zones 1 to 6 is the traditional orange striped paper card or a Key Smartcard; sometimes a Bank Contactless Card can make sense (and Radlett has Oyster as well).

Thameslink are slowly extending e-tickets to more stations. E-tickets can be bought online, then presented to the gateline (or shown to staff), either from a mobile device (such as a Smartphone) or on paper. On Thameslink they are currently valid at Central London stations (excluding Farringdon), at Gatwick Airport and a number of other destinations. On Thameslink Midland Mainline stations, validity is as follows:

- Now: St Albans City, Luton, Luton Airport Parkway, Bedford
- By end of year: Leagrave
- By Spring 2021: Harpenden, Radlett

More details in [their briefing](#) including all the GTR stations where they are, or will be, valid. E-tickets are widely accepted, particularly by longer distance operators, but they sometimes are not available for journeys involving more than one TOC; ticket websites will only offer them as a possibility if they are valid for the journey being planned.

## Railcards: Extensions in life

You may have heard that there are going to be no extensions in the life of existing Railcards (at least unless there is a change of Government policy. We received this update from the Rail Delivery Group:

*As promised, I am writing to advise a decision has been made in regard to requests for refunds or extensions for those customers who were unable to use their Railcard during lockdown.*



It is with regret I write to inform you, the government has confirmed to us that Railcards will remain non-refundable and will not be extended. Refunding or extending Railcards for over 5.1m customers would come at a significant cost to the taxpayer, at a time when the focus must be on maintaining rail services to support the country's recovery from the pandemic.

APTU responded as follows:

Thanks for the update, as you say disappointing news. I can see that a refund process would be expensive to operate. Very cheap to operate would be to offer a simple discount on renewal - Say of £15 or £20 (it might vary by type of card). Yes, it would have to be operated for over three years for longer life railcards that have already expired (or will expire before the programme is launched) and been renewed at full price, but that still wouldn't be that expensive to operate. Yes, some existing users will not renew (eg 30 year olds), but many will. The discount could also be a voucher to count towards the cost of an actual ticket.

Whilst it would clearly be nice to get this decision reversed, I don't believe it is high ranking in our overall list of wanted changes – so we will campaign about it (thus our response above), but only as 'light touch'.

### KeyGo (Post Pay) and Railcards

A reminder that KeyGo now supports Railcards – full details in our [last newsletter](#).

## Luton Local Transport Plan consultation

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There is one at present: [Luton's Local Transport Plan](#) – Closing 16 November. They gave an update (including [slides](#)) to the local Railfuture Division and commented:

We don't produce a separate rail strategy but the main things included from a rail perspective are improvement of Luton Station, growing importance of Leagrave station with planned developments north of Houghton Regis and Luton, and the provision of strategic mobility hubs at the stations interchanges. Whilst not directly rail related it also talks about Mobility as a Service and moving to a SmartCard approach (similar to 'Swift' in west Midlands) that can be used to pay for a range of different transport modes

These all sound 'good' from the APTU perspective and we will be supporting in our submission – with an important observation that we do not support a dedicated Smartcard as the only option – occasional users should be able to use Bank Contactless cards and other Smartcards such as Thameslink's KeyGo.

If you have any suggestions that you would like us to include in our response, please [let us know](#) by the end of Sunday 8 November.

## Future Timetables

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### Short notice timetable changes

We are aware of no such plans but do be aware of the possibility; for instance, East Midlands Railway recently informed us of service reductions driven by staff that are either ill or self-isolating. That Thameslink find themselves in a similar situation in the future is a credible outcome.

### December 2020

The December 2020 timetable will not bring significant change. A key fact is that there will be a switch from an underlying Saturday timetable to an underlying Monday to Friday timetable; this should have relatively little impact for most travellers but may well beneficially impact early morning services. We have been provided with a number of specifics on changes:

[Additional weekday peak services including:](#)

- Fast and semi-fast Midland Main Line services providing additional capacity and journey options at Bedford, Flitwick, Luton, Harpenden and St Albans.
- East Grinstead to Bedford services, providing additional capacity and journey options at stations such as Oxted, South and East Croydon.
- Early AM services between West Hampstead and Orpington in both directions, providing additional capacity and journey options at stations within the M25 area such as Kentish Town, Elephant & Castle, Catford and Bromley South.

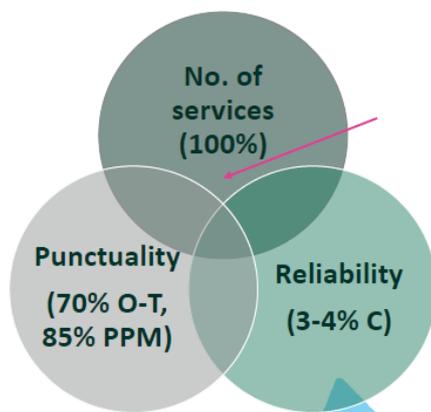
## May 2021

EMR Electrics are due to be introduced; as at now, my personal assessment of the risks to this date is as follows:

- Infrastructure (overhead line etc): Low. The overhead has been energised and is being tested
- Rolling Stock (class 360s): Low to Medium. Class 360s are slated to start transferring to EMR imminently and some have already had the necessary mechanical changes to make them 110mph compatible. I have not heard anything recently about the scheduled interior refresh, but would speculate that other than production of a preview or demonstrator train, these are likely to be completed post launch
- Driver availability: Medium to High – and uncertain. Firstly, I believe that in non Covid-19 times the risk would be low (as it would with the Rolling stock). The risk and the uncertainty comes from future Covid-19 rates, and possible changes in working practices – eg on the number in the cab. It is worth noting that EMR have two imminent and substantial training needs – on Class 360s for EMR Electrics, and on Class 180s (another high speed diesel train, due to displace EMR’s HSTs [which are not Disability compliant]). It is also worth remembering that EMR operates in a number of Tier 3 Covid-19 localities, associated higher illness rates are likely to put strain on EMR’s resourcing. Whilst I do not think EMR’s drivers directly involved in EMR Electrics will come in substantial numbers from Tier 3 localities, they may be re-directed to substitute for staff from such areas

## Longer term timetable

Pre-covid (Dec 2019)



Thameslink continue to remind us of their work which suggests that some frequency reduction is a worthwhile price for reliability and punctuality.

Their Autumn Services webinar [presentation \(slide 26 onwards\)](#) shows the impact of the recently reduced service level on Punctuality and reliability.

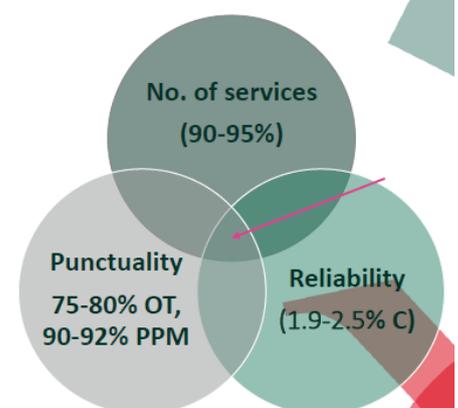
At this stage, I believe the APTU stance should be:

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).

Post-covid





## News round up

### Updates from Thameslink

We have recently participated in:

1. GTR's Autumn Services Forum (ASF) – this covers all 4 brands; a [presentation](#) is available.
2. The Thameslink Stakeholder Reference Group (TLSRG) – this covers all 4 brands; a [presentation](#) is available.

The most relevant content is covered throughout this newsletter, but the following other content might be of interest:

- Data on passenger numbers & trends – now largely of historic interest in view of current rates of infection, local lockdowns et al (ASF).
- Detail on how Thameslink obtain passenger loading data – and how you can receive it (ASF pages 12 – 17).
- Thoughts on questions for 2021 and beyond (ASF page 23).
- Update from Network Rail on performance management (TLSRG pages 14 – 16).

### GTR confirmed as remaining in-situ until at least September 2021

Since September, GTR have been operating their train service through an [Emergency Recovery Measures Agreement](#) (or ERMA) that will run until at least next September. Three observations are:

1. Some TOCs are having tense discussions with the Department for Transport regarding termination of their previous Franchise arrangement; at the time that Covid-19 started they were in financial difficulties due to revenue shortfalls et al (in 'normal times'). The nature of GTR's previous contract means that this is not relevant.
2. It seems clear that there is a lot of micro-management and direction coming out from the DfT; in particular, changes with revenue impact and/or containing discretionary cost elements always need to be cleared by the DfT.
3. Although the published life is at least one year, the DfT recently gave Cross Country a 3 year extension to October 2023, which I suspect is a sort of goal as to how long the franchise might be extended for

### Passenger Benefit Fund improvements

GTR have released their plans for [Passenger Benefit Fund improvements](#):

<b>Cricklewood</b>	<b>Harpenden</b>	Defibrillator x 2 Seating Toilet improvements Waiting shelter	<b>Mill Hill Broadway</b>
Artwork	Cycle security		Landscaping
Waiting Shelter history panel	Landscaping		Seating
Mural	Seating		Waiting shelter
Shelter	Toilet improvements	<b>Luton</b>	<b>Radlett</b>
<b>Elstree &amp; Borehamwood</b>	<b>Hendon</b>	Customer Information Screen	Canopy over Ticket Vending Machine
Landscaping	Cycle parking	Defibrillator x 2	Improve walking route
Seating	Footbridge decoration	Landscaping	Landscaping
Defibrillator	Side entrance improvements	Toilet improvements	Seating
<b>Harlington</b>	<b>Kentish Town</b>	<b>Luton Airport Parkway</b>	Toilet improvements
Landscaping	Refurbishment of station footbridge	Customer Information Screen	<b>St Albans City</b>
Seating	Seating	Cycle parking	Artwork
Toilet improvements	<b>Leagrave</b>	Toilet improvements	Waiting shelter
Waiting shelter			<b>West Hampstead</b>



Defibrillator x 2  
Seating 713  
Waiting room

improvement  
Water feed to platform

### Step Free Access campaign

Ian Cook, a regular Flitwick station user, is campaigning for improvements to Step Free Access on the Railway. He currently has a [petition on Change.org](#) to demonstrate support for this. There is more on their [website](#).

On the question of why level access for Thameslink trains has been provided in the Central London 'Core', but not outside it, this [Tweet](#) from Network Rail Kent & Sussex has a good explanation.

### Luton Airport Parkway

The lifts at this station are due to open again on 9 November and the station also celebrates its birthday – 21 years old at that point; there will be some marking of the occasion, but inevitably somewhat subdued by the circumstances.

### Elstree & Borehamwood

The new cycle hub has opened “With two-tier storage for up to 100 bikes, the hub is the largest of four built at Thameslink stations this year. The new LED-lit hub also has CCTV, a maintenance area and free access using Thameslink’s ‘Key’ smartcard.” More detail in Thameslink’s [news release](#).

A special mention needs to be made of Station Assistant Siggie Cragwell, aged 80, who has worked on the Railway for 57 years and was awarded the Lifetime Achievement Award at the virtual National Rail Awards last month. There is more in the [news release](#) and you can also watch Geoff Marshall of All the Stations interview him on [YouTube](#).

### St Albans Station redevelopment

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

- No further delays following the earlier delay due to Covid-19 – still December 2020, with the retail units opening in early 2021.
- No update on who the retailers are to be nor on the fate / future arrangement of the vendors who use the Platform 4 car park. We have asked for an update.
- As regards cycle security they comment “has also seen extensive work to improve the security of the bike racks at the station. Additional CCTV cameras and security fencing have been added to the racks on Station Way and a new secure cycle hub will be included in the new station building and entrance on Ridgmont Road, which we expect to open in mid-November”.

### London TravelWatch Survey

London TravelWatch would like answers to the question “Where, when and how will people be travelling once the current pandemic is finally over?”. They are interested in responses from both those who live in London and those that travel in it. They have an [explanatory page](#) and a [short survey](#).

Regards

*Neil*

Neil Middleton