Written evidence submitted by the Harpenden Thameslink Commuters’ Group (RTC0047)

August 2018

Executive Summary

1. Harpenden Thameslink Commuters’ Group was created in March 2018 in response to the then forthcoming changes to rail services to/from Harpenden being proposed in the May 2018 timetable. It has over 2,000 members in the short time it was formed.

2. The UK taxpayer spent £8 billion on the Thameslink Programme. Commuters in Harpenden experienced significant disruption during the works with the promise of improved services when the work was complete in 2018. The decision by Department of Transport (DFT) and GTR with respect to the May 2018 timetable has not only removed from Harpenden the benefits which should have been delivered by the Programme, but materially reduced key services compared to those operating prior to the timetable change.

3. The key points we address are:

   • Harpenden is a commuter town in Hertfordshire, with a high proportion of the population working in London and having no (credible) alternative to using Thameslink’s services to commute. On the train line it sits between Luton and St Albans.

   • The May 2018 timetable (if implemented in full) would have seen key services to Harpenden reduced by one third. The failure of GTR to deliver the full May 2018 timetable, means that currently actual service reductions are significantly greater than this benchmark at peak. Whilst cuts in key services are most keenly felt, the broader services outside of commuting have also suffered significant degradation. On Saturdays services have been cut by 75% versus the pre-May timetable (2 trains an hour from 8) – with direct services to many stations removed altogether.

   • The immediate cause of the intended cuts as contained in the May 2018 timetable at Harpenden was the introduction of “Thameslink Express” services which stop only at Bedford, Luton, St. Albans and London stations. These were introduced to mitigate complaints of Bedford commuters when EMT services were stopped from calling at Bedford during peak. There is no evidence that the consequential impact on Harpenden, Luton Airport Parkway, Leagrave, Harlington or Flitwick of removing stops was considered.

   • At the same time as Harpenden services were reduced, service levels to St Albans (one stop down the line) and Luton (two stops up the line) were significantly increased. In particular, in the 20 May timetable:
      ▪ “St Albans will have more 12-car trains in the morning and evening peaks. In the morning there will be 17 12-car trains compared to nine now, with an

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1 Services between Harpenden to London leaving between 0630-0830 and returning between 1630-1900 Monday-Friday
additional 3,464 seats. In the evening there will be 18 12-car trains compared to eight now, with an additional 3,160 seats”
- From Luton, there will also be 27% more carriages and 3,200 more seats (25% more)”.

- **GTR, in breach of its franchise obligations, failed to consult on the service cuts to Harpenden**. That failure to consult was conceded by the DFT, in particular, the Rail Minister told the House of Commons it would have been “disingenuous to consult” despite the absolute obligation to do so before material cuts to rail services are made. Further he claimed that there was only “one viable option” available. This is demonstrably incorrect and would itself seem disingenuous to assert such a claim having not made any attempt to prove or disprove this assumption through consultation. Had a consultation taken place it would have undoubtedly provided alternative, deliverable solutions. We consider that the decision by the DFT to allow GTR not to consult was made ultra vires – i.e. it had no legal power nor authority to do so. The obligation to consult was an unqualified one in that it was compulsory and not dependent on any factors. Further if this decision by the DFT was not on the basis of legal advice it has not acted in line with the government’s consultation principles.

- The changes in service pattern in the May 2018 timetable, exacerbated, by GTR’s failure to deliver the full service as has been well publicised, have led to an increase in passengers being forced to change trains at St Albans. St Albans is not designed or suitable to be an interchange station. The result is that an already busy station is seeing increased levels of overcrowding, including on an island platform where high speed East Midland Trains pass. We have voiced our Health and Safety concerns with the local Council and GTR but have not received a satisfactory response.

- Whilst Network Rail and GTR accept that St Albans requires additional footbridge capacity the earliest that this capacity will be built is 2020. Nevertheless, **GTR introduced a timetable which increased the number of people required to change at this station, despite the evident safety risk. We have seen no evidence of a full risk assessment being performed or a suitable plan or interim mitigating actions introduced.**

- The original flaws in the May 2018 timetable have been exacerbated by the failure of the industry to implement the timetable as intended. As a consequence, there is an ongoing significant and detrimental impact on many Harpenden commuters who experienced a reasonably reliable, regular ‘turn up and go’ rail service now reduced to a lottery. Whilst the implementation of the July 15 ‘interim’ timetable has provided a degree of predictability to the service this is as a result of GTR further

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2 See Herts Advertiser, 23 March 2018
5 Hansard 18 April 2018, Column 438
cutting service frequencies to get a handle on an underlying portion of the May 2018 timetable; referred to as ‘bedding in’ by GTR a process which remains on-going at the time of this submission. As such, commuters are experiencing significant gaps in services (including in peak and at weekends), overcrowding (including off peak and at weekends) and frequent short notice delays and cancellation.

We recommend:

1. That the DFT take control of the situation and instruct Network Rail and Govia Thameslink Railway (GTR) to reinstate services at Harpenden which has been materially and inequitably disadvantaged in the May 2018 timetable.

2. Should it be necessary to reduce services until performance can be restored then the burden of service cuts should be distributed more fairly and equitably across the line rather than Harpenden bear the brunt as it is currently.

3. In particular, we ask for the stopping pattern of the Thameslink Express services to be changed to include a more equitable distribution of stops between Luton, Harpenden and St Albans from 5:0:5 to 3:3:4
We deal with the following:

Section 1: Impact of May 2018 timetable changes on Harpenden

Section 2: Causes of cuts in Harpenden services

Section 4: Harpenden Needs and GTR disregard

Section 4: Impact on Passengers

Section 5: Conclusion
Section 1: Impact of May 2018 timetable changes on Harpenden

5. Harpenden rail services are provided exclusively by Govia Thameslink Rail (GTR), a joint venture of Go-Ahead and Keolis. GTR has operated a mix of services to London, fast services which call at St Albans only or St Albans and West Hampstead only before St Pancras and which prior to May 2018 timetable took around 25 minutes; semi fast services which call additionally at Radlett, Elstree & Borehamwood and Mill Hill Broadway taking 30-35 minutes; all stations (slow) services taking c.45 minutes. Slow services are normally over taken by subsequent fast service, although we acknowledge some people choose to take semi-fast services in preference to fast due to the increased change of getting a seat, especially in the morning.

6. A season ticket between Harpenden and London Thameslink stations costs approximately £4,000. Hence the vast majority of daily commuters are office based staff who are required by their employer to work normal office hours.

7. Our analysis of the impact on Harpenden of the May 2018 timetable is based on services leaving Harpenden between 0630 and 0830, arriving in London (depending on station) between 0700 and 0900, rather than the longer definition of morning peak (running up to 1000) which GTR reference. We do not believe that for the vast majority of workers catching a train which arrives in London at 1000 – meaning people would not be in their office until after 1000 – is acceptable for their employers.

8. For the return journey we recognise that people have more flexibility so we have included the whole of the GTR defined evening peak (1630-1900).

9. In the morning, under the full May 2018 timetable key Harpenden services are cut by one third with journey times extended by approximately 3 minutes or c.12% for fast services. In numerical terms there is a reduction from 23 trains to 18 and from 212 carriages to 176 for all services – and a reduction from 19 to 12 in the key faster services.

10. For fast services departing Harpenden between 0730 and 0830 the number of services is cut from 9 to 6 with the number of carriages reduced from 88 to 68 (there are no semi fast services during this period in pre-May or May 2018 timetable). Given the cross London nature of the service, this is a reasonable proxy for high peak.

11. The July 15 ‘interim’ timetable resulted in the loss of a further 3 services (1 fast, 2 slow).
12. Under the May 2018 timetable, **significant gaps in fast train services are introduced**, for example 18 minutes between 0633 and 0651; 17 minutes between 0704 and 0721; and, 16 minutes between 0734 and 0750. This is longer without a fast train than the previous timetable had for its day-time **off peak** service. There is also a 14 minute gap from 0806 which particularly hits working parents – predominantly mothers – who relied on services after 0800 after leaving children with childcare. By way of contrast, in the previous timetable the longest gap between services was 12 minutes with an average gap of 8 minutes.

13. GTR and the DFT have attempted to dismiss our analysis claiming that the timeframe we have analysed is selective, variously claiming[^7]:

- “These figures have been cut using a very specific timeframe which presents a misleading picture. They also include the ‘loss’ of semi-fast evening trains which will still run but simply stop at three additional stations, taking only around 5 minutes longer than they do today.”

- “During the entire morning peak (for trains arriving in London between 0700 and 0959, which is the industry standard), there are the same number of fast and semi-fast trains (25, which will rise to 26 in December) and 12 more carriages. We have removed two

[^7]: Thameslink FAQ published on Rail2020 website
early stopping trains (the 0650 and 0708 from Harpenden) but added two additional semi-fast trains, at 0839 and 0909 to better match passenger needs.”

However:

- The 0630-0830 was selected as a recognisable, clock-face period based on when most Harpenden commuters need to travel. It was not selected to provide an artificial or misleading view of the situation.

- It is worth noting that 0630-0730 or 0730-0830 see similar reduction to the full period, whilst analysing 0730-0800 shows an even more extreme reduction in service – a period of service where even under the old timetable services were routinely full before arrival at Harpenden.

- Services running at 0839 and 0909 can in no way be considered a viable alternative for passengers who were catching the 0650 or 0708.

- A semi-fast service which has three additional stops added in is, by definition, a slow service. That these services are now comfortably overtaken by the subsequent fast service, unlike the previous semi-fast services, in practice makes them irrelevant for most people commuting between London and Harpenden.

14. During the same time period, the May 2018 timetable provides St Albans with an increase in services from 26 to 28.

15. Commuters attempting to travel between Harpenden and West Hampstead, a major north London interchange with connections to the London Underground and London Overground are even more severely affected with a reduction in services of 22% for the May 20th timetable, and 44% for the July 15th timetable; the latter with a critical 48min gap in service between 0651 and 0739.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Harpenden - West Hampstead Morning Rush Hour DIRECT Trains</th>
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<tr>
<td>Before May 20th</td>
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9 TRAINS 76 Carriages 7 FAST/SEMIFAST 22% reduction 21% 5 TRAINS

7 Fast/SemiFast 7 Left no change reduced by 29% to 5
16. Key evening services between London and Harpenden are also severely cut. Whilst the total number of services has fallen only from 23 to 22, the number of fast or semi-fast services has fallen from 16 to 13 in the full May 2018 timetable. The July 15 ‘interim’ timetable reduced the total service by another 5 trains. Notably creating an effective gap of 30 minutes in peak time after the 18:36 St Pancras service.

| St Pancras Int’l - Harpenden Evening Rush Hour Trains DIRECT |
|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|
|              | Before May 20th | May 20th timetable | New July 15th timetable |
|              | Departing | Duration | Carriages | Departing | Duration | Carriages | Departing | Duration | Carriages |
|              | am | mins |          | am | mins |          | am | mins |          |
| 16:32        | 24 | 8    | 16:36    | 20 | 8    | 16:36    | 00:26 |
| 16:36        | 27 | 8    | 16:43    | 24 | 8    | 16:36    | 00:25 |
| 16:40        | 39 | 8    | 16:56    | 24 | 8    | 16:36    | 00:25 |
| 16:48        | 27 | 12   | 16:58    | 43 | 8    | 16:36    | 00:43 |
| 17:02        | 24 | 12   | 17:06    | 24 | 8    | 17:06    | 00:24 |
| 17:06        | 26 | 8    | 17:12    | 24 | 8    | 17:12    | 00:24 |
| 17:10        | 36 | 8    | 17:26    | 25 | 12   | 17:26    | 00:25 |
| 17:22        | 28 | 8    | 17:28    | 41 | 8    | 17:26    | 00:25 |
| 17:32        | 25 | 12   | 17:36    | 24 | 12   | 17:36    | 00:24 |
| 17:36        | 26 | 8    | 17:41    | 24 | 12   | 17:41    | 00:24 |
| 17:42        | 39 | 8    | 17:43    | 42 | 8    | 17:41    | 00:24 |
| 17:46        | 26 | 8    | 17:56    | 25 | 12   | 17:56    | 00:26 |
| 17:50        | 35 | 8    | 17:58    | 43 | 8    | 17:58    | 00:43 |
| 18:02        | 24 | 12   | 18:06    | 24 | 12   | 18:06    | 00:24 |
| 18:06        | 26 | 8    | 18:11    | 25 | 12   | 18:11    | 00:25 |
| 18:10        | 42 | 8    | 18:13    | 41 | 8    | 18:13    | 00:42 |
| 18:20        | 27 | 8    | 18:25    | 43 | 8    | 18:26    | 00:25 |
| 18:24        | 37 | 8    | 18:28    | 41 | 8    | 18:28    | 00:42 |
| 18:32        | 24 | 12   | 18:36    | 25 | 12   | 18:36    | 00:26 |
| 18:36        | 25 | 8    | 18:43    | 43 | 8    | 18:36    | 00:26 |
| 18:42        | 39 | 8    | 18:56    | 24 | 12   | 18:43    | 00:43 |
| 18:46        | 26 | 8    | 18:58    | 43 | 8    | 18:58    | 00:43 |
| 18:54        | 33 | 8    | 18:58    | 43 | 8    | 18:58    | 00:43 |

23 TRAINS 204 Carriages  22 TRAINS 216 Carriages  17 TRAINS 216 Carriages

4 % Reduction -6% 26 % Reduction

17. Once again West Hampstead – Harpenden journeys are also reduced significantly. Under the July 15 ‘interim’ timetable commuters face a 45% reduction in services and gaps in services of one hour (from 17:07).
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**11 TRAINS** 88 Carriages

**10 TRAINS** 80 Carriages

**6 TRAINS** 60 Carriages

**9% Reduction** **9% Reduction** **45% Reduction**
Section 2: Causes of cuts in Harpenden services

18. The cause of the reduction in service was the introduction of “Thameslink Express” services which service only Bedford, Luton, St Albans before London. These trains were a panicked response to EMT’s decision to stop serving Bedford and Luton in peak hours following Network Rail’s failure to complete upgrade work to the Midland Mainline. Under the Thameslink Programme plan, these services were intended to call at additional stations, including Harpenden before stops were removed in order that Thameslink could run fast services to/from Bedford.

19. Despite repeated requests, neither the DFT nor GTR have provided any evidence that the consequences for Harpenden or other stations were considered before the decision to cut out stops was taken. The loss of services is a material adverse change. As such GTR had an absolute obligation to consult.

20. The Franchise Agreement sets out how timetables should be created and states that “operators should prepare timetables in response to a train service specification set by DFT”. Train service specifications are prescribed in the form of Train Service Requirements. The name of the May 2018 Train Service Requirement is TSR6. When asked in a Freedom of Information request ‘FOI’ for sight of TSR6 as revised for impact of the reduced East Midlands Train service at Bedford and Luton, the response received was that such a revised TSR would not be prepared until GTR had written the revised TSR6 timetable. This perhaps indicates that rather than DFT specifying the service they wished to procure, they were writing what they wished to procure in the contract once they knew what their service provider (GTR as Train Operating Company) was willing to provide. Arguably, the franchisee (GTR) was acting in the role of franchise manager as well as franchisee.

21. Once the decision had been taken to reduce services at Harpenden, in practice, the DFT and GTR took a decision to suppress news of their decision. In its letter dated 30 April 2018 to our group, the Secretary of State for Transport stated that announcing the planned changes in November would have confused Harpenden commuters with respect to temporary disruption caused by the Christmas engineering work. We believe that commuters are more than capable of understanding the difference. Arguably more confusing and misleading was the continued promotion by GTR of the May 2018 timetable at Harpenden as being an improvement.

22. The DFT has claimed that it would have been “disingenuous to consult” as they “...did not have any options available.” We believe that these statements are flawed in at least two respects:

- Firstly, the duty to consult on a Significant Alteration is absolute. It is there to protect passengers so the neither the DFT nor the operator is permitted to waive this obligation. **We would ask that the Committee look specifically at this decision as it**

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8 Paragraph 4 of Schedule 1.1 of the Franchise Agreement contains a clear obligation for GTR to consult stakeholders over a reasonable time period on proposed timetable changes, including the removal of passenger services and changes to stopping patterns.
sets a dangerous precedent. If Government departments can decide not to consult when it suits them to do so, what is the point of the obligation?

- Secondly, we believe that other viable options were available which would have delivered the express journey time for Bedford passengers whilst having due regard to passengers at Harpenden, St Albans and Luton. These alternative options would undoubtedly have been identified had the required consultation taken place.

23. By changing the morning stopping pattern of the Thameslink Express services from (as introduced in May 2018) Luton 5: Harpenden 0: St Albans 5 to 4:3:3 or 3:3:4 there would still be enhanced services for St Albans and Luton (compared to the pre-May 18 Thameslink timetable) and the penal treatment of Harpenden would be corrected. Similar changes to stopping patterns in the evening peak would also need be made. Given that these services run on the fast lines though all three stations we do not believe there is any technical reason this solution could not be implemented (and neither the DFT nor GTR have provided a technical reason). Alternatively, GTR have stated that adding an additional stop at Harpenden will add up to 3 minutes to the journey time. Given the ‘padding’ which has been added to the timetable (e.g. timetabled journey times increased from 25 minutes to 28 minutes) this could be absorbed by this buffer. The Committee may wish to consider whether these increased journey times are genuinely in the passengers’ interest or are designed to reduce the ability of customers to claim compensation for delays and artificially improve the TOC’s performance data.

24. Unlike GTR, EMT demonstrated an ability and willingness to make late changes to their timetable. Only a week before the May 2018 timetable was implemented EMT reinstated a stop at Bedford for the 1904 service from St Pancras. Despite this, GTR continue to run an 1850 Thameslink Express (which was originally created due to lack of EMT services to Bedford) which, in the July 15 ‘interim’ timetable, leaves a 30 minute gap in peak time for passengers returning to Harpenden (and other stations not serviced by the Express) during a period where Bedford now has two fast services.

25. The Thameslink route is one of the busiest on the network. Therefore it is important that the available capacity is used to the greatest benefit. However, it is clear to regular users of the line that the Thameslink Express services are significantly less busy than other fast services on the route. They all appear to be 12 carriages long – yet serve a minimal number of stations. Yet trains that service more stations (including Leagrave, Harlington Fliitwick and Harpenden) are often 8 carriages. The absurdity of that is in our view, obvious. In addition, the uniform stopping pattern of the Thameslink Express services causes significant numbers of passengers to change at St Albans (commuters using the Thameslink Express to get first to St Albans and then changing onto other services in order to reach their final destination) – a station neither designed nor suitable to be an interchange station. This is increasing overcrowding and creating safety issues.

26. The safety risk at St Albans caused by the Thameslink Express services is recognised by GTR. In an email to Councillor Alec Campbell on 6 August, Larry Heyman, Local Development Manager, Thameslink & Great Northern stated:

“*The six ‘Thameslink Expresses’ that do not call at either Harpenden or Luton Airport Parkway obviously result in a considerably greater number of passengers leaving...*"

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9 The 1858 Thameslink service from St Pancras arrives in Harpenden 10 minutes later than the 1906.
those train at St Albans City than would have been the case before they were introduced. If it is a same platform change (on platform 4) there is no safety issue and our aim is to run all trains on time, so eliminating the need for the signaller to divert any service to the slow line.”

27. However, in practice it is inevitable that services will be delayed or disrupted on a busy railway – additionally this assumes that passengers will wait for a “fast” service to arrive from London when a “slow” service from London arriving on a different platform first would reach their destination earlier (since both have the same subsequent stops.) As such GTR show that they must accept that the timetable solution they have created has increased the risk to passenger safety at St Albans.

28. The timetable changes introduced in the May 2018 timetable enhanced St Albans service at the expense of Harpenden. We have repeatedly asked the DFT the following questions; (1) which senior officials in the timetable process regularly commute from St Albans? and (2) what measures were put in place to identify and mitigate for this conflict of interest? However, the DFT has not replied to these questions.
Section 3: Needs of Harpenden and GTR’s disregard

29. We are concerned that the leadership of GTR have failed to consider the needs of Harpenden passengers. It is regrettable that in correspondence with all parties, our concerns feel like they have been trivialised and even disparaged. We do not feel respected as customers and feel our concerns about our health, work and home-life have been dismissed. GTR’s poor decision making about the May 2018 timetable was affected by their failure to assess properly the impact of their decisions on real people.

30. The position is as follows:

10 It is our view that Luton Airport Parkway will, due to its very nature – an airport station – not experience the same peaks and troughs in passenger numbers during the peak morning and evening hours like a commuter stations such as Harpenden and passenger numbers are more likely to be more evenly spread to match flight times.
31. Passenger demand has increased over recent years at Harpenden (ORR estimated station usage statistics) and we are concerned that the May 2018 timetable has not been correlated with passenger demand. Indeed more housing within Harpenden as part of the local neighbourhood plan which aims to deliver 15,500 new homes and a planned new (fourth) secondary school in Harpenden point to greater demand in future.

We are also concerned by GTR’s conduct:

1. Although GTR knew from November 2017 that services at Harpenden were to be reduced they continued to advertise Railplan 2020 and the new and improved journey opportunities it offered at Harpenden station and on routes to and from Harpenden.

2. At the first public meeting in Harpenden about the new timetable in March 2018, arranged once news of the reduced service had filtered through from other places on the line, GTR senior management insisted that they had consulted properly on the timetable even though their consultation was on an improved timetable not the reduced one which was to be implemented. As such, we consider that GTR has failed to meet its legal service commitments to its passengers in its Passenger’s Charter including the “new and significantly improved timetable” and “improving punctuality and reliability” and “listening to your views and using your feedback to improve our service” and the multiple commitments it contains about informing passengers when things go wrong.

3. In April 2018 the Committee of Public Accounts expressed deep concern that the DFT had disregarded the terms of its contract and in July 2017 allowed GTR to buy out its future liability for future poor performance until September 2018. This has removed a prime incentive for GTR to deliver a workable timetable and reduce delays and cancellations. This is contrary to the standards expected of all public services which dictate that penalties should always be determined by the actual level of performance.

4. It is clear that changes to the May 2018 timetable have not been made in an equitable way; it is not equitable to reduce the key services in Harpenden by a third at peak times whilst substantially increasing services in neighbouring St Albans. Harpenden has been unfairly targeted.

5. We are concerned by the subjective presentation of the situation by GTR. We would highlight two comments made to Parliament by the Prime Minister on 13 June 2018\textsuperscript{11}, in which it was stated that “Govia Thameslink is introducing a new timetable that is better than the pre-May timetable and will have 200 more

\textsuperscript{11} Hansard Column 891 and Column 894
planned journeys”, and that Govia Thameslink has “introduced a new timetable that is not the final timetable, but it is better than the pre-May timetable.” In fact all temporary/interim timetables have been significantly worse than pre-May 2018 timetables.

6. Responses to letters to those in Harpenden from DFT and GTR have been condescending in nature. For example, in response to an accident at Harpenden Train Station on May 23 when two people were badly injured and needed emergency medical treatment after falling on the footbridge stairs between platforms having been forced to hurry when cancellations meant that the train approaching was the only service for 30 minutes showed little appreciation of the impact of the scale of cancellations. GTR responded to a complainant: “Ultimately it’s the customer’s choice to prioritise punctuality over safety and run for a train. As you state there were other options available and while perhaps resulting in a later than planned arrival, I would suggest this would be the preferable choice”.

7. In response to the huge disruption on 21 June 2018 when 14 trains were cancelled and just 2 trains ran in two and a half hours in the morning peak, GTR replied, “We still believe that the new timetable will bring huge benefits to our customers when it is fully introduced, but there is still work to do to make this happen. Rest assured we are doing all we can to bring this about as swiftly as possible and to limit the disruption to your service while we do this.”

8. It is also clear from the responses to letters that there has been a failure to accept responsibility by DFT, GTR and Network Rail. The lack of a single accountable decision maker in a complex system has meant that it has been extremely hard for passengers to have their voice heard and get agreement to even minor, sensible changes which would deliver great benefit. This has therefore caused even further frustration amongst commuters.
Section 4: Impact on passengers

32. The impact of the reduced service with changed and, at times, unpredictable stopping patterns and longer average journey times is grindingly negative and wide-ranging. We attach at Appendix 1 commuter impact statements from Harpenden commuters gathered on 7-10 August 2018. We apologise for the length of this appendix but it reflects the strength of feeling of Harpenden commuters and we would hope that the Transport Select Committee would find it of assistance to understand the impact the trains are having on Harpenden commuters.

33. In a nutshell:

1. Passengers have to allow longer for their journeys, typically needing to allow an extra half-hour in the morning and 45 minutes in the evening, without taking cancellations into account. They are leaving home earlier and returning later. This means extra childcare has to be arranged from nurseries, family members and friends which both costs money and erodes relationships. Families see each other less, social engagements and work events are cancelled, any relaxation or exercise time forgone.

2. Layered on top of this, are the additional last-minute cancellations which increase anxiety and stress by reducing the inability to plan. This means indebtedness to others looking after children, it means waiting for a number of hours alone at night at stations, taxis from evenings out in London when no train arrives, it means important meetings missed and income forgone, it means meals, birthdays, anniversaries and school events and even final exams have been missed and family and friends feeling let-down and burdened.

3. The overcrowding is adding to intense exhaustion. Those with medical conditions are needing to extend their days even further to travel to stations thirty minutes away on other lines where they can get a seat. Maternity leaves have been started early, with income forgone and time with babies after birth reduced. Some are forced to switch modes of transport and now drive.

4. We are aware of a number of people who have resigned from their roles as the additional burden of the trains has led to one too many things to juggle and disciplinary procedures have been started at work for poor timekeeping. Many people have had to change their working patterns, working from home more often and subsequently having a knock-on impact on working patterns and meetings in organisations.
Section 5: Conclusion

34. Whilst the failure of GTR to implement the May 2018 timetable efficiently has exacerbated the situation, making commuting an intolerable burden for many people with personal and economic consequences, this disruption must not be allowed to distract from the very serious shortcomings created by the May 2018 timetable, specifically the impact of Thameslink Express services upon Harpenden.

35. Even during the summer holidays the services which have operated have been very full. The implication of this is that overcrowding will be significantly greater come September 2018.

36. Both GTR and the DFT have ignored process and governance which is in place to protect passenger interests and action is required urgently to correct a problem – the reduction of services to Harpenden – which was both avoidable and entirely of their own making.

Harpenden Thameslink Commuters’ Group
August 2018
Appendix 1:

Comments from Harpenden Commuters collated 7-10 August 2018:

The new timetable (when it is not the falsehood of the school summer holiday period) presents me with a complete inability to accurately predict when I will be at work in London and when I will be at home in Harpenden. I am therefore letting employers, colleagues, clients, childcarers and my family down. My working productivity and my family life is markedly diminished. This was not the case before the changes to the timetable.

Ryan Kennedy. Harpenden.

So far I have to leave 30 minutes earlier and don’t see my family in the morning before they get up for school / Work. Since 20th May I have been home and had dinner with my family probably twice. Not twice per week. Twice in total. At work I have to make excuses as to why I can’t work late as I fear beyond 8pm the trains will be non existent. What is harder to measure is the stress on me and my family due to all of this.

Ian Coyne. Salisbury Road. Harpenden.

Commuting an hour and a half earlier in the mornings to offset any chance of lateness that tends to occur with trains any time from 7am. Work has supported my adjustments and been flexible but they think it's temporary and regularly ask if it's sorted yet?

More often not home in time to support the family or takes double the time to get home so have to leave work earlier. Regularly taking cabs from St Albans costing additional money.

Stopped going out in London after work and take cabs home if working late as can't take the risk of being stranded as a woman alone or put on a bus at St Pancras.

Overall a longer working day, with high chances of lateness both ends of the commute and additional cash required regularly to supplement the journey to get back to my family.

Working/living pattern and social life changed overall to adjust to the daily commuter chaos.

Sam Ogden , Harpenden commuter

I now leave the house at 6:00 having got up at 5:15 to catch the 6:21. My husband drops me off so that I can get ready properly in the morning. My children are being dragged out of bed at 5:50. I am a bit claustrophobic so later trains are an object of fear.

I dread dropping my children off at school because the earliest train i can catch is at 8:06 and it is packed if there are any problems I am frequently late when getting this train and cannot state how much I dread this journey.

Coming back I then have the terror of being stuck at st Alban's with no train when they cancel Harpenden stops which is a frequent occurrence. I could get home more easily from Luton Airport parkway but thameslink say they can't honour this ticket despite them cancelling my usual stop. Which is ridiculous apparently The dft have to approve this!

I have given up nightschool as evening trains are running at prehistoric frequencies.

Sally O'Neill, Harpenden Commuter

I get a train earlier in the mornings to avoid delays but have still arrived later at work. I have stopped going out in the evening in London as trains not reliable and do not want to be stranded. I have also inconvenienced my family by having to get my husband to collect me from St Albans on a number of occasions.
Overall my day is longer, the trains are busier and more overcrowded, sometimes dangerously so.

_Yvonne Barford. Harpenden commuter_

I’m a nurse in London and I’ve had to change my work pattern to work mostly nights which means I don’t see my husband as much but trying to get home after a day shift which finishes at 20:15 is incredibly difficult as trains stopping at Harpenden at this time are a pretty rare occurrence-one night I wasn’t home until 22:45.

_Niki Taylor_

I have had to change my working hours as I can no longer get into work in time, my journey to work now takes me 25 mins longer than before, my childcare costs have increased and I can’t pick my children up from school. _Linda MacDonald, Harpenden._

My husband missed a critically important meeting this week which impacted on his stress levels and in my view the quality of sleep he had as a result the next day worrying about the trains.

_Kathryn Weston_

I have missed numerous client functions being stuck waiting on platforms, this impacts my business, delays home in the evening have been unbearable to the point I no longer commit to anything social or work based after 5pm. Instead I have reverted to driving into London which is exhausting or using Hemel Station.

_Helen Fish_

Unreliable, unpleasant and unfit for purpose. Every journey is a no good adventure. No trains, no seats, no courtesy, no value. Leave on time, arrive God knows when. Everything a rail service shouldn’t be. Stressful and causing havoc on a daily basis at home and work. Any best laid plan ruined by an Operator with no sense of service and complete contempt for their customer base.

_Graeme Sprowson, Marquis Lane, Harpenden_

I’m a social commuter but in order to not miss a flight last week caught a train two hours earlier than needed in order to be sure of getting to the airport. My husband has an even longer working day than before and rarely gets home before 8.30pm. He eats, has perhaps an hour free time before going to bed, then getting up at 6.00am to start the merry go round all over again. My son took a taxi to the station during an off peak period and found no trains for over an hour by which time it was too late for him to get where he needed, so he paid for a taxi again to come straight home. Harpenden can no longer call itself a commuter town with the appalling service now being provided. The railway came to Harpenden in 1868 but it feels like Thameslink decimated the service in 2018, some 150 years on.

_Debbie Copas_

I am having to seriously consider if I can continue working as a two train commute to Shepherd’s Bush (via West Hampstead) has gone from long (1.5hrs door to door and two trains) to unmanageable and unpredictable (often now 2hrs and 3 trains). I only ever used to see my kids for around an hr each day. So I now feel I need to choose between work and seeing my kids (at all) in the week.

_Sally Matthews_

Social commuter but on the last few occasions left home early because of all delays to ensure I’ve got to event, trains packed and some station platforms dangerously crowded. I have been put off visiting London which is a shame as so close but want to be confident I can return home stressfree

_Pat Docker_
The new timetables mean I can scarcely predict what time I will get to work, or home so is causing incredible stress in our home for both myself and 11 year old daughter. It made state senior school an impossible option as I wouldn’t be able to hold down a job so for starters it’s costing me over 18k a year in addition to train fares. I am having to ask endless favours of friends /neighbours when I get stranded without a train and my daughter needs to get home from school or a holiday club. This also impacts those organisations when they are required to remain beyond closing time because of parents being late. In an effort to recuperate some time and still manage to hold down a job, I am now paying higher travel costs to get the Javelin train to work as West Hampstead and jubilee line is not viable and I just need to ensure I can do a full 8 hours minimum in the office.

Impact on my daughter in new term time we will now have to leave home 20 mins earlier and she is left at a bus stop on her own 6.30am till her bus arrives at 7am. Not ideal in winter on dark mornings for an 11 year old to be left alone opposite the BO garage with no shelter from the elements. If her father were to find out, he would challenge my custody of her!

Just the stress of racing out of the door every morning is impacting our relationship and home life. I can no longer walk our dog in the morning so increases doggy day care costs at £50/week.

There are many occasions when I absolutely run for my life to catch a train risking accidents on stairs at the station etc. If there are roadworks en route we are even more challenged to make these timings but I need to get a 0651 or 0704 at latest to be able to do my hours. As a single parent with no family to support the situation not to mention all the changes and interim timetables have caused untold stress to myself and my daughter. I am seriously considering leaving Harpenden as the town is clearly being downgraded.

S. Cooper, Harpenden

I’m a social commuter and frequently go into London for shows and events but like everyone else I am really having to think whether it is worth getting the train, and have driven into London and to Wembley in the last couple of months rather than risk not being able to get home. These changes make Harpenden a much less attractive place to live. Please reinstate our old pre May level of service.

Valerie Jones

Following the introduction of the new timetable on 20 May the trains to and from Harpenden were reduced by about 33%. The schedule went into meltdown. A new one was introduced on 15 July. This has reduced the peak hour trains further. Although the trains have undoubtedly been running better there are still far too few trains from and to Harpenden. The main issue has not therefore been resolved.

For example in the morning before 20 May there were the following trains between 0630 and 0730:

- 0632
- 0640
- 0646
- 0655
- 0658
- 0700
- 0708
- 0712
- 0718
- 0720

TEN trains in total.

Now there are:

- 0633
- 0639
0651
0704
0721
0728

SIX trains in total.
This represents a reduction of 40%. In particular there are only 3 trains between 0651 and 0721 of which one (0704) is only 8 coaches.
That is outrageous and must be reversed immediately.

*Rupert Farr*

There is now a half hour gap in services back from London between approx 18.30 and 19.00. This means it has become very hard to get Home to see my daughter before she goes to bed which previously to may 20 would not have been an issue. I also leave 15 minutes earlier in the morning than I used to, reducing my time with her then as well. Occasionally I need to travel via West Hampstead. I now almost always conclude it’s easier to drive there, which is ridiculous. I have also been on a number of trains and platforms since May 20 which have in my opinion been dangerously crowded. There seem to have been more frequent signal failures and other ‘operational issues’ affecting the line too which has led to me missing family, social and other commitments on what feels like a depressingly regular basis. As a carnet user I have received no comments compensation beyond delay repay which comes nowhere near additional taxi and babysitter costs incurred due to the delays.

*Rachel Sheridan*

Since the introduction of the new timetable 20th May, I have to leave the house at 7.15 instead of 7.50, which means I no longer see my children in the mornings for 5 days a week. This has impacted our family life negatively. I can also not commit to any evening events as it has been proven time and time again that the homeward journey is unreliable, which has negatively impacted my working life too. I feel completely let down by Thameslink, Network Rail and ultimately DfT throughout this change.

*Matthew Davies*

I have to get up and leave the house 20 minutes earlier than before 20 May to ensure that I catch an earlier train and have back up trains so I am not late for work. I am also currently pregnant and have struggled to even reach the seats on trains on week days and weekends due to overcrowding. Also there has been dangerous over crowding due to infrequent trains and cancellations especially in the evening. I have also stopped making plans in the evening in London because trains after 8pm are even worse and I have often been left stranded in St Albans.

*Emma Owen*

As a disabled person I have had to work from home. I can't stand for long periods on crowded platforms for delayed or cancelled trains - but if you aren't close to the doors you may not squeeze on. Even if I did get on, there's a major problem getting through rammed trains to the priority seats. This has cut my earnings in half. As a freelance I can't go into London to work in the offices of my clients, so I can only handle commissions where I can work from home.

My family is suffering from the drop in income. My career is being damaged too. I'm missing opportunities for work and to see friends and my mental health is at risk from being stuck in my house.

*Kaye McIntosh, Harpenden*

I still see my children in the morning and along with my husband we travel to the station together before school drop off. I am fortunate enough to be able to shift my schedule. However now have to take no meetings before 930am as I’ve missed too many because of the frequency of train delays. As a result of this shift, I stay later at work. So I now miss and cant help with club and activity drop offs, volunteering to help said clubs or generally participating like a parent.
would want to or should... Also leaving late I often can't get a train for ages given the big gaps and frequent cancelled trains. Getting home at 8pm isn't rare. Making for a 13 hours day. I do not go out for work social events anymore as the time to get home is ridiculous. I don’t sign up for exercise classes as I miss them. I did go out recently in London, left at 9pm and got home at midnight. I haven’t even mentioned how unpleasant the travel is, hot crowded... and often with irritable people. It makes you wonder when the UK is so health and safety conscious that this is ignored and you are told it’s perfectly safe! Ha! It isn’t!

Jennifer Locker Harpenden Commuter

Chronically infrequent
Dangerously overcrowded
Fraudulently overpriced

Roger Fox

My morning commute is unimpacted (550 and 610) replaced by (556 and 608) but the evening commute back massively degraded (BFR to HPD 730pm onwards). With so many trains skipping HPD for no reason, the service for HPD is patchy, crowded and not worth the season ticket prices we paid at the start of the year with no warning of massive cuts. I look at this poster on daily basis and think “Fare evasion is theft - and so is train evasion”. If we only paid for half the fare, we would be jailed. But they can provide half the service for no impact?
Ps I don't get to see my young children in the week at all now, so fatherless from Sunday night to Saturday morning

James Spencer-Lavan

The timetable changes have added nearly 20 mins to my journey each way meaning I can no longer do school runs and get in by start of core hours. I am arriving later, leaving later and getting less time with my kids. All this when the trains run as timetabled, which has been nearly never.
I am now at a stage where I need to consider whether I change my job or move. I don't want to do either.

Mike Ross

Before 20 May I didn't need to plan my journeys carefully as Harpenden had a frequent and regular train service for which I pay £4.5k a year. Now the down grading of Harpenden (on which we were not consulted) has robbed me of an hour of precious personal time every working day. Fast trains are so packed i
usually get a semi fast or slow train of which there are now fewer. Plus 20 mins in the morning. I'm later to work. We have hot desks so sometimes they are all taken. There are often long waits for Harpenden trains in the evening, especially if I have to work late, so forced to change at St Albans which is ridiculous and not equipped to function as an interchange. I have literally watched the train I need come and go from the next platform which I just can't get to because of the crowds. This causes so much stress and frustration after a long day at work, adds at least 30 mins to journey times and is a safety issue. Add to that the high number of cancellations and time wasted hanging around on platforms. I'm so fed up and depressed about what has happened to our essential train service. The overcrowding is unbearable and unfair and there seems to be no solution in sight. Please help.
Kathy McMurray, Harpenden.

I work for the Evelina Children's Hospital, part of Guy's and St Thomas's Foundation Trust. I have a 4 month old son and due to the issues with the trains I am getting up earlier than is healthy and returning most evenings after he has gone to bed. Due to this I am having to consider my position here, the extremely poor service is disastrous to my work life balance and the new 'improved' timetable even if it ran perfectly would significantly limit my train options and increase journey time still resulting in me having to look at the viability of my work. Working for the NHS is not lucrative or done for money but the amount I pay and the service I am getting is not comparable in any way. We are currently being treated in an extremely dismissive way, the Dept for Transport are passing the buck hoping we will get tired and go away and yet the company that should be running a vital service but isn't is still taking our money and banking the profits. They have breached a number of the terms of their franchise and the consultation process for the timetable change was flawed. They should be removed immediately and a full assessment done of the service.
I like my job and the positive impact I can have on people's lives I don't want to change roles but it is coming to a point where I will have to for my family life and personal health.
Neil McKie

I have had to change my working hours to get a train about one hour earlier in the morning (not seeing my children) to ensure I can actually get home in time for them. Since the timetable change I have had a seat on the train coming home once and I no longer accept social invitations in London in the evening. I also missed the start of my son's end term of play - arriving a stressful 30 seconds before his solo as the Trains were cancelled/delayed despite me leaving plenty of time to get there!
Sally Singer

I actively avoid having to go to London since the train debacle began. If I set off I don't know whether I will make it to meeting in time or not or whether I might get stuck somewhere. I then am unsure whether I will get back home in time to see my children before bedtime, which to me is more important to me than my meetings (however I shouldn't have to be in a position to be making this choice!) so I regularly have to leave London mid afternoon in order to ensure I am home and as such am leaving far earlier than previously which has a massive impact. In my view it's incredibly unfair. It's not a sustainable situation for most of us; at some point something will have to give.
Abi Cooke

I work in Leatherhead and so use Thameslink and South West or Southern Trains 3 to 4 days per week. Prior to the 20 May, the journey took me about 2 hours each way. Post 20 May, I could not catch my connecting service, despite running through the underground to try to make the connection. After a few days of this, I gave up running and the journey now takes me 2 1/4 to 2 1/2 hours. As I do not get home until after 8pm, I have a very short evening as I am up at 6am the next day.
John Rushton

I regularly have to take my children to appointments in London where I must be on time. As an example yesterday I should have been able to get an off peak train which would have got us there with time to spare. However given the unreliability we felt we had to set off much earlier and pay for peak train tickets. This
is time and money we can not claim back. It has also been difficult because we can not get to Kentish Town easily anymore. As for my daily commuting husband - we see him even less in the evenings and this has an impact on all the family as well as being concerned for his health and safety. I am also put off wanting to take the children on fun/educational day trips to London.

Sarah Jenkins-Greig

Since the May 20th timetable change, I have been constantly delayed by the cancellation of timetabled trains between 0750 and 0820. Where those trains do turn up, the services are packed or I have to resort to taking a slower train. 9am meetings are just not possible any more without leaving 45 or more minutes earlier in the morning, impacting our family life and routine significantly. Given the delays arriving to work, I frequently leave much later in the evenings. Those services are absolutely diabolical, with mass cancellations and enormous time table gaps. It often takes 1hr or more to get home, and frequently involves changing trains at St Albans, and trying to scramble to change platforms. Late night services are non existent, meaning a constant gamble that may involve a taxi home (with no hope of recovering that cost). As a family we dare not venture into London for a show or night out. As a user of Carnet tickets I am severely discriminated against, with a very labourious delay repay process, the need to queue at the gate line to keep my tickets for the delay repay, and we are not to be given the opportunity to recover enhanced compensation as this is reserved only for the "most loyal customers".

Alan Mcgroarty

I travel into London every day during peak travel times. The trains are now quite literally heaving/packed to the gills (even when they are running - they are still frequently cancelled and/or running late). My meeting schedules usually start early but I am now unable to rely upon the trains to get me in on time, such that I am constrained in when I am able to arrange meetings or calls, at significant inconvenience. Coming home, the trains run less frequently and again frequently suffer from delays and cancellations, such that I arrive home at least an hour later than I ever used to, which means I rarely if ever get back in time to have dinner with my family as I used to do, which impacts negatively upon the quality of my family life. Financially, it seems unreasonable that my not inconsiderable season ticket cost went up, only to see the service I previously enjoyed slashed in terms of frequency etc, and then have even that reduced service not run properly.

KIT BURDEN

I work in west London and use Thameslink to get home from West Hampstead to Harpenden in evening rush hour. Pre May 20 this journey could be done in 18 minutes but now can take up to 47 minutes. With new timetabling, fast trains have been removed for West Hampstead to Harpenden commuters in evening rush hours and I’m now forced to take a slow all stopper train which often terminates at St Albans where I then wait for the next service to Harpenden. What was an 18 minute journey can now take 47 minutes.

Joe Turner

I have to leave 15 mins earlier each day, I have had to change my hours to finish at 5.30 as trains are all slow after 620pm now. I’ve had to ask to wfh Fridays so I actually see my children one weekday evening which has deeply upset male colleagues at work, and been forced to trial it with no support. On top of cost of ticket/ car park in a job that relies on bonus in a terrible economy. Seriously considering leaving job of 20 years for local job / more family friendly wfh

Flexibility due to commute.

Lisa Harrison

The new 20 May timetable and every subsequent iteration have severely impacted my job and family life.

I have a flexible work arrangement which requires me to arrive to work early at 8am so that I can leave early at 4.45 for the nursery pick up. Due to the new timetable and to ensure I could arrive at work on time, I had to take a 6.21 or earlier train. I also had to leave work at 4 to ensure I could return by 6.30pm for the nursery pickup. Essentially I was budgeting 1.5 hrs in the morning and 2.5 hours in the evening to commute, a total of 4 hours which is
ridiculous given the proximity of Harpenden to London and the pre-20 May semi-reliable train service. Despite all this extra time for commuting, I was frequently late to work, spending more time away from home and less time actually working. I was also heavily pregnant and commuting on such unreliable, hot, overcrowded trains became unbearable. My doctor advised against any commuting due to the potential risk of a medical emergency on a train that was stuck or being stranded on a train platform with no way of getting home. I worked from home for 4 consecutive weeks of my pregnancy under doctor's orders. Although I was working, I was perceived to be absent or unavailable to the wider department where I work which has negatively impacted my career. Finally, I gave birth 4 weeks early and while this cannot be directly attributed to the train fiasco, the constant stress of commuting and lack of sleep to budget for extra commuting time definitely took its toll on my well being and pregnancy. Together we pay an extortionate amount of money for an unreliable and dangerously overcrowded train service and urge the ORR to take action where so many others have failed (which includes the Dept for Transport, GTR, Network Rail and the current government). How long must we suffer before action is taken?

Selena Greaney, Harpenden

I moved to Harpenden 6 years ago and the frequency of the train service was a major factor. My job involves me working late 3 times a week on average and I would be able to do that and still be able to make it home around 8.30pm so I could eat with my family. I used to often catch up with friends after work. Now getting home is miserable and unreliable and it has effected my whole family. My daughter had her mock GCSEs and I was stuck waiting for trains and not getting home until she was in her bed and then leaving before she was up. There were days when I wouldn't see her. I have stopped arranging to meet friends after work as it's too stressful not knowing when I will get home. I get in to work on time because I get up at 5.30am and get an earlier train and if it is delayed I still have given myself a bit of a cushion to get in to my office by 8am. I don't know how I would have coped when my daughter was you get and I had to take her to school. What used to be a reliable 25 min fast service is an unreliable slow service. I often have to get off at St Albans or find the quickest route home is to go to Luton airport and get a train back to Harpenden. I have also been physically pushed out of the way while trying get on a crowded train at st Pancras and the overcrowding at St Albans is dangerous. Everyday is a different, unpredictable and miserable experience. It’s a disgrace how we were not consulted and how difficult this situation seems to be to resolve.

Lori Houlihan Harpenden

My day starts off worse as there are no direct trains to Kentish Town anymore. I can’t get an earlier train as I can’t afford peak travel so end up getting into work later. So I have to stay later and then my journey home takes longer as there is no longer a fast connection change at West Hampstead so I lose even more time (and have to pay more for childcare) with my daughter in the evening. I also feel like a second class passenger as I’m 'only' off peak, not a season ticket holder so really feel at the bottom of the pile regarding any priorities.

Jackie Clode-Dickens

I moved to Redbourn 2 years ago and have a 2 year old child. Returning to work a year ago following maternity leave meant a daily routine of dropping my daughter to nursery and then driving to the station. We got ourselves into a good routine. The previous frequency and reliability of train services meant that having unpredictable mornings with a young child were manageable. The past few months have been simply awful. I have to now take my daughter daily to nursery at the opening time and give myself practically double the amount of time to get work in order to at least have half a chance of getting to work on time. The evenings are far worse, it seems as though throughout the day the service gets worse and so getting home for nursery pick up time has become my daily stress factor, more stressful than my demanding job. I am frequently late picking up my daughter and this results in fines but more importantly a distressed child that has spent too long at nursery and not enough time with her family. I hate the impact the trains have had on my life, my family, my time with my
daughter and the incredible stress it has added daily.

Claire Jarmyn

The impact of the changes of the train times has meant that I have to shift my whole pattern, in short leave earlier in the morning and later in the evening. Information is often incorrect and the delays and unpredictability have been a real issue. If this is to continue I will consider my options and ideally not commute. I have been stuck on platforms for hours, been late to the child minder numerous times and fined for late arrival. I have missed nights out, been late to work and am missing my own personal time with my family.

Clare Winspear

I am 'lucky' enough that I don't have to worry about meeting childcare commitments, however, I work in Canary Wharf and used to get one of the several trains that stopped in West Hampstead to the Jubilee Line.

It was great - I could get a seat, get some work done and mentally prepare for the day ahead. I could usually get a seat on the tube too - a lovely journey (despite being 1.5 hours door to door). Now, I travel into London Bridge, have to stand most days and never get a seat on the tube. It's exhausting. Dealing with the crush of people, frayed tempers, no personal space and an inability to mentally prepare for my day.

During the day, I'm wondering what disaster will befall Thameslink meaning I can't get home in a sensible time. I turn down evening events as every time I've stayed late, the trains are trashed.

When it's time to go home, I'm checking what time it's sensible to leave - I used to be able to leave any time and know a train would turn up in a few minutes - and take me all the way home without having to change.

Telling my family what time I will be home for dinner, to go out, to catch up, is a lottery. I'll work out I should be home by 7pm, but by the time I've got to a London Terminal, the train has been cancelled, is running late, has changed it's stopping pattern - and I'm left standing at a station trying to work out a new route home.

It's mentally exhausting - I know more about trains than I would ever wish to know. It's the first thing I check when I wake up in the morning, it's on my mind throughout the day and then until I finally get home.

I've been picked up from Stanmore, Cockfosters, Watford, St Albans, Hemel Hempstead - in a desperate effort to get home at a time that means I might barely scrape an evening, before starting it all over again.

Anna-Marie Jacob - Harpenden Commuter

I used to get the 7.08 straight to Kentish Town and be at my NHS hospital for work by 7.55am. Similar straightforward journey back with 2 99percent reliable trains back meaning I could do a full day of medical Consultant work and leave at the last minute and still make the train.

No direct KT trains anymore. I now get the packed 7.04 and then the packed 7.22 from St Albans. Often one or other is cancelled. I arrive at work far later. On the way back I have to leave 30-45minutes earlier to get home at the same time. Reliability now about 60percent.

I work one in four Saturdays oncall. No direct trains at weekend and my worst return journey was 3 hours Home. I dread commuting now whereas up to 19/5 I actually enjoyed it. Seat, cup of tea, reliable service.

I cannot drive to work so feel powerless with alternatives.

Julie Andrews

Again I am a social commuter. I moved here as was easy access to visit my elderly mum. (West Hampstead) May half term on my first day off with kids I choose not to visit as trains were so bad no guarantee of getting home. On evenings where as previously I would stay out late I now choose to leave early, as trains do bad. Work party recently in London - my husband drove me and a colleague into London, instead of train. Glad he did as took my work colleagues over 2.5 hours to travel in, due to issues on train.
Yvonne Neville Murphy

We moved to Harpenden from London a few years ago and one major factor was train frequency and to be able to commute to our London jobs and be back in time to collect our son from after school care. I have to time my commute to the minute due to the reduced timetable in the morning and evening. The reduced and altered times of the train 'service' means much more stress and worry on top of a demanding job. The constant train roulette means I run the risk of leaving my son stranded and the stress takes its toll on family life. Laura

I leave 30 mins earlier in the morning which in itself doesn't appear much of an ordeal but it means I no longer get to spend any time with my 3 children on week day mornings. I have to leave before they wake. On an evening, I either leave work 30minsearlier putting my job at risk or I find myself having to arrange last minute childcare when I cannot collect in time from after school club due to the delays and cancellations. My husband no longer has time with the kids in the evening owing to evening peak problems getting home. Overall, I am more exhausted and stressed from juggling childcare and work due to train issues, I dearly miss my family and the financial strain from lost work hours and increased childcare costs makes it almost unfeasible for me to keep working.

Joanne Tang

It has resulted in less time with my children for me who are 1 and 4 and in bed by 7pm. I have to get up 15 mins earlier at 5.50am to get a train now as the 6.40am and 6.46am no longer run. If I am late picking up my children from nursery I get fined too so there is a financial impact as well.

Laura Burns Wheathampstead

Prior to 20th May timetable change I didn't have to specifically plan my journey to or from London as fast trains were frequent. I work at Blackfriars & my commute prior to the change was easily done within an hour door to door, with 2 or 3 train options to achieve 9am start following children drop off. I wouldn't worry if I had a 9am meeting. Now my commute regularly takes me far longer than 1hr. If I have a 9am meeting I leave the house by 7.15 due to fact I cannot rely on trains arriving / being fast. I therefore can't drop my children off. Coming home is worse and I have had to extend childcare by 1hr, at extra cost. More importantly it means I only get to see my children for a very short time. Also reliability of trains goes downhill at this time meaning I am regularly late & don't see my children at all. On days when I cannot extend my childcare I have to leave the office 4.15pm to be back for 6pm. I am regularly having to make up time once I have children in bed. I am an interim paid a day rate, running a strategic transformation Programme & eyebrows get raised when I am late into the office, have to leave early, don't turn up for meetings with my CEO, Group HRD, or Board because of issues with trains. The lack of trains, and the unreliability of this running will make my situation untenable.

The trains that do turn up are hugely over crowded & present a health & safety risk. We are very lucky right now that we are in holiday season as volumes are dramatically down. However despite this, when 3 trains came in yesterday within about 5mins of each other, the volume of people who poured out of the station brought station approach to a standstill. It was absolutely hazardous & I feel only a matter of time before someone is seriously injured.

Ann Crozier, Luton Road, Harpenden

I moved to Harpenden after considering the commute and confirming it was workable for me. Since the new timetable has been introduced I have to leave much earlier and get a stopping train as I cannot bear to stand for 30mins every morning. My return journey now usually takes almost twice as long and involves changing at St Albans most evenings. I dread the commute and I am exhausted all of the time.

Kerry Tinkler

I have lived in Harpenden over 20years and always thought we were relatively lucky with the frequency of trains. For the last 3 1/2 years I have taken the fast 8.10am and got a seat and at my desk near St. Paul's at 9am. After 20th May the earlier trains were just not reliable between 7.30 and 8, the 8.06 is so full there sometimes isn't even standing room. Now
taking the 8.20, 8.24 or 8.28 as usually one of them runs, although seats not guaranteed. Means I get to my desk 9.20 -9.30 and feel obliged to stay even later than usual before leaving to go home. Have to plan when I am going home by checking what is running and what is stopping at Harpenden. No fast trains between 6.30 and 7 to Harpenden. Too often route being changed after we are in the train and have to change at St. Albans with no connecting train for 20 mins or more - twice two weeks ago! Missed gym classes, meals with friends, cinema visits. My children are older now, but I still like to have some life in the evenings. I rely on social media updates/Facebook daily for train updates as website not accurate — used Facebook once a year before May timetable changes!

Alison Mclaughlin

I'm seeing less of my wife and kids as I need to leave earlier to try to get to work on time and it takes me longer to get home. I am also going out less as getting home later is so unreliable.

Derek

My wife and I both commute in from harpenden, and rely on the train to get into work. We have two children so timings are critical. With trains so unreliable it's so frustrating knowing that every 15 min spent watching 'express' trains skip harpenden (empty) is one fewer mr man book, or a little less Harry Potter.

Dan

I cannot spend time in London without changing my plans each evening due to failed trains and promises

Andy

Our 17yr old daughter commutes to college in London (Culinary as not offered at 6th form nationally). She has missed and been turned away from classes (late policy for college) due to trains not arriving and being cancelled. As parents we also worry greatly about cancelled trains returning to Harpenden if she gets kicked off at an unmanned station at night, which has happened. It affects her education and stress levels as a young adult trying to work toward her career.

Lynnelle

I have missed or been late for client meetings/breakfasts in the morning so now have to leave 45 minutes earlier than I used to. In the evenings, after client events, faced with uncertainty and long delays, I have travelled to Welwyn Garden City and had to pay £25-30 for a taxi back to Harpenden. This sad episode has had a very significant impact on time spent with family, stress levels and financially.

Simon Jennings

I am one of the “invisible disabled”, suffering from a back condition. To stand on the train is just too physically demanding for me, so I now leave the house 30 minutes earlier and work 40 minutes later in an attempt to ensure I can catch a train where I can get a seat. That's an hour and 10 minutes additionally away from my family each day and I am currently exhausted and stressed. On top of that, I have less time to exercise, so the long term impact is that I am becoming less stable across my upper spine, with potential increased damage. My options are either to consider back surgery (which is not advisable given the position of the weakness in my spine and has a higher than acceptable likelihood of paralysis) or to retire three years earlier than planned. I would not want to reveal my salary, but the financial impact of three years loss of salary is, I would consider, significant.

Nicola MacLeod
We bought a house in Harpenden last year, knowing we would be able to work in London. With the change to timetable I struggle getting to work on time (getting up to Luton and Bedford) and know the risk to move employers is now too high due to unreliable transport. The change to timetable has also affected our social life - we have friends in London and we don’t see them anymore because late trains are far too unreliable now. In a year, not only has our day to day lives changed, but so has our future. We worked hard to buy here - and we love the town and community, but this has led to me missing good work opportunities because I cannot rely on the train service for small mileage let alone to London (I’ve been late to ad hoc conferences and I cannot knowingly commit to the same stress every day). The change to our train service has affected how we see harpenden as our long term home. It’s an awful thing to work the hours we work, yet still feel out of control with something as basic as a decent train service that is fit for service, and that illustrates the commuter-town population.

Emma Payne

I commute to Sutton daily and the removal of semi fast straight through services has added approx 45 mins to my journey each way. Furthermore the reduced frequency of trains to and from Harpenden has left few good connections meaning that my travel times are restricted to half hourly or (in the way home) hourly intervals.

Isabel Green

I have commuted to London for over 20 years, and we have always been promised a better service, and with the money that has been spent I thought that was what we were getting. In all my years commuting it has never been as bad as the last few months. The "service" since 20 May is chaotic, unreliable, and unpredictable. I work close to Farringdon and now have to travel earlier and return home later. I am more stressed and get to spend less time with my family. It is particularly bad in the evening when there are large gaps in the evening service, so sometimes my best option is to travel to St Albans, where I have to then wait up to 20 mins, to travel the last 5 minutes to Harpenden. I now also avoid going out in London in the evening or on my days off, as it is just not worth the extra effort if the trains go wrong.

Liz Wilde

My daughter (14) commutes for a specialist vocational school in London and work (she’s a professional West End Actress/singer) and I commute for work. The current situation for us is not sustainable long-term. The unpredictability and unreliability of service is putting a huge strain on both of us. I’m continually late for work, and she’s late for school, we’ve had instances where she’s been thrown off the train at Hendon, Or St Albans which is extremely frightening for a 14yo.

I’ve also had to pay for Uber’s home at 10.30 at night due to no trains running. Long-term this is affecting our family life as I also have a son, which means we see less of him in the morning and at night. Having to stand both travelling to and from London isn’t ideal for either of us, and long-term I’m now considering a change of job and a house move. We moved to Harpenden for trains to school and work, which we can no longer rely on, and to pay £4500 for my annual pass plus £300/month for my daughter for the level of service we are getting is shocking. Additionally we are worried about the over-crowding of the trains and the platforms. We’ve seen several people faint recently on over-packed trains and the number of people at St Albans station when the train terminated abruptly there is horrific. It’s only a matter of time before there is a serious accident. We’ve travelled to and from London for the last 3 years without a problem, but since May timetable change, our lives have been disrupted unreasonably. We feel strongly that a fair and honest consultation was not conducted and that Harpenden has been unfairly down- regulated. We ask respectfully that the decision is re-evaluated.

Katrina Methven

I moved to Harpenden from London in 2016. We chose Harpenden for many reasons, the key one being my ability to still commute to work in London in around an hour. We felt we made a good choice, I didn't have to aim for a specific train because they were so frequent. Commuting was actually a pleasure as it was my only me time! Now it's no longer a pleasure. I have to aim for specific trains because they are less frequent (we have lost over a third of our key services), but those trains are so frequently delayed or cancelled it quite often takes at least 1.5 hours if not more. So I am getting up earlier (and am consequently exhausted) in order to still get home to have enough time to see my children after work before their bedtime. I'm very lucky my employers allow flexible working, if not I probably would have been fired for being late/leaving so early. This is having a significant impact on mine and my family's life, along
with questioning our decision to live here. I just want our trains back (and then an improved service like was promised!).

Karah Slowley, Harpenden

The timetable change has meant I aim for earlier trains than before to guarantee I can be where I need to be when I need to be - this is because there are fewer trains and the impact means I am leaving home earlier in the morning and have less family time - this is made particularly challenging when you consider the large service gaps and the impact that one cancelled train makes. The old pre-May timetable could accommodate cancelled trains (lets face it GTR haven't run without cancellations for years). The stopping pattern changes mean when I need to get to Canary Wharf or Paddington I can no longer rely on trains to West Hampstead. This means longer journey times and I now change at St Pancras / Kings Cross - no doubt putting more needless strain on a very busy interchange (that said Cross Rail and the Farringdon interchange is much needed). Worst impact is getting home in an evening because there are too few trains to allow for a 'turn up and go service' as we had pre-May. This means I need to check the GTR App and make sure I either end meetings to time with the trains or aim for a later train. The 6:30 to 7:15 period is terrible for service gaps and the impact to me is either less productivity at work or less time at home with the family. Then you have the late night service - the timetable is fundamentally worse and still doesn't run successfully, meaning I leave work & social events early, don't attend or need to use Taxi's either to get to the station on time or worse all the way home. The timetable means my wife and I don't really plan for 'London nights' since it can be just too painful getting home after 9pm. Finally, since I also need to use the off-peak service I have been astounded at the huge gaps in service which mean I've regularly spend 15-20mins very unproductively on platforms waiting for trains that frequently turn up late or not at all. Overall a huge impact to life in lots of small but very significant ways.

Jon Benson – Harpenden

I have lived in Harpenden for nearly 25 years. Have used the train service by various operators over that time as I have always worked at University College Hospital with cancer patients. From time to time we have had bad services but nothing compares since this timetable change. I have very rarely had a seat in the morning and basically never in the evening. I’ve got to the stage where I just feel fortunate I’ve got on the train. I have osteoarthritis in both knees. Have had a total knee replacement in one knee so standing for a half hour journey without delays is no fun. I have got to the stage where I am seriously thinking of moving out of Harpenden and moving to somewhere where I will never need Thameslink again.

Yasmina Adhihetty