Written evidence submitted by Joel Alexander RTC0017

For the last two years I have commuted for work from Stratford in East London up to Luton Airport Parkway using the London Overground to West Hampstead then Thameslink up to Parkway.

Since the introduction of the May 20th timetable my commute has become harder and more stressful through constantly canceled trains, lack of information and no sign of improvement from the railway.

Prior to the May 20th Timetable I had several trains an hour, usually heading up between 7:30 and 8am usually getting me into work for around 8:30am, these trains were generally fast stopping at St Albans and Harpenden only and for the most part not busy vs the trains in the opposite direction. Same could be said for my return journey using a train between 17:30 and 18:00 again these trains were not too busy and only had a few stops in-between – usual journey time about 20/25 mins.

This has now changed I usually aim for the 0752 which has run 44% of the time in the last 12 weeks of which 21% ran on time – this journey also takes about 37 minutes. I often have to get the 0807 (again a slow train) which means I get into work about 0905, if I get this train I often have to pay out of pocket to get a taxi up to work so I make it on time.

Return journeys are the same with a reduction in fast services, I aim for the 1749 service which in the last 12 weeks ran 39% of the time with 26% on time, this particular service also has a habit of showing its running, then moving to delayed 1 minute/2 minutes/3 minutes then goes to just ‘Delayed’ then it goes from the boards. This happens quite often at the moment and this lack of information is not good enough, surely they have an idea it is not going to run – and if that’s the case let people know as I would stay in work and make up lost time.

More often than not due to these delays people are having to stand on services that were previously quiet adding to an already unpleasant journey, this is partly caused by use of short formation trains. This is made more frustrating by the fact that when I pass the Cricklewood depot there are usually several 12 coach trains parked up.

One such incident happened a last week where the platform at Luton was packed with people visiting on holiday, in very hot weather the 1749 went then the following 1805 went too meaning the next train was about 1830, they then changed platform so many people had to run over the bridge with suitcases to try and catch the train.

I find the lack of information at Luton Parkway shocking to say it’s an airport station with people coming to visit on holiday and this is their first impression. Nearly every day one of the escalators here is out of service or there are problems with the lifts. There is never anyone giving information out on the platform instead you will often find about five members of staff in at the ticket barriers happy to take money off unwitting tourists who through they could use Oyster on the service. I have found some of the staff to be helpful but there is not proactivity in manning the platforms and providing information – I am assuming half the time they don’t know what is going on themselves.
Thameslink keep saying to check the app for updated journey planners – but half of the time this is pointless as trains showing as running on here are prone to cancelation and delay even within minutes of arrival.

I have found in the past that when there has been an issue on an underground service I get an email with an apology and stating what went wrong. Since the disruption started on Thameslink I had one email telling me how to use delay repay, since then nothing about how they are working to improve the service and what is going to change. On the note of delay repay £1.90 from a £3.5k season ticket is a bit of a slap in the face, to claim you must fill out all of your details every time which is frustrating. There is also the ‘enhanced compensation’ which requires filling out a document by hand and posting out to them, the reward for which is a return ticket anywhere on their broken network.

The interim timetable proposed for the 15th of July does not fill me with confidence, it also appears irrational with a return service for me 1730 or 1735 then nothing until 1800 and 1805 – why have nothing for half an hour then two within five minutes. In the morning I am now left with an option of the 0737 which would mean leaving earlier or the 0807, both of which are slow trains – total deterioration of what was offered before the May timetable. All of that on the pretense that this new timetable actually works.

Train Stats from https://www.onitimetrains.co.uk/ if you need further horror stories I would suggest looking at the Thameslink Twitter page.

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