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Reason for submitting evidence

I have been a regular weekday commuter from Bedford to London for 28 years, using peak time trains, so the timetable changes have had a direct impact on my life.

Loss of peak time East Midlands Trains services between Bedford & London

The loss of peak time East Midlands Trains (EMT) services has had a markedly detrimental effect on my commuting and working life. These trains provided a reliable, half-hourly, fast journey of 35 minutes. The fastest Thameslink train I can now catch should take 45 minutes, but evening express trains are still routinely delayed, and unreliable, despite the July amended timetable, so my journey time has just about doubled.

With EMT peak services I was unlucky not to get a seat. With the timetable changes, despite advertising extra spaces, I am lucky if I do get a seat on a Thameslink train, often having to choose between waiting for a later train or standing for 20 minutes until St Albans.

Initial problems caused by timetable changes

Late, cancelled, and slow-running trains meant I was continually late for work in the morning and late arriving home at night (up to an hour each way). For several weeks, just about every peak time Thameslink train was either delayed or cancelled.

This total lack of reliability meant you could not plan your journey, so often wasted approximately 15 minutes waiting on a platform before spending longer on the train journey itself.

Trains were quite regularly changed to all stations stopping services, with an announcement only being made after the train had left, thus adding another 15 minutes to the journey.

At other times the trains travelled so slowly you assumed it must be a trainer driver.
Sometimes, delays in the evenings were so bad that overcrowding at St Pancras forced staff to shut access to the platforms, thus creating more delays.

This state of affairs would have been bad enough for a few days or a week, but this continued for several weeks, both morning and evening, during the extremely hot summer weather.

**Continuing problems despite revised timetable**

Evening trains from London to Bedford are still being delayed, and are still unreliable. The 1721 St Pancras to Bedford 'express' is constantly late arriving at Bedford, regularly adding 10 or 15 minutes onto the journey time.

Reasons given for delays do not invite trust. One delay was blamed on trespassers on the line, despite the train running slow all the way from London to Bedford whilst every other train passed at normal speed. We are told 'express' Thameslink trains are delayed outside Bedford due to 'congestion' at the station, whereas people waiting there tell us there are no other trains in the station.

A couple of times there have been major delays due to incidents such as broken down trains. With the removal of EMT peak services, there has been no alternative service to use.

**Effect on everyday life**

For over three months my journey times have basically doubled. I have spent weeks being late to work, and arriving home late, and wasted an unbelievable amount of time waiting at stations for services to arrive.

On occasions where I needed to be at work at a specific time I have had to allow a ludicrous amount of extra time, once having to get up at 4.30 am.

I have spent more money than I should on taxis as I have been too tired to walk home from the station after long journeys and having to stand part of the way.

I feel I have had no proper evenings for a long time, arriving home late, frustrated, and angry, and eating late, which is not healthy.

Certainly, the extra time spent travelling and the general unreliability of Thameslink trains will be a factor in deciding whether or not to retire next year.

**Lack of information and misinformation**

There appeared to be conflicting reports as to why EMT peak time services to Bedford & Luton stopped, with each TOC seemingly 'blaming' the other.
One reason given was the Midland Main Line upgrade north of Bedford but, generally, engineering works lead to the cancellations of off peak and weekend services, for minimum disruption, not peak time.

Another reason given was Thameslink wanting more track capacity, but I do not understand how removing one or two stops creates more capacity if the EMT services are still running.

After the event the railway industry talked of how they had warned of initial disruption in their timetable changing advertising, but I cannot see any evidence of this.

Claims made by Thameslink as to how they were given limited time to finalise timetable changes due to Network Rail delays also seem to keep changing. Originally it was months reduced to weeks, then it was over a year reduced to months.

Thameslink blaming part of the problem on not having enough drivers trained on the new routes does not garner sympathy. They had the same problem when they first took over the franchise.

Lack of or conflicting information only fuels suspicions that EMT want to remove peak time services to Bedford permanently, suspicions first created by the East Midlands franchise consultation document which seemed to totally exclude Bedford, contained no initial plans for a public consultation meeting there, and claimed commuter stops’ such as Bedford could add ‘up to’ 30 minutes to a journey, which seems rather excessive.

That document also suggested that peak time EMT trains were overcrowded due to ‘commuter stops’. I totally disagree. If you were willing to walk the full length of EMT services you generally found a seat; a full train is not an overcrowded one.

**Conclusion**

Before the timetable changes I had a reliable 35 minute, half-hourly, service between Bedford & London. Now my journey time is just about doubled, trains are unreliable and there is no guarantee I will get a seat.

The quality of my daily commute has deteriorated from very good to below average.

The stopping of EMT peak time services has resulted in hundreds of extra commuters having to use already crowded Thameslink services which are still unreliable, whilst EMT trains leave with empty seats. If there is a problem with Thameslink services, commuters to Bedford no longer have an alternative service to fall back on.

Unless the Thameslink service to Bedford improves dramatically in both reliability, with proper ‘express’ services to Bedford in the evening, I would strongly support the reintroduction of EMT peak time services from/to Bedford at the earliest opportunity.

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