



Department
for Transport

Rt Hon Nick Herbert MP
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From the Secretary of State
The Rt. Hon. Chris Grayling

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16 July 2018

Dear Nick,

17 JUL 2018

Thank you for your letter of 4 June 2018, about the new GTR/Southern timetable.

I am deeply concerned to read of the delays and cancellations that your constituents are experiencing on their journeys following the introduction of the new timetable and I fully appreciate the impact that this disruption has had on commuters, families and businesses.

I acknowledge that over the past weeks passengers on Govia Thameslink Railway's (GTR's) Great Northern and Thameslink services have faced totally unsatisfactory levels of service, and I apologise to passengers that have experienced and are experiencing disruption.

Both the Minister of State and I are continuing to monitor the situation very closely and my Department's overriding priority is to restore the reliability of service across the network. We are taking action to resolve the problems as quickly as possible, to compensate passengers appropriately, and to learn the lessons that will prevent this happening again in the future.

Please be assured that since the introduction of the May timetable, my Department and the industry have been working round the clock to restore the reliability of the service across the network. Hour by hour, my officials are in contact with GTR and Network Rail to work to improve the service to passengers.

I am deeply frustrated that what should have been a highly beneficial development for passengers, with the introduction of new services, new routes and expanded capacity, has had such a poor start.

This was the most significant timetable recast in a generation - designing a robust, well-integrated timetable that works for the majority of passengers is highly complex and timetabling practitioners have worked hard for more than a year on the challenges involved. We were aware that there may be some disruption in the early days of any new timetable change of this size, however, the scale of the problem has far outstripped any expectation. The Department is determined that this is not repeated in the future.

Network Rail was far too late in finalising planned timetable changes and this must not happen again. GTR was not sufficiently prepared to manage a timetable change of this scale either. The rail industry has collectively failed to deliver for the passengers it serves.

The process of introducing the new timetable was overseen for the last two years by an Industry Readiness Board, made up of Network Rail, Office of Rail and Road (ORR) and the train operating companies and an Independent Assurance Panel. Both of these groups have told me that they had been given no information to suggest that the new timetable should not be implemented as planned – albeit with some likely early issues as the timetable bedded down.

Indeed as few as three weeks before the timetable was to be implemented, GTR themselves assured me personally they were ready to implement the changes. Clearly this was wrong, and it is totally unacceptable.

To give passengers more confidence, GTR are removing more services in advance from their timetable rather than on the day, and reducing weekend services to pre-May levels, which will be in place until a full re-planning of driver resourcing can take place. From 15 July, GTR will introduce a full interim timetable across their network as the next step to improve reliability and performance for Thameslink and Great Northern passengers. This will allow GTR to slowly build up services to the new full timetable. In the meanwhile, Thameslink and Great Northern have declassified first class on services, to help ease overcrowding on the network. Details of the new interim timetable were published on Friday 6 July.

An inquiry by independent rail regulator the ORR into the May timetable implementation is now underway. The inquiry will consider why the industry as a whole failed to produce and implement an effective timetable. Its findings will be shared as early as possible with me and the rail industry, so that lessons can be learnt in advance of future major timetable changes. The ORR aims to publish the final report by the end of the year.

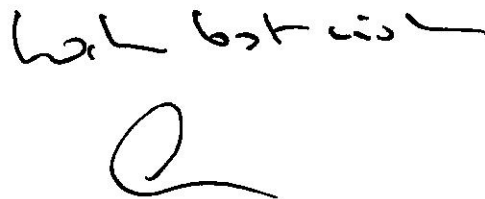
In the future, the Department will insist on a gradual approach to timetable change wherever possible and not the significant changes that we have seen this past month.

Passengers are encouraged to apply to GTR for Delay Repay compensation for affected journeys. As you may be aware, on 4 July GTR announced a special compensation scheme for Thameslink and Great Northern passengers. The scheme will be designed to refund season ticket holders up to one month where they have suffered severe disruption and up to one week where disruption to services has been moderate.

We expect the scheme to open for claims in the coming weeks for timetable disruption suffered between 20 May 2018 and 28 July 2018.

The scheme will work in a similar fashion to last year's Southern compensation scheme, and GTR will be implementing administrative processes that worked well for customers and helped make claiming a refund as easy as possible. When the details of the compensation scheme are public, I have asked GTR to clearly communicate with passengers how they can make their claim and ensure the process is straightforward.

I acknowledge that this is small comfort to your constituents when things are not working as they should, please be assured that I will continue to do everything possible to ensure passengers get the service they deserve.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Chris Grayling', with a large, stylized flourish below it.

Rt Hon Chris Grayling MP

SECRETARY OF STATE FOR TRANSPORT