

Dear Friend

I hope you are staying safe.

I invite you to an in-person meeting of Railfuture Herts & Beds on **Saturday 17th May 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 – all are welcome.

Our next two meetings are:

- **Tuesday 17th June at 19:30 on Zoom.**
- **Thursday 17th July at 19:30 on Zoom.** At last month's meeting, I said that I would need to change this date, and we agreed on the 16th. But I have since discovered that my 'other' commitment was actually on the 16th, so the original date stands.

August will be a "social" outing on a Saturday.

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.

Topics for meeting

1. Welcome
2. Branch AGM – Saturday 12 April including Division numbers (more below)
3. National AGM – Saturday 5 July in Newcastle (more below)
4. Nature of our August "social" (I see no signs that EW Rail will be open by then)
5. Contactless extension (Project 'Oval') and fares (more below)
6. National developments (more below)
7. Performance (more below)
8. Just in case
 - ECML December 2025 Timetable
 - Fares (generally)
 - Hadley Wood Toilet
 - Long Blockades
 - Written updates
9. Round table

Newsletter content

Our Venue	1
Topics for meeting	1
This month's newsletter	2
Branch AGM – Saturday 12 April – Chair & Vice Chair and number of Divisions	2
National AGM – 5 July	2
Contactless extension (Project 'Oval') and fares	2
National developments: Consultation: A railway fit for Britain's future	3
Universal Studios at Stewartby	3
East West Rail	3
Performance	3
Cancellations over time	4
Cancellations by week / day of the week	5

Commentary	6
GTR's brands and service changes – disruption and planned engineering work	6
Written updates / Topics 'on hold'	6
Engineering blockade publicity	6
For the record: Performance measures	6
Can I forward this email to others?	6
Privacy, including GDPR	6
Appendix A / Performance measures	7

This month's newsletter

Is going to be a bit shorter than normal as I have been away on holiday for three weeks – and without my laptop and much Internet connectivity.

Branch AGM – Saturday 12 April – Chair & Vice Chair and number of Divisions

At the AGM Roger Blake “retired” as Vice Chair after many years’ service (he remains a committee member). Richard Bowry (Metro Division Convenor) became Chair, and I agreed to become Vice Chair.



1 Victoria Falls Rail and Road Bridge [standing in Zimbabwe, looking at Zambia]

The Committee thinks that we should contemplate a reduction in the number of Divisions. Currently there are 6 – Eastern, Kent, Sussex & Coastway, Surrey, Metro and Herts & Beds. Some are much more active than others (including Herts & Beds). We think that consolidation might be a solution for area below the critical mass for interested members. For Herts & Beds, I think there are two core possibilities – we extend eastward to include Eastern, or remain unchanged, with Eastern folding into Metro and/or East Anglia Branch.

I would be interested in members’ views. An interesting question is: Do we give primary focus to physical geography, political geography or rail operating teams.

National AGM – 5 July

This year’s national AGM is in Newcastle – more on the [website](#). As has been recent practice, the morning will be the formal AGM business, for members only, and the afternoon will have speakers and is open to all. The speakers are:

- [Simon Walton](#), Journalist and the Head of News and Digital Content at news titles in the northeast (talking about: Rail freight in the North).
- [Jason Wade](#), Director North East, [Northern Trains](#) talking about: logistics behind the reopening of the Northumberland line from the operator's view point).
- [Dennis Fancett](#), Chair, [South East Northumberland Rail User Group](#)  (talking about: campaign to reopen the Northumberland Line).

Both parts of the AGM will be live streamed.

Contactless extension (Project 'Oval') and fares

Further my reporting of a session with my MP (Victoria Collins | Harpenden & Berkhamsted) in the last update, she has tabled a written question and received a [response](#). Whilst very bland, and no mention of dates, at least it contains ‘will’ twice (rather than ‘may’, ‘might’, etc). these relate to Railcard discounts on contactless and that other payment options will retain railcard discounts. She has confirmed that she will continue to lobby the DfT etc.

Now I am back from my holiday, I will be ramping up my activity levels in this area. 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. If you do write to them, 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.

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

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](#)).

A reminder that 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.

National developments: Consultation: A railway fit for Britain's future

The consultation concluded on 15 April; Railfuture's response is here: [Download](#) | [Read online](#). Background is on the DfT's [website](#).

Universal Studios at Stewartby

This now has the formal go ahead. The main immediate impact is that the development of Wixams station has been put on hold. This is because the design is not fit for the volume of passengers that will be travelling too Universal. Given that the current design is for 2 platforms on the slow lines and 4 platforms will be essential and that the current design minimised costs by only requiring one line to be moved, I struggle to see how it could be built and then the Universal expansion layered on top in any simple way.

East West Rail

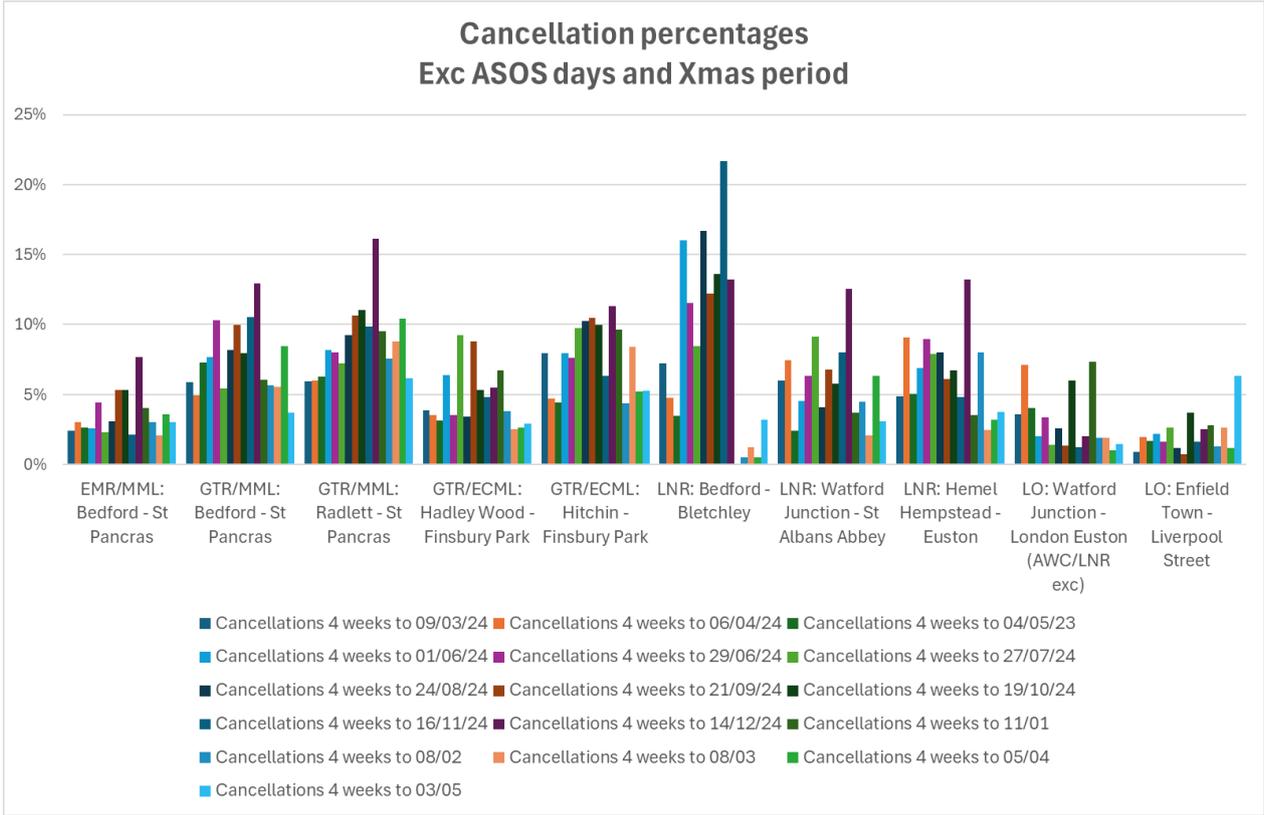
No official news recently. There is undoubtedly considerable contemplation of Universal Studio's impact on passenger flows. To me, Universal Studios reinforces the importance of Bedford Station having an up fast platform as further increases in passenger numbers wanting to change there will now occur. Journey options like Derby to Stewartby with a single change will be critical.

Performance

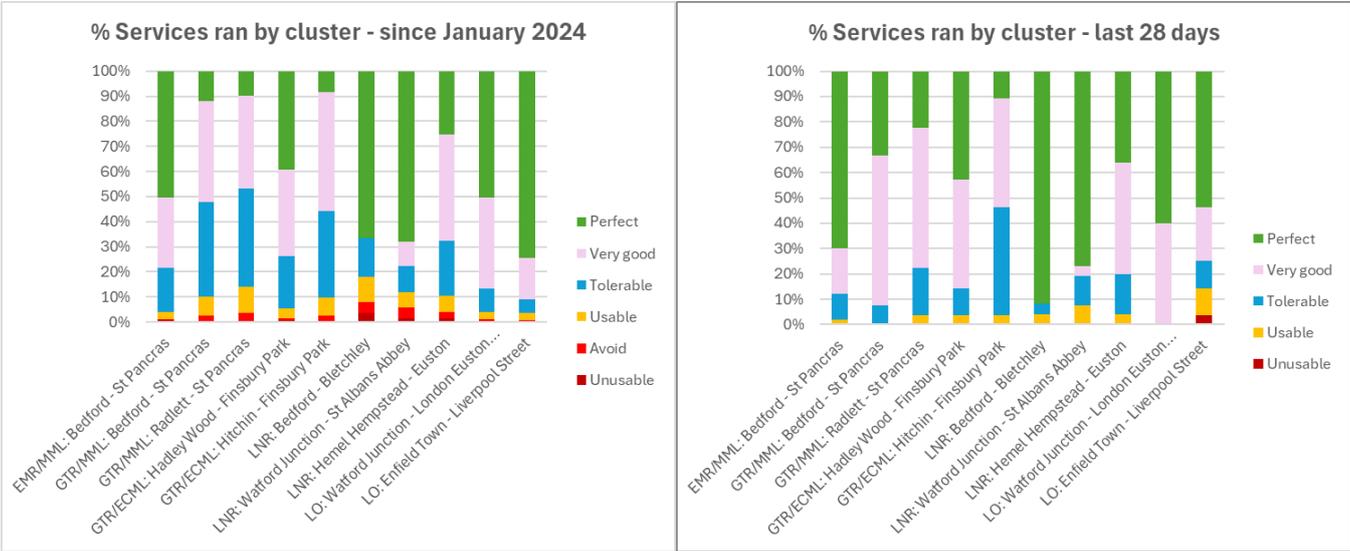
I have continued to collect the performance data for our main services via Recent Train Times.

Continued overleaf

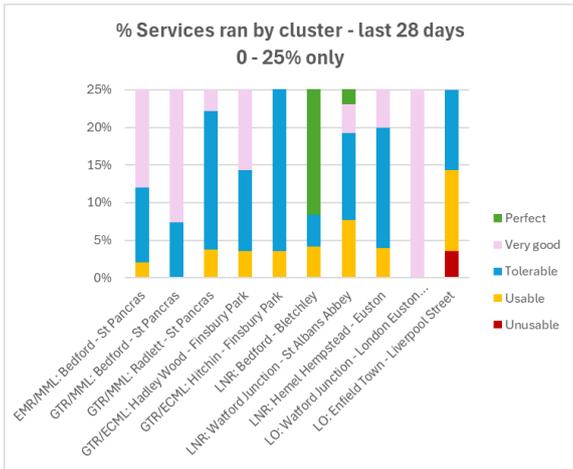
Cancellations over time



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



Continued overleaf



Definitions

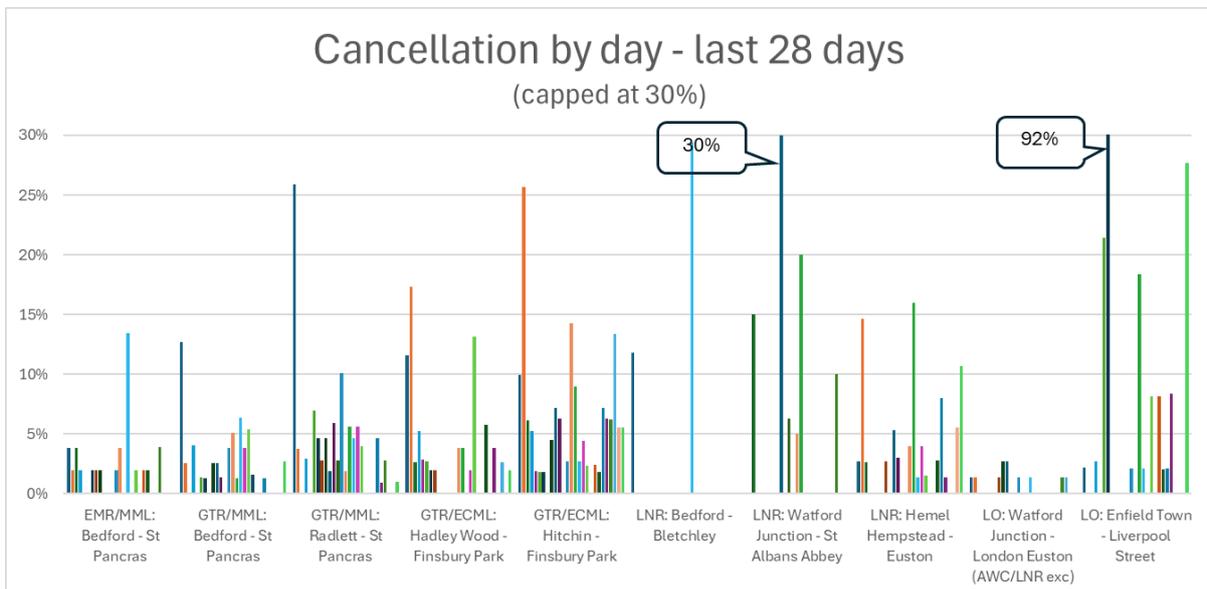
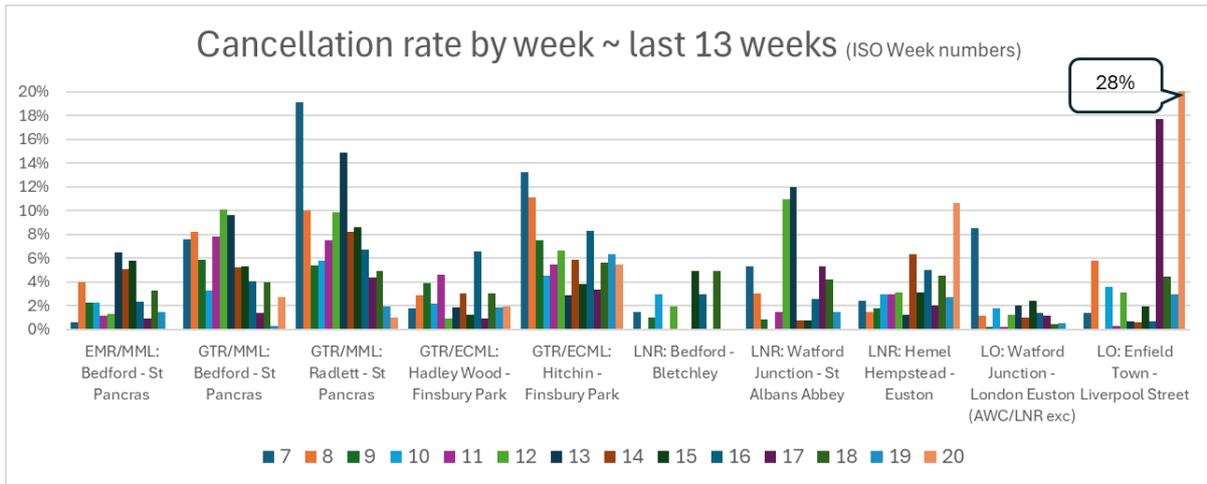
- 38% Unusable
- 50% Avoid
- 70% Usable
- 85% Tolerable
- 95% Very good
- 100% Perfect

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

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.



Please note a slight change in approach – I am now excluding days with just a handful of planned services - eg those running just after midnight Friday on a weekend of engineering works

Commentary

My main view has to be “not getting much better – but at least not getting worse either ~ and quite a lot of volatility.

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.

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.