Written evidence submitted by the Transport Salaried Staffs’ Association (TSSA) (RTC0085)

I am writing on behalf of TSSA, a trade union that principally operates in the railways of the United Kingdom and the Irish Republic. In Britain, the Union is recognised for collective bargaining purposes by all the Train Operating Companies as well as Network Rail and many of its infrastructure contractors. Additionally, TSSA bargains with organisations like the RSSB, Transport for London and London Underground.

TSSA’s submission to the inquiry is based on:

- An online survey of station staff members in Govia Thameslink Railway that was run between 25th June and 23rd July 2018;
- Reports from members in Northern.

Findings of the Survey of GTR Station Staff

The survey covered members employed in ticket offices, on platforms, at gatelines, and those in supervisory and revenue protection roles. Members were asked to participate because:

“There have been reports of increasing passenger frustration since the timetable changes. We are also concerned that the company is putting staff and passengers at risk during the hot weather. Please take part in this survey to help us target our intervention to management with accurate information from you on the ground.”

TSSA would draw the Select Committee’s attention to the following findings from the survey:

1. Whilst staff with varying degrees of experience took part, over half (53.64%) had more than ten years’ service. The level of complaints from this experienced group indicates the extent of the difficulties that they faced in dealing with the fallout from GTR’s introduction of the new timetables. Many have told us that they have never before experienced the volume of the difficulties that they had to confront from May 2018;

2. The most important finding for us as a trade union was that of the personal safety and levels of support that our members received during the difficult period of the chaotic introduction of the new timetable:

   a). A staggering 79% of members (over three quarters!) told us that they felt less safe in the six weeks after the introduction of the new timetable;

   b). A similar number (77%) complained that the levels of support from the company had actually got worse. This suggests that staff were left to face the issue by themselves and indicates an abdication of GTR’s duty of care
responsibilities towards its staff. It also means that nearly all members believe GTR failed to show sufficient leadership which left the front line staff over exposed to passengers who they were struggling to help with insufficient and inaccurate information.

3. In terms of why GTR station staff employees felt less safe, 95% of our members said that they had experienced an increased level of passenger frustration since the new timetable came into force whilst over 87% complained about an increase in either verbal, physical abuse or attacks on staff.

Almost a third of stations were felt to be unsafe places to work by our front-line “Passenger Host” members who reported a huge spike in abuse towards them from passengers, ranging from screaming and swearing at them, spitting at them, wishing them dead, finger-prodding them, etc.

For 30% of staff, these issues were compounded because they didn’t have safe, secure and appropriate rest facilities at work where they could find some sanctuary.

On the line running out of London to Kings Lynn and Peterborough, staff reported a heightened sense of stress and vulnerability because of lone working at stations.

4. 92% of survey participants also told us that their job had become more difficult or stressful since the introduction of the new timetable with many workers (65%) also citing the obligation to work additional hours during this period.

5. TSSA members advised us about how the chaos played out, telling us about:
   - multiple cancellations
   - delays meaning passengers had to spend long periods waiting in massive queues
   - overcrowded and claustrophobic trains
   - people being forced into trains that were already overcrowded
   - some trains were so packed that doors had to be forced shut manually;
   - passengers passing out and being sick due to overcrowding;
   - some stations being closed because of the extent of overcrowding (eg, St Albans and St Pancras) leading to passenger abuse
   - a lack of information to give to passengers
   - passengers regularly congregating around staff in booking halls, gate lines and platforms hurling abuse
   - incurring angry passengers when having to ask passengers to move along the entire length of the train (to get more people in the train) or when having to stop customers entering a train due to overcrowding
   - passengers having to rush between platforms because of last minute platform changes
   - short formed trains (ie, with insufficient vehicles for the number of passengers)
- trains cancelled as they ran into the platform to pick up passengers
- passengers forcing themselves on to trains before others could alight;
- trains arriving so full and standing - passengers falling out of the trains and collapsing; others being trampled on by other passengers (albeit accidentally) as they got out of the train.

The impact of all of this is to leave staff demoralised, stressed and sick. When the company was asked by TSSA to suspend progressing staff along the MFA (Managing for Attendance) sickness monitoring processes because of the levels of presenteeism (sick workers reporting for duty) resulting from stress caused by the timetable issues, the request was denied and the only concession was “on a case by case basis.”

Staff members were asked to report abuse and assaults but were afraid to because of possible repercussions and accusations that they have not reacted properly.

Members also reported the real and understandable fear that due to the constant pressure at work, along with putting in extra time (whilst waiting for their train to take them home, or in the form of overtime) may have caused them to make a mistake or misjudge a situation with the implications around personal safety and the safety of passengers.

6. Members report the situation from both staff and passengers was exacerbated by the heatwave with neither toilet nor water facilities made available on overcrowded platforms or trains to help cool overheating and over-delayed commuters.

65% of survey respondents said that they had witnessed unsafe conditions in the recent hot weather that put passengers at risk at the same time as the timetable chaos. When asked to give details, comments came about:
- dehydration
- trains with the heating on
- air conditioning not working on trains
- new trains without windows that can be opened
- feinting
- a lack of bottled water
- on one overheated trains in the evening peak, two people passed out.

Feedback from members in GTR

In addition to the survey, TSSA members have reported other issues which show a collection of reasons for the abject failure at GTR:

- There was new rolling stock (Class 700s) on which drivers were not yet fully trained
Additionally, there was an issue of recruiting enough drivers and ensuring route knowledge was secured;
It was completely predictable that there would be a number of issues with members witnessing trains stuck on platforms in terminus stations and not shifted to sidings, meaning that the following trains were unable to get onto the platforms causing backlog issues;
There were also incidents of trains at stations without the onward bound drivers there to take over and drivers at stations with no trains there for them.
The company employed four additional security teams (in pairs of two) to assist at certain locations across the network. These started towards the end of June. As was entirely predictable, due to the large geographical area each team was expected to cover the largest proportion of time in each shift was spent travelling between stations. Members reported that the security staff, intended to assist with the personal safety issues, were often on site for as little as 10 minutes at a time.

The conclusion that can be reached from these reports is that inadequate planning was carried out by GTR management, exasperated by the fine margins between services, which resulted in the enormous knock-on issues for the entire service.

There is also an ongoing issue of understaffing, meaning TSSA members are sometimes lone working at stations when they should not be.

Reports from members in Northern
TSSA members in Northern have reported that whilst the company was quick to apportion the entire blame on late delivery to Network Rail, it was, in reality, only a factor. The actual complete picture also included actions taken by Northern, including:
- The failure of the centralised rostering (eg, for train crews) has failed;
- Train Planning was unable to cope with the extra preparations for the new timetable;
- The terms and conditions for drivers are not fit for purpose;
- A pause on recruitment for drivers for the former Trans Pennine Express services transferred to Northern;
- Drivers establishments (numbers at particular depots) were incorrect;
- Not enough managers left to be able to deal with the situation;
- Thousands of driver training days generated by the May timetable, releasing drivers to train causing more cancellations.

We are also advised that because these issues had not been confronted before the timetable change in May, many managers, supervisors and planner are now being put under a great deal of stress to find a solution.

In addition, TSSA is advised that a big issue is that there are a significant number of new Directors, heads of department, working in the franchise that have little to no experience of the industry or how a rail company operates. Added to this we
understand that the Arriva Group are putting an unacceptable amount of pressure on them to deliver impossible targets at whatever cost.

To give a flavour of the chaos passengers have been facing, a colleague provided the following evidence on 18th June 2018:

“I had the dubious pleasure of travelling from my local station, Outwood, just outside Leeds, to Crewe and back on Thursday using Northern, TPE and Arriva Trains Wales TOC’s - the journey to Crewe wasn’t too bad, but the return journey was horrendous. The train (Arriva Wales) from Crewe to Manchester Picc was delayed by 14 minutes. When we finally arrived at Manchester Piccadilly it was absolute chaos - the platform for the Newcastle via Leeds train was absolutely heaving - the train had just picked up at Manchester Airport and consisted of three carriages. Three carriages at peak hours!!! People were shouting, pushing and arguing in lumps. The staff were constantly trying their best to keep everyone back from the platform edge. Getting on the train was a nightmare and I’m pretty sure quite a few people gave upon the idea. We then picked up at Manchester Oxford Road and again at Manchester Victoria where the scenes were the same.

I’ve been travelling between Manchester and Leeds for years and honestly cannot believe that someone has had the wise idea to stop and pick up at all three main stations in Manchester - especially after coming from the airport with just 3 carriages. It wouldn’t have taken a genius to forsee the chaos that this is causing. It’s so bad that on Friday I was supposed to be travelling a similar route onto Liverpool that I decided last minute to go in my car as opposed to tackle that madness again. Took me 1 hour 35mins to get to Liverpool, at peak commuting time - as opposed to 3+ hours by train at least two of which would have been absolute chaos again.”

Finally, as an indication of Northern’s attitude, we would offer the evidence of its penalty fares system. We have no issue with the company being more stringent about dealing with fare dodgers and collecting lost revenue but are concerned when signs like that in the Appendix appears at stations where there is no facility to buy a ticket (eg, at a ticket office or from a ticket vending machine) for what can be very short journeys of a matter of a few minutes to stations like Wakefield and Leeds. Due to the business on the train, conductors are unable to get through the train in time to be able to sell tickets meaning that passengers are penalised for the company’s failings.

**Conclusion**

Our view is that the rush by the Secretary of State for Transport and the Train Operating Companies to blame Network Rail for the timetable chaos has been a smokescreen to cover up their own failings and is part of a Government agenda to discredit the Infrastructure Manager and prepare it for privatisation.

In our response to the Transport Select Committee’s Inquiry, we have spent time stressing the impact on workers and passengers of the incompetence caused by the
timetable chaos. Too often, decisions in boardrooms at the DfT or TOCs fail to factor in the negative impact on those required run the trains - or on those people who have to travel for work or other purposes. We trust that the Select Committee will not overlook how workers have been left fearful, stressed, demoralised and sick - alongside the real sense of frustration that passengers feel at the way the British rail system is being run. Our view is that the pursuit of profit by TOCs and government/ORR demand for efficiencies in Network Rail is taking the focus away from providing a service that people want to use whilst also failing to give workers the resources that they need in terms of extra staff, support and facilities.

*September 2018*
Appendix A - Penalty Fare Sign, Arriva Rail Northern

WARNING

Have you paid?

Please buy your ticket before you travel, otherwise you may have to pay a Penalty Fare (at least £20).

If you cannot produce a valid ticket for your entire journey or a Promise to Pay notice when asked to do so, you may be charged a Penalty Fare of £20 or twice the full single fare (whichever is the greater amount) to the next station at which your train stops. Also, you may be charged the full single fare to your destination station if you continue your journey on the same train.

Examples of when a Penalty Fare may be charged:

- travel without a valid ticket
- are unable to produce an appropriate Railcard for a discount ticket
- are aged 16 or over, travelling on a child rate ticket
- travel beyond the destination on your ticket

For further information please pick up a Penalty Fares leaflet from your nearest staffed station or visit our website at northernrailway.co.uk or via the Northern app.