



Department
for Transport

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From the Secretary of State
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Thank you for your letter of 3 June, on behalf of a number of MPs whose constituents have been affected by the disruption on Govia Thameslink Railway (GTR) services following the introduction of the May 2018 Thameslink 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 GTR have faced totally unsatisfactory levels of service, and I apologise to passengers that have experienced and are experiencing disruption. I can only imagine the deep frustration that they have felt over the unacceptable service.

Restoring services to what they should be is one of my biggest priorities. Both the Minister of State and I are continuing to monitor the situation very closely. Right now 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 is 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.

In the coming weeks GTR aim to introduce a full temporary timetable across their network as the next step to improve reliability and performance for passengers. This will allow GTR to slowly build up services to the new full timetable.

An inquiry by independent rail regulator the ORR into the May timetable implementation has now been launched. 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.

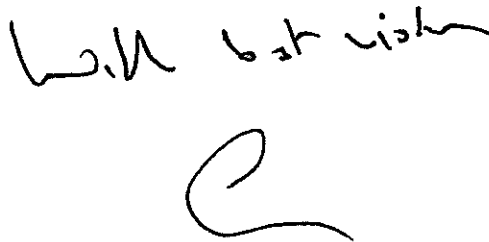
Passengers are encouraged to apply to GTR for Delay Repay compensation for affected journeys. As you may be aware, on 4 July GTR announced a special compensation scheme for Thameslink and Great Northern passengers. The scheme will be designed to refund season ticket holders up to one month where they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

Further details of the scheme, the passenger categories and stations eligible for compensation will be set out by GTR next week. 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.

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.

Once these current problems are resolved, we will have a much better service for passengers. While we acknowledge that this is small comfort to your constituents when things are not working as they should, once we are through this difficult and challenging period, I am confident that we will have a better railway, fit for the future. In the meantime, 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

