

Dear Friend

I hope you are staying safe.

A shorter update as it is “high” summer, with just 5 topics:

1. Our upcoming social on **Saturday 30<sup>th</sup> August**,
2. Future meetings
3. An update on LNER’s Flex fares pilot (imminently available for many more stations),
4. Other fare changes from 7 September
5. My standard collection of performance graphs

### Our next meetings

After This Saturday, meetings are then:

- **Wednesday 8th October at 19:30 on Zoom.**
- **Tuesday 4<sup>th</sup> November at 19:30 on Zoom.**
- A Saturday in the first half of December – likely central London

### Summer social – 30 August at Ridgmont Tea Rooms

This is scheduled for next Saturday.

- I have booked us in – but it will all be a lot easier if it is dry enough to sit outside, as the Tearooms are quite small.
- The Saturday service currently seems quite reliable – the morning / lunch time services have all run for the last few weekends.

We’ll stick with the plan of converging on the [tea rooms](#) via the 12:09 arrival from [Bletchley](#) and the 12:11 arrival from [Bedford](#) and aim to leave on the services 2 hours later (Personally I will be either being picked up to go on to Sheffield around 14:00 or leaving on the 14:11 to Bletchley [and then Milton Keynes and Sheffield]).

**Because of the tea room booking and being able to communicate real time due to train service disruption etc, [please do let me know](#) you plan to come, how (and when) you plan to travel and also provide me with a mobile phone number (or advise you don’t have one).**

### LNER Extension of “Simpler Fares” to GN and other London stations

LNER have announced the next phase of their “Simpler Fares”, an extension to 27 stations between Stevenage and Kings Cross. The 27 stations are between Knebworth / Watton-at-Stone and Finsbury Park (inclusive) and also Drayton Park (but not stations Highbury & Islington to Moorgate [as these are TfL operated]).

All of these stations lose the option of an off-peak ticket and gain the option of the flex ticket (plus or minus 70 minutes the booked train).

What hasn’t had much publicity is that all stations in London in Zones 1 to 4 (other than Drayton Park and north thereof) have lost the off-peak single and not gained the flex fare. This really is quite painful for them. I understand the official “response” is split ticketing – use Oyster / Contactless to travel to / from Kings Cross.

I also understand that the 70 minute measurement point is the start of the journey – so, eg from Hatfield, rather than Stevenage or Peterborough.

Mary Lowe and I met GTR on Wednesday 20<sup>th</sup>, and we both made the point that the GTR websites need banners on them noting that Flex fares are yet to be available when buying from those websites and recommending use of LNER’s website (they are also available from Trainline, but that’s a step too far in even wanting mention of the use of a commercial third party).

There’s an interesting design philosophy to contemplate as well.

- LNER: The fare choices are presented left to right, with the services from top to bottom.
- Trainline: Offers only the cheapest fare. You need to scroll to the bottom for other options.
- GTR: The services are presented left to right, with the fares from top to bottom.

.. so LNER is the only one trying to upsell flexibility.

My broad concerns at present with LNER's Simpler Fares trial are:

1. It's not simpler, particularly as it expands. Eg knowing you need to split ticket from (eg) Highbury & Islington) cannot be considered simpler.
  - Specifically, that you currently need to know which website to go to is unfair.
2. The loss of reasonably priced tickets with a wide time band to travel in.
3. That there is no guarantee that you can travel for a reasonable price (as the anytime ticket could be the only one available).
  - The LNER argument is that the average price to travel has not shifted much between the old and the new world and most tickets sold at less than the previous super off-peak tickets. I can accept this has some merit where the choice to travel or not is genuine and there is flexibility in travel times. But this is not a "turn up and go" railway philosophy, which we think essential. And whilst many will find the Flex time band of 140 minutes long enough, that not always the case. And at the heart of it, it impacts travellers with least choice – they "have" to go (eg an ill relative), and they have least choice over travel time ("now" when going, and "once sorted" when coming back).

My immediate activity plan is to write to Passenger Focus and London TravelWatch to complain about the retailing offer – and also issue press releases etc. Then onwards, as they say.

### Thameslink and Great Northern weekend fare rises

GTR have told us that weekend fares are rising again from 7 September. The new fares are in pricing engines. I explore impact below in two examples.

	Harpenden to London Thameslink	Hatfield to St Pancras
Before 1 March	£11.90	£11.10
From 2 March	£13.20	£12.30
(would have been if same rate of increase as Anytime)	£12.40	£11.60
From 7 September	£13.70	£12.80
(total increase) <sup>1</sup>	£1.80 / 15.1% (or 10.4% over baseline increase)	£1.70 / 15.3% or 8.6% over baseline increase)
Monday to Friday cheapest ticket (from 7 September)	£19.40	£16.70

These increases are being driven by pressure from the Government to increase the farebox revenue – the challenge is will the increase in fare per traveller be more or less than the drop off from those disincentivised to travel because of higher costs. My instinct is that apply more financial pain, and the passenger drop off will be significant.

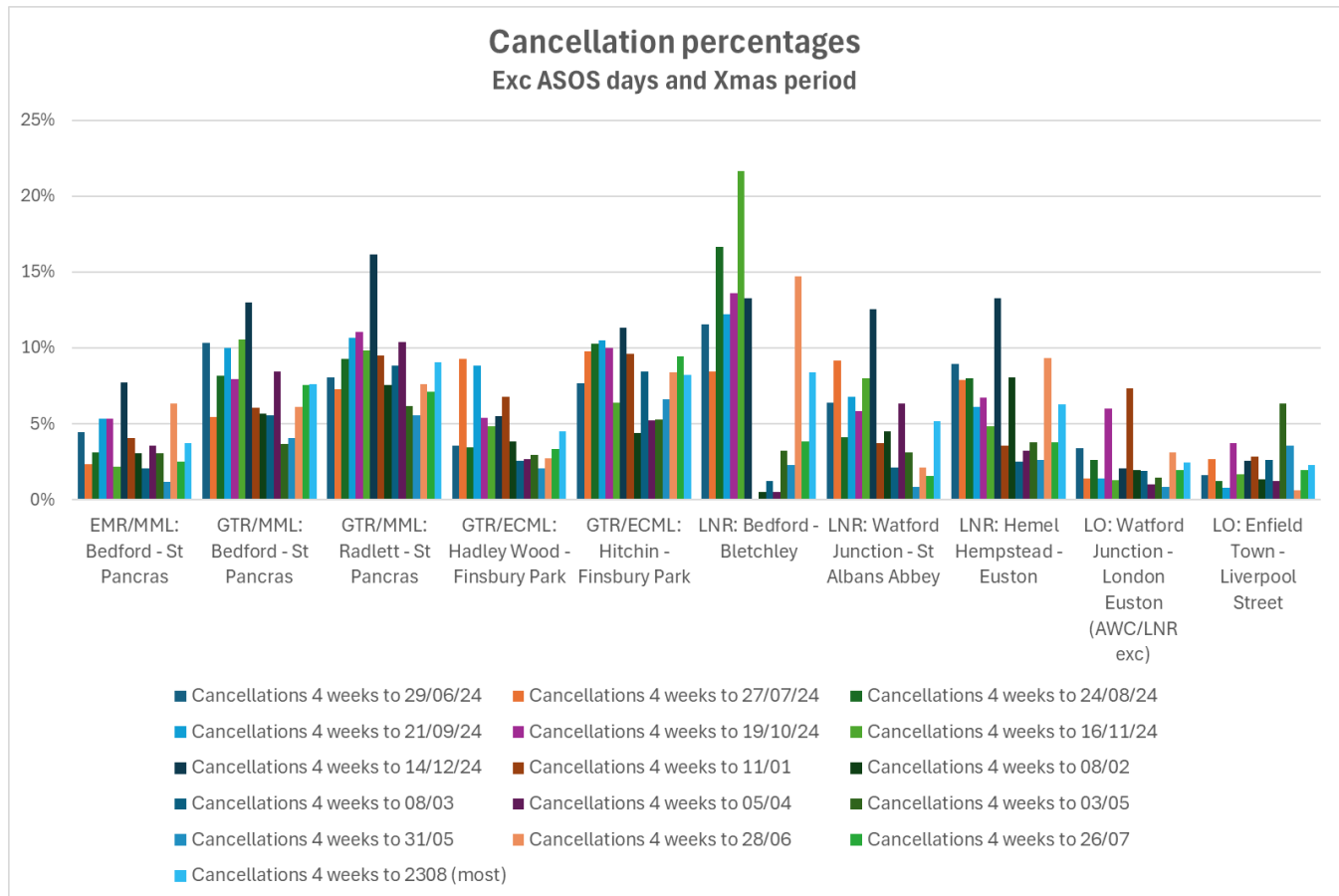
For Midland Mainline stations Saturday and Sunday services are broadly similar (after a later start) but that's not so on the East Coast Mainline where Sunday frequencies are lower. We tried on the argument that higher fare = (mechanically) a better service, but GTR (not surprisingly) didn't see it the same way. But, over time, particularly if there is a drop off in passenger numbers, there will be an argument for a better service to tempt them back.

<sup>1</sup> Percentage increases can be significantly impacted by the rail fare rounding 'habit' of to the nearest 10p)

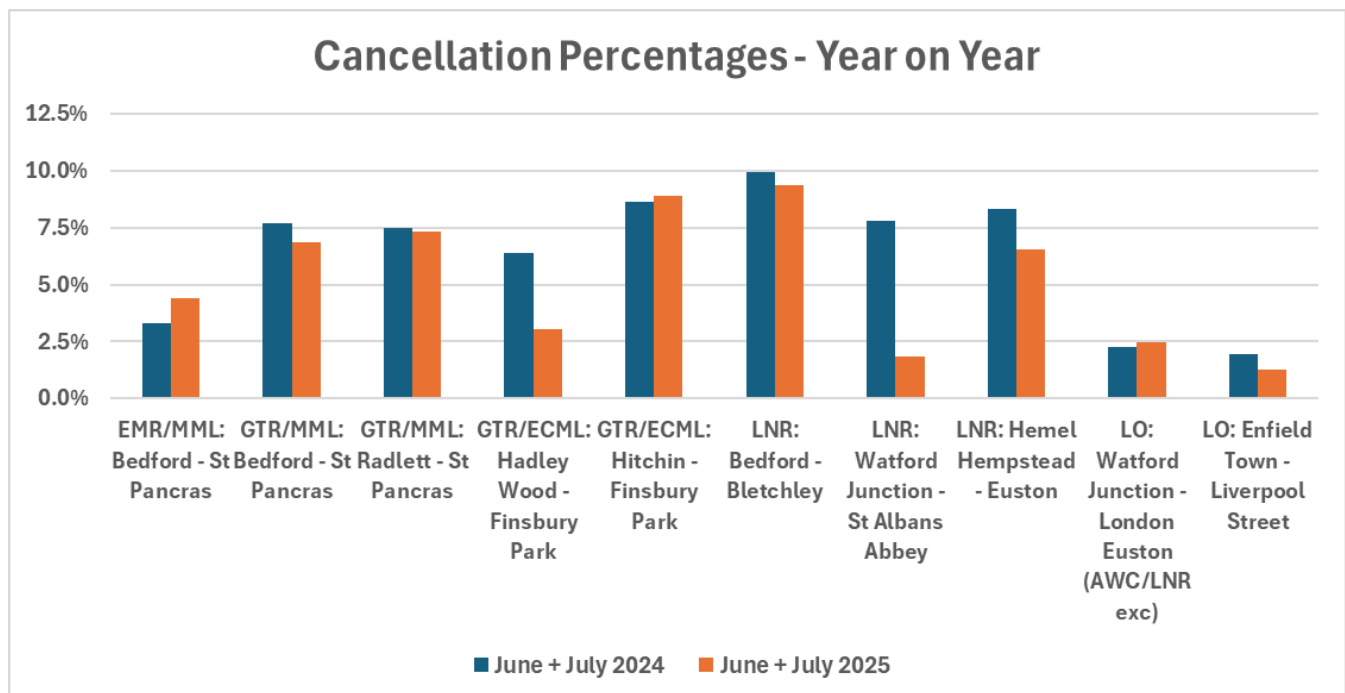
## Performance

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

### Cancellations over time

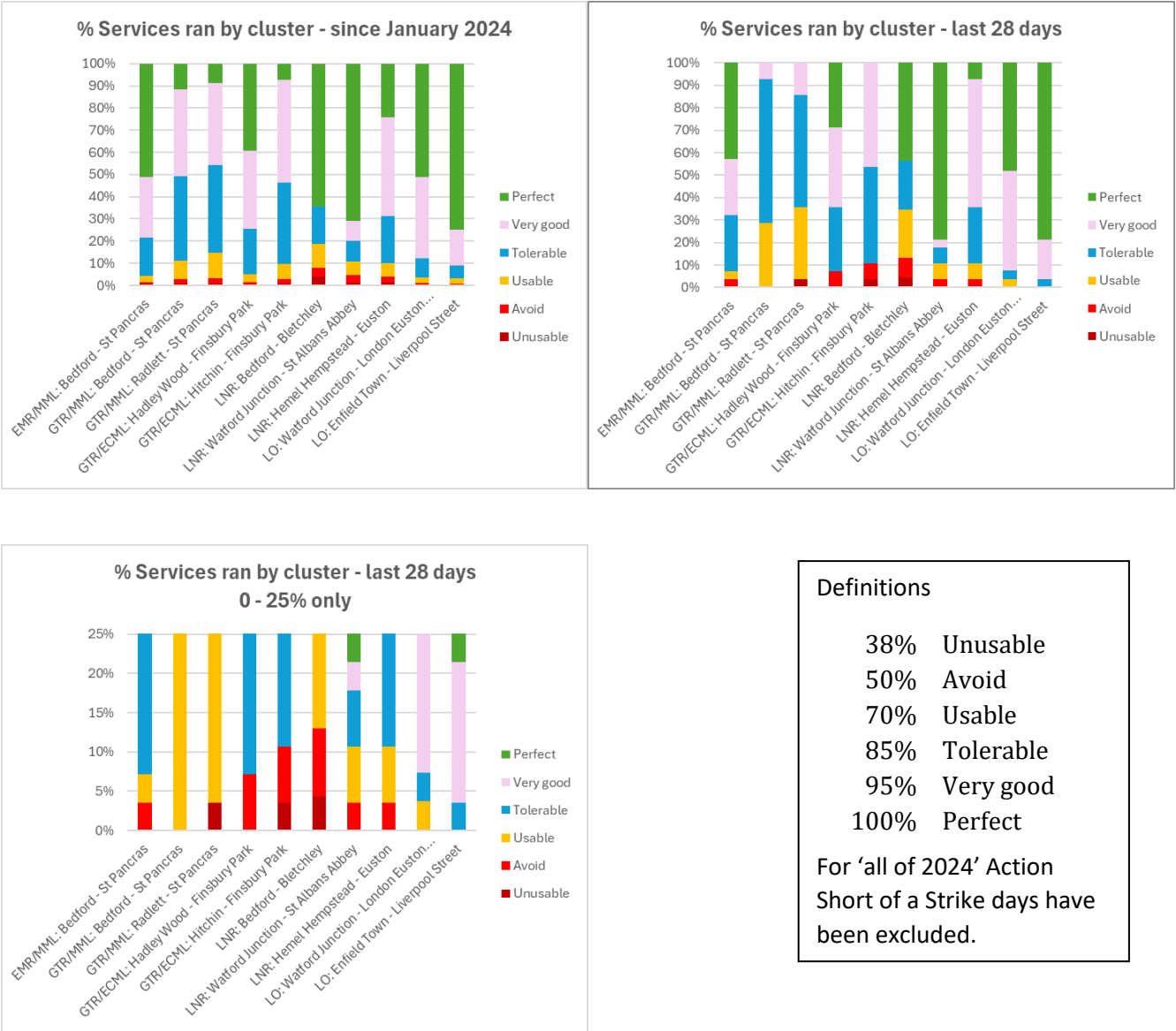


### Cancellations year on year



I have this time a new graph: this compares 8 weeks in May/June last year with May/June this year:

Spread of cancellations

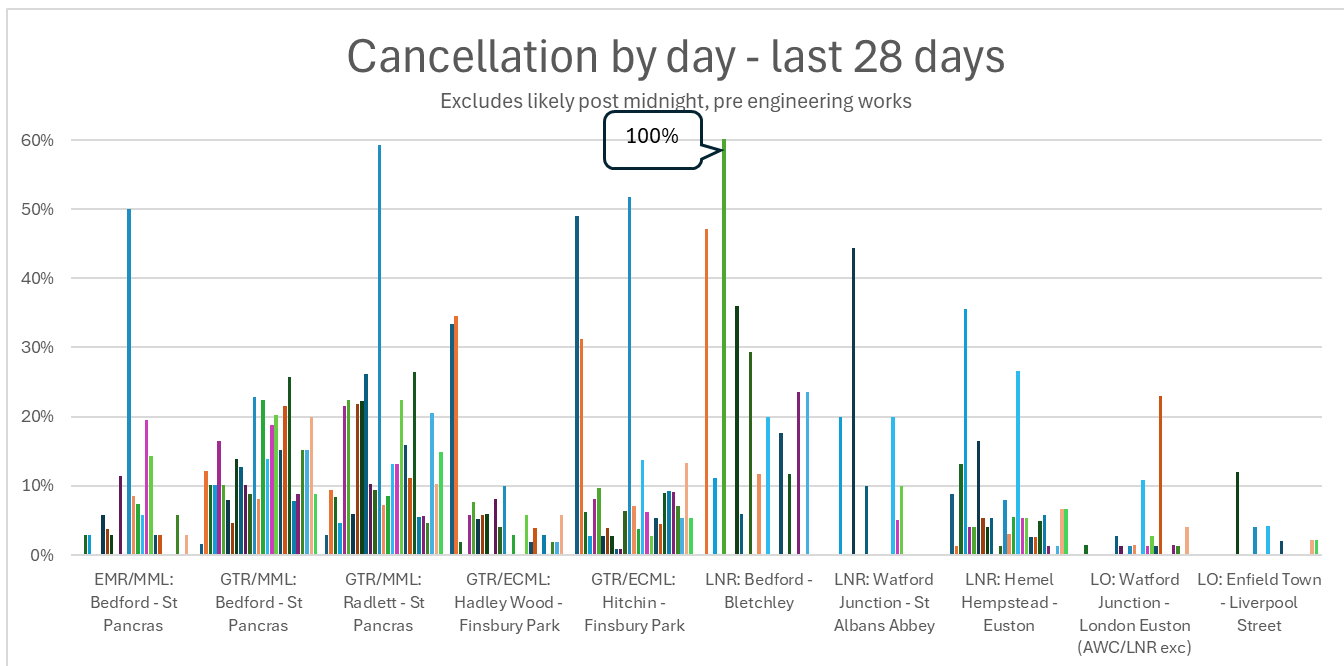


Because I am measuring this statistic across at the “whole of day” level, I do not detect long gaps within the day.

Continued overleaf

## Cancellations by week / day of the week

The second graph is particularly prone to “dodgy data” at the level of granularity in place.



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Stay Safe.

*Neil*

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