Written evidence submitted by Geoff Robinson (RTC0040)

I am writing to give my experiences of the timetable changes from May 2018 on the GTR network. This was handled badly in many ways.

In summary
- GTR did not listen to any of the responses from the consultation
- GTR are operating less trains from Welwyn Garden City Monday – Friday than during the previous timetable, with a longer end to end time making the journey extremely unpleasant,
- The weekend service frequency is the worse since privatisation, coupled with the fact it is unreliable because of cancelations – in effect it is unusable with no date from GTR about when this is likely to improve
- GTRs information to passengers is poor, often conflicting and normally information that they have known about in advance isn’t passed on to passengers.
- GTR refuse to admit that they have played any part in these problems, nor provide any timeline for when we are likely to get back to the levels of service on the previous timetable (yet alone the new one)
- You can even today no long plan your journey, although with the exception of weekends it is better than before the 15th July it is still unpredictable and if anything goes wrong it collapses rapidly.

1. Consultations.
GTRs consultation of the users for the services was really just a box ticking exercise. They never actually took into consideration any of the feedback that was given to them and had already made up their mind of what was going to happen.
2 examples, the loss of direct services to Peterborough from stations south of Peterborough, with and extremely poor connection as a replacement and the increase in time of journeys from many stations to London. Welwyn Garden City has seen many trains increase from a duration of 20 minutes to over 30 minutes. GTR claim that the consultation gave a natural response to these changes, but the survey covered the entire franchise so this is expected. I did the survey myself and was getting asked to comment on services that I didn’t use. A Not applicable option was not included, you can’t say if you are for / against a change that doesn’t impact you. Therefore by the way GTR designed the survey they got right to do whatever they wanted without considering the users views – totally unacceptable.

2. Timetables
Since the change of the timetable, my journey to / from work has needed to increase by about 1 hour. I used to get the 0824 WGC – London KX service. A combination of the slowing down of the service and the unpredictability of the route. You now need to leave 2 trains ahead of the one you should get because of cancellations. This has put me on the 0722 service. Even with the latest revision of the timetable my local station Welwyn Garden City has less trains then before the change. The weekend service is unusable. It is at half the level of the previous timetable with multiple cancellations. You can often have over 3 hour gaps in the
service between Welwyn Garden City and Kings Cross. GTR will not provide any dates when this is likely to improved.

3. GTR communications.
It is a pity that GTR are showing no remorse for this. Charles Horton lied on national press on Monday 21st May when he claimed that these were teething problems that would take a couple of weeks to iron out. They have also said that we should lower our expectations and that such a big timetable change was never going to work day 1. As yet we have received no apology from GTR, they are looking to deflect the blame to Network Rail. Although considering we are now in July even if Network Rail had done their part on time, they still would not have being able to operate the timetable as they chose not to train the drivers quickly enough. All correspondence from GTR uses the language that the “rail industry” is at fault implying they play no part in this. They refuse to compensate people that travel 4/5 days per week with only season ticket holders covered. If any cancellation is down to another factor they are quick to highlight this but never admit their own failures. Their apology is only because the department of transport have forced them to do so, but they don’t give the impression of an organisation that is actually either sorry or trying to fix this.

GTR tell passengers to check before travelling.
I have sat on trains at Kings Cross where they hare cancelled 10 minutes after they are supposed to depart because the driver is in another part of the UK. One example – I was on the 1151 London KX – Cambridge, cancelled at 1210 (No driver) but passengers should stay on the train as it will now form the 1221 London KX – Cambridge. This was cancelled at 1215 (no driver) but the train would form the 1251 London KX – Cambridge (which it did). It is impossible to plan when things change when you are on the train. You can’t even plan alternative routes as the information is delivered so late. We still today have conflicts between monitors and platform staff. On Wednesday 25th July, the 0802 Welwyn Garden City – London Kings Cross was showing on the monitors as on time, but it was actually cancelled with platform staff directing passengers to other services. This kind of conflict of information simply should not happen, which reinforces passenger’s opinion the GTR simply don’t care.

GTR have a policy of skipping stations when a train is slightly late causing a large gap in service. What is even more frustrating is that in many instances the train doesn’t actually gain any of the lost time. Skip stopping should be banned if the next train is more than half an hour behind.

Many instances where a train is simply shown as “Delayed” although either the drive / rolling stock are not in place so it is actually cancelled.

I hope lessons can be learnt from this and key senior management in GTR are held accountable.

July 2018