

HEIDI ALLEN MP, SIR OLIVER HEALD MP AND JONATHAN DJANOGLY, MP
SOUTH CAMBRIDGESHIRE, NORTH EAST HERTFORDSHIRE AND HUNTINGDON



HOUSE OF COMMONS
LONDON SW1A 0AA

Mr Stuart Cheshire, Head of Passenger Services
Mr Phil Hutchinson, Head of Timetable Planning
Mr Nick Brown, Chief Operating Officer
GTR

By email

Cc – Jo Johnson, MP, Minister of State at the Department for Transport

26th June 2018

Dear Stuart, Phil and Nick,

We write to express our concern and disappointment that 5 weeks on from the timetable launch, constituents and commuters are still being failed by the service provided by GTR.

This week saw the launch of your pre-interim ‘emergency’ timetable which was loaded onto the GTR website on Monday 25th June, and which was intended to be operational from this point. This timetable, whilst offering restricted services, is intended to provide constituents with a workable and reliable format on which they could base their journeys.

We are still receiving substantial levels of communications from constituents who share the following concerns:

- The timetable is not running at full expectation, with several trains cancelled during peak rush hour in the morning and evening.
- Those trains that are operational are too full for commuters to board (and this in itself raises urgent questions about the safety of trains running beyond their prescribed capacity).
- The special stops implemented by GTR to provide additional capacity are not being communicated via the timetable channels (boards, apps and website) meaning constituents are left in the dark about which services are available.
- Short notice cancellations of trains remains common-place (and indeed this is something you are asking commuters to check for before they travel).
- Gaps in peak hour service are all too common (particularly for smaller stations), and can be for up to one hour. Even where this is relieved by a ‘special stopping’ service, this is not effectively communicated through the necessary channels.
- Weekend services remain abysmal and unreliable.
- Late and early trains are frequently cancelled impacting the ability of shift and emergency workers to reach their workplaces.

We know you have already received detailed communications from Rail User Groups about the above concerns, but we have attached them again here in Annex 1 to reiterate the sheer level of dysfunction. We ask for a detailed response to each concern raised and assurances that these concerns are being addressed as a matter of urgency.

In the spirit of collaboration, we have each worked with GTR to share users' concerns and we have communicated your assurances to commuters that things are improving. The anecdotal evidence that we are receiving suggests that commuters are still experiencing service levels well-below 'emergency' expectations. We ask again for your commitment that everything possible is being done to alleviate the difficulties faced by users of our services.

In our previous meetings and indeed to our User Groups, you have repeatedly stressed the need for capacity to be opened up through Cambridge by the tweaking of other operators' schedules. This related specifically to tweaks that needed to occur on the Abellio services, Cross-Country services and East Coast Mainline routes. It is disappointing to hear that Abellio's Head of Planning has received no such request. Please could you outline why this is the case and when you will do this?

If infrastructure issues require these urgent cross-industry tweaks, we cannot understand why your planning team have failed to log this request with their industry counter-parts.

Passengers are fed up of hearing that 'things are going to improve'. 5 weeks of emergency planning has not stabilised the service sufficiently to restore our confidence in GTR as an operator. To add insult to injury, our Great Northern passengers remain in the dark about the compensation offer due to them (in spite of Northern passengers being offered theirs two weeks ago). We understand that a decision will be taken on this by you in conjunction with rail industry bodies on Thursday 28th July. In order to demonstrate sufficient contrition for passengers affected and in order to reset the equilibrium between passenger and operator we request again that 'enhanced' compensation, which also covers additional costs suffered as a result of the delays be considered. The suggestions made by Transport Focus in their recent 12th June letter to you would seem to be a sensible place to start. They demanded a lump sum payment for season-ticket holders and recognition for travellers who do not buy season tickets that adequately reflects the cumulative impact that this 5 week period has had on people's lives.

We copy this letter to the Minister and urgently request that further input and resource is made available to the core team at GTR to enable the transformation in service to occur in time for the 'interim' launch in mid-July.

Yours sincerely

Heidi Allen
MP for South Cambridgeshire

Sir Oliver Heald
MP for North East Hertfordshire

Jonathan Djanogly
MP for Huntingdon