Dear Friend

I hope you are staying safe.

I invite you to our meeting on **Tuesday 10th November at 19:30 on Zoom**; I am targeting a finish by 20:45; definitely by 21:00.

Our subsequent meetings are then:

- **Saturday 12th December at lunchtime** near Kings Cross / St Pancras & Euston as a social (details to follow, and theoretically (more below) might be replaced by an East West Rail outing on Sunday 13th)
- **Tuesday 19th January 2027 at 19:30 on Zoom**.
- **Thursday 18th February 2027 at 19:30 on Zoom**.

Join Zoom Meeting:
https://us02web.zoom.us/j/88450315544?pwd=d3krdCtiUHIrMExQcGtMWm1zVU9Qdz09; alternatively join manually via https://zoom.us/join, then Meeting ID: 884 5031 5544 & Passcode: 910342.

If your PC doesn't have a microphone, then use the link above to open (and download, if needed) the software and, once connected, click the up arrow next to the microphone or join audio icon (bottom left) and follow the "switch to phone audio link". If you don't have a PC, tablet or Smartphone available, call one of the 3 numbers below, enter the Meeting ID [then '#'] at the first prompt; at the second prompt just press '#' and at the third prompt, enter the password [then '#']. Phone numbers to dial: 0131 460 1196 | 020 3481 5237 | 020 3481 5240.

Topics for meeting

1. Welcome
2. East West Rail (more below)
3. Hertfordshire County Council LTP Consultation (more below)
4. HERT Consultation (more below)
5. Contactless fares (more below)
6. TfL & GN Inners (more below)
7. Wixams / Universal station (more below)
8. National AGM location (more below ~ a quick item)
9. Performance, including disruption options (more below)
10. Round table

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East West Rail

I'm not aware of any particular breaking news on the section between Bletchley and Cambridge. On the already open section between Bicester and Bletchley, there is now greater clarity following a session at the Transport Select Committee last week (on Wednesday 4 November).

The session was in two parts, firstly the startup of Oxford Bletchley services and secondly the total programme.

Between Bicester and Bletchley

My interpretation of the first session was that, from the headline reasons for not opening, all of the following need to happen before services can start:

1. RMT and Chiltern need to come to an agreement on the status of the second person on each service – have they have been fully trained with the ability to go on the track – or not.
2. RMT and Chiltern then need to come to an agreement as to whether or not the second person on the service will open / close the doors or not.
3. ASLEF and Chiltern need to agree arrangements following the DCO / second person door opening decision.
4. Whatever training is needed needs to be completed. It seems to me that all / most drivers already have the relevant route and traction knowledge, but presumably the second person on the train training is a lot less advanced.
5. Winslow station has some remedial works that need competing and there is a lease to be signed.

There are also all the usual activities – approval from the ORR, a full set of station staff everywhere etc.

My impression is that #1 & #2 above are the most uncertain in terms of how long they will take to resolve. I do not know how long #3 and #4 will take but have the feeling that reasonably reliable estimates for their duration probably exist. And that #5 is probably not on the critical path, nor most of the other tasks, with a few exceptions such as the ORR approval which comes right at the end.

It strikes me that it is super optimistic that services will begin on 13 December; I suppose there is a small chance of early January if #1 and #2 above happen very quickly, but the earliest credible date range must be something such as "before 31 March 2027".

So theoretically, our social meeting planned for Saturday 12th could move to Sunday 13th, but this seems very unlikely.

Bletchley and Cambridge

I don't think there was any particular breaking news here. There is a pair of related topics – why the choice is for discontinuous electrification and the missing chord at Bletchley to go from East West Rail Beford direction to the West Coast Mainline northwards. The point was made that whilst there is capacity for one freight train per hour on EWR, capacity constraints to the east of EWR mean this is less likely to be used east of Bletchley – thus damaging the case for the chord, and whilst, it was not said, for continuous electrification.

That's not to say we should give up – but our campaign 'story' needs to look beyond EWR.

Hertfordshire County Council LTP Consultation

Responses for this are due by 23:45 on Monday, so before our Tuesday meeting.

With big thanks to Kevin Ambrose who gave me his thoughts, I have prepared a draft response. That is here (Word format). If you have suggested changes, can I have these by Monday 17:00. The LTP itself can be found here.

The actual response process is by online form, so some of my answers end up, in part, as a bit of a leap of imagination to map to the available boxes.

My main comments are in two parts:

1. That there should be recognition of, and a response to, the external changes occurring to the mainlines running through the County, including the diversion of services from the WCML and Universal and the expansion of both Luton and Gatwick airports.
2. That updating the Rail Strategy is an urgent task.

HERT – Hertfordshire Essex Rapid Transit

A HERT consultation is now underway – responses are due by 4th December. The consultation page is here.

I've yet to read the full document in depth, but the Abbey line remains and becomes part of HERT. The challenge, though, is that "Rapid Transport", and a 60 minute interval service is not really a compatible combination. So, our response will include a need to make the necessary infrastructure improvement to allow a 20/30 minute interval service earlier than currently suggested. We probably need to link it to HERT arriving for the St Albans to Hatfield corridor, so improving public transport as a viable choice for Watford – Hatfield.

I am planning that Tuesday's meeting will cover HERT under three broad headings:

1. Abbey line frequency improvement options
2. Is light rail as an option just a fantasy (remembering that there doesn't seem to be any credible option to fund it as a single whole – it is going to be many incremental improvements).
3. Generally.

Contactless fares

Together with Charlie King from Metro I caught up with TfL on Contactless last month. It was an interesting and wide ranging conversation. I think there were a couple of key messages:

1. That there are no immediate, nor funded plans, to put railcards on contactless.
2. TfL made the point that contactless can also been seen as the convenient option to pay – not necessarily the cheapest.
3. Current generation Oyster was reconfirmed as a legacy application – it won't get significant development. Some form of new generation application will replace it. A key question is what object might be used where any form of discount is given. Eg a Child Oyster currently has a photo to reduce fraudulent use risks – enabling a bank contactless card means no image and more fraud risk.

So, we have some interesting trade-offs:

1. Do we "like" TfL's current contactless because it is more universally available? (all you need is a Bank Card); or might we prefer a Smartphone based option (which can be linked to a national rail based application such as GTR's KeyGo and offer more fare options) – but requires a Smartphone.
2. If Contactless is for convenience, do we start campaigning for some old fares to reappear, such as weekend fares? – Previously, we hand in mind a sequence of TfL system extensions to support Contactless, then other changes, but it seems we can down play that sequence.
3. How do we deal with "simple" – TfL's two fares are simple, and we want more… I think the answer is look it from the passenger's choice, not just a simple count.

A topic for discussion at the meeting.

TfL & GN Inners

I caught up with Geoff Hobbs, TfL's Director of Public Transport Service Planning. He told me that the process for the transfer is making progress. There's been the Strategic Outline Business Case, there's been the main Outline Business Case presentation recently, with some queries being answered and next year there will be a Full Business Case prepared – at which point the decision will be taken.

Under the Starmer Government, my own feeling that GBR being a whole was a bigger priority than devolution; I think in the Burnham Government this has swapped, and devolving is the greater priority.

I think that for us, there are two live topics:

1. Seeing the ECML (and the Hertford Loop) managed as a whole on the day – ie cancellations, stopping services short, skip stop decisions etc. Geoff confirmed that this the planned choice. We need to monitor this and react as needed.
2. Possible increases on the ECML – do we want these to be Thameslink operated and go to St Pancras, Farringdon etc – or TfL operated – and go to Moorgate. Our last preference was for a Thameslink operated service, and we will need to continue to push for this.

Note: Services on the Hertford Loop increase to 4 trains per hour from 14 December.

Wixams / Universal station

I've discovered a couple of updates informally (but from reliable sources).

1. That there is likely to be more than one lift per platform – I see this as important, as the station will have a very unique profile – many more children in buggies, probably more wheelchair users in proportion (as the site will be accessible…)
2. That the need to turn trains around from the south is recognised, although there is no solution as yet.

We need to continue to monitor and press for both of these.

National AGM location

At the last Board meeting we were discussing options for the location of the 2027 National AGM. Should we pick a development with recent rail developments or one that is convenient for more members. For 2026, we managed the double – the expansion of local Trams, and a reasonably convenient location, by going to Birmingham. But when we don't get both, which gets priority?

Either drop me an email – or we will discuss it briefly at our November meeting.

Performance

Recent performance

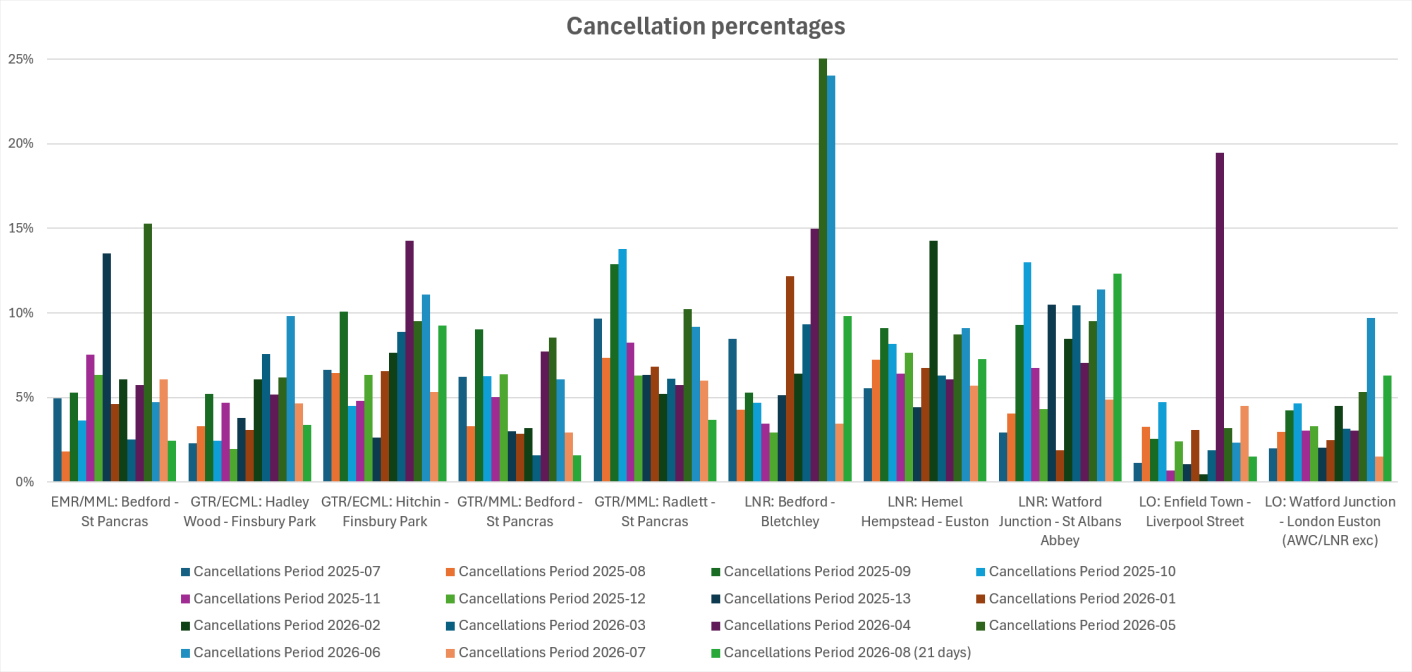
I have continued to collect the performance data for our main services via Recent Train Times. As previewed previously, I've excluded the Midland Mainline days badly impacted by the Elstow train crash.

I went to a GTR Workshop last week, which focused on performance. I'm yet to receive the slides, which has the detail I was going to set out, but here is my recollection of highlights:

1. Soil Moisture Deficit are the three words of the summer. This is where the soil under the track dries out, leaving to an uneven track, which in turn leads to imposition of speed restrictions. Problem areas mentioned were the Hertford Loop and Cambridge to Kings Lynn, but this is a GTR wide problem to a greater or lesser extent. Up to 60 consequential speed restrictions were mentioned. Most of these, including all with the severest impact, have now been resolved.
2. TOC caused cancellations due to driver shortages have reduced – about the only bright spot.
3. Trespass, including suicide attempts unfortunately continues to be a real problem for the railway.
4. Control staff have limited visibility of how busy services are – they can look at station CCTV to see how many are waiting, but do not have real time access to train loading data.

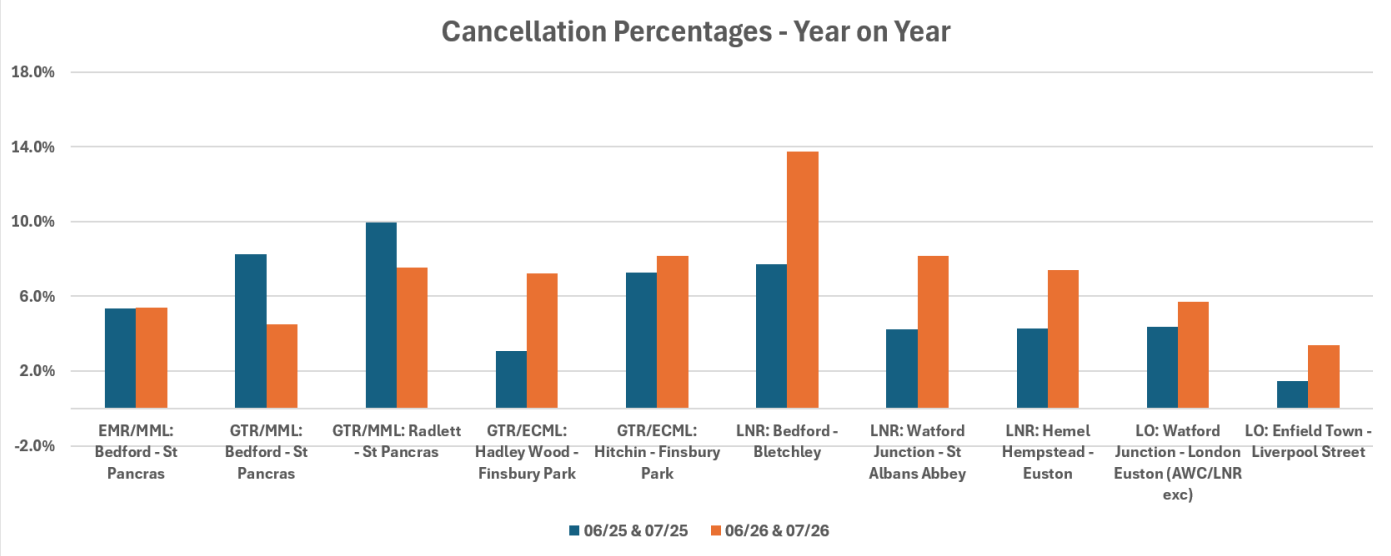
At our last meeting we concluded we should focus on service recovery – are the decisions taken to recover the service in the best interests of passengers – eg is the consequence of a skip stop small (another service is imminent) or not.

Cancellations over time



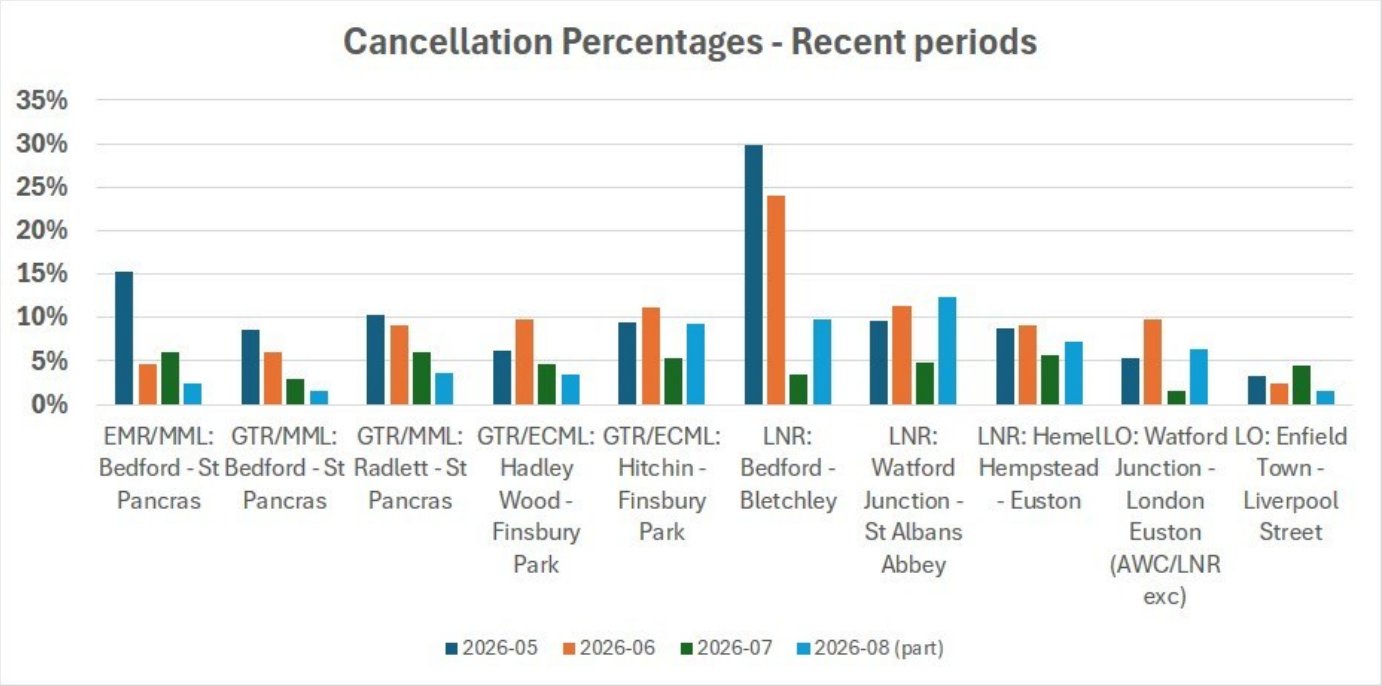
This graph is also available in landscape at the end of the newsletter.

Cancellations year on year



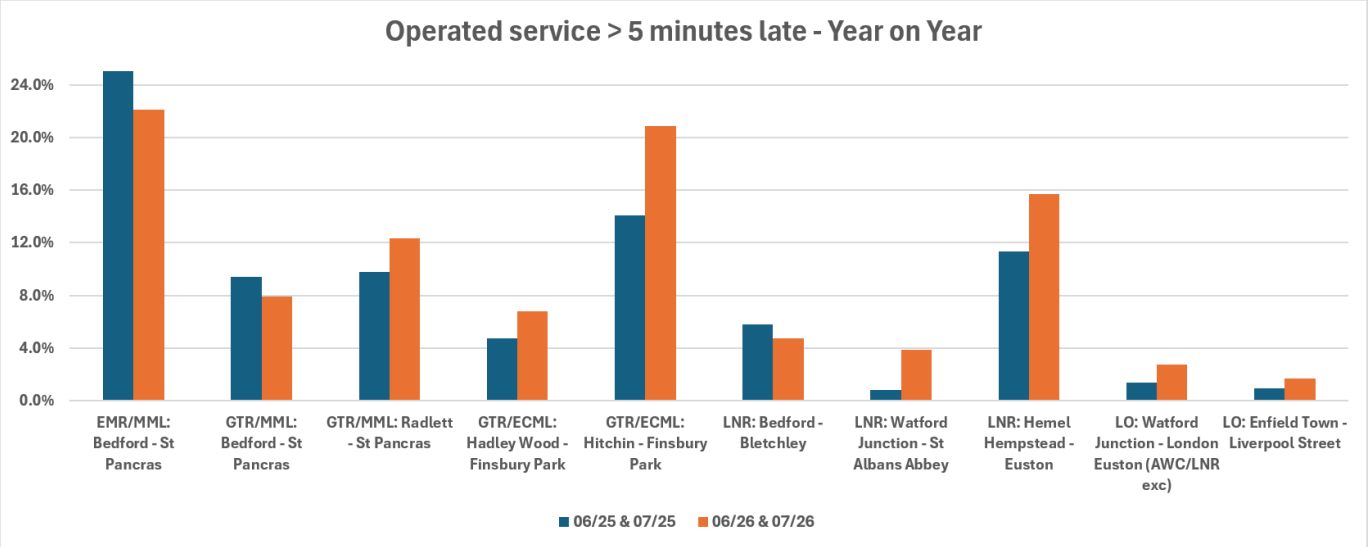
Cancellations – Recent months

This is new this month, and does, broadly support GTR's view that there is an improvement in performance.

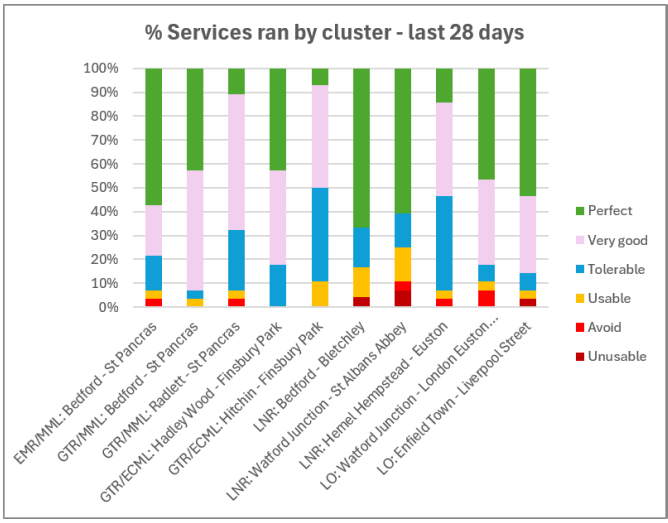


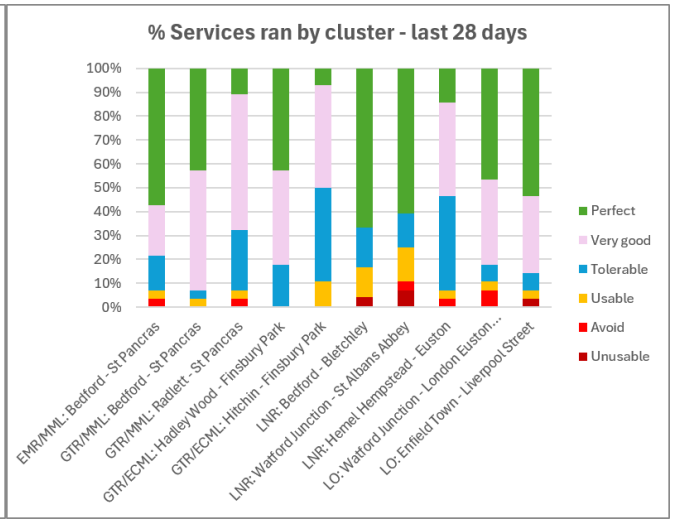
Operated but late

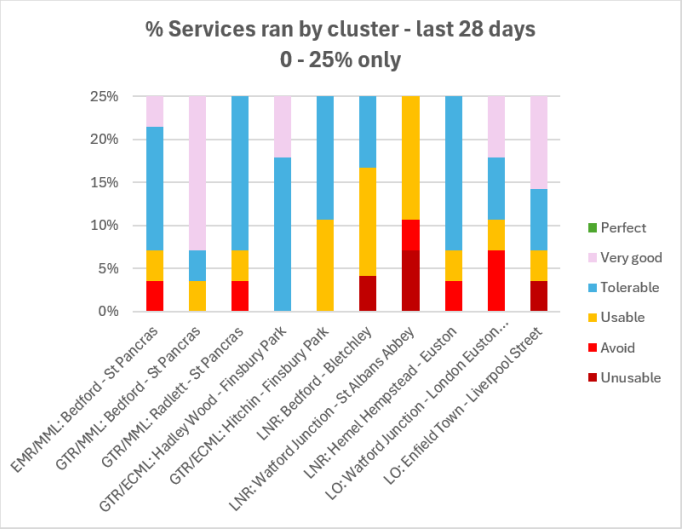
This is new last month



Spread of cancellations







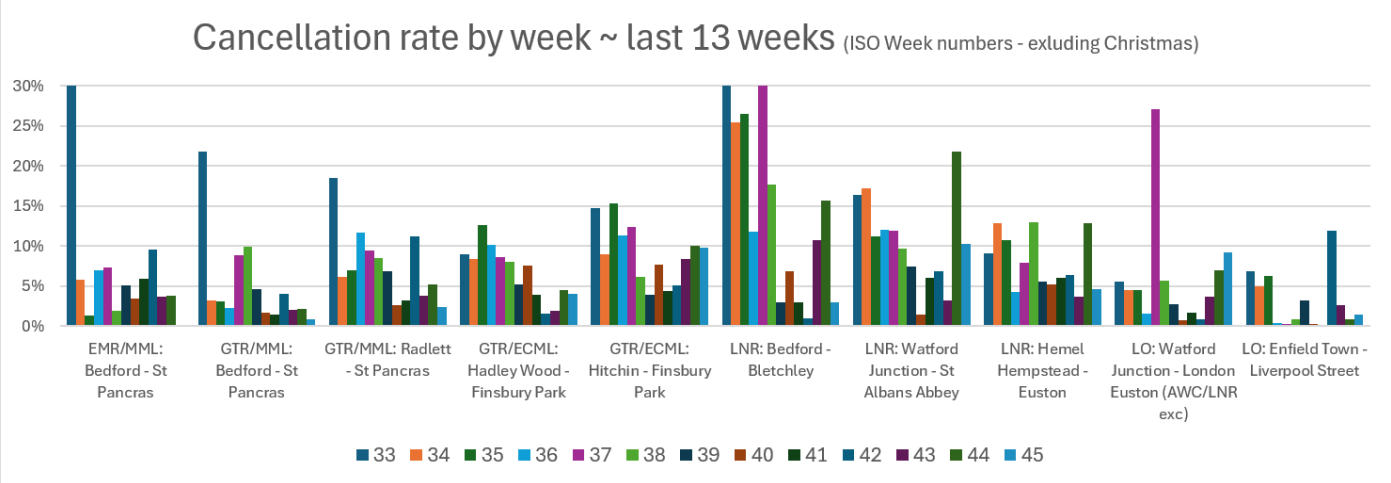
Definitions

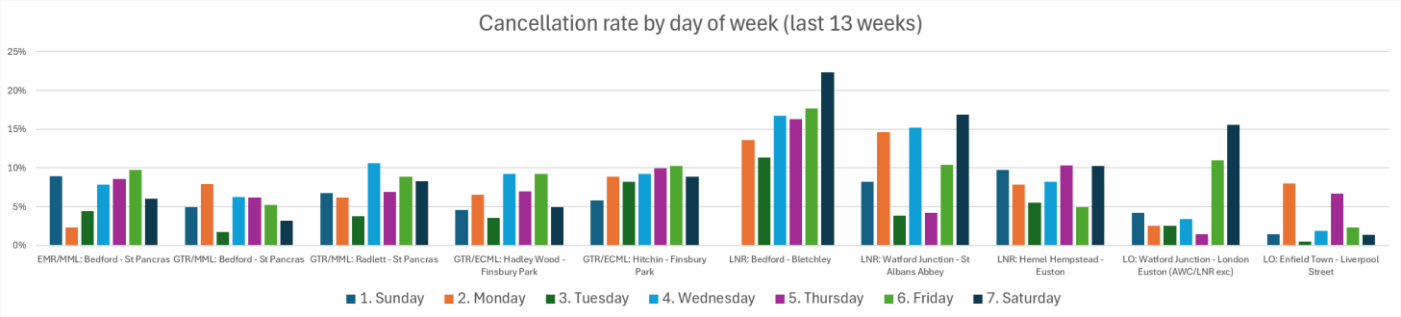
38%	Unusable
50%	Avoid
70%	Usable
85%	Tolerable
95%	Very good
100%	Perfect

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





Local Campaigning priorities

The list of campaigning priorities was updated in August; it will next be updated around the end of the year.

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2. You have previously attended one of our meetings (or actively declined a previous invite) and I believe you have given us clear permission to keep you updated about future meetings.
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Stay Safe.

Neil

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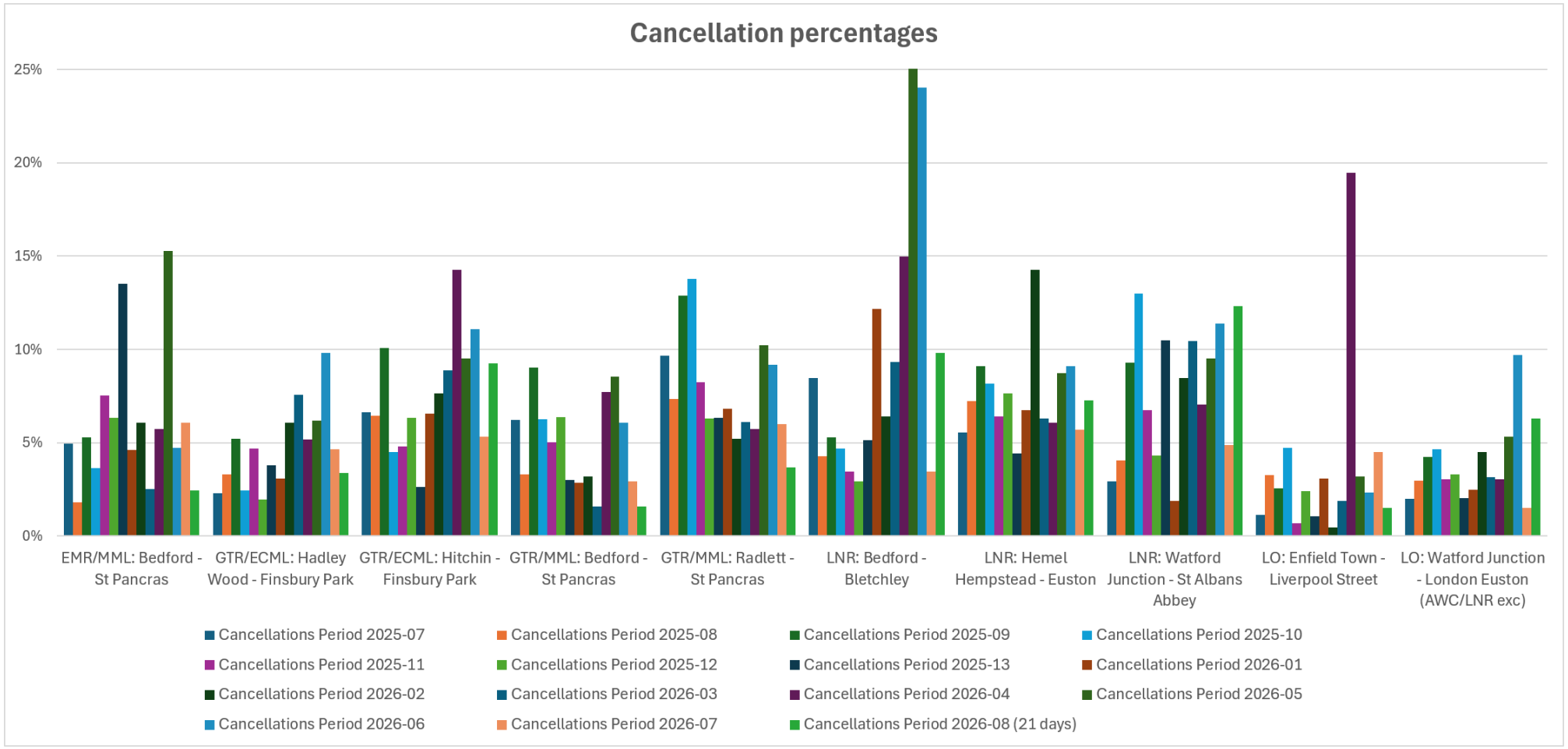
Cancellation percentages
25%
20%
15%
10%
5%
0%
EMR/MML: Bedford - St Pancras
GTR/ECML: Hadley Wood - Finsbury Park
GTR/ECML: Hitchin - Finsbury Park
GTR/MML: Bedford - St Pancras
GTR/MML: Radlett - St Pancras
LNR: Bedford - Bletchley
LNR: Hemel Hempstead - Euston
LNR: Watford Junction - St Albans Abbey
LO: Enfield Town - Liverpool Street
LO: Watford Junction - London Euston (AWC/LNR exc)
Cancellations Period 2025-07
Cancellations Period 2025-08
Cancellations Period 2025-09
Cancellations Period 2025-10
Cancellations Period 2025-11
Cancellations Period 2025-12
Cancellations Period 2025-13
Cancellations Period 2026-01
Cancellations Period 2026-02
Cancellations Period 2026-03
Cancellations Period 2026-04
Cancellations Period 2026-05
Cancellations Period 2026-06
Cancellations Period 2026-07
Cancellations Period 2026-08 (21 days)