

Dear Friend

I hope you are staying safe.

I invite you to an in-person meeting of Railfuture Herts & Beds on **Saturday 26th September at 11:00 (until 13:00) in person**. It will be at St Paul's Church, Hatfield Road, St Albans (more details below). Then, I plan to go on for lunch at one of the venues between the Church and St Albans City station (probably our 'usual' – The Crown) – all are welcome.

Our next meeting is then:

- **Tuesday 10th November at 19:30 on Zoom** (a change of date).

More on meetings for the rest of the year below.

Our Venue

We will be returning to St Paul's Church on Hatfield Road in St Albans ([AL1 4JP](#)) ~ in Garden Room **One**. The Church is in walking distance for most of us from St Albans City station (0.5 miles / c 10 minutes). From St Albans Abbey station it is around 1.5 miles / 30 minutes. There are direct buses from City station; from Abbey station, a change is required. If you are driving, the Church is at the junction of Blandford Road; this often has free spaces; failing that, Brampton Road (at the far end) should have plenty of spaces. Neither have restrictions on a Saturday, unlike Hatfield Road.

This newsletter

Will be shorter than some as I have been away on holiday for just over two weeks so spending my time looking at wild life rather than seeking a bigger, better railway.

Meetings for the remainder of 2026

As I note in my East West Rail update below, there has been no start date announcement. Whilst I do have an entry in my calendar about the possibility of a start on Sunday 13 December 2026, I am realistically I am being an optimist.



Worried about travelling by train in Britain?

I therefore propose that we plan our remaining meetings for 2026 as follows:

- **Tuesday 10th November at 19:30 on Zoom** (two weeks later than planned)
- **Tentatively, Saturday 12th December at lunchtime** near Kings Cross / St Pancras & Euston as a social.

In particular, this Saturday let's spend a moment looking at Calendars / Diaries and be prepared to move that social date if that suits the majority (if you can't make it, do let me know preferences by email).

If Sunday 13th does turn out to be day 1 of East West Rail, then we'll switch the social meal to being in Oxford that day.

Topics for meeting

1. Welcome
2. Late 2026 meetings (see above)
3. Local campaigning priorities for the remainder of 2026 (see below)
4. GTR & Chat GPT
5. Performance, including disruption options (more below)
6. East West Rail (more below)
7. TfL & GN Inners (more below)
8. GTR Ticket Vending Machine reductions (more below)
9. Round table

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Local Campaigning priorities

The [list of campaigning priorities](#) was updated last month; it will next be updated around the end of the year.

Within this list, here are my planned focus areas for the Autumn:

1. Fares, both local ~ Contactless (lack of railcards etc) and national (mainly pricing and availability for longer distance travel).
2. Performance – if you look at the performance statistics, this year is (generally) worse than last year. Less the need for better performance – there are many others already on the case, and more how the industry responds – and influenced by the planned discussion during the meeting.
3. TfL and the GN Inners.
4. Universal (Wixams) Station – now under design.

EWK is not on the above list but will appear on it as needed. I continue to steer clear of the industrial relations issues.

Let's review this in the meeting.

GTR Midland Mainline and Customer information by Chat GPT

GTR have updated me as follows:

Participants wanted for a trial pilot of a new Thameslink customer information system

Our customer information team are about to start a trial pilot of a new customer information tool that is designed to make it easier and faster for customers to get real time information about their services and journeys.

Using a tailored GTR 'site' within ChatGPT – that has been trained, developed and tested using GTR information – the new tool is designed to make it easier for customers, many of whom are already using similar systems as part of their daily experiences, to get accurate information and advice about their journeys. The separate GTR 'site' within ChatGPT and the information you would get from it is

different to what someone who get when using the ‘regular’ ChatGPT system as it has been taught using our operational information.

To develop this concept further and gain feedback from real users with real journeys, the customer information team are starting a semi-public trial from 21 September that is free to participate in and will last for around six weeks. The trial is being targeted at customers that use Thameslink services on the midland main line.

Please let me know if you are interested and I will pass your details on.

Performance

More options during disruption

The Government has [announced](#) more ticket acceptance during disruption. This comments “East Midlands Railway will join the scheme at a later date”. I wrote to EMR to ask them why, noting “I can understand a certain reluctance to carry passengers diverted from other routes given reduced capacity, but on the other hand, that reduced capacity and few options during disruption means it is good to have the option of re-routing.” They responded to say that they are saving capacity for local passengers, but use of other operators following ‘their’ disruption is in place.

Recent performance

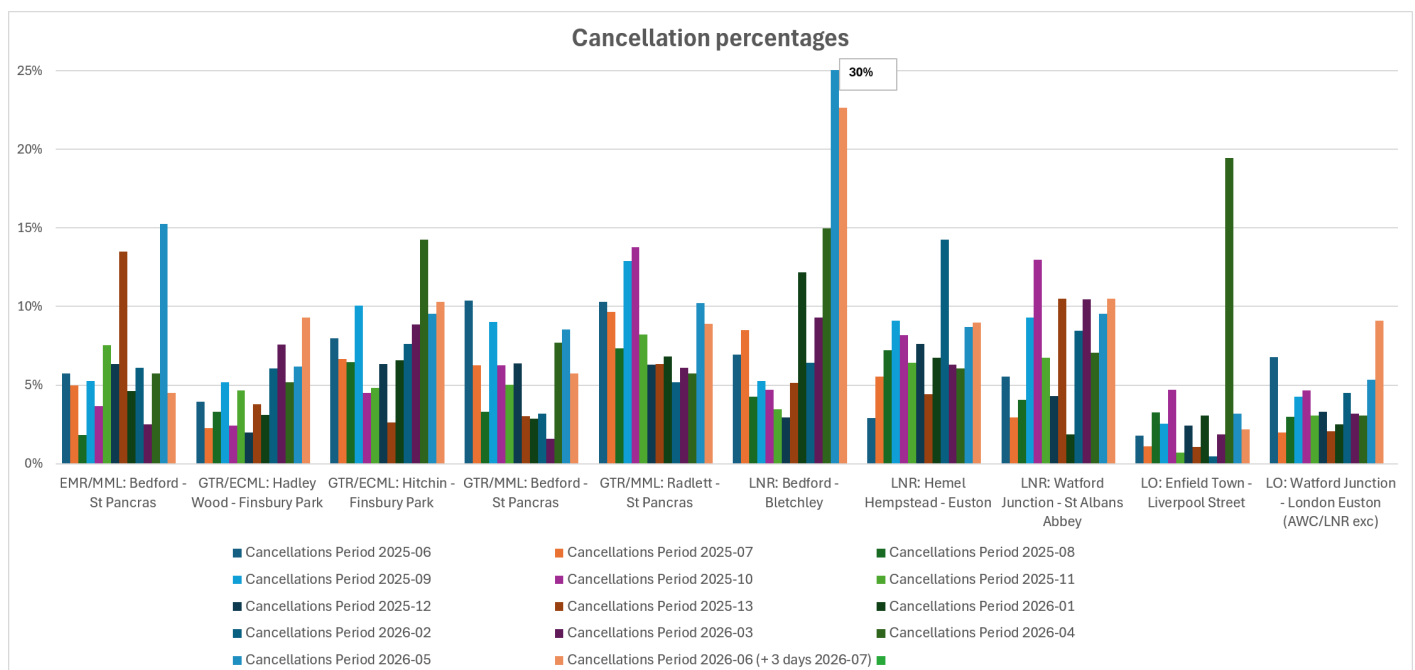
I have continued to collect the performance data for our main services via Recent Train Times. As previewed previously, I’ve excluded the Midland Mainline days badly impacted by the Elstow train crash.

Looking at the graphs, performance has generally deteriorated year on year. Of the 10 service clusters I measure, 8 have a greater cancellation rate this year versus 2025. On services that did run, 9 of the 10 have a greater rate of services running more than 5 minutes late – although my instinct is that the cancellation rate increases are worse than the performance deterioration.

I think we could productively spend a few minutes at the meeting asking ourselves some questions on

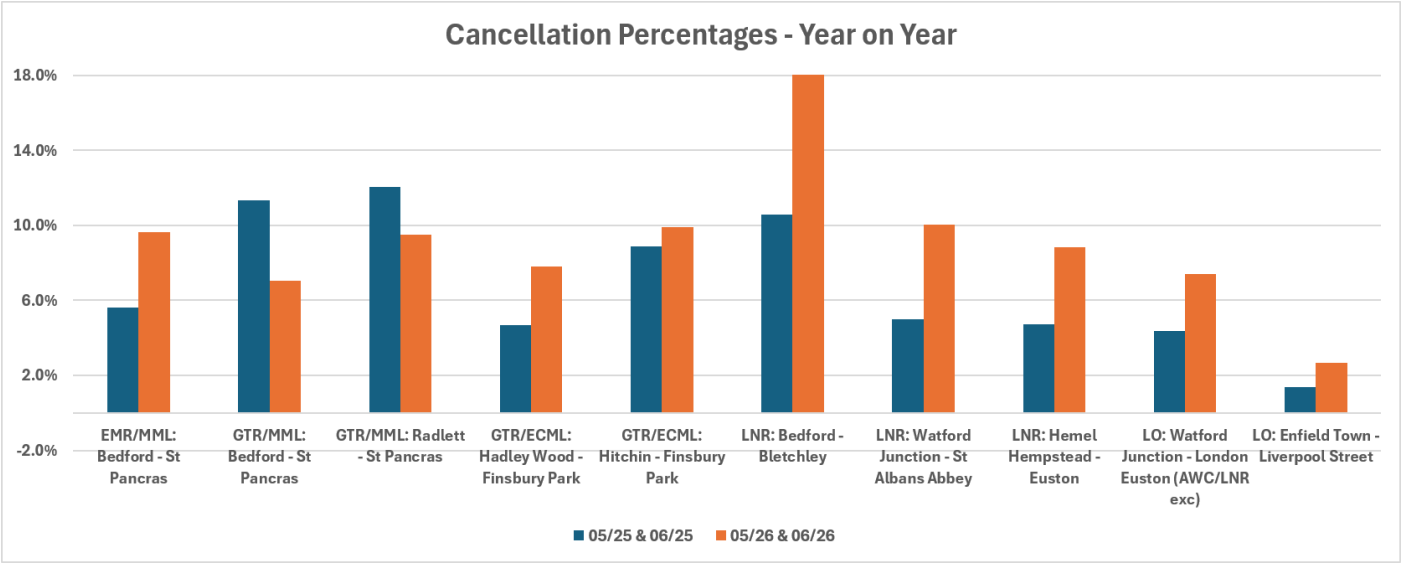
- The portion caused by changes in the environment vs TOCs activities (and in-activities).
- The portion caused by reduced performance vs worse service recovery.
- What we can actually influence and get changed.

Cancellations over time



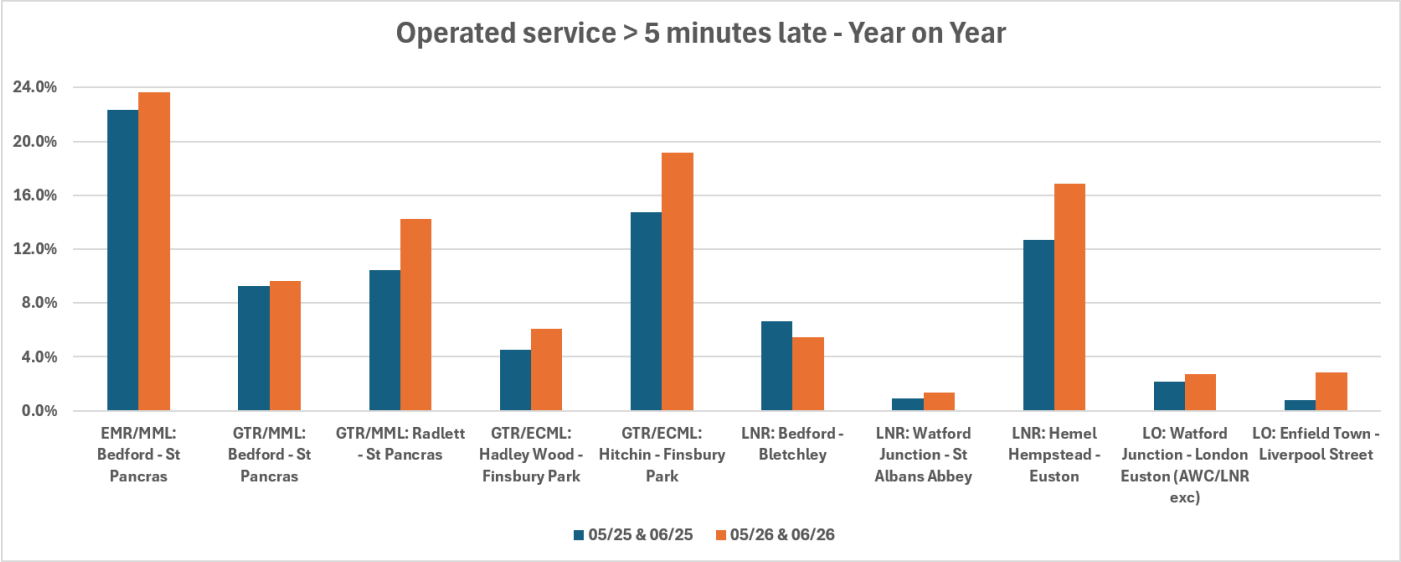
This graph is also available in landscape at the end of the newsletter.

Cancellations year on year

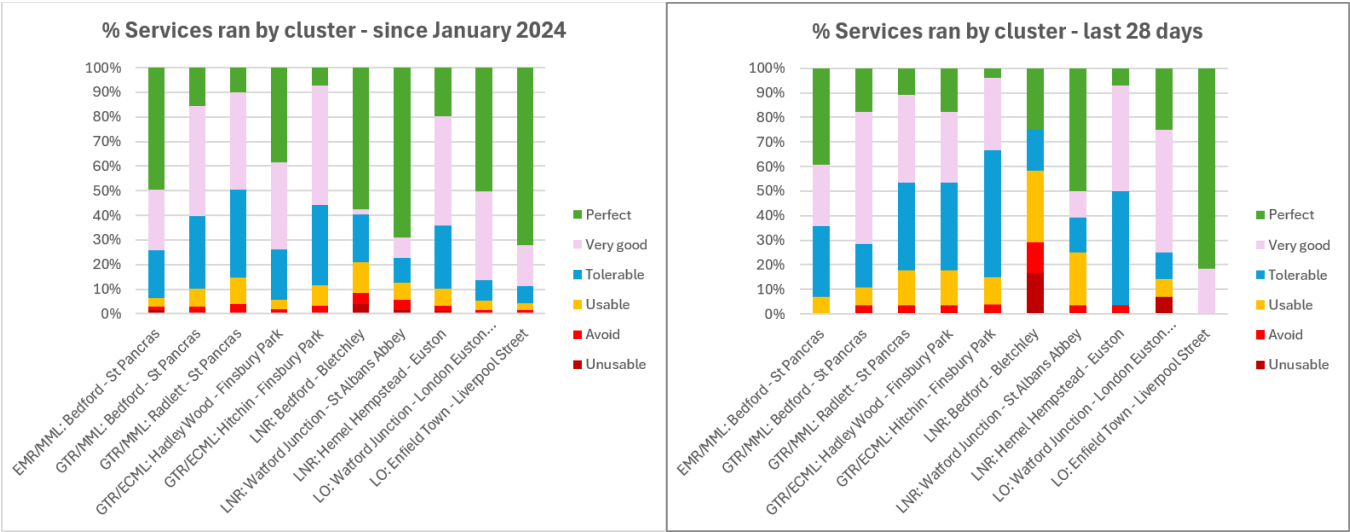


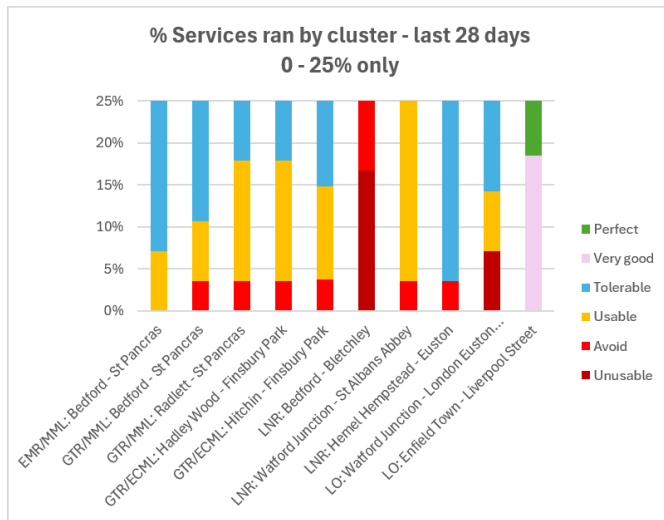
Operated but late

This is new this month.



Spread of cancellations





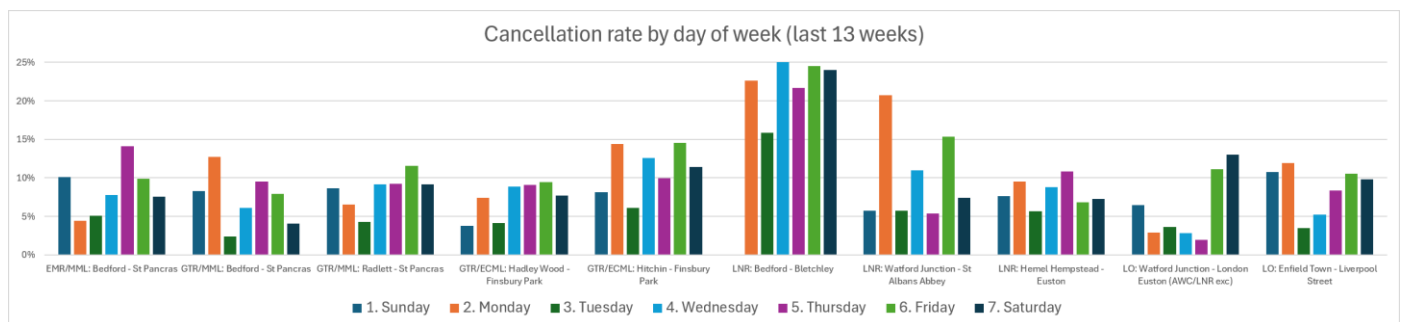
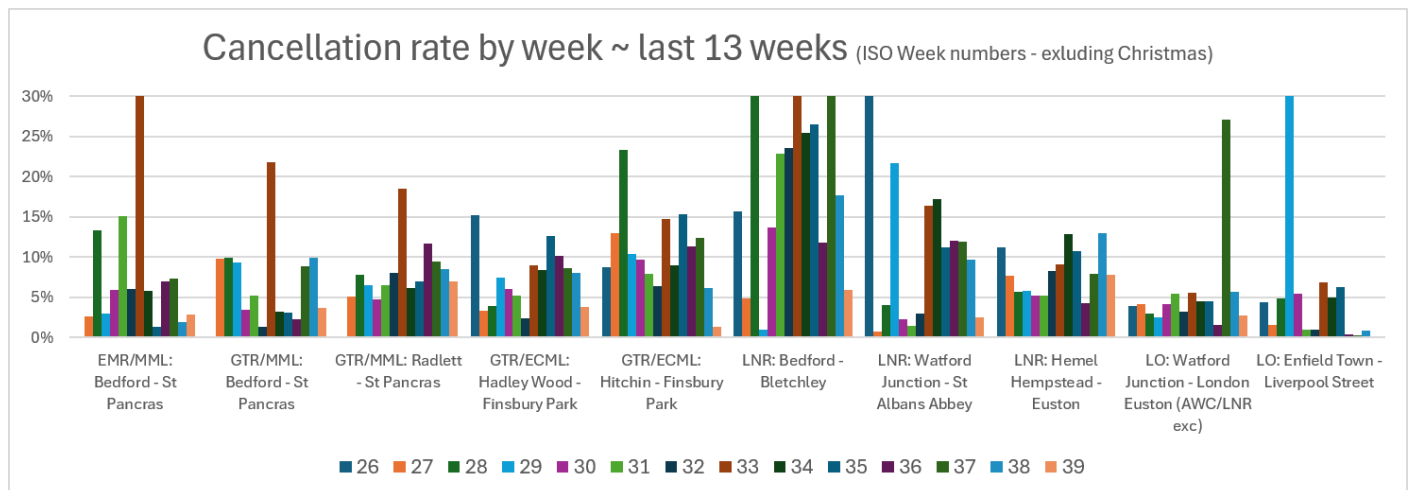
Definitions

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



East West Rail

The only news on East West Rail is that the industrial relations dispute continues. ASLEF have seemingly confirmed that there isn't a driver dispute; the RMT remains in discussions on the role of the second person on the train, in particular whether or not this person will open and/or close the doors. Christian Woolmar, Railfuture's President, has an [article](#) in the latest Rail Magazine.

The [announcement](#) about Chiltern moving to the Department for Transport Operator had very little to say: “public ownership also provides a fresh opportunity to deliver East West Rail and its benefits for passengers”.

In last month's newsletter I predicted that we would hear more in this announcement – technically, I can claim a 'pass' on that, but practically, I admit a bit too much optimism!

Whilst the dispute is officially presented as being about the Oxford – Milton Keynes service, I believe that it is being seen – on both sides – as setting a principle for operation for the future.

It's hard to know whether there are serious negotiations going on away from the public eye that could result in an announcement that services will begin imminently. ASLEF comments imply that services could start very quickly from the driver perspective (with references to the challenge of retaining route knowledge); I am not clear as to how much training the Guards / Conductors / On Board Supervisors will need.

TfL seeking control of GN Inners

There is no new official news on this. A reminder that as regards 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 if there will be enough drivers available, even after allowing for the segmentation of the available drivers between GN Outers/Thameslink and GN Inners. I suggested to Geoff Hobbs, TfL's Director, Public Transport Service Planning that we chat again, and I am following up on this.

Fares

I've not been able to pursue moving the contactless debate on this month and am planning post meeting activity.

GTR reductions in Ticket Vending Machines

I have this on the meeting agenda, but that is simply to give an opportunity to identify specific issues

Class 700 Seat Replacement

This has now been officially announced – see, eg this [BBC Article](#). The Government claims 'public ownership of our railways in action', but that has certainly got quite a bit of a spin in it – they (the Government of the time) specified the seats, and the change is part of the contractual renewals of the fleet as they age.

The reprise of local campaigning topics

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

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3. You have specifically given us permission to keep you updated about future meetings.

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Stay Safe.

Neil

Neil Middleton

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