

Dear Friend

I hope you are staying safe.

I invite you to our meeting on **Thursday 14th May at 19:30 on Zoom**; I am targeting a finish by 20:45; definitely by 21:00.

Our subsequent meetings are then:

- **Saturday 20th June - In Person 'social' from 11:00** at Bricket Wood Tea Room
- **Wednesday 30th July at 19:30 on Zoom**
- **Thursday 27th August at 19:30 on Zoom**
- **Saturday 26th September in person from 11:00** at St Paul's Church, Hatfield Road, St Albans, followed by a 'social' lunch.

Join Zoom Meeting:

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/88450315544?pwd=d3krdCtiUHlrMExQcGtMWm1zVU9Qdz09>; alternatively join manually via <https://zoom.us/join>, then Meeting ID: 884 5031 5544 & Passcode: 910342.

If your PC doesn't have a microphone, then use the link above to open (and download, if needed) the software and, once connected, click the up arrow next to the microphone or join audio icon (bottom left) and follow the "switch to phone audio link" If you don't have a PC, tablet or Smartphone available, call one of the 3 numbers below, enter the Meeting ID [then '#'] at the first prompt; at the second prompt just press '#' and at the third prompt, enter the password [then '#']. Phone numbers to dial: 0131 460 1196 | 020 3481 5237 | 020 3481 5240.

Topics for meeting

1. Welcome
2. East West Rail (more below)
3. TfL & GN Inners (more below)
4. Contactless Fares (more below)
5. HERT (more below)
6. GTR to the DfT Operator on 31 May (more below)
7. Performance (more below)
8. Round table

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Other Railfuture meetings you might be interested in

Sat 4 July, 11am | Railfuture [National Annual Meeting](#) | Priory Rooms, Birmingham

East West Rail

Since the last newsletter, the pre Development Consent Order Consultation has been launched. The last day for submissions is Tuesday 9 June.

A single Railfuture response is being drafted with East Anglia Branch the holder of the pen, with key inputs from Thames Valley and Herts & Beds. The EWR consultation home page is [here](#); and the main consultation PDF is [here](#). As part of that we've already sent an email to all members – that can be read [here](#) (if you are a member, didn't receive it and it isn't in your Spam folder, please let me know). It makes the following key points:

- We like:
 - Provision of 4 passenger services and a minimum of 1 freight path per hour across the full route
 - Improvements to existing stations including new entrances at Bletchley, Bedford and Cambridge
 - Extension of improvements along the Cambridge-Newmarket line to the Fulbourn area
 - Acceleration of some works to deliver benefits ahead of the full completion of the line
- We think changes are needed as follows:
 - The full route, from Oxford to Cambridge East, must be continuously electrified
 - An additional station — at minimum passive provision for one — should be provided at St Neots
 - Cambridge East station should be moved to Cherry Hinton
 - Full delivery of the project must be accelerated

As regards our local area, I have the following observations:

1. We're comfortable with the 4 stations (and Bedford St Johns) option for the Marston Vale.
2. I wondered about asking for the submission to emphasise the importance of inclusion of an up fast platform at Bedford but noticed this in the consultation

The inclusion of this platform would keep the station open as much as possible during construction and would reduce our construction programme by over two years. This is because widening the platform provides the working room needed to enable elements of the large footbridge structure to be constructed during the day, reducing the amount of night-time work.

On this basis, I don't think this is an element that will "disappear". I suspect the plan is now for this to be a very early delivery, as it will much ease working on the east side.

3. The new Bedford Midland station seems to have two platforms dedicated to Thameslink. I have written to GTR to ask what impact this will have, in particular, could they run the full 8 trains per hour envisaged in the original 2019 timetable (currently they run up to 7 trains per hour (8 in 61 minutes).
4. In the email mentioned above I've also asked about turn backs at Wixams / Universal so services from St Pancras can reach there when Bedford is closed for engineering works.
5. At Bedford, the images in the consultation document show a link between EWR from the west and MML to the north (or vice versa). We will ask for its complement – MML from the south to EWR to the east (or vice versa).
6. It occurred to me as specific to Stewartby, but it is generally applicable, which is that a pair of lifts to serve a platform should be a routine provision – we can see from St Pancras International the impact of the failure of the single lift. My current thought is that (in our area) Stewartby, Bedford Midland and Bedford St Johns should definitely be in scope; the first because of families and volume, the second because of volume and interchange and the last because it is to be an island platform. And there needs to be a principle of no single point of failure everywhere – ie if all exit from a platform is via a footbridge, then two lifts are essential.
7. More generally, I am conscious that I do not have the detailed knowledge to assess the detail of the station proposals, and welcome suggestions from local members on changes to 'their' station.

8. Specifically, there is an emphasis on supporting active travel to/from stations (a specific ask), which is welcomed – but I cannot judge whether what is planned is suitable.
9. There is no mention of a chord that would connect EWR to/from Bedford with the West Coast Mainline north – the provision of this, or at least passive provision for it will be mentioned in the submission.

The consultation response is via a form available at [here](#) — you can complete the form online or return a copy via email, **We hope that you can write in and support the proposals, and the modifications that we propose, please, by Tuesday 9 June, but preferably sooner.**

Cambridge South opening date

Hertfordshire stations will have a new [destination](#) from Sunday 28th June with an opening ceremony the following day. In theory the [first train](#) is at 06:35, so I'm not planning on being on it! That time has some credibility as it is a GN service, and, unlike Greater Anglia services, they are not listed as (incorrectly) calling there before then.

TfL seeking control of GN Inners

There is no new official news on this. I have spoken to Geoff Hobbs, TfL's Director, Public Transport Service Planning again to discuss why we have been less than enthusiastic supporters. I made 4 key points:

- (Hard) The Hertford North branch is getting 4 trains per hour anyway.
- (Hard) We prefer service enhancement to on the ECML itself to be Welwyn Garden City – Sevenoaks.
- (Soft) We are worried about governance, accountability and TfL's willingness / ability to spend when only non-London passengers' benefit.
- (Soft) The fragmentation of service delivery, particularly during disruption.

There are plainly trade-offs in the 'Soft' space – eg we are fretful on governance and accountability, but on the other hand, if the GN Inners remain within GBR, there will be an element of the poor cousin – why allow an extra GN Inner service where the fare is (eg) £4, when the alternative is another Edinburgh service with an average fare of (something like) £60.

In terms of milestones, a key one is around September when the window closes on bids for the May 2027 timetable (when shadow running is envisaged) – before then TfL will want to know there will be enough drivers available, even after allowing for the segmentation of the available drivers between GN Outers/Thameslink and GN Inners. And that in turn will give a cost number to feed into the business case, which in turn will either remain viable or fail.

I suggested to Geoff that we chat again in early July and he has accepted that. And to recap TfL's response to my original 10 questions is [here](#) and the redacted business case [here](#), and I think there are three broad outcomes:

1. TfL's business case is accepted and implemented.
2. GTR's alternative proposal – the same for the Hertford Loop (now confirmed, irrespective), and that the Welwyn Garden City to Sevenoaks service becomes all day is accepted and implemented.
3. Nothing changes.

The view of the January meeting was that choice 2 was our preferred option.

For my next steps, I think the 80/20 rule very much applies – a little bit of time is justified but making it a big time consumer is not sensible – the decision is probably going to be driven in good part by national political and perception views.

HERT Public engagement

As I write this update, HERT (Hertfordshire Essex Rapid Transit) is in a round of public engagement: "We're bringing the example HERT vehicle to towns across Hertfordshire from 9 - 17 May 2026". Remaining dates are:

- Hatfield, 12 May 10am - 4pm, University of Hertfordshire, The Boulevard

- Hemel Hempstead, 14 May 9am - 4pm, Marlowes
- St Albans, 17 May 12 - 6pm, Spring Festival on Victoria Street (I hope to visit, probably later in the day).

More on the Hertfordshire County Council [website](#). That also includes two other items that I don't think I had previously noticed (but might well have been there for some time):

1. That a "Trackless tram" is the preferred option. Somewhat cynically, I am curious as to how this is different to the eliminated "Bus rapid transit".
2. There is a route diagram which begs questions as to the role of the Abbey line. The implication is that passengers will change from the main HERT route to the Abbey Line in St Albans and then again to get to Croxley.

Any information picked up in a visit you might make much appreciated.

Fares

I've not been able to pursue moving the contactless debate on this month and am planning post meeting activity. However, I'm pleased to say others are also on the case:

- Blake Stephenson, MP for Mid Bedfordshire took up fare changes at Harlington and has published a response from the Rail Minister (this is on [Facebook](#)).
- (outside our area), both Chris Coghlan MP (Dorking and Horley) and Rebecca Paul MP (Reigate) have been on the [case](#).

I'm happy to quote MPs from anywhere in the South East – this is a regional issue and pursuing the issue for a local station solo is unlikely to gain traction unless there are unique issues for that station.

GTR stakeholder session Monday 22 June

GTRs have another of their lunch time stakeholder sessions coming up on Mon 22nd June – as always matters to be discussed as encounters on the day allow – I'll be referring to our campaign [campaigning priorities](#).

GTR moves to the DfT Operator on 31 May

GTR will move to be owned by the DfTO at 2am on 31 May. Unlike EWR, where I harbour hopes of being on one of the first trains, I have no plans to be at Brent Cross West at [0158](#) on the 31st!

If you are a GTR customer you've probably had an email about it. The new legal entity is Thameslink Southern Great Northern Limited (TSGNL) (remember TSGN from the franchise bid....???). I hear the trading brand will be Greater Thameslink Railway, so no change of email addresses.

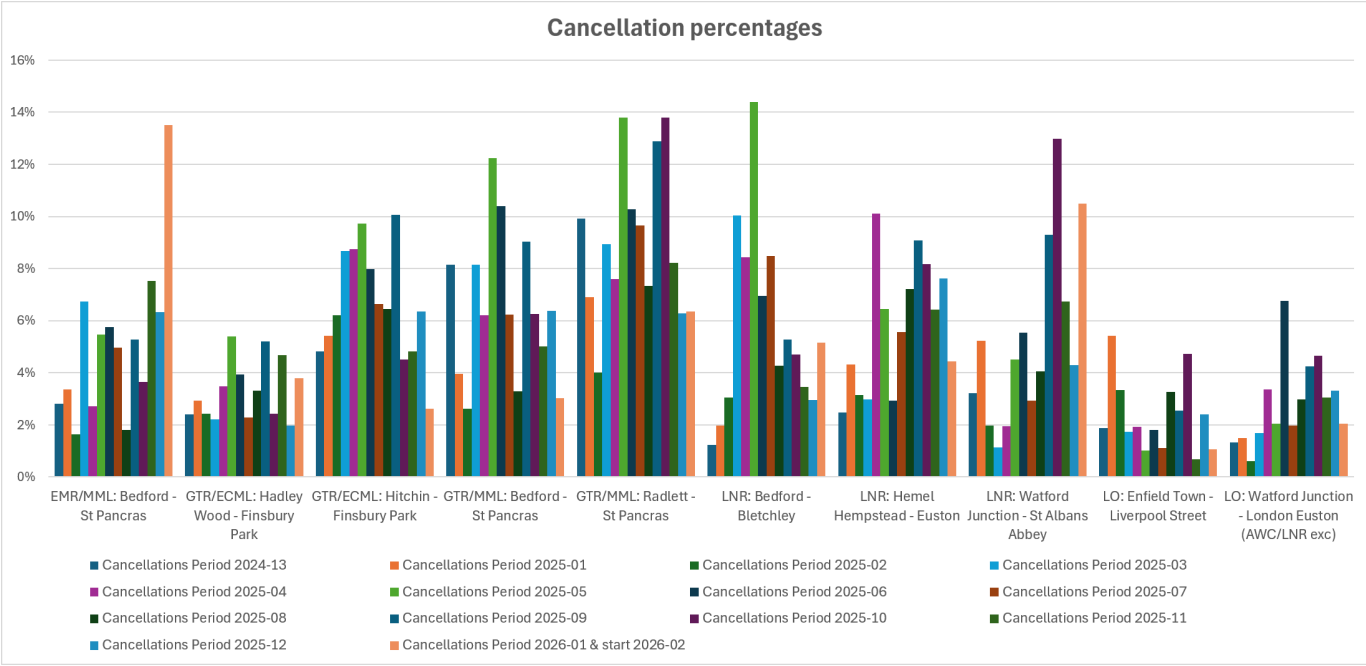
I am expecting little change on day 1. I hear of talk of more integrated business units – in this case all of GTR and the Network Rail Sussex Route.

Performance

I have continued to collect the performance data for our main services via Recent Train Times. This month, I've made a shift in time periods – I have been using 4 week periods since I started, and have now switched to using Railway accounting periods (also 4 weeks), except around the railway's year end of 31 March, where instead I use the nearest Saturday. This should have no meaningful impact in the data but does mean it should more match the data we get from TOCs.

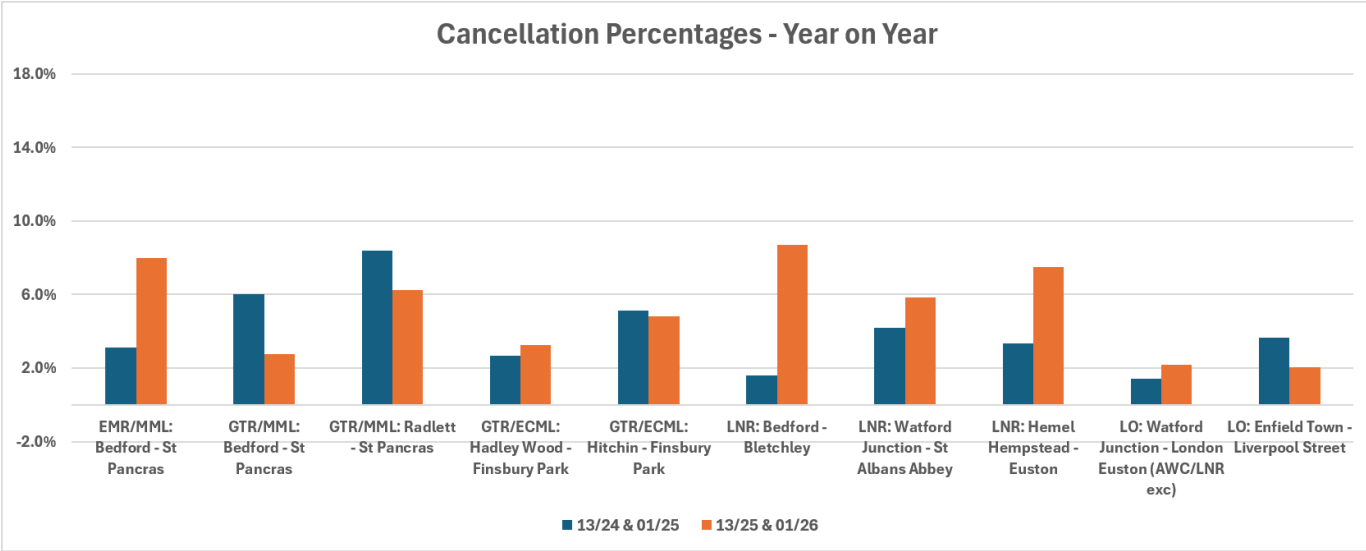
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Cancellations over time



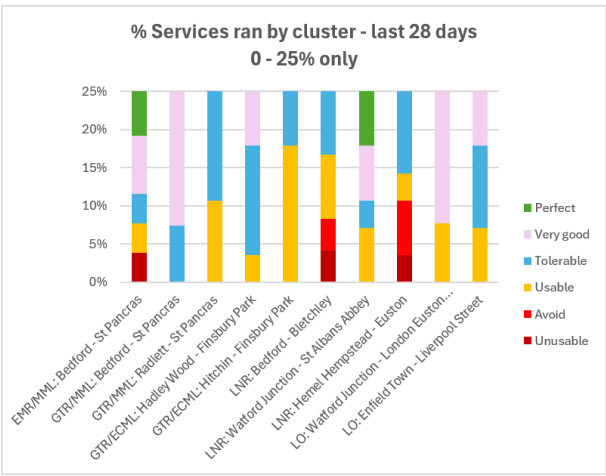
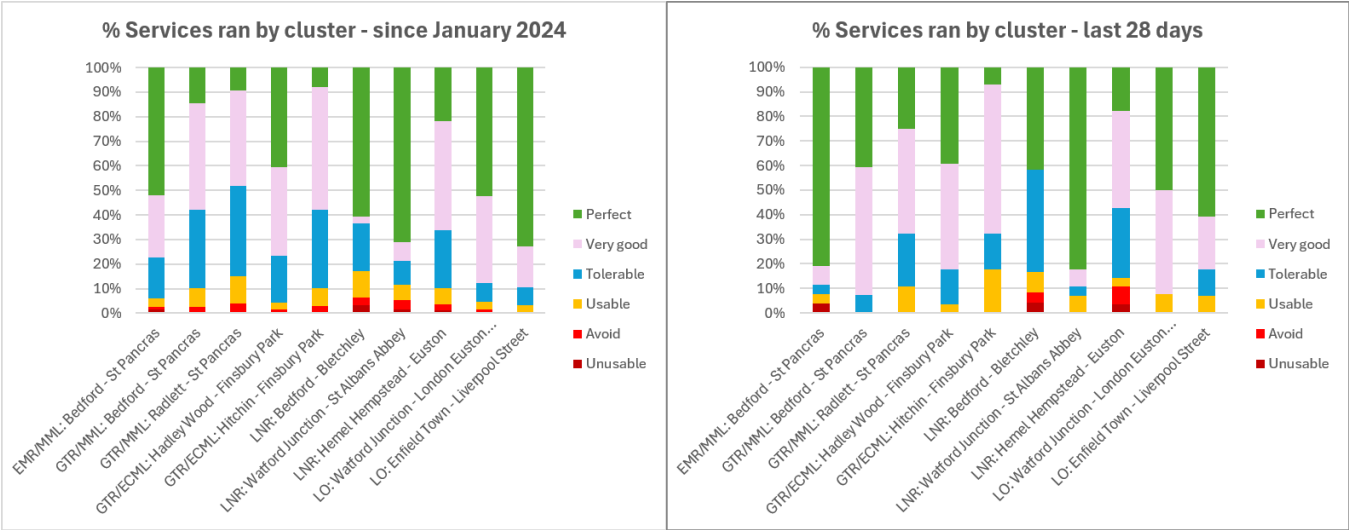
This graph is also available in landscape at the end of the newsletter.

Cancellations year on year



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Spread of cancellations



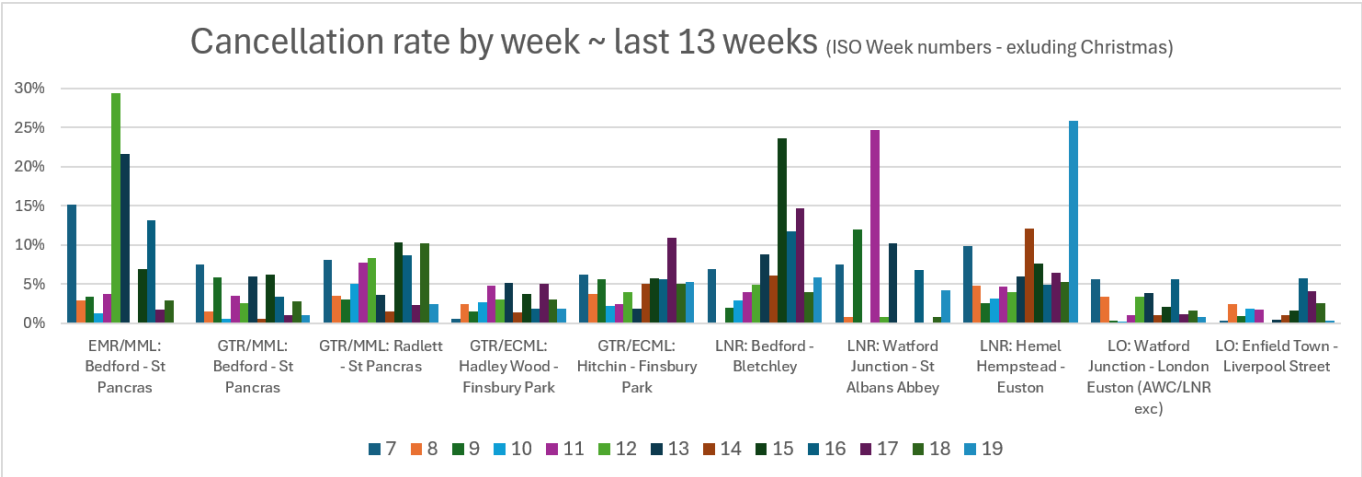
Definitions

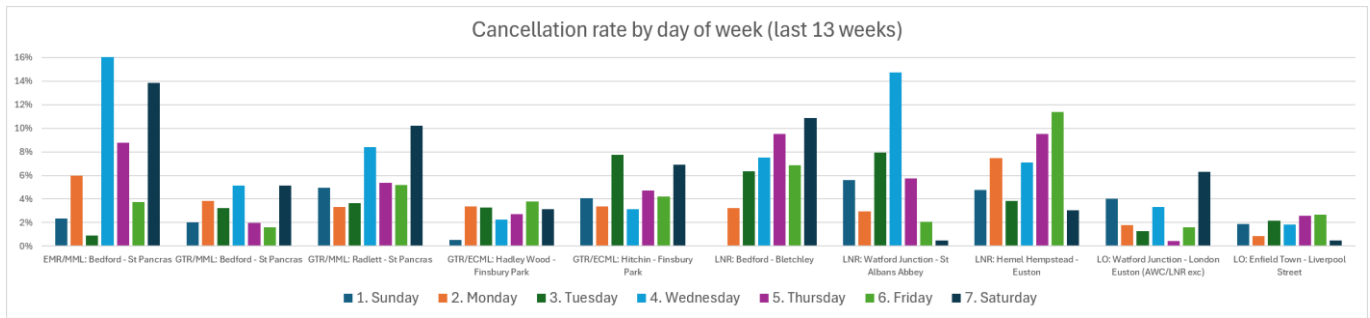
- 38% Unusable
- 50% Avoid
- 70% Usable
- 85% Tolerable
- 95% Very good
- 100% Perfect

For 'all of 2024' Action Short of a Strike days have been excluded.

Because I am measuring this statistic across at the "whole of day" level, I do not detect long gaps within the day.

Cancellations by week / day of the week





A reprise of local campaigning topics

The [list of campaigning priorities](#) was updated last month; it will next be updated in July. Comments are welcome. Changes last time were small and incremental.

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Stay Safe.

Neil

Neil Middleton

Director (with responsibility for Communications) | **Convener, Railfuture Hertfordshire & Bedfordshire** |
 TOC Liaison Representative for GTR | Vice-Chair, London & South East Branch
 e-mail: neil.middleton@railfuture.org.uk | phone: 07887 628367
 our websites: www.railfuture.org.uk | www.railfuture.org.uk/Herts+and+Beds | www.railwatch.org.uk
 follow us on Twitter: [@Railfuture](https://twitter.com/Railfuture) | [@RailfutureLSE](https://twitter.com/RailfutureLSE) | [@Railwatch](https://twitter.com/Railwatch)

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 Registered Office: Edinburgh House, 1-5 Bellevue Road, Clevedon, North Somerset, BS21 7NP (for legal correspondence only)
 All other correspondence to 3 Chandos Court, Martlesham, Suffolk IP12 4SU

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Cancellation percentages

