

Scrutiny Streets, Environment & Homes Sub-Committee

Meeting of held on Tuesday, 26 June 2018 at 6.30 pm in Council Chamber, Town Hall,
Katharine Street, Croydon CR0 1NX

MINUTES

Present: Councillor Sean Fitzsimons (Chair);
Councillor Jan Buttinger (Vice-Chair);
Councillors Robert Canning, Luke Clancy, Felicity Flynn and Callton Young

Also Present: Councillor Stuart Kin, Cabinet Member for Environment, Transport and
Regeneration (Jobshare)
Dan Athoil Head of Thameslink Readiness, Thameslink
Sam Cullen Public Affairs Manager, Thameslink
Jon Ruch Senior Programme Manager, Thameslink
Richard Lancaster, Project Manager
Charles King Chair, East Surrey Transport Committee
Alan Hannaford, London Reconnections
Tim Bellenger Director of Policy & Investigation, London Travel Watch

Apologies: Councillor Richard Chatterjee

PART A

21/18 Minutes of the Previous Meeting

The minutes of the meeting held on 20 March 2018 were agreed as an accurate record.

22/18 Disclosure of Interests

There were none.

23/18 Urgent Business (if any)

There were no items of urgent business.

24/18 New Rail Timetable

The Chair welcomed all Members and invited guests to the meeting for a discussion on the impact of the changes made to the rail timetables upon the residents and businesses of Croydon as well as the wider community.

The Chair informed the Sub-Committee that Govia Thameslink Railway (GTR) had given their apologies for non-attendance at the meeting as they did not feel it appropriate to attend due to pending enquiries by the Office of Road and Rail as well as the Transport Select Committee.

The Chair expressed his disappointment on behalf of the Sub-Committee that GTR declined to attend the meeting to answer its questions. Although they were not legally compelled to attend, it was felt that the opportunity to explain what had happened and provide reassurance of future improvements should have been taken. This meeting was an opportunity gain an understanding of what went wrong, the impact to Croydon residents, the economic community and the recovery process.

Officers from Network Rail were in attendance and provided a presentation to the Sub-Committee on their current position following the implementation of the new rail timetable. The issues faced and the service recovery plan following the problems that had arisen which impacted negatively on people's lives.

The Sub-Committee was informed that there were a number of issues that contributed towards the disruption experienced, the main being driver availability. Drivers were not always at the station they needed to be at the appropriate time which resulted in train cancellations.

As part of the recovery programme, in the first couple of weeks following the introduction of the timetable, Network Rail worked with GTR on services that had available drivers to ensure they ran smoothly. Following on from that the current focus was to try to stabilise services that had experienced regular cancellations.

Councillor Callton Young arrived at 18:50pm

Work was currently being undertaken on a revised, consistent timetable which would limit disruption for peak services.

Tim Bellenger from London Travel Watch advised that his organisation had been involved with Thameslink and GTR since the public consultation and confirmed that the delivery of the timetable had been discussed including the challenges anticipated.

The relationship between the operator and Network Rail had been witnessed and there has been discussions around rethinking how the timetables should work, which was not limited to just changing the times but the whole process involved. It was identified that driver training, infrastructure and communication between other operators was vital to the successful implementation of the timetables.

Councillor Luke Clancy arrived at 18:55

The Sub-Committee was further informed that proper consideration had not been given to the number of fully trained drivers needed for the new routes. This failure arose from complicated plans for driver changes with many not confident on the new routes which meant they needed to be accompanied by a senior member of staff.

Councillor Stuart King arrived at 19:01

The Chair queried whether the operators knew they had sufficient trained drivers for each route. Officers responded that through the insurance process details were made available. The Assurance Panel reviewed and challenged the information provided. It was felt that the failsafe measures that should have been built in as part of the independent assurance process was not appropriately embedded.

Alan Hannaford commented that GTR should have built work rota's alongside the new timetables, as it would have been difficult to ascertain how many drivers was required, especially if they received the timetables late. It was also felt that GTR was too optimistic and unprepared for failures.

A Member questioned who held responsibility for bringing forward the challenge on the amount of trained drivers required to successfully roll out the changes. The Sub-Committee was informed that the Department of Transport had a role as each franchisee should have brought forward details of their plans.

When GTR examined franchise data and found that there was 66 less drivers than anticipated, this was due to the operators not putting correct information in the plans submitted. It was the responsibility of the Department of Transport to check and monitor franchises and this was not completed satisfactorily.

Tim Bellenger advised the Sub-Committee that several recommendations had been made to the Transport Committee which included comment on the lack of appropriate infrastructure and that the December timetable change should be pushed back 3 or 4 weeks to avoid the busiest period of train use.

There were two dates in the year when changes were made to the timetables. It was mandated by the European Union for all changes to occur on a particular date. This was due to the complexity of the networks and interrelationship between operators in order to not have an adverse effect on each other.

Councillor Felicity Flynn arrived at 19:18

It was acknowledged that although the changes to the timetable had been implemented poorly, and passengers had suffered, there had also been some notable successes. The London Overground service had continued to improve on performance and the South-Eastern service has also had good performances. Some parts of the Southern Metro service had also been successful and when the Southern service ran, it performed very well. It was

also acknowledged that it would take a few months for any changes made to timetables to become fully embedded

Charles King from the East Surrey Transport Committee stated that he had sat on the implementation group with many operators. They were reassured that there would be enough drivers, but there had been significant disruption to vital Croydon services including the Coulsdon South station with many trains cancelled, sometimes with no trains in a two hour period. The evening and Sunday services had also been badly affected with up to 80% of services affected at some stations. The last train to some stations often did not run and this impacted upon people who worked late evenings.

It was further commented that the changes made to the arrival platforms of some trains at West Croydon station had a negative impact on passengers with disabilities and the elderly who were unable to reach the other platform to transfer to the Overground train on time. It was difficult to understand why this change has been made when the previous system had been in place for over three years and worked effectively.

Croydon's Transport Project Manager stated that complaints had been received by the Council about the changes and they were keen to get an answer. The view from the local business community was that although the timetable had been welcomed and seen a positive change, the implementation had been extremely poor. The Croydon Business Network commented that trains were consistently cancelled or late and there had been a lack of communication when needed. Long term poor service had a detrimental effect on businesses in terms of recruitment and retention. All of which made attracting businesses to Croydon more difficult.

Councillor Stuart King, Cabinet Member for Environment, Transport and Regeneration (Job share) commented that a quality impact assessment was required at West Croydon station due to the detrimental impact changes had on residents and businesses.

In response to a Member question on the appropriateness of announcements which state that there was a lack of drivers when it should be that there was a lack of trained drivers, Network Rail stated that this was a question for GTR. It was however difficult to convey fully the causes for a disruption over tannoy announcements.

A Member commented that the information board that advertises train arrival times were often unreliable and incorrect. Network Rail said that they had been supporting GTR with improvements in this area and new system integration would result in reduced last minute changes which would be reflected in the information advertised on the boards.

In response to a Member comment that the most common reason given for train cancellation seemed to be due to a fault on the train and as such why this had not been addressed, officers stated that there has been issues with train functionality but many were now running well with fewer faults.

A Member queried the reason why changes were introduced during school term time. Officers advised that time table changes had historically occurred in May and December. Changes can be made outside of this time but the timing had to be a national decision.

The Chair commented that a number of factors led to the issues faced by the rail company and it would appear that people in the industry had raised concerns and received reassured many times. If it had been highlighted that there were flaws in the plans, would the plans have been reviewed or the implementation stopped or delayed?

Officers responded that the system operator was currently looking at its decision points and whether the plans could or should have been stopped at any time. Charles King commented that operators should have realised there were issues and should have reacted to the warning signs accordingly.

Tim Bellenger observed that there were financial consequences for franchisees. There would have been conflicts between departments which resulted in financial implications for franchisees, these conflicts would have led to the temptation to carry on with the plans regardless of warnings of impending issues.

Councillor Luke Clancy left at 19:57

A Member stated that a project of this magnitude would have had comprehensive risk register which would have been reported through governance in front of an independent panel. As such it was difficult to understand how the risks involved were not highlighted and if highlighted, appropriate measures were not put in place to minimise the impact of disruption to the service.

In response to a Member comment on what consideration had been given to the cancellations at Waddon station which caused great inconvenience to residents, officers responded that they were working with GTR to monitor services in an effort to ensure that consecutive trains were not cancelled.

A Member commented that interaction with customer service at many main line stations was poor. There were particular issues faced by people with disabilities who found it especially difficult with a lack of specific places for them to convene in order to be able to access trains when they became available following multiple cancellations. It was suggested that opening up the platforms would ease congestion on the train concourse. The attitude towards the needs of people with a disability was very poor and a cultural shift was needed. Officers responded that this would be discussed with station directors at mainline stations.

A Member commented that the GTR website stated that they were working on a compensation package but it was unclear what this would involve. Council

officers were asked to look into a case for compensation for the effects of economic activity on the town.

The Chair thanked all officers and representatives for attending the meeting to discuss the issues presented by the timetable changes.

In reaching its recommendations, the Sub-Committee came to the following **Conclusions:**

1. The introduction of one of the biggest timetable change on 20 May 2018 in line with the expansion of the Thameslink network has proven to be a disaster, with major disruption to the level of service experienced by the passengers of Thameslink and Southern. It was also having a detrimental impact on businesses in Croydon and along the route.
2. The intention behind the changes to the timetable were needed and would have been welcomed had the delivery been successful. However the scale of implementation was compounded by many factors which resulted in catastrophe and chaos to the network.
3. Whilst Network Rail had responded to the request by the Sub-Committee to attend the meeting to be held accountable for actions, it was noticeably disappointing that the main operator Govia Thameslink Railway declined to attend to answer fundamental questions on the impact this was having on residents and businesses in our town who rely on their services. The reason given by GTR, that they couldn't attend whilst a review was being undertaken, was not accepted as GTR had attended a London Assembly Scrutiny meeting the previous day.
4. On hearing the evidence it was concerning that the GTR did not react appropriately despite the assurance process which would have flagged up issues and challenges, such as trained driver availability. Instead the implementation of the timetable went ahead with what can only be described as with an optimistic view of successful delivery and minimal disruption which has not been the case.
5. It was clear that the Rail Industry-wide assurance process, including the Department of Transport, also failed. There was no evidence to show that other major industry players made any real attempt to rein in GTR gung-ho attitude towards its implementation plans.
6. Throughout the process there have been issues with the level of communication with passengers. It was vital that any details of changes to service are passed onto customers at the earliest possible opportunity in order to allow for passengers to make alternative arrangements.
7. There are significant changes which affect the borough of Croydon specifically which include:
 - a. There were as many Southern cancellations as Thameslink especially in late evening and on Sundays.
 - b. The greatest number of Thameslink cancellations were on the Horsham to Peterborough service which disproportionately effects East Croydon and Coulsdon South
 - c. On the Redhill Corridor there were often 2 hour gaps between consecutive trains on both Southern and Thameslink services at Coulsdon South and no alternative service was provided.

d. At West Croydon the Overground trains now terminated at platform 1 rather than platform 4. This had ruined the same platform interchange for onwards connections to Waddon and Sutton. This also meant Overground passengers could no longer use the step free access on platform 4 and now had to use the steps and ramp or side gate via the car park. This was a particular difficulty for those with mobility difficulties and wheelchair users who now had to use the gate to the car park, London and Stations Road to make the interchange and this could not be done within the 6 minutes allowed for the next train.

e. The 09.42 and 10.12 Coulsdon Town all stations to London Bridge service were taken out of the final timetable without any notification. This had created a 90 minute gap in the all stations service which affected all the following stations Coulsdon Town, Reedham, Purley. Purley Oaks, South Croydon, East Croydon and Norwood Junction. This also affected the ability to transfer to the Overground at Norwood Junction from East Croydon.

f. The change in timetable had meant that from many stations in Croydon you could no longer obtain an off-peak travelcard, off-peak Oyster fare or use your Freedom Pass at 09.30 and in some cases not until almost 10.00am. GTR should work with TfL and London Councils to reintroduce easements at those stations where the first off peak train was after 9.40 to allow off-peak fares on the preceding train to 09.30.

g. Ticket Vending Machines have had the One day London Bus and Tram pass removed as options. As the tram was about to go cashless, the reinstatement of this facility was important

8. Many disabled passengers had been left severely affected by the knock on effects of cancellation, with station concourses extremely busy with commuters. When the platforms were open there was a surge for trains which meant they could not always compete with other commuters to get to their train.

9. In the initial aftermath of the timetable fiasco there have been some notable improvements. The fundamental changes to the timetable itself were not the issue, rather the delivery itself that had caused fundamental problems.

10. The Committee received correspondence from all three local MPs, which show the importance of this issue to Croydon residents. Their evidence demonstrated the impact the changes were having on individuals and business.

11. Taking all the above into context, the Committee questioned whether it was right for GTR to continue to act as the operator of the Thameslink and Southern Franchises.

The Committee **RESOLVED** to recommend to GTR that

1. They apologise to the people and business of Croydon for the disruption they caused through a timetable change, which they failed to deliver, and that they should provide generous compensation for passengers.

2. Information on timetables changes be communicated to passengers more effectively and with as much advance notice as possible.

3. That passengers with disabilities were being particularly disadvantaged by the breakdown in the delivery of rail services, and they should rethink their approach to ensure additional resources were directed to resolving this issue.
4. Cancellations of late evening and Sunday services should be minimal, and in particular GTR should not be cutting the last train services which had the biggest impact on passengers getting home at night.
5. A robust programme of rebuilding of trust between the operators and passengers should be devised.
6. Consideration needed to be given to the reinstatement of the 9:42 and 10:12 Coulsdon Town to London Bridge which were vital trains for commuters.
7. Consideration also needed to be given to the reinstatement of facilities such as the bus and tram pass on vending machines.
8. To make a commitment in support of public scrutiny of their performance by local authority scrutiny committees.

The Committee **RESOLVED** to recommend to Network Rail that

- i. To thank them for their attendance and the openness of their responses
- ii. Where Network Rail was responsible, information on timetables changes should be communicated to passengers more effectively and with as much advance notice as possible.
- iii. Should review its own internal assurance processes in regards rail operators proposed timetable changes, and consider whether it needed to take a stronger public stance when it had concerns about the deliverability of those timetable changes.
- iv. The facilities for disabled passengers at all stations, but in particular at mainline stations where passengers had to wait, needed to be revised to ensure that their needs were taken into consideration, especially at times of service disruption.
- v. They take into consideration Croydon's population increase and economic expansion as important factors to be considered when planning changes.

The Committee **RESOLVED** to recommend to Department of Transport that

- i. They consider whether GTR should continue as the operator for the Thameslink and Southern franchises.
- ii. To explain its own role in why it allowed GTR to press ahead with a major time-table change when GTR didn't have the resources in place on the day of implementation, and which others had flagged up earlier as a cause for concern.
- iii. It should make it a legal requirement for rail operators to co-operate fully with local government scrutiny reviews of local rail services, as recently confirmed by the House of Commons Communities & Local Government Select Committee 2017 "Recommendation 6: Scrutiny committees must be able to monitor and scrutinise the services provided to residents. This includes services provided by public bodies and those provided by commercial organisations. Committees should be able to access information and require attendance at meetings from service providers and we call on DCLG to take steps to ensure this happens (Paragraph 90)"

The Committee **RESOLVED** to recommend to Croydon Council that

- i. Officers explore a case for compensation to the borough due to the effects this has had on economic activity.

The Committee **RESOLVED** to recommend to Office of the Rail Regulator that

- i. To copy all the above recommendation to them
- ii. To flag up the Committee's concerns about the industry-wide assurance process for time-table changes, and whether the system was robust enough to ensure that operators have the correct resources in place to deliver the changes from day one.
- iii. It reviews its stance on local government scrutiny of rail operators as local accountability of public services is a fundamental role of local government, as recently confirmed by the House of Commons Communities & Local Government Select Committee 2017 "Recommendation 6: Scrutiny committees must be able to monitor and scrutinise the services provided to residents. This includes services provided by public bodies and those provided by commercial organisations. Committees should be able to access information and require attendance at meetings from service providers and we call on DCLG to take steps to ensure this happens (Paragraph 90)".

The Committee also **resolved** that these conclusions and recommendation should be copied to the three local MPs

25/18 Exclusion of the Press and Public

This was not required

The meeting ended at 8.36 pm

Signed:

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Date:

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