

Dear Friend

I hope you are still staying safe.

I invite you to our meeting on **Saturday 1st March, which will be in-person – 10:45 for 11:00 at Kings Cross station in GTR's Offices there**. My thanks to GTR (and Andrew, in particular) for offering to host the meeting.

Firstly, please note that 10:45 is meaningful as we need to be escorted in. Meet under the awning next to the Platform 1 gateline ([What3Words](#); [Google Street View](#)). I am targeting a 12:55 finish; I won't be able to join lunch afterwards (as there is a Railfuture Board meeting), but don't let that stop others doing so.

It would be good to know who is coming along in person (and whether or not you plan to stay on for lunch) ~ Saturday morning (1st) is fine for this.

Please remember that Engineering work on Saturday 1st means buses replace trains between Luton and Mill Hill Broadway and Hertford East and Broxbourne.

As regards our subsequent two meetings, they will be:

- **Wednesday 9th April at 19:30 on Zoom.**
- **Saturday 17th May 11:00 in Person** at St Paul's Church in St Albans – and followed by lunch at 13:00.

Tentatively, we will then be meeting mid-week on Zoom in June and July and August will be a "social" outing on a Saturday.

Topics for meeting

1. Welcome
2. Branch AGM – Saturday 12 April (more below)
3. Contactless extension (Project 'Oval') and fares (more below)
4. National developments (more below)
5. East West Rail (more below)
6. Performance (more below)
7. Just in case
 - ECML December 2025 Timetable
 - Fares (generally)
 - Hadley Wood Toilet
 - Long Blockades
 - Written updates
8. Round table

Please note there is a call for you to write to your MP about shortcomings in the rollout of contactless fares. More on pages 2 and 3.

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Branch AGM – Saturday 12 April

A reminder of this – a meeting in two parts, in the morning a speaker (TBC) and in the afternoon the formal business of the AGM. It takes place at the same venue we have used for a number of years – Wesley's Chapel, near Old Street. More on the [website](#).

Contactless extension (Project 'Oval') and fares

For readers not at last month's meeting, I had quite a rethink between the newsletter and the meeting.

I concluded my message on contactless was too complex and also, in seeking for a complex fares structure to be retained I was 'off message', even when tested against my own high level goals. At the meeting I recommended these revised goals:

Improve the best price promise and concentrate on three things:

1. No long wait between the fare change and the arrival of contactless
2. Contactless to support railcards.
3. Bring back cheaper weekend fares for contactless stations (paper & QR code only for now).
4. ... And make a supplementary observation on the importance of developments to allow contactless to be a sensible option for anyone travel with children.

I also concluded that there are so many combinations of circumstance that attempting a generic press release targeted at every reader was mission impossible – not so much for me, as writer, but because the message would be complex and variable, and the reader would stop reading too early.

So, instead, I have a changed approach – a situation report, then to write to relevant individuals with a very customised message that is specific to their circumstance / the circumstance(s) of the people they represent / their audience.

Any specific communications to an interest party now has two pages on the website to help / expand upon the argument – a [summary](#) and a more [detailed explanation](#) (also in [PDF format](#)).

I've now written to my own MP – Victoria Collins for Harpenden & Berkhamsted.

Whilst I'll happily write to any MP with my "Herts and Beds" or "Fares and Ticketing" hats for Railfuture, it would be good for members to write to their MP with a personalised to your situation request for action.

I'll also be writing to the media etc, but anything that has a personal touch is for the better.

Critically, I think there are different reasons for the main asks. The Railcard coverage ask is about fairness and proper delivery of a product; weekend fares are about commercial reality and family coverage is also about fairness – but with a longer delivery time as we don't even have a designed product, let alone an action plan.

Whereas the Railcard coverage and families ask applies throughout, the fares ask varies by station, broadly between:

1. We lost our weekend fares when contactless arrived.

2. Contactless arrived a long time ago, so weekend fares stayed; now I'm worried they'll disappear.
3. Contactless is due, I'm worried that weekend fares will disappear.

Hopefully all those combinations give some idea of why I abandoned ideas for a generic press release!

If you do write to your MP, please do both copy me in, and offer my name up as someone who will help them understand the situation more if they want a more detailed explanation.

National developments

Consultation: A railway fit for Britain's future

The DfT has launched this consultation, see their [website](#). Much of the consultation branding on launch day was about "New rail watchdog to give passengers a voice and hold railway to account" – in reality it is much more than this and is really about the setting up of GBR. Railfuture will be responding to the consultation, which closes on 15 April. I urge all readers to contemplate their open personal submission.

That "Watchdog" headline hides a very important change – a move from a railway that consisted of a regulator (the ORR), a track manager (Network Rail), Passenger TOCs and others (Open Access and Freight) to just two – GBR and "others".

If you want to get an overview of the consultation, I personally found the [Green Signals episode](#) on the topic useful – from YouTube and also many Podcast platforms.

To me, some of the bigger questions / points are:

1. Whilst the story is all about GBR being in charge, what is going to be the real split between GBR and the DfT? (eg bottom of page 15 'some of [the DfT's] functions transferring into GBR.'). In one sense, GBR can't just be in charge given devolved railway operators, open access and freight. The latter two are inevitably beholden to the UK government for their right to exist, but devolution is a wider issue, particularly for Scotland and Wales, where the boundaries are more porous.
2. It does seem that more devolution for the operation of trains is not really on the agenda – although existing arrangements will continue. There is mention that more devolution is a possibility (para 6.20) but reading the rest of the document that does seem something that the government generally doesn't want to happen, particularly on the main mixed use railways. So, it seems to me that devolution of the GN Inners is less, not more, likely.
3. How will governance and control work in practice? Currently, the ORR can set boundaries, but that will disappear with the new world. So how will:
 - a. GBR be kept in line if it is performing badly? (see also my next point).
 - b. How will the correct balance be struck between GBR's own targets and other users of the railway, most notably Open Access, Freight and devolved operators.
4. I think 'performing badly' needs to be split between:
 - a. GBR's relationship with other parties that run and design the railway – devolved operators, local government more generally etc – are they getting fair conditions and, broadly, value for money. And I think I include in this the promises they make to Westminster for funding.
 - b. The service to passengers – reliable, consistent, safe, fair (this time in the context, eg, of application of penalty fares).
5. To me, the successor to the ORR and Transport Focus has those two separate goals – one inherited from the ORR and the other an evolution of Transport Focus.

All the above almost certainly isn't comprehensive; I hope to have spend more time digesting by Saturday/

Other

I think there are two of note:

- The DfT remains very cool on Open Access in the current legal framework, expressing a dislike for 8 of 9 current applications – more in this Rail Magazine [article](#) (registration may be required). Locally, I think this is almost academic as we don't really rely on Open Access including any proposals for new services.
- The local government devolution debate rumbles on, with local government input for rail seemingly not really on the agenda – I think in part because the best structure for input into rail is different to most other drivers of a structure.

East West Rail consultation

The East West Rail non-statutory [consultation](#) has now concluded. Railfuture's response can be found here ([in your browser](#) | [Download](#)).

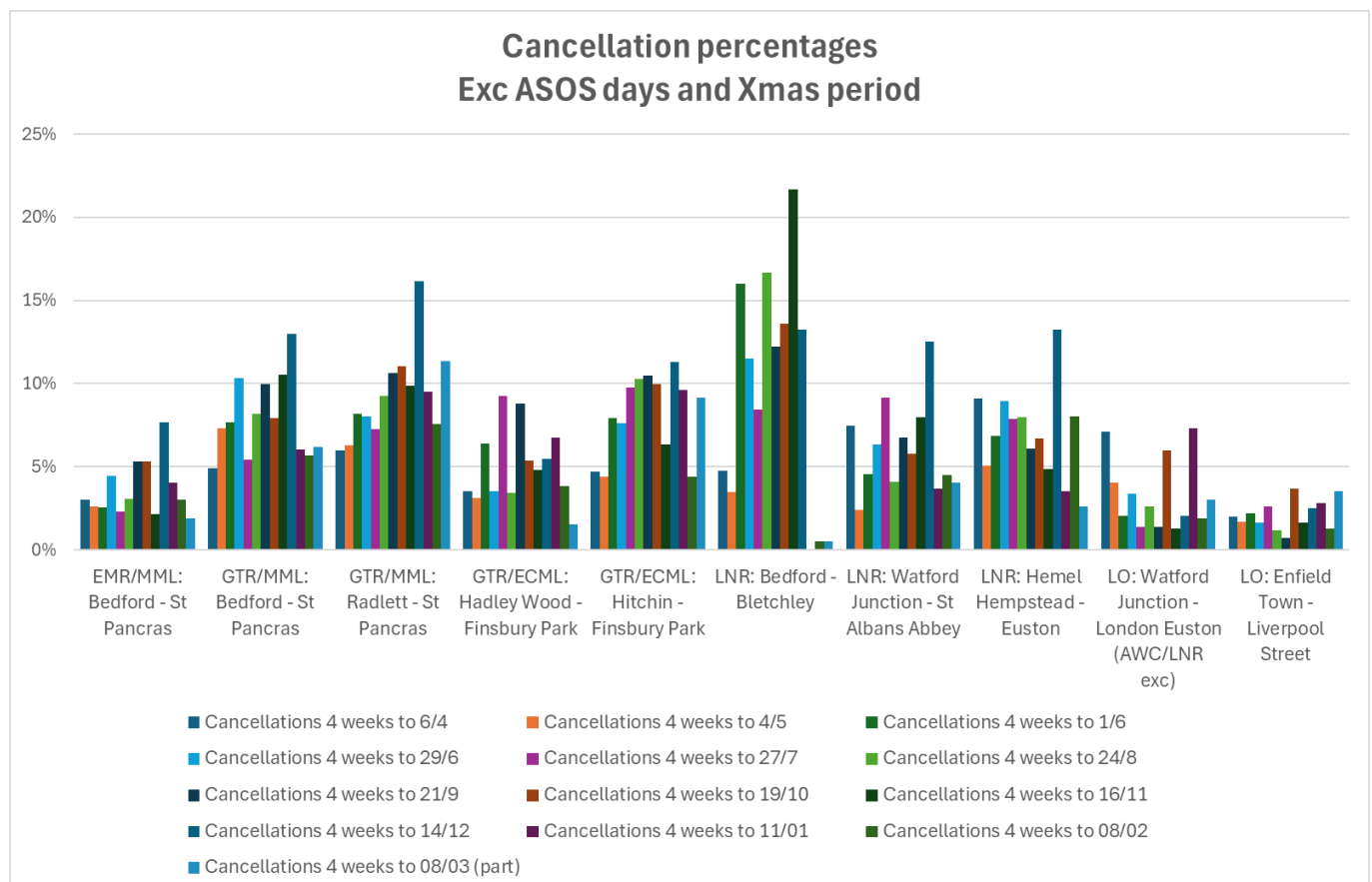
The Government seems to still be committed to East West Rail, as one of their three headline rail projects; there should be more clarity in the Chancellor's Spring Statement next month. The rate of allowable spend on the project remains unclear to me – it seems to me a general desire to spend less per year to benefit the Government's fiscal rules, vs the importance of the Oxford Cambridge Arc to the Government's economic growth agenda.

There were many other submissions to the Consultation similar to Railfuture's – ie it is much more than better journey opportunities between Oxford, Cambridge and intermediate stations – it is a new and essential extension to the national network. Switching to this latter goal will involve extra expenditure (eg for full electrification), so is a 'big ask' at present.

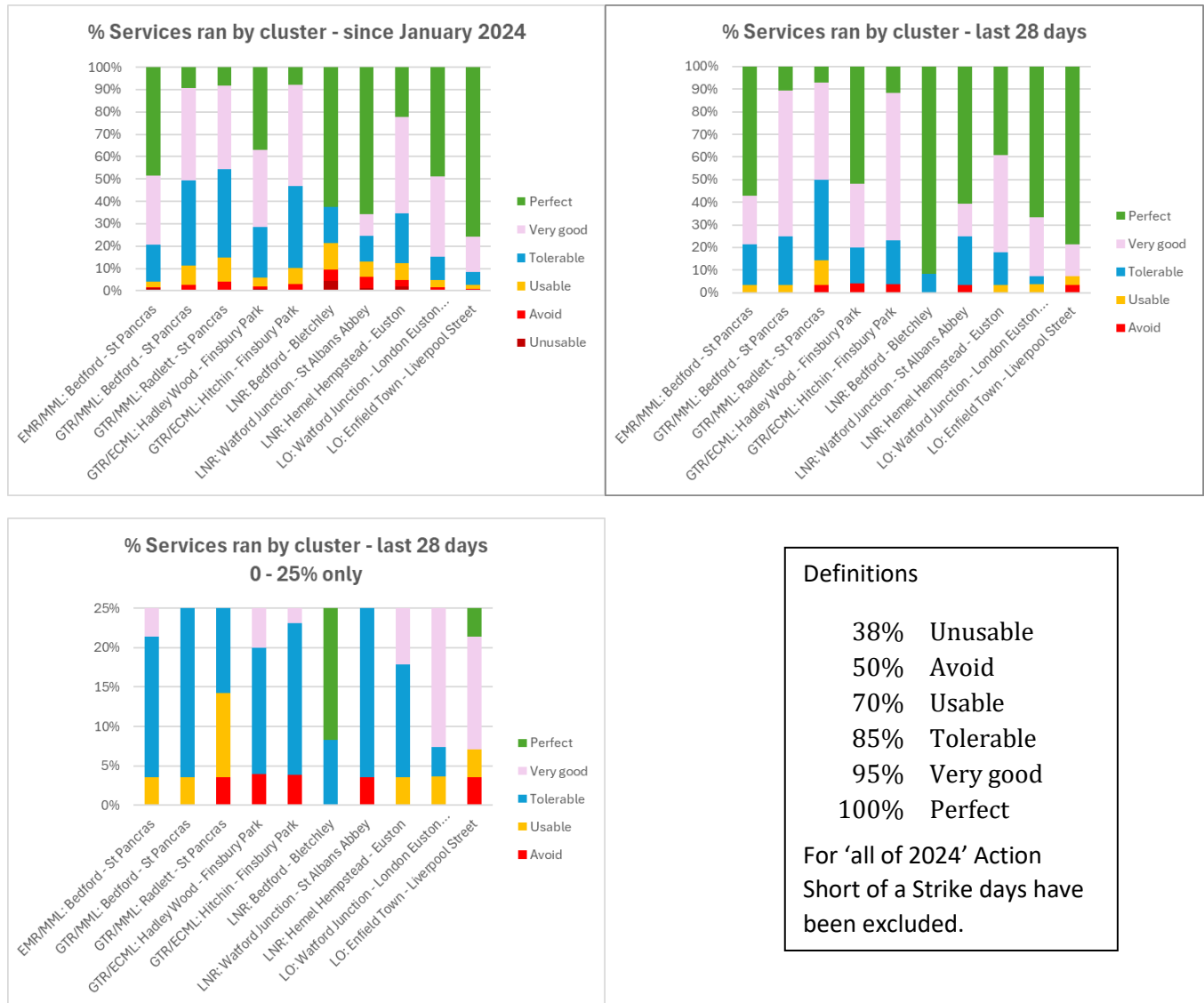
Performance

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

Cancellations over time



In these next graphs, I explore the spread of cancellations (excluding the Christmas period):



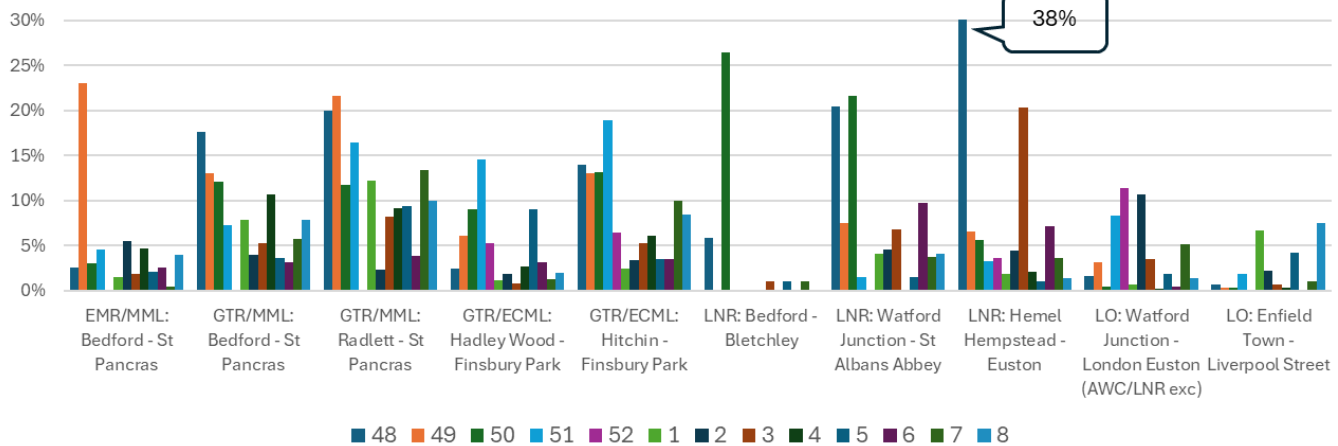
Because I am measuring this statistic across at the “whole of day” level, I do not detect long gaps within the day.

Cancellations by week / day of the week

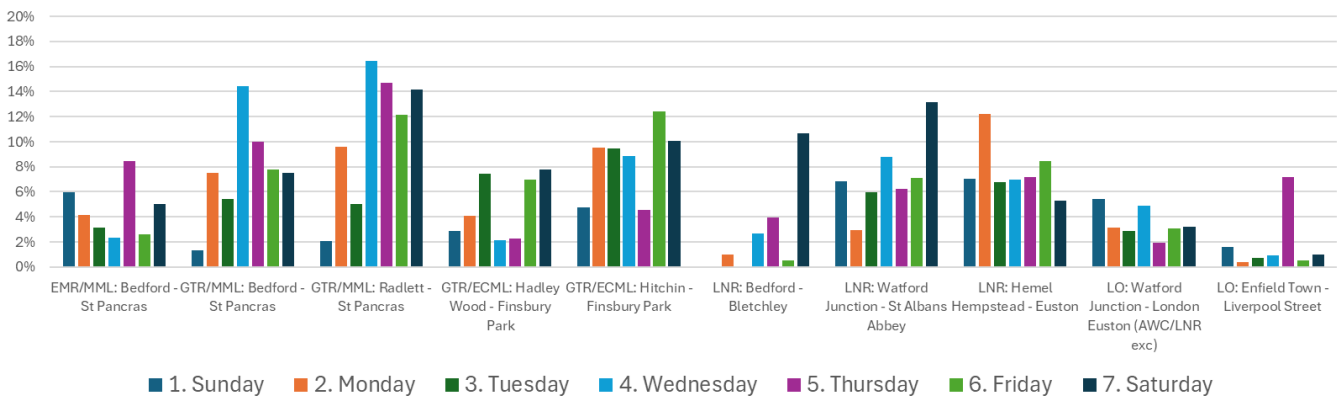
In these graphs, I am trying to see if we can increase our understanding of the volatility of cancellations. Both graphs are quite granular, and the objective is much less to look at week X and understand the rate there and much more to understand does it change a lot. The first graph looks at cancellations by week over thirteen weeks, the second at cancellation by day of the week over the last thirteen weeks and the third cancellations by day over the last 28 days. This last graph is particularly prone to “dodgy data” at the level of granularity in place.

Continued overleaf

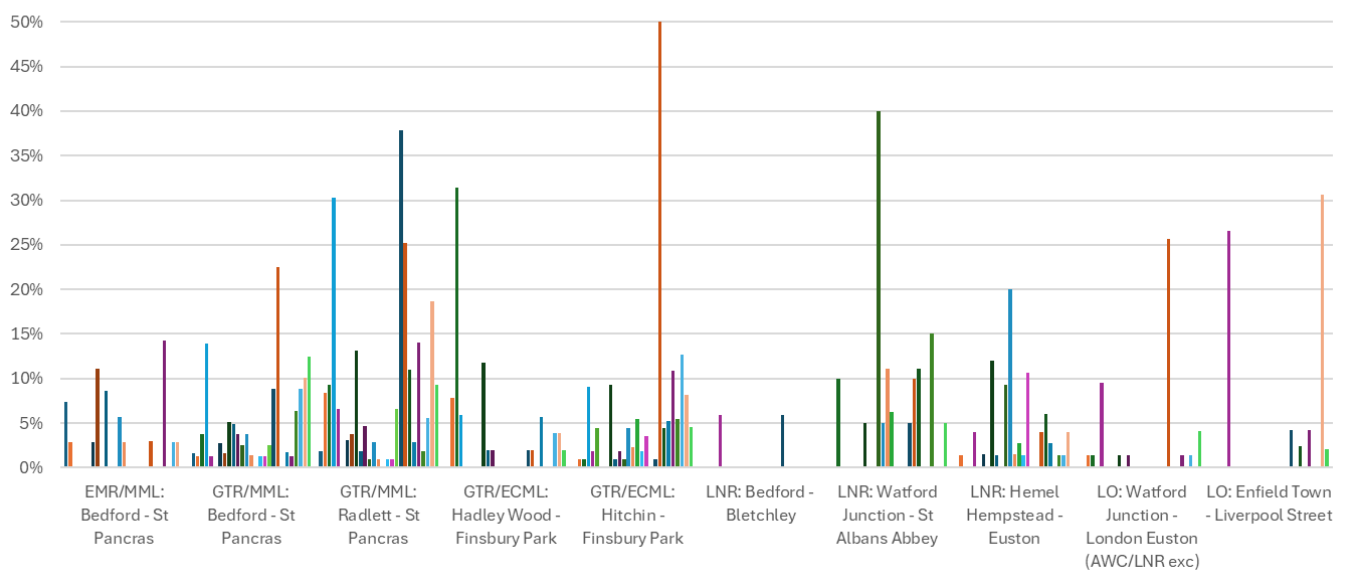
Cancellation rate by week ~ last 13 weeks (ISO Week numbers)



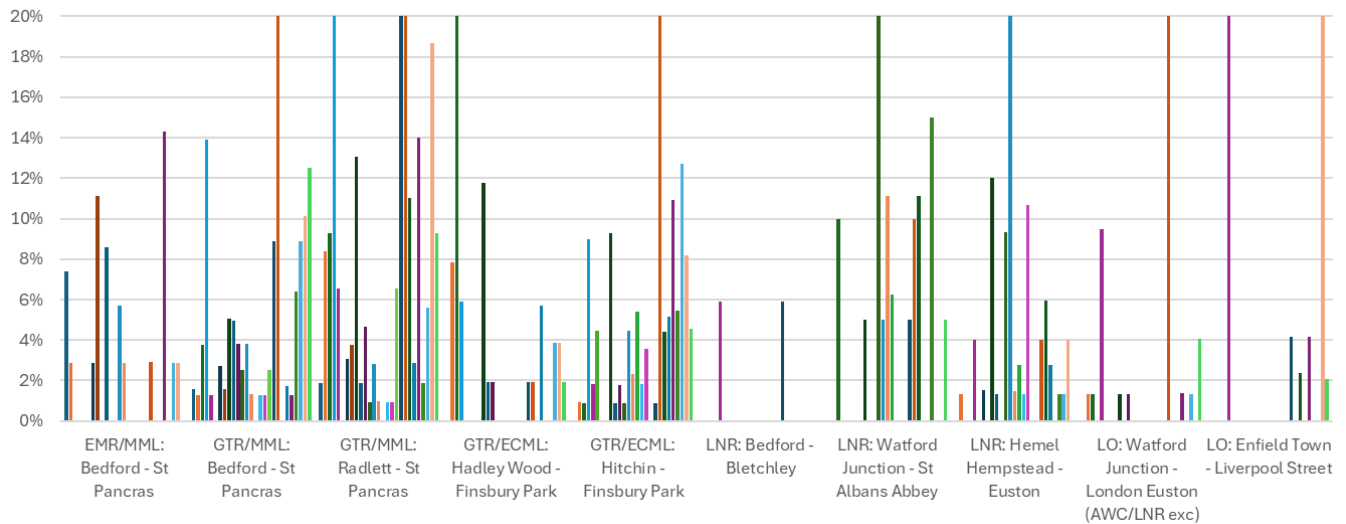
Cancellation rate by day of week (last 13 weeks)



Cancellation by day - last 28 days



Cancellation by day - last 28 days (capped at 20%)



Commentary

I shall have some thoughts on this by the time of the meeting.

GTR's brands and service changes – disruption and planned engineering work

Nothing to report on this, but a topic I will return to.

Written updates / Topics 'on hold'

- **inter-railse archive** (the branch's two page e-newsletter). We recently added many more members to the list of recipients; if you are not already receiving it in your inbox, [email Roger Blake](#). Give your choice from receiving a web link or as a PDF attachment.

Engineering blockade publicity

The next step is to "convert" the Railwatch article into a position paper. In the article I majored on multi day impacts on commuters, but a common theme of conversations has been that sometimes we organise our lives a lot longer ahead than the railway's typical 12 week timeframe – and sometimes have choices of dates (will I go to the Panto on the 7th or the 14th?) and this should be bought into play as a key factor.

Ticket Office closures consultation

No news to report.

For the record: Performance measures

See Appendix A.

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Stay Safe.

Neil

Neil Middleton

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Appendix A / Performance measures

1. Lack of notice (when a likely shortage of resources in the near future is reasonably predictable in advance). Two 'test' points:
 - a. Shortly before going to the station / in time to get the previous train (our definition: 1 hour before)
 - b. In time to rearrange journeys, appointments etc (our definition: early evening the day before)
2. Loss of first or last train of the day (with the loss of the last train being worse than the first)
3. Gaps of more than 1 hour or cancellation of 2 consecutive services
4. inequity in allocation of lost services – ie better some impact on most service clusters than some service clusters taking most of the impact.
5. Cancellation via skip stopping of the first train post disruption and gaps as per #2 above.