



Department  
for Transport

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From the Minister of State  
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Dear Councillor Fitzsimons

Thank you for your letter of 4 July, about the introduction of the May 2018 timetable by Govia Thameslink Railway (GTR) and its impact on services to and from Croydon stations and on passengers and the local economy.

I am grateful for you taking the time to share Croydon Council's views on the introduction of the May 2018 timetable and I fully appreciate that passengers travelling from Croydon stations expect a regular and reliable train service. I was particularly concerned to read of the impact the recent timetable disruption has had on disabled passengers.

Over the past weeks, passengers on GTR's Thameslink services have faced unsatisfactory levels of service, and I can only imagine the frustration that they have felt over the unacceptable service.

I would like to assure you that right now, the Department's overriding priority is to ensure GTR restores the reliability of service across the network. We are taking action to resolve the problems as quickly as possible, to ensure passengers are compensated appropriately, and to learn the lessons that will prevent this happening again in the future.

I note the Council's agreement that the timetable changes were needed, and I am frustrated that what should have been a beneficial development for passengers, with the introduction of new services, new routes and expanded capacity, has had such a poor start.

I also note the Council's disappointment over GTR's failure to attend the Council Sub-Committee when requested. The Department does expect GTR to manage its stakeholders fairly and effectively and I would like to assure you that Department officials have raised this issue directly with GTR.

This has been the most significant timetable recast in a generation – designing a robust, well-integrated timetable that works for the majority of passengers is highly complex and timetabling practitioners have worked hard for more than a year on the challenges involved.

While we were aware that there may be some disruption in the early days of any new timetable change of this size, the scale of the problem has far outstripped any expectation. The Department is determined that this is not repeated in the future.

Network Rail was far too late in finalising planned timetable changes and this must not happen again. GTR was not sufficiently prepared to manage a timetable change of this scale either. The rail industry has collectively failed to deliver for the passengers it serves.

The process of introducing the new timetable was overseen for the last two years by an Industry Readiness Board, made up of Network Rail, independent rail regulator the Office of Rail and Road (ORR) and the train operating companies and an Independent Assurance Panel. Both of these groups have told the Secretary of State that they had been given no information to suggest that the new timetable should not be implemented as planned – albeit with some likely early issues as the timetable bedded down. Indeed as few as three weeks before the timetable was to be implemented GTR itself assured the Secretary of State personally that it was ready to implement the changes.

Although there is still a considerable way to go, passengers have begun to see reliable and stable services since the introduction of the interim timetable on 15 July. Performance has significantly improved as compared to weeks following 20 May, however the Department is monitoring closely for sustained improvements by GTR and will be holding it to account. We will not hesitate to take action if the operator is found to have been at fault.

An inquiry by the ORR into the May timetable implementation is now underway. The inquiry will consider why the industry as a whole failed to produce and implement an effective timetable. Its findings will be shared as early as possible with me and the rail industry, so that lessons can be learnt in advance of future major timetable change.

Further, in regard to your point on GTR continuing as the operator and cooperating with scrutiny reviews, you may be interested to know that a comprehensive investigation is underway into GTR's compliance with its contractual obligations in relation to the introduction of the May 2018 timetable. If it is found that GTR is in breach of its contract we will take appropriate action.

I am pleased that a special compensation scheme for Thameslink passengers has been announced. The scheme has been designed to refund season ticket holders up to one month where they have suffered severe disruption and up to one week where disruption to services has been moderate.

Compensation will cover the period 20 May 2018 to 28 July 2018. The scheme is opening in three phases and Phase 1 is now open, with GTR contacting registered qualifying passengers, before a web portal is opened for Phase 2 by the end of September. Phase 3, for eligible non-season ticket holders, will begin at a later date, to be announced by GTR.

Full details of eligible stations and more information can be found on the Thameslink<sup>1</sup> website. GTR has been asked to clearly communicate with passengers how it can make their claim and ensure the process is straightforward. Passengers are also encouraged to apply to GTR for Delay Repay compensation for affected journeys.

We acknowledge that this is small comfort to passengers when things are not working as they should, but once we are through this difficult and challenging period, I am confident that we will have a better railway, fit for the future. In the meantime, please be assured that I will continue to do everything possible to ensure passengers get the service they deserve.

Thank you again for your letter and for raising the Council's concerns. I hope this reply is helpful.

*Yours,  
Jo*

**JO JOHNSON**

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.thameslinkrailway.com/industrycomp/>

