

Dear Friend

I hope you are staying safe.

I invite you to our meeting on **Wednesday 8th October at 19:30 on Zoom**; I am targeting a finish by 20:45; definitely by 21:00.

Our next two meetings are then:

- **Tuesday 4th November at 19:30 on Zoom.**
- A Saturday in the first half of December – near Euston or St Pancras / Kings Cross (date to be set during Wednesday's meeting)

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.

This is again a shorter update as I have been away on holiday for two weeks. If nothing else, said holiday was a reminder that UK rail services have competitors for awful experiences – the Italian trains I rode were graffiti covered, very crowded and around half of them late. On a more positive note for the traveller, they were easy to pay for – just tap in / tap out. These were relatively local journeys (where I had little choice of travel mode) so I was happy to tolerate the unknown pricing from this. But for longer journeys, knowing the price in advance becomes more important, particularly if there is a meaningful choice on travel modes.

Topics for meeting

1. Welcome
2. December social – agree date – see below (more below)
3. EWR opening date Milton Keynes to Oxford – a ride? (more below)
4. A reprise of local campaigning priorities (more below)
 - The top 5/10
5. East West Rail, Universal and Wixams (more below)
6. Performance (more below)
7. Round table

Newsletter content

Topics for meeting	1
December social	2
EWR between Milton Keynes and Oxford	2
A reprise of local campaigning topics	2
East Coast Mainline	2
West Anglia Mainline	2
HERT (Hertfordshire Essex Rapid Transit)	3
West Coast Mainline, including the Abbey Line	3
Watford	3
Marston Vale line and East West Rail	3
Midland Mainline	3
All of Herts & Beds	3

Performance	4
Cancellations over time	4
Cancellations year on year	4
Spread of cancellations	5
Cancellations by week / day of the week	5
Can I forward this email to others?	6
Privacy, including GDPR	6

December social

At Ridgmont, we seemed to agree on a social in central London in December. Tentatively the preference was a weekend rather than week night. I'd like to set a date and time for this, so want to find the date that suits most. If you can't make it on Wednesday and would like to come, please let me know your preferences, and as I think we are likely to go for a Saturday lunchtime, your availability for Saturday 29th November, and the first three Saturdays in December: 6th, 13th & 20th.

EWR between Milton Keynes and Oxford

In theory this is still due to open in 2025 – Forums, news stories and the like suggest that this may well not happen as there is still disagreement on Driver Controlled Doors / DOO. But if it does open, subject to my diary I hope to ride it on the first day. If you are also thinking the same, please let me know.

A reprise of local campaigning topics

As mentioned, I have campaigned little over the last couple of months due to lack of time and other priorities. But over the winter I expect to have more time. So, I thought it worthwhile bringing together an overall assessment, starting at due north from where I sit as I type, and going round the clockface:

East Coast Mainline

- December 2025 Timetable – it has been a long time coming, but for us a net benefit, not least because our trains will stop at Cambridge South when it opens early next year. No activity planned.
- Performance on GN Inners and Outers. Still below par, so we should all continue to press for improvements as opportunities allow.
- LNER stops at Stevenage – From December these will be pick up only travelling north and set down only going south. “Big picture” this is a rational move, and something I think we can expect more of from GBR. However, what I / we should do is complain when, due to disruption we think there should have been a short term easement due to lack of imminent GB/TL services.
- LNER Simpler Fares – This needs to come back as a focus area, as the end of the initial trial period is in sight. It is not the Flex fare (that's a useful addition to the portfolio), but the disappearance of the off-peak fare, and so the loss of a flexible option at a tolerable price and for must travel “some time today”, the guaranteed fare is now very high. Activity planned.
- Hadley Wood Toilet opening – which is really a proxy for the principle that toilets can be open at any station when it is unstaffed. Activity planned.
- GN Inners operator – bidding by TfL (or suggestions by others that TfL should be the operator) appears intermittently. To me, the challenge is the business case, when there are clear downsides to be offset (loss of maintenance efficiencies, another operator on the ECML etc). No activity planned on this at present.
- Extensions of Contactless – seeking the retention of more fare choices than just peak and off-peak, most notably weekend fares. Activity planned.
- GN Inner service levels – seeking 4 trains per hour. Opportunist lobbying, but limited proactiveness.

West Anglia Mainline

- My list on this has nothing on it. Outside our patch, the ECML observation re Cambridge South ie relevant; also Stansted is due to get contactless fares imminently.

HERT (Hertfordshire Essex Rapid Transit)

- Just a watching task at present

West Coast Mainline, including the Abbey Line

- Performance – Still below par, so we should all continue to press for improvements as opportunities allow. Specifically, watching for decisions to not resource the Abbey line and cancel services there. I don't really have any WMT local contacts, so this will be opportunist activity / support for RUGs.
- Recent extensions of Contactless – seeking the return of more fare choices than just peak and off-peak, most notably weekend fares. Activity planned.

Watford

- Link between Metropolitan line and Watford junction and other opportunities for the track bed for Croxley Green. Only activity will be reactive.

Marston Vale line and East West Rail

- For the current service, performance can be an issue, and as with the Abbey line watching for decisions to not resource the MVL and cancel services there. I don't really have any WMT local contacts, so this will be opportunist activity / support for RUGs.
- On the EWR, the main issues for us are:
 - How Universal Studios will impact the design of the new EWR services, most notably because of passenger flows for customers and, critically, workers at the site (be proactive).
 - That Bedford station gets an up fast platform on the Midland Mainline (be proactive).
 - That St Neots gets a station (mainly supporting EA Branch).
 - Retention of the current route through Bedford Midland (be proactive)
 - Working with Railfuture Thames Valley and East Anglia as appropriate (be proactive).

Midland Mainline

- Thameslink performance is below par, so continue to press for improvement as opportunities arise (including creating those opportunities. For EMR performance, it is a watching brief only at present.
- Extensions of Contactless – seeking the retention of more fare choices than just peak and off-peak, most notably weekend fares. One to be proactive on.
- Wixams – seeking for the new design also suitable for Universal traffic to be delivered as early as possible. One to be proactive on.
- Leagrave & Flitwick – support intentions for lifts as opportunity allows / is created.
- Luton (Town) – Support the substantial improvement to this station, including lifts as opportunity allows / is created.

All of Herts & Beds

- Engineering blockades – improving notice periods. Currently on hold due to lack of time, but to be taken forward.

Omission from the above is for one of two reasons:

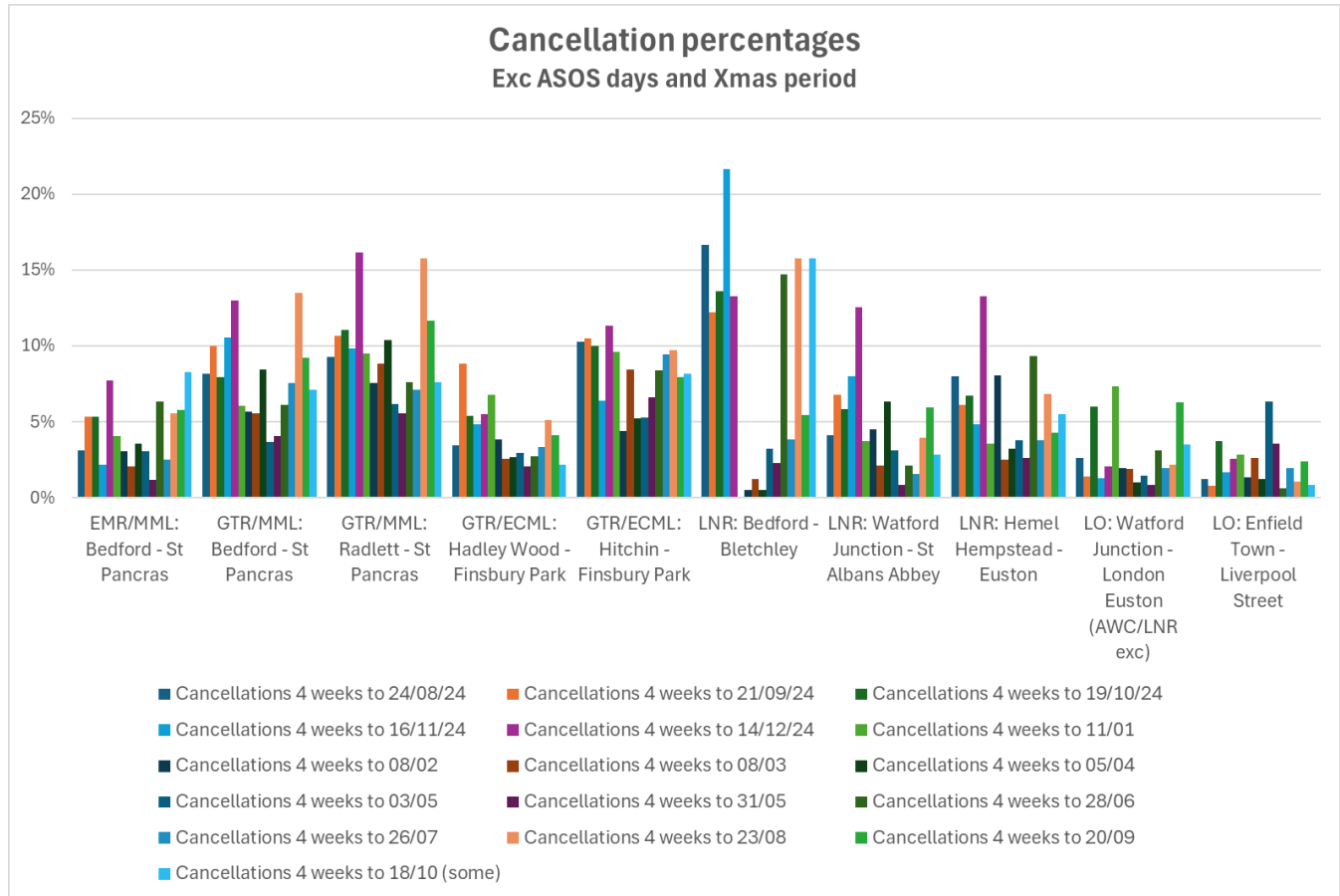
1. I've probably just forgotten about it.
2. Possibly, I don't think we can do anything about it and improvement is unlikely.

In both cases, do remind / ask me!

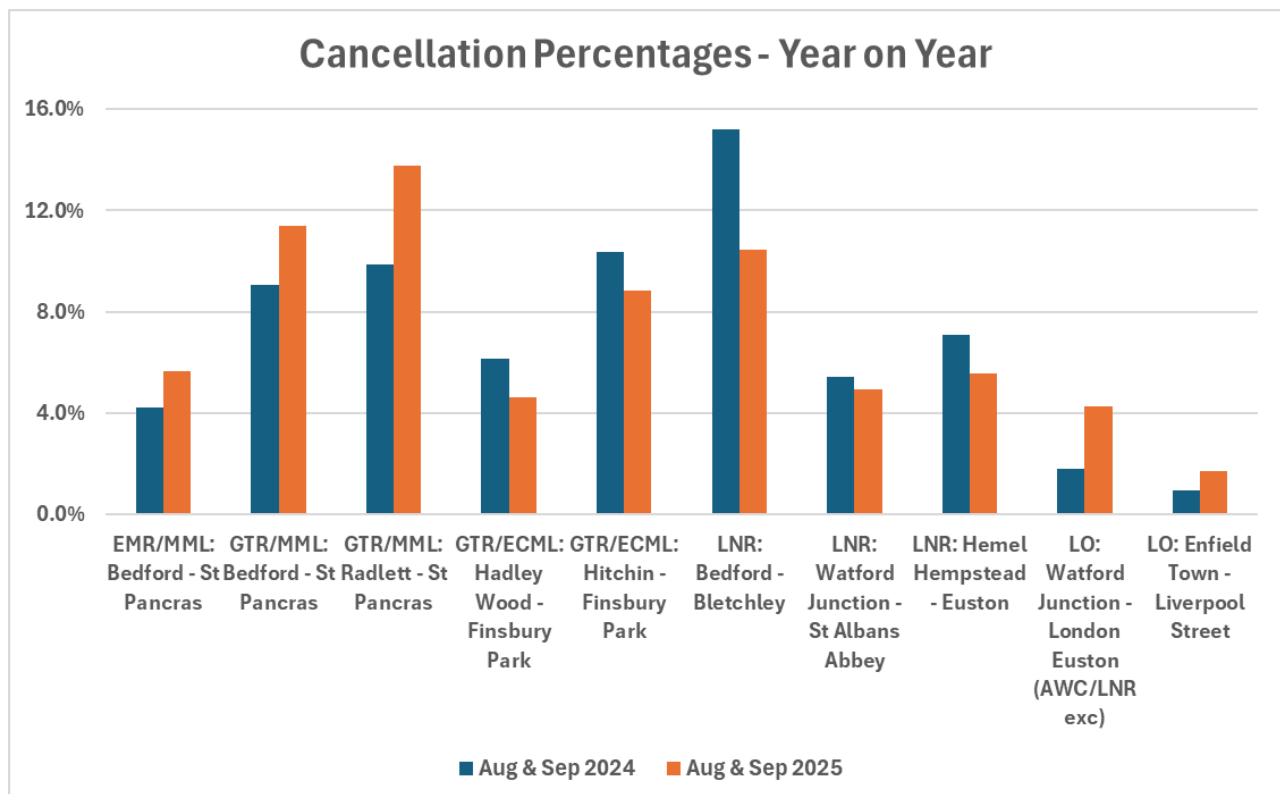
Performance

I have continued to collect the performance data for our main services via Recent Train Times.

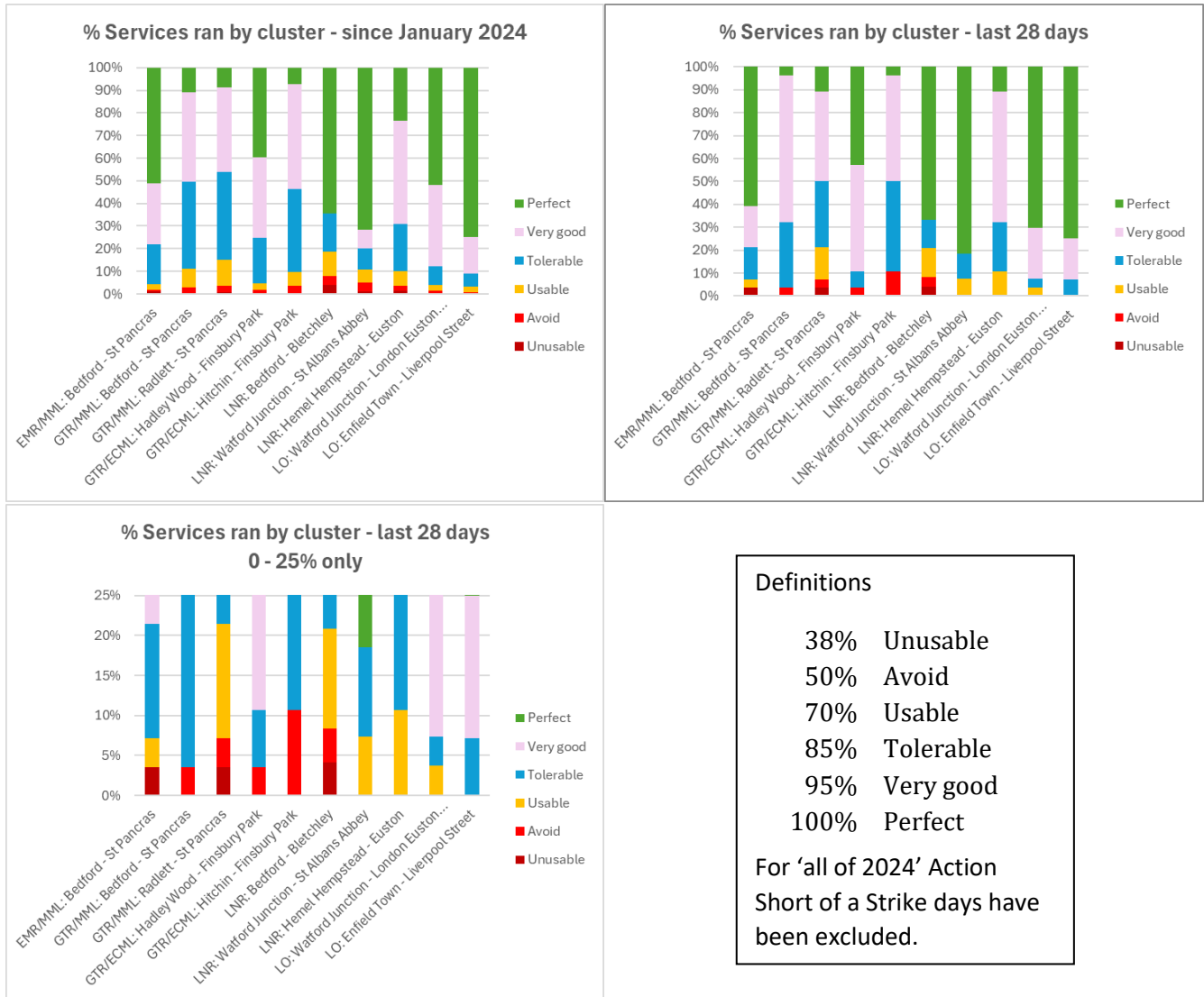
Cancellations over time



Cancellations year on year



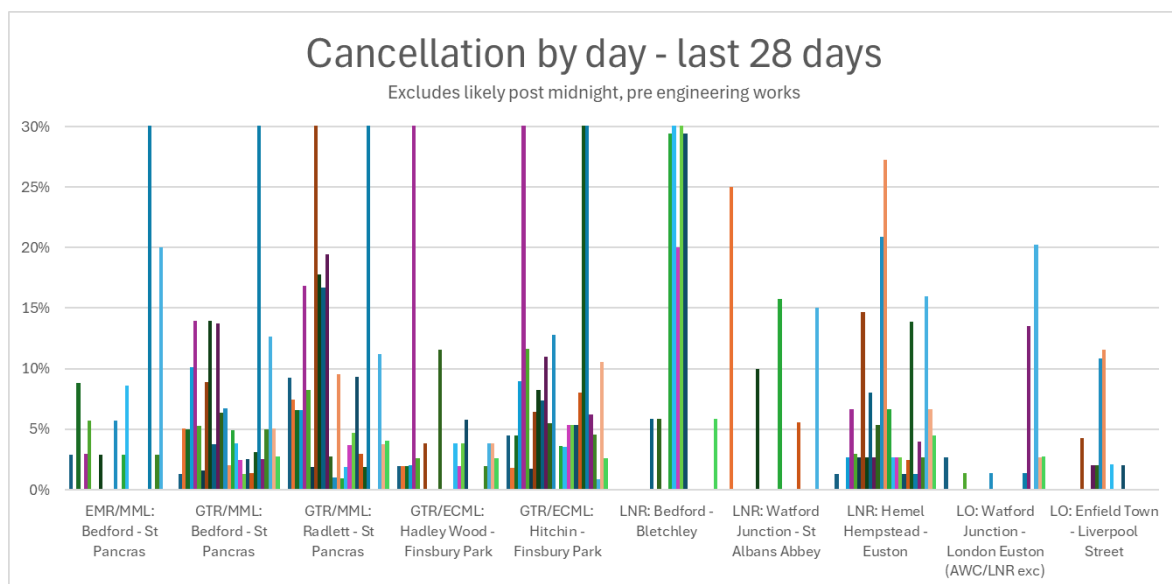
Spread of cancellations



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

The second graph is particularly prone to “dodgy data” at the level of granularity in place.



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Stay Safe.

Neil

Neil Middleton

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