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<< Address >>

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Via email: bim.afolami.mp@parliament.uk

Dear Bim

Thameslink Carnet tickets need to be made available on GTR's Smartcard (the Key) as soon as possible

I am writing to you to ask that you lobby the Department for Transport ('DfT') to bring forward the release date for the availability of Carnet Tickets on GTR's Smartcard (the Key) as much as possible. They were about to release this functionality but have been asked to defer it by the DfT. I think this decision needs to be reversed and the tickets made available as soon as possible. This is particularly the case given stories in the media this weekend just gone talking about further delays – eg this [City AM article](#).

By way of background:

Carnet tickets

Thameslink Carnet tickets offer a discount of 10% in return for purchasing tickets in bulk in advance. Sold as singles, you buy a book of 5 or 10 tickets, which are valid for 3 months. It is possible to buy both Anytime and off-peak tickets and they are priced as "get 10, pay for 9".

Importantly, it is possible to mix and match so, for instance travel to London with an Anytime ticket and return with an off-peak ticket, offering a more substantial saving.

For instance, for Harpenden (my station) to London Thameslink:

- Anytime return £26.30
- Travel using a pair of Anytime Carnets £23.60 Save 10.3%
- Travel to London with an Anytime Carnet, return with an Off-Peak one £18.70 Save 28.9%
(return before 4:30pm or after 7pm [measured at St Pancras])

Each time a Carnet ticket is to be used, the date of travel needs to be written on it with permanent black ink.

Paper Carnet tickets have a number of disadvantages for both the traveller and for the operator:

1. They are often very unpleasant to use because they are subject to high levels of fraud. Unscrupulous travellers abuse the Carnet system by not dating their tickets (or using non-permanent ink) and seek to retain them for re-use at journey's end. This leads to unpleasant (and worse) experiences for other travellers who through mistake fail to follow the rules precisely whilst revenue staff review the situation. There are many stories on the Internet of very unpleasant experiences with carnet use – often about whether a ticket has been dated sufficiently well. For instance, Railfuture mentioned to me one user's experience "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."
2. There are also costs from undetected fraud to us, as taxpayers through foregone revenue.
3. They increase Covid-19 risks, as because of the aforementioned fraud risks they often do not work ticket barriers, resulting in unwanted congestion at the ticket gateline as users' queue to be left through manually.

Supporting Carnet tickets on the Key

Over this Spring and Summer GTR developed the functionality to allow Carnet Tickets to be held on their Key Smartcard. This was a very important step forward, as it provides a much more reliable method of recording Carnet Ticket use – by simply tapping in/out at the Ticket Barrier or Validator and this makes Carnet tickets a much friendlier way to travel, can be expected to much reduce disputes and is more Covid-19 friendly – as well as reducing fraud opportunities.

My request

I ask that you lobby the DfT to instruct GTR to release their functionality for Carnets on the Key Smartcard as soon as possible, in advance of any wider initiatives to improve ticketing for those of us who travel less than 5 days per week (often referred to as flexi-seasons). In making this request, I believe it is important to emphasise that the request is not for early introduction of a new type of ticket – rather it is for an existing ticket type to be delivered using modern technology.

Whilst I would very much like the ticket to be released to the Smartcard as a standalone launch in the near future, another possibility would be the DfT to ask GTR to launch the product as “live” on the day of the flexible season ticket announcement.

In asking for this, you will no doubt wish to extend your letter to refer to Hitchin and Great Northern Carnets (all arrangements are identical)

The longer term

In asking you to do this, I think it important to emphasise that I think Carnet tickets can have a longer term future as part of the flexi-season ticket initiative and it would be useful to also lobby for this as part of the imminent wider changes. As part of that, I rather suspect 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

If you would like some suggested improvements, please let me know.

Yours sincerely