

Transport Committee – Monday 25 June 2018

Transcript of Item 4 – Govia Thameslink Railway

Caroline Pidgeon MBE AM (Chair): I would like to welcome Nick Brown, Chief Operating Officer at Govia Thameslink. You have been before the Committee before with other hats on in the past, too. You are very welcome today. John Halsall is the Route Managing Director for the South East Route at Network Rail. Thank you very much for coming today and for giving us your time, at a very busy time for you, to go through some of the issues.

I am going to kick off the questions and I particularly want to look at, really, the current level of performance because I am a Southern passenger myself and the train I went for this morning was cancelled. Somebody emailed me this morning and between Streatham and St Albans they used to get 16 trains an hour and this morning they had six. From 16 over the peak-hour period, they had only a handful. Passengers are really suffering.

Perhaps a gentle question to start off with. What is the current level of performance on your network?

Nick Brown (Chief Operating Officer, Govia Thameslink Railway): Thank you, Chair. The level of performance is unacceptable, specifically on the Thameslink and Great Northern (GN) services and how they impact on the Southern timetable, which was also changed on 20 May. It is quite right that I start by extending our apologies for our part in what is a complex industry-wide situation as to why this timetable has failed as far as Thameslink and GN are concerned.

It is against a background of huge investment in the Thameslink programme undertaken by colleagues from Network Rail to expand capacity. Growth in the southeast and through London has been huge in the last 16 years, with a doubling of demand on our services over the last 12 years. Therefore, the timetable that has been brought in, the first phase of four phases, has not gone well and, as I say, we apologise for our part in that.

As I am sure we will discuss, there are some wider issues that have impacted on it. With John, we have worked hard on this over the last year to try to remedy the situation as fast as we can for the benefit of passengers travelling to and through London.

Caroline Pidgeon MBE AM (Chair): The current performance: would you say it is better or worse than under the old timetable for many passengers?

Nick Brown (Chief Operating Officer, Govia Thameslink Railway): As far as Thameslink and GN are concerned, it is worse in terms of punctuality and the level of cancellations. That arises from a set of complicated issues. As far as Southern is concerned, most parts of the Southern timetable are performing better, which was part of the intention of the Thameslink timetable as well. For many years, the Southern timetable has suffered as a consequence of the work that has been going on but also because as a structure it was not fit for purpose. One of the benefits, if we could call it that, of what has happened as far as Thameslink and GN is concerned is that the Southern timetable in totality is working better, but we need to get the Thameslink and GN timetable right to then ensure the benefits for the metro parts of the Southern timetable.

Caroline Pidgeon MBE AM (Chair): Can you give us the number of services that have been cut from the timetable, perhaps in absolute terms, to give us a real picture here as well as perhaps a percentage?

Nick Brown (Chief Operating Officer, Govia Thameslink Railway): It varies day by day. It is typically about 350, some of which are planned and some are on-the-day cancellations, which in a live railway we suffer. I apologise for some cancellations this morning arising from some problems we had on the coast, but also a very nasty fatality on Friday night in Purley, which has caused some engineering problems for our fleet engineers. That number of cancellations varies and the objective that we have at the moment is to give the best possible passenger information to ensure that our passengers can plan their journeys as far as they can, but it changes to some extent on a daily basis.

Caroline Pidgeon MBE AM (Chair): Around 350 a day out of how many services?

Nick Brown (Chief Operating Officer, Govia Thameslink Railway): Across all of GTR, it is about 3,400 rising to 3,500 in the new timetable.

Caroline Pidgeon MBE AM (Chair): About 10% of trains are just being cancelled and that does not include others that are delayed or have problems. That is a pretty poor service for passengers.

Nick Brown (Chief Operating Officer, Govia Thameslink Railway): Yes. We acknowledge that.

Caroline Pidgeon MBE AM (Chair): OK. How are you really managing these current problems? What are you doing to get the timetable back on course? To be fair, the consultation you did was very thorough. We were involved in briefings. The public were able to input. To go from that to then what appears to be a disaster surprised us all because it felt, certainly at that point, that there was a lot of planning going on.

Nick Brown (Chief Operating Officer, Govia Thameslink Railway): That is absolutely correct and that goes to the heart of the industry-wide issues that we face in the implementation of the timetable thus far. The consultation was extensive and - to answer some of the points that you made, Chair, in regard to some stations - there are always winners and losers in a timetable revamp. This has been the biggest that the industry has undertaken in a generation.

The challenge was to deliver as much of the benefit as possible in that first phase as practicable, but there was an acknowledgement through the Industry Readiness Board and the Assurance Panel and with colleagues from the Department for Transport (DfT) who sit on those bodies that the timetable needed to be phased in. The objective was that we had the opportunity to learn at each stage whether there were any gaps or plugs that we needed to fill to give the best possible service as we could to as many passengers as possible, accepting that there is always a trade-off in railway timetables between frequent stops and fast services over longer distances.

Caroline Pidgeon MBE AM (Chair): OK. How are you now managing the current problems to get back to the May stage of the new timetable?

Nick Brown (Chief Operating Officer, Govia Thameslink Railway): When we got to 20 May [2018], we had some very late presenting problems, which have caused the difficulties. The work we are undertaking at the moment is to try to stabilise the timetable and to give as much passenger information as possible. From today, we have geared that up further in terms of what we have sought to do. For the first two weeks, it was a daily change to the timetable and we recognise and apologise for that because it was awful for passengers. However, from the second week onwards, we were able to pre-plan to a degree so that there was a weekly

pattern as far as we could achieve it to the services that were taken out but also the services that we were able to put back in. We have been able to put back in some services.

As we stand now, we are developing a timetable and working with colleagues from Network Rail to implement that from around about the middle of July. That will see a focus on peak services where, obviously, a lot of passengers travel, with some reductions in the off-peak but not on the scale we have currently, to achieve two things; firstly, to give passengers a service on which they can rely much more than currently and have some predictability, but secondly also to continue the driver training programme that was underway before the 20 May changes. A lot has been made of driver training, but driver training was never intended to be completed by 20 May. It was always going to continue through.

Caroline Pidgeon MBE AM (Chair): We are going to focus on that in a minute, but when do you think the May timetable or a variation of it will be fully in place for passengers? Is it the mid-July date or is it later?

Nick Brown (Chief Operating Officer, Govia Thameslink Railway): No, it will not be the mid-July date. It is still in planning and it is something we have to discuss with colleagues from the DfT.

Caroline Pidgeon MBE AM (Chair): That is not firmed up yet. OK. Thank you very much.

Steve O'Connell AM: Thank you. Good morning to both of you. As you will be aware, I represent Croydon and Sutton and those areas are particularly directly affected by the changes. You mentioned earlier about the number of trains, in a percentage manner, not working. You have publicity saying around 20%. However, if you look at the Peterborough to Horsham service, which particularly affects East Croydon and Coulsdon South and others, on some days 60% of the service is not running. That is pretty poor, is it not? Would you like to comment on that, Nick?

Nick Brown (Chief Operating Officer, Govia Thameslink Railway): Two or three things in regard to that. Peterborough to Horsham and Cambridge to Brighton are two of the longer distance services and they are resourced from Peterborough and Horsham, not unsurprisingly, and we have not been in a position to conclude all the training for drivers in those two locations. It was never a case of all drivers at both locations; it was to respond to the demand that the first phase of the timetable put in place. However, the allocation of work across the whole timetable has caused us that challenge, which means that we are slightly behind where we want to be, but that training now -- the cancellations are enabling us to recoup some of that training time.

Steve O'Connell AM: We will have questions around drivers later, but your point around that is a driver issue. Thank you for that. We talked about the separation of Thameslink and Southern. You say that the main Southern services are running well. In my area, we often have as many cancellations as Thameslink. For example, last Wednesday in the evening, areas such as Wallington, Thornton Heath and Norbury suffered four out of five consecutive cancellations to London. That is equally poor, is it not?

Nick Brown (Chief Operating Officer, Govia Thameslink Railway): It is.

Steve O'Connell AM: Could you explain why? Your earlier comment was to accept the Thameslink timetable is an issue, but with Southern the separation has been better. That does not reflect the details and the information I have.

Nick Brown (Chief Operating Officer, Govia Thameslink Railway): The services that you receive will be from Thameslink or Southern depending on which part of south of the Thames you are from. The figures I quoted before were across the whole of the geography. Inevitably, at some stations, there will be figures such

as you have described - I do not have all the detail precisely for every station - but what we are seeking to do to minimise the inconvenience to passengers where that occurs and in particular four out of five, which is wholly unacceptable, is to make alternative arrangements through other local transport and that is across the network, buses and taxis as appropriate, but also to ensure that following trains have special stop orders so that passengers will still be able to get from station to station.

Steve O'Connell AM: You say that sometimes there are other arrangements, but frequently you have cancelled particularly last trains and late trains without providing any alternative services and people were stranded. Would you accept that?

Nick Brown (Chief Operating Officer, Govia Thameslink Railway): I accept that it is a risk. Our policy is not to cancel the last train of the day. If there are any specifics that we have missed out on that you need me to follow up on, I will gladly do so, but our intent is to run the last train or last two trains of the day in every circumstance and, also, to avoid consecutive cancellations where we can.

Steve O'Connell AM: OK. There are two things I would like to comment on briefly. One is that, even without the chaos, the new timetable has reduced services on what I call the 'inner London metro', areas like Norbury, Thornton Heath and Norwood Junction. There is a reduction in services there and they have caused problems in south London, particularly around school times and when Millwall and Crystal Palace football fans are moving around. They will be facing a reduction in timetabled services. Do you acknowledge that there is a reduction in those services?

Nick Brown (Chief Operating Officer, Govia Thameslink Railway): As I mentioned before, there are always winners and losers with every timetable, but if there is a specific around those as a consequence of the plan to have the new timetable in place, I will happily take those away.

Steve O'Connell AM: I will write to you on that. The last thing I will also write to you about is - and I did mention it to you earlier - about easements. By the changing in the timetable, there have been certain off-peak trains being moved to just before 9.30 pm and therefore being moved to on-peak. That has affected people and they have had to wait over half an hour for the next off-peak. Transport for London (TfL) and others have told me they are happy around easements and you are aware what easements are. I am told that GTR have turned their face against easements. If I write you, will you look at that with some optimism, perhaps?

Nick Brown (Chief Operating Officer, Govia Thameslink Railway): We have not turned our face against anything. We accept that there are always going to be consequences of timetable change. We collect the revenue but we do not keep the revenue from these and, therefore, it is a discussion with us and the DfT. If you write to me, I would be very happy to take that up.

Steve O'Connell AM: I will write to you for some support.

Nick Brown (Chief Operating Officer, Govia Thameslink Railway): Yes.

Steve O'Connell AM: Caroline, thank you.

Caroline Pidgeon MBE AM (Chair): I will pick up some of those general issues in our correspondence following this.

Keith Prince AM: Clearly, part of the problem, we are being told, is the late agreement on the timetable and the fact that the agreement between you and Network Rail was a bit late. Can I first of all ask John, if you do not mind? Why was there this delay in the timetable being agreed?

John Halsall (Route Managing Director (South East), Network Rail): First of all, can I repeat the message that Nick has already given in terms of an apology? The situation that we find ourselves in is completely unacceptable and the criticisms that we face by passengers and the media are entirely appropriate. There are no excuses for that. All we can do is apologise and give you the commitment that we are doing everything we possibly can to fix it, which is what we are doing.

It is very difficult to answer that question very simply so, if you bear with me for a few seconds, I will try to give you as honest an account as I can. Without going back for years in history, which we could easily do, if we go back to about November of last year [2017], there was a decision that had been in discussion for some time, which was to move from a proposal to roll the Thameslink timetable out in two phases. A decision was made in the autumn of last year to move from two phases, which was considered to be a 'big bang', to a more drawn-out, incremental change with a four-phase timetable.

It would be true to say that that decision was made later than we would have hoped but, at the time, we felt that it was the lesser of two evils because, whilst it eroded a lot of time in terms of producing the timetable, we still felt we could deliver the new timetable collectively between Network Rail and GTR and we still felt it was better than having this 'big bang' approach. The problem began, if you like, at that moment in time.

Why did we think it was easier to roll out a four-phase timetable than a two-phase timetable? We felt that it was a removal of train services and, therefore, it would be relatively simple. The experts in both GTR and Network Rail felt that to be the case and that it was deliverable.

If I go back in terms of reflection and ask myself what the mistake was that I made personally, it was allowing us to continue on at that moment because, once we started carrying on beyond that point, we had unconsciously created a position where it would be almost impossible to reverse.

At that point in time, we did actually have, broadly speaking, a timetable for the 'big bang' approach, which was in accordance with the timescales of the industry process. Then, in fairly short time, our colleagues in GTR had to produce a modified timetable. We expected that to be relatively simple - timetables are all pretty complicated - and we expected it to be complete very early this year.

In reality, it was much more complicated. There are a variety of reasons why it was more complicated. There were changes made, for understandable reasons, by GTR. There were changes made by Network Rail. There were changes made by the Department [for Transport]. What was intended to be a very simple change proved to be really quite complicated. To put that into context, we were expecting collectively about maybe 800 or 900 changes to the timetable. It transpired that there were about 4,500 - in fact, marginally more than that - and so considerably different.

We were now in a situation where the timetable was effectively submitted late but the approval of that timetable by Network Rail got later and later because of the additional complexity that we were not expecting and, hence, we were now eroding into important time that GTR needed. However, when we spoke to our respective timetable teams, they both felt comfortable they could get the timetable done, which they duly did, but it took longer and longer, even to the point where we were down to maybe just a few trains out of thousands and thousands of trains, but I unpicking those last few trains meant us going back into the heart and soul of the timetable and rebuilding it. It was just a vastly complicated process.

When we finally got the timetable approved, therefore, it was way later than we were expecting. Therefore, colleagues in GTR had a significantly reduced period of time to do the work that they had to do, typically - and Nick knows better than I do - maybe three weeks instead of 12 weeks. If you add on that the layers of complexity, this was already one of the biggest timetable changes in a generation and, therefore, not only did we have less time to process the timetable but it was a much more significant timetable.

Therefore, it is correct to say that Network Rail responded late, but really you have to go back to the beginning of the sausage machine in terms of time to really understand why that is the case. It is quite a complicated story.

Keith Prince AM: That is a very clear and helpful explanation. The question, therefore, is: with all this combination of delays and so forth and there being only two or three weeks until it had to 'go live', for want of a better phrase, why was it not suggested that the launch of the new timetable be delayed to enable GTR to get their ducks in a row?

John Halsall (Route Managing Director (South East), Network Rail): I will take up the beginning of the tale and then the issue that we are --

Keith Prince AM: I will be asking the same question of GTR.

John Halsall (Route Managing Director (South East), Network Rail): Yes. Almost by definition, there is a handover point at which I will hand over to Nick. To some extent I have answered some of the question, but as to the question why, let us rewind and let us consider the governance process because that is quite key in this process.

At least at the time, up until 20 May [2018], it felt like we had a robust governance process which was beyond GTR and Network Rail. It was an Industry Readiness Board chaired by elder statesmen of the industry. Sitting on that Industry Readiness Board was the Office of Rail and Road (ORR), the Department [for Transport], two other colleagues from Network Rail, the Network Rail team that was responsible for the timetable, five operators and a number of other individuals, and, as such, a very robust and capable team. That team was reviewing the different component parts of operational readiness once a period but, in addition to that, there was another industry expert who then did deep dives into component parts and then reported back on identified risks. It was what we considered at the time to be a robust process to test and make sure that we were ready to roll this timetable out. In hindsight, clearly, that team was not as robust as we had hoped.

There was a series of questions and events. The first question was in November [2017]. Is it the right decision to move away from the two phases to the four phases? At the time, all of the experts believed that whilst that did introduce some risks, those risks could be mitigated, and that is a matter of fact and evidence in terms of the minutes of those meetings, and so that was a moment in time.

The next question was, as we were going through those timetable changes and it became apparent that that assumption was incorrect, what was then happening with the Industry Readiness Board? The view was, yes, we could still deliver the timetable in a timely way. Yes, there were risks but both Network Rail from a system operator overall position felt that it was deliverable and so did colleagues in GTR. The meetings were pointed and challenging. They were not a walk in the park. We were collectively challenging each other, as you would expect, but the considered opinion of that group was that we could still progress.

Clearly, time was being eroded and, therefore, there came a point in terms of driver rostering, training and all of that side of things, which I will hand over to Nick to pick up.

Nick Brown (Chief Operating Officer, Govia Thameslink Railway): Thanks, John. I agree with that summary. I would just like to add a couple of things by way of dates.

As John has described, we submitted our proposed timetable in August of last year [2017] based on the specification issued by the DfT, which was what was called an 'end-state specification'. That was submitted to Network Rail and the 'end state' would have been at the conclusion of the timetable in its totality in the two-phase approach that John described. The offer back from Network Rail in November responded to that, and that in and of itself created a workload for GTR then to respond, too.

The two other things that were happening simultaneously were the phasing which John has described and also a specific change around Bedford with the removal of East Midlands Trains services, which was another major change. The north end of the Thameslink service had to be incorporated into the plan. Colleagues in Network Rail's central capacity planning team were under some massive workload as a consequence of those changes as well as wider ones across the rest of the country at the time, which caused - exactly as John says - some of the challenges that took a much more protracted period of time to resolve those timetable issues.

That took us right through to the second or third week of April [2018] when the timetable was finally 'proven', as Network Rail would describe it, and we then had something to work with to prepare our train diagrams and work schedules, as we call them, for the rolling stock and then for the drivers. Then, from there, we go to the last phase, which is what is called 'rostering', which is where those work schedules are applied to a roster for drivers to work around. At the diagram stage, because of the haste with which it was done, we have usually no less than 12 weeks to prepare that part; often 20 weeks is part of the industry process. The industry process was creaking quite substantially in terms of what we were required to do and, therefore, our necessary haste meant that we had insufficient time to optimise the work schedules as we describe them and, therefore, had an inefficient set which led to an inefficient roster. The first part caused an increase in demand above plan for the workload for train drivers and the second had a mismatch of the locations and where they were to drive.

The issue then was that, with three days to go between posting the roster and the timetable, we had very little time to do anything different and, exactly as John says, the consequences to the rest of the rail network would have been catastrophic if we had held with the existing timetable. It would have been more unworkable over a greater geography.

Keith Prince AM: When it got to three weeks or minus three weeks - or however you want to express it - when you had the final plan, did it not occur to anybody either from Network Rail or from yourselves to say, "Hang on. The industry standard is 12 to 20 weeks. We might be able to do 10 or 15 weeks, but three weeks it is not practical. We need to delay this for 20 weeks"?

Nick Brown (Chief Operating Officer, Govia Thameslink Railway): At that point, it would have still been unworkable given the impact on the rest of the industry. The other thing was that each party in the process - and John described who they are - was working on a series of workarounds to make sure that we delivered the timetable as best we could. The ultimate problem that we faced was that we ran out of time to deliver the workarounds that were there to get the whole timetable delivered on 20 May.

Keith Prince AM: Surely, John, Network Rail could say to the whole industry - we are not saying you mucked up, but it just helps my phraseology - "Look, there has been a mess-up. There has been a delay in agreeing all the different timetables. Can everybody just stand where they are? Can everybody just keep doing what they

are doing for another two months" - or a month or whatever period of time you need to buy time - "to get everything sorted?" Why was that call not made?

John Halsall (Route Managing Director (South East), Network Rail): There are two aspects. I will start with the end of the story while I remember it. With three weeks to go --

Keith Prince AM: Will it change in a few minutes' time, then?

John Halsall (Route Managing Director (South East), Network Rail): This is being recorded, this conversation, a lot --

Caroline Pidgeon MBE AM (Chair): It is.

John Halsall (Route Managing Director (South East), Network Rail): -- and, as such, I will be consistent. With three weeks to go - and I am sure Nick will provide more detail in a few seconds - we were not waving a red flag. With three weeks to go, we were not in that position. The red flag was waved considerably closer to zero hours than that.

However, there is an important point that I will share with the Committee, which is probably the essence of the problem that we face or the cause of the problem underneath everything. Two years ago - in fact, Nick and I started in role at about the same time - when the Industry Readiness Board was set up, the Thameslink programme and the rollout of the timetable was an extraordinary challenge. It was an extraordinary challenge in terms of timetable, but the thing that we have not spoken about is the infrastructure changes at London Bridge, Blackfriars, Farringdon, new stations, refurbished stations, new infrastructure that nobody ever sees, new points, tracks, retraining of staff, new signalling, new technology, some of the first in country, and a long list, £7 billion --

Keith Prince AM: Can I just stop you there? I do apologise but we are short on time. The question is, though, it is one thing if you are playing with a train set in your loft, but you are playing with a real train set. I am very envious, actually, but you are playing with a real train set and real people. You have to deal with rolling stock. You have to deal with driver training. You then also have to deal with the unions as well.

Who in their right mind would think that you could achieve any of that in three weeks? My experience is that you would be lucky to do it in three months. Why would you then say, "Yes, we can do this by the seat of our pants"? It does not seem like a sensible decision to have made.

John Halsall (Route Managing Director (South East), Network Rail): That preamble was important because, with that level of complexity two years ago, we had to collectively as an industry create an environment where we can do it because, if we had not created a culture of can-do, then, quite frankly, nothing would have happened, and two years ago that was the direction of travel. Two years ago, there was a momentum that we could do this and a passion to do it because we knew that doing it - and it still will - will deliver huge benefits to passengers and we will get there in the end. Two years ago we wanted to create that culture and we created the culture. Now, that culture was processing risks all of the time, as all of us are very aware of, as problems arose, as problems were dealt with. Day after day, problems arose and they were mitigated and dealt with.

The mistake that we made was that as those problems continued to arise, even up to the last minute, our attention was focusing on resolving them and dealing with the risk associated with them rather than putting

the red flag up and saying, "It is too late". I unreservedly apologise for the fact that we failed to put our foot on the ball until it was too late, but I can only say that --

Keith Prince AM: I am going to bring this bit to a close, but I just find it difficult to understand why. You have already touched on it. You were not just dealing with changing the timetable. You were dealing with virtually a new train line. You were dealing with new stations, new underpasses, new tunnels and new rolling stock. There were so many new variables, any one of which if it went wrong would cause a problem, and yet you still decided with only three weeks to go to say, "We will see what happens". I find that very surprising.

I am conscious of time and, therefore, I just want to throw in one other googly, if you like, which is around complexity and the fact that in the south it is a bit of a lottery as to where you are going to end up when you get on a train, in my experience. You go to different stations. Where I come from in Romford, all the trains go to Liverpool Street or they go to Shenfield and it is quite simple. In the south, they tend to go to different main line stations or different stations. [Sir] Peter Hendy [CBE, Chair, Network Rail] commented - I am sure you have heard of Peter Hendy - on how difficult it is going to all these multiple stations. For instance, there is a line where one train goes to Cannon Street and the other one goes to Charing Cross.

Would there not be some argument for saying that we are just going to go to one track instead of trains crisscrossing all over the place? Is it just too complex?

Nick Brown (Chief Operating Officer, Govia Thameslink Railway): Can I pick that one up, Mr Prince? You have almost described the whole dilemma of the project and that is to link north and south of the capital to cope with phenomenal growth. Frankly, where do you put the trains? There are some unlikely origin and destination points. We have talked about Peterborough and Horsham. The issue is not that Peterborough and Horsham of themselves need to be linked; it is that you can just run the trains end-to-end so that you do not have to leave them stationary in London. It would take up vast quantities of real estate to have even larger stations to do that. We have London Bridge, which has been fantastically rebuilt by colleagues in Network Rail, but even that is getting close to capacity and running the trains through London Bridge and then through the core out to St Pancras and then north from there is the most efficient way of moving the large numbers of people that we need to move into and across the capital.

If I may just come back to an earlier point you made about infrastructure, routes, trains and technology, all of those parts did come together, but we have not only just recently started to train people to drive the new trains or to learn the routes, that has been going on for quite a while.

Caroline Pidgeon MBE AM (Chair): We will come on to that. That is our next section and, therefore, let us hold your comments on that.

Nick Brown (Chief Operating Officer, Govia Thameslink Railway): All right, but it all fits together. As John says, yes, there was a series of workarounds that we had to put in place and mitigations, and I reiterate our apology that when the time ran out on all of those, that was when the problems started.

Keith Prince AM: Can I just ask one final question? Whose decision would it have been to run with the ball or who would have been the person to say, "We cannot run with this. It is just too tight"? Who made the decision to go with it - or who did not make the decision to not go with it - and whose decision is that?

Nick Brown (Chief Operating Officer, Govia Thameslink Railway): John will speak for himself as well. Those of us sitting at the Industry Readiness Board all had a participative role in that, but, from the actual

operation of GTR, that would have been me or the Chief Executive Officer. However, we were acutely aware of our role within the industry structure and the implications it would make.

In terms of how this has come to pass, not just here but perhaps in the north of England as well, the issues that we face are industry structure and the processes that we face and that we have to work through perhaps were built for a time and designed for a time very different from the levels of investment that are going into the rail industry now. Therefore, we welcome the opportunity to sit down with the ORR in their review and the industry debate that is raging at the moment as to what the best way to do this going ahead is. Our first job - and I hope I speak for John in this - is to get this put right for our passengers and for London as soon as we can in as sensible and safe a way as we can. The challenge for the wider industry is to develop processes that are fit for purpose and not to make a bad process better.

Caroline Pidgeon MBE AM (Chair): Thank you. The Peter Hendy point, before he became your Chair, is about it having 17 different ends on this route and Crossrail is complicated enough with three. Tom, you wanted to come in quickly?

Tom Copley AM: I have just a couple of further points on that. You said that with three weeks to go there was not a red flag going up, but I am wondering how on earth there was not. You know how many trains you need, you know how many drivers you need, you know how long it takes to train a driver, you know how many drivers have been trained and how many more you need. With three weeks to go, surely you would know whether or not it was going to work.

Nick Brown (Chief Operating Officer, Govia Thameslink Railway): Three weeks out, we received the timetable from Network Rail. We then had to assess the number of work schedules. The number of work schedules was greater than we had planned for and in the plans that we shared with the Industry Readiness Board by, roundly, 50 drivers. That immediately used the contingency that we had in place to run the service.

Because of the challenges, two of the issues that were always part of the plan for this were to, firstly, continue the training throughout the whole process and through the subsequent phases that we described before and, secondly, to achieve that by what we call piloting drivers through the core part from East Croydon through to St Pancras or Blackfriars, typically, to enable drivers who did not have that key part of route knowledge because London Bridge was being rebuilt and suchlike. That was the key part to get folks through. We then had to go further afield and we did very quickly bring in training managers, testing and commissioning drivers who had been bringing in the new trains and suchlike to reinforce behind the contingency that had been used up.

At that point of three weeks out - and it was a bit less by the time we had issued diagrams and so we were down to perhaps about two weeks - we had started to flag to the Industry Readiness Board that there was a problem and that there would have to be some further contingency to enable us to close that gap because we had soaked up the 50 drivers into the base service away from the piloting programme which had been there.

Tom Copley AM: Joanne [McCartney AM] is going to come on to ask some questions about drivers, but just finally on the complexity point, in our briefing it said that Network Rail had warned the DfT when the franchise was let that the timetable was going to be too complicated. John, you kept using the word 'deliverable', saying, "Yes, it was deliverable", but did Network Rail really believe that it was deliverable given what we have heard, which is that they were telling the DfT it was not and, when [Sir] Peter Hendy [CBE] of course became Chair, based on what he had said to us as well?

John Halsall (Route Managing Director (South East), Network Rail): That is correct. Network Rail in the original refranchising process did say that the proposal that had been submitted was not deliverable, but then we spent several years working with GTR to create what we considered to be a working proposal. It is not fair to blame the current situation on that original rejection. Everybody would accept that the level of change was hugely ambitious and still is, but I believe that we can come up with a plan that will work. It will always be challenging and it will be ambitious, but we need to do it and I believe we can do it. We do need to focus on the recent history in terms of what has gone wrong rather than blame those decisions because it is recent history where we have tripped up badly.

Tom Copley AM: Thank you.

Caroline Pidgeon MBE AM (Chair): Thank you. Let us move on to drivers.

Joanne McCartney AM: For all of your long-suffering passengers on the GN route, even before the new timetable, the unavailability of a driver was quite a frequent excuse given as to why a train was not arriving. We have touched on it already, but can I just ask you for some detailed figures? Can I ask you, Nick, how many drivers had you planned that you needed?

Nick Brown (Chief Operating Officer, Govia Thameslink Railway): At the time of the timetable change - and I will explain the headline and then the detail - we needed 889 drivers and we had resourced 898. That included bringing some in at short notice from Southern and Southeastern whom we recruited when we were aware of the diagram problem. That is what took up the contingency that I just described.

Joanne McCartney AM: Is that the total number of drivers or additional drivers?

Nick Brown (Chief Operating Officer, Govia Thameslink Railway): No, that is the total number of drivers across Thameslink and GN. The number of diagrams that we had forecast was 854 and that went to 930. These things always do jump around a bit but by not as much as you would expect as that. That was the quantum problem that we faced three weeks out and we believed we had solved that one --

Joanne McCartney AM: The training problem?

Nick Brown (Chief Operating Officer, Govia Thameslink Railway): -- but then we went to an issue where we had the rostering problem. Drivers were training well before the timetable change. We had trained, on one example, over 52% through what we call high-level 17, which is a new part through London Bridge. When London Bridge reopened after the work that Network Rail undertook at Christmas and the New Year, within a week we were back training people through London Bridge by diverting some passenger services where we could off the Herne Hill route and suchlike.

Joanne McCartney AM: Can we stick with training for the moment? You have given me an example there, but we have heard, for example, on the Peterborough to Horsham line, only 15% of the drivers had been trained at the time the new timetable came into effect. Is that correct?

Nick Brown (Chief Operating Officer, Govia Thameslink Railway): I cannot quote a percentage, but I know that there were a dozen drivers trained at Peterborough for two what we call 'lines of work'. That would not have been a bad ratio from 12 to two lines of work --

Joanne McCartney AM: It would be useful if you could write afterwards with the various lines and drivers, that would be helpful.

Nick Brown (Chief Operating Officer, Govia Thameslink Railway): If I could write to you and explain that? Yes. Basically, for two jobs we had 12 people, which over a week would have worked. Those were plans that we had explained to the Industry Readiness Board and where we put up the red flag when we did at the beginning of May.

Joanne McCartney AM: You started rostering drivers and what happened then?

Nick Brown (Chief Operating Officer, Govia Thameslink Railway): The rostering process is one that we go through in two phases with colleagues from the trade unions. One is to agree the diagrams, which is a consultative process, and then a negotiable process, which is the rostering. We had a greater quantum of diagrams and a high degree of inefficiency in those, which is what drove the increased numbers that I have described. We had increased numbers and then, as they were then applied to the roster, further inefficiency and a mismatch of the route knowledge, which we have just talked about, say, for Peterborough-Horsham, where that work fell across the different depots that we have. I am sorry it is so complicated --

Joanne McCartney AM: Is this part of some new software you were using or was it --

Nick Brown (Chief Operating Officer, Govia Thameslink Railway): No, we are investing in new software, which will enhance the process, but it does not take away from the responsibilities we have to trade unions in those joint processes. What we did was to have insufficient time, as John has described, to do that in a quality way. I pay tribute to those colleagues from the trade unions who worked late into the night to get that done because it was on 18 May when we were able to conclude that and post the rosters. That was when we realised - and nobody else had put their finger on it from any part of the industry until that point - that we had that problem then.

Joanne McCartney AM: Going back to training, do you have or did you have sufficient training instructors to do the training that was needed or are you looking at that again?

Nick Brown (Chief Operating Officer, Govia Thameslink Railway): We have recruited over 19% more train drivers over the last few years into Thameslink, GN and GTR in total. Our driver training programme is one of the largest in the land because, when the franchise was let, there was insufficient train drivers and the backlog had to be recouped. Along with an advancing age profile, there was a clear need to recruit more train drivers. The training management teams and the courses that we run are very substantial and have always been well populated and we will continue to recruit train drivers.

The problem that we had when the rostering problem hit following the diagrams problem and the work schedules problem was that we had to use our competency development managers and our training managers, all fully qualified as train drivers, to support the piloting through the core part because those we had intended to use on the core part of the network for training were used supporting the main train service. Therefore, our key objective at the moment is to have those people returned to training to continue to pass out some of the new drivers and some of the existing drivers on the new routes.

Joanne McCartney AM: Going forward, when do you believe you will have enough drivers for the planned routes and the planned new timetable?

Nick Brown (Chief Operating Officer, Govia Thameslink Railway): It is difficult to pin down exactly when simply because it is a part here and a part there. The distribution as a consequence of the rosters has made that difficult to predict.

What we do have and what we have been doing in the last few weeks is, rather than a train drivers' depot-based plan, we have gone to an individual train driver training plan, which in fairness we had before but we have gone into a greater degree of granularity to pinpoint exactly where a train driver can pass out the quickest in terms of getting the qualification needed to complete their work and to gain route knowledge. That will work out over the next four to five months. As time goes on, the quantum - back to the Peterborough illustration - is that there will be a greater number of competent drivers for a fixed number of work schedules that they work to.

I can write to you if that makes more sense. I accept that there is a lot to take in there.

Joanne McCartney AM: The new timetable will come in at some point and it would be helpful if there were no cancellations at that point.

Nick Brown (Chief Operating Officer, Govia Thameslink Railway): That is the whole objective, but we have to trade off putting some cancellations in the service from July compared to what it would have been in the 20 May timetable but also allowing us to recoup the training period that we have lost since 20 May and getting back to the training gradient and pass-out rate that we had in place before.

Caroline Pidgeon MBE AM (Chair): We were told that last October [2017] drivers started expressing concern that the training was too late and that the predicated training rate meant that you would not have enough drivers. Are you aware of that?

Nick Brown (Chief Operating Officer, Govia Thameslink Railway): The challenge with trained drivers learning new routes is that their knowledge lapses after six months. For a timetable starting in May, January or the previous December is probably the window of opportunity to start that driver training. We were satisfied that we had a trajectory that gave us enough train drivers. We had a plan which we had shared with the Industry Readiness Board to give them competence over what was required. The [Industry] Readiness Board had acknowledged and supported the fact that we were going to have to continue training throughout. All parties in the Industry Readiness Board were aware of that and we were preparing mitigations. I speak many times a week to train drivers in various guises, usually when they are driving trains or on the platform. Some did express a concern, but when I explained the background as to how we were doing this, they understood the how and why. Interestingly, some Peterborough drivers said, "Hang on a minute. There are only 12 drivers here". Yes, but it is not for 30 lines of work; it is for two or three lines of work to start with. That is how it was working through, but when you are dealing with those ratios, what we presented on 4 May [2018] was the second iteration to the Industry Readiness Board of how we were going to try to manage in that very time-constrained period.

Caroline Pidgeon MBE AM (Chair): Just quickly before we move on, you have a very unusual franchise in that the DfT rules every single thing you do. Did you ask the DfT for funding for driver training which they declined?

Nick Brown (Chief Operating Officer, Govia Thameslink Railway): The franchise arrangements for GTR are, as you say, complicated. Those are a matter of negotiation with the DfT along with other aspects of the Thameslink programme introduction.

Caroline Pidgeon MBE AM (Chair): Did you request further funding for driver training that the DfT declined?

Nick Brown (Chief Operating Officer, Govia Thameslink Railway): I am not aware that they have declined anything yet. We have not asked for any extra funding over and above --

Caroline Pidgeon MBE AM (Chair): You are not aware that in the last six months you asked for further funding for driver training?

Nick Brown (Chief Operating Officer, Govia Thameslink Railway): No, there is a discussion as part of our ongoing business with the DfT that is to fund the totality of some of the Thameslink work of which driver training is part and parcel, but that is all there in discussions weekly and monthly and has been for a long time. It is not as a consequence of any of the problems that we have encountered.

Caroline Pidgeon MBE AM (Chair): OK. Maybe we will come back to that in correspondence. Let us move on to looking at the infrastructure and rolling stock.

Tom Copley AM: Thank you. Yes, John, why was the network not ready for the timetable changes?

John Halsall (Route Managing Director (South East), Network Rail): All of the infrastructure was available and none of the problems that we are facing today are infrastructure related. Some of the challenges in the north of the country have filtered their way through in terms of the challenges that parts of Network Rail face in terms of timetable processing, but none of the problems we are facing today are infrastructure related.

Tom Copley AM: There were a number of issues, though. For example, the train management system was delayed.

John Halsall (Route Managing Director (South East), Network Rail): The train management system is still behind programme, but it does not have an impact in terms of the current situation at all. It is quite exciting inasmuch as the technology is brand new to the Overground railway, but recognised knowledge on the subject means that it takes typically between 18 months and three years to deliver the benefits. You are absolutely right that the bigger priority in terms of traffic management is about making sure that when it goes in it is right because it is a slow-burn benefit --

Tom Copley AM: Hang on. You are saying that that has not had any impact at the moment?

John Halsall (Route Managing Director (South East), Network Rail): No, there are no infrastructure issues which impact on the current situation.

Tom Copley AM: I find that rather difficult to believe, really. Our briefing is saying that because of the delays with this and because it was not in place, controllers were overwhelmed when the new timetable came in.

John Halsall (Route Managing Director (South East), Network Rail): That is incorrect.

Tom Copley AM: That is not correct?

John Halsall (Route Managing Director (South East), Network Rail): It is completely incorrect. We have provided a very clear narrative as to the challenges that we face in terms of consuming time and squeezing up the process to the end so that colleagues in GTR struggled to make sure that drivers were

available. The challenges that we faced that we are prioritising and trying to fix today are all about dealing with the cancellations. Those cancellations are due to driver availability. It is as simple as that.

In the event that traffic management was available, then it is questionable, even if it was available, whether or not it would deliver material benefits because it does take a long time to deliver. It is definitely nothing to do with that.

Tom Copley AM: One other aspect of the infrastructure which I believe has had a knock-on impact on driver training is that the Canal Tunnels were made available or they were not made available in a timely way. Why was that?

John Halsall (Route Managing Director (South East), Network Rail): The Canal Tunnels were available for empty coach moves from October 2016 and so I do not know whether your records say that. They were not available for passenger services until February [2018]. They were always programmed to be available in March. What became apparent at one of our Industry Readiness Board meetings and also another meeting that Nick and I hold together is that, to train drivers, the sooner that the Canal Tunnels were made available the better. In terms of programmed delivery, they were programmed to deliver in 2016 and they were available for empty rolling stock and actually were delivered ahead as a result of Nick pushing for them to be delivered ahead. They were delivered ahead of the March date this year.

Tom Copley AM: It says they were delivered in mid-February and only after pressure from Govia.

John Halsall (Route Managing Director (South East), Network Rail): Yes, that is correct.

Tom Copley AM: It was mid-February when they became available for route training.

John Halsall (Route Managing Director (South East), Network Rail): Well --

Tom Copley AM: I can see Nick wants to come in on this point.

Nick Brown (Chief Operating Officer, Govia Thameslink Railway): There is a little piece of the jigsaw, if I may, Mr Copley, is that whilst they were available for empty stock moves, you still have to run a train through and put it somewhere. Therefore, John and I were both very active in the meeting to get it open on 26 February this year so that we could start to run passenger trains through because that is the most efficient way of having competent drivers training other drivers to get through.

John Halsall (Route Managing Director (South East), Network Rail): The question that we posed at the time, because obviously this is a well-trodden conversation, was -- the original plan, which is I guess the point that I am making, was available for empty rolling stock in 2016. I do not know whether it was October but it was some time ago. The original plan was to have them available for passenger moves in March [2018]. That was the plan. That is what Thameslink had to do; that is what Thameslink did.

Tom Copley AM: Does 'empty rolling stock' mean a driver can go through --

John Halsall (Route Managing Director (South East), Network Rail): A driver can go through but cannot have passengers on that train.

Tom Copley AM: Yes, but does that mean the driver who is being trained can go through?

John Halsall (Route Managing Director (South East), Network Rail): It could be. The question which was not asked was: Thameslink had a programme and they followed the programme and Network Rail delivered according to that programme, but the Thameslink programme team did not ask GTR, "When do you need this to be available?" Similarly, GTR did not say to Network Rail, "When will it be available?" Therefore, I am not making a judgement as to who is right or wrong. I am simply saying that, in terms of the original programme, the infrastructure was made available on time.

Tom Copley AM: Does that mean you were not talking to each other?

John Halsall (Route Managing Director (South East), Network Rail): This plays back to the point that Mr Prince [Keith Prince AM] made earlier on, which is that there are thousands and thousands of interdependencies. We were talking to each other, which is why it was raised at one of our [Industry] Readiness [Board] meetings and it was flagged as a risk, but there was an assumption that the Thameslink timetable programme was well understood. That assumption was incorrect.

Nick Brown (Chief Operating Officer, Govia Thameslink Railway): When John refers to "Thameslink" there, he means the Thameslink programmes as opposed to GTR. That is all right. The issue for us was that if we had had access as we would have ultimately wished to the Canal Tunnels, we would have been parking trains in St Pancras when passenger trains were there and the operational risk to the service as it was at the time at the back end of last year would have been way too great.

Tom Copley AM: You would not have used them for training?

Nick Brown (Chief Operating Officer, Govia Thameslink Railway): Other than at the margin to train testing and commissioning drivers, who work under special rules. The only efficient way for us to have trained drivers, which is what we did, was to get early permission as soon as we could in January [2018]. It was at the January Industry Readiness Board where I led the charge and John supported us in saying to the programme [team], "We need this sorting very quickly, please", and it was by 26 February.

Tom Copley AM: Just more broadly in terms of infrastructure, when John says that the infrastructure did not have any impact on this, do you agree?

Nick Brown (Chief Operating Officer, Govia Thameslink Railway): The work that was scheduled to be completed has been completed. There are still some issues that affect us south of the river, but they were not material to the introduction of the timetable.

Tom Copley AM: John, are there any other infrastructure improvements still outstanding and, if so, when will they be finished?

John Halsall (Route Managing Director (South East), Network Rail): As Nick said, there are a few minor infrastructure issues, but I am answering this with respect to which are impacting on train performance today. I presume that is the context of the question. There are a few minor ones in terms of turn-backs and some signalling but nothing that is materially impacting on the problem that we are facing today, so no.

Tom Copley AM: Finally, Nick, why was the rolling stock so late to enter service?

Nick Brown (Chief Operating Officer, Govia Thameslink Railway): The rolling stock of Class 700 trains - and this predates my time in GTR - were delayed in delivery from Germany. It required the drivers in some parts to relearn and it caused some dislocation a couple of years ago to their training programme. The trains

were not as reliable as they should have been. Their miles between failures were much lower than we expected. Siemens have worked hard to improve that and have rolled out a series of software modifications to do that, but from 20 May we had all the trains that we needed across the network on the Class 700 fleet, both full-length units and reduced-length units.

Tom Copley AM: I believe there were some issues with the financing but that was something that was for the DfT?

Nick Brown (Chief Operating Officer, Govia Thameslink Railway): I cannot comment on that.

Tom Copley AM: Yes. OK.

Caroline Pidgeon MBE AM (Chair): Lovely. Thank you very much indeed. We are on our last section now. It is on passengers.

Florence Eshalomi AM (Deputy Chair): Thank you. I appreciate that the two of you started off by offering apologies for the recent chaos, but the reality is, for passengers who are using these routes, apologies are not what they want. They just want a functioning train service for which they are paying thousands of pounds annually. A recent survey by *Which?* found that three out of five respondents replied by saying that this change to a new timetable has had a major impact on their health, their finances and their family life. A number of people are just really struggling. We are seeing scenes at stations where people are being crammed on platforms. People are then taking that frustration out on hard-working staff. It is just not fair.

In terms of what is going on, what is your message to passengers who are affected not just across London and the southeast but right across the country?

Nick Brown (Chief Operating Officer, Govia Thameslink Railway): Let me start by reiterating our apology. I know - your point is well made - that passengers want us to get back to as normal a service as we can as soon as possible and we want that as well. I have met with many of those passengers. We have Meet the Manager sessions, which we hold frequently at King's Cross and more recently at London Bridge and travelling on trains. We do know and we do feel and we see through our post bag the discomfort, the challenges and the life impact that this is having on people. I make no bones about it: we do understand that. John's colleagues stand shoulder to shoulder with us when we have met our passengers at those set-piece events.

There is compensation that is in place. GTR has an industry-leading delay-repay compensation scheme in place. I say it is industry-leading because it is after 15 minutes. That is compensation to be paid to passengers at 15 minutes. Since 20 May, we have had 260,000 applications for compensation and 80% of those have been processed within two days. That is against the timetable as it should be, not against the interim arrangements that we have. We are about to launch a poster campaign to raise the visibility of that as well as the online systems so that passengers can claim what they are entitled to.

Florence Eshalomi AM (Deputy Chair): That is good to hear and my understanding is that you do have a lot of data for your passengers because, again, a number of them purchase their tickets well in advance. You have their details. In terms of the passengers who still have not come forward, what are you doing proactively to reach out to them? Again, when you are trying to juggle getting to work on time and explaining to your boss why you are late and then trying to plan your route back to pick up the kids, get home, get them ready for bed, the last thing you want to do is go online and fill in a compensation form, but they are entitled to that. Is there anything that you think you can offer in terms of passengers who have not come forward?

Nick Brown (Chief Operating Officer, Govia Thameslink Railway): A good proportion have come forward, clearly indicated by the figures that we have. We, as I say, are raising the profile of that so that passengers who have not yet made contact with us and are affected - not all are affected but many are affected - so that we can make that compensation available to them in an efficient and swift way.

Florence Eshalomi AM (Deputy Chair): I understand that in 2016 GTR offered season ticket holders compensation equivalent to one month's travelling following some of the delays. Again, will something to the tune of that nature be offered?

Nick Brown (Chief Operating Officer, Govia Thameslink Railway): Those were arrangements put in place as a consequence of the industrial action. The revenue that we collect on behalf of the DfT is the DfT's revenue that we are collecting. Therefore, any other arrangements beyond what I have just described will need to be agreed with the DfT.

Florence Eshalomi AM (Deputy Chair): Finally, before I hand over to my colleague Caroline [Russell AM], what more do you feel could be done in terms of the messaging and information getting out to passengers? Again, there is that sheer frustration of turning up and standing at a platform. Sometimes the staff at the station do not know what is going on. There is a lapse in terms of the information coming down to the ground. Some of this could be headed off by making sure that you are getting that information out in a more timely manner. I appreciate that there will be some cancellations which might be out of your control, but, again, those decisions are being taken somewhere. What more do you think can be done in making sure that information is going out?

Nick Brown (Chief Operating Officer, Govia Thameslink Railway): One of the challenges that we have had is getting that information out as fast as electronic media and there are different forms of electronic media to get to passengers and to staff because passengers now are seeing stuff at the same time as staff are seeing it. We have had some issues with one or two central London stations to make sure that that information is as fast as it can be. You are absolutely right about cancellations. The other challenge we have had is where we have reinstated trains and that is making sure that there is sufficient notice so that passengers can plan their journey, be it 20 minutes in advance, be it 10 minutes in advance, and to know what the stopping pattern for that train is.

The key objective for us and for our colleagues in Network Rail and the rest of the rail industry is to get this timetable sorted by bringing in an interim arrangement in July [2018], as I have described, catching up on the backlog of training and getting that trajectory right to get the full benefits of this massive investment programme in place.

Florence Eshalomi AM (Deputy Chair): Thank you.

Caroline Russell AM: Thank you. Nick, you started off earlier this morning saying that there are always going to be winners and losers in a timetable revamp. What it seems that we are looking at here is an awful lot of losers. Just in terms of planning, you say there are never consecutive trains cancelled and --

Nick Brown (Chief Operating Officer, Govia Thameslink Railway): We try to avoid that.

Caroline Russell AM: You are trying to avoid that and you say that the last train does not get cancelled. In terms of people planning ahead, that is really difficult. In our briefing, it says that on 19 June [2018] GTR was

updating its online timetable on Friday for the following week. This is really difficult for passengers who are really relying on these services to get to work and to get home at the end of the day.

When do you think that the full planned service will be operating?

Nick Brown (Chief Operating Officer, Govia Thameslink Railway): Can I just pick up the first part about 19 June? On what I said earlier about the winners and losers, firstly, I accept that there are losers at the moment because the service is just poor. The issue around the plan that we put in place and which the Chair described as a very comprehensive consultation that we did, there is always a trade-off between stopping a train frequently to pick up passengers versus running them fast. Therefore, stopping patterns have changed. They change at school times to pick up and drop off schoolchildren appropriate to the time of the day and the geography that they serve. That is what I meant by winners and losers in terms of how a timetable is constructed and not letting trains get in the way of each other.

To the wider point of 19 June, once we got through the first two weeks, which I described as almost daily changes that we had to make to try to get some stability in, we were changing and strengthening the timetable week on week. 19 June will have been one of those weekly changes. It should not have changed substantially other than to put in incremental trains where we were sure that we could run them. The objective is to give that forecast for the next two, three and four weeks ahead. That was our intention. The changes from that week to subsequent weeks would have been incremental and building up.

The objective we are trying to avoid is what we had in the first two weeks when passengers were faced when they got into a station with just seeing, "Cancelled, cancelled, cancelled", which is not the intention at all. We need to show passengers what is running and what is assuredly running. That is the point.

Caroline Russell AM: How much longer should passengers expect this situation to be going on for until they can expect a stable timetable?

Nick Brown (Chief Operating Officer, Govia Thameslink Railway): As I have mentioned, around about mid-July. We are looking - and it is subject to agreement with colleagues in the DfT and the franchise management team - to put in a timetable that will enable us to offer a greater level of surety to passengers. It will have fewer trains in the off-peak. We will aim to secure the peak because that is when the bulk of people are travelling, but also to improve on the timetable that was in place beforehand, and then, as I mentioned before, build up through the rest of the year to the full level of the May timetable.

Caroline Russell AM: By "the full level of the May timetable", you mean bringing that in --

Nick Brown (Chief Operating Officer, Govia Thameslink Railway): Insofar as we can, between the July timetable change that we want to make to bring in some stability and then to build the rest of the promise of the May timetable.

Sorry, if I can just qualify that, because of the way the system works, adding extra trains in happens in an inefficient way because of the manpower requirements for driver resources or whatever. What we want to do is to make sure that what we build in to get back to the full timetable, firstly, is assured for passengers. That is the key thing. We do not want to put something in one week and then find that we have a problem in the subsequent week. We will do it in steps and we are not going to give any guarantees yet as to exactly when that is going to be, but the first step will be from the middle of July.

Caroline Russell AM: People are finding it quite hard to understand why these careful steps are happening now and have not happened months previously so that it was able to be delivered properly.

I just want to move on to the December [2018] timetable change. Now, we have heard through this morning about the problems of processing risks and getting so involved in the detail of firefighting the problems as they were coming up that no one had a helicopter view to put up a red flag and say, "Hey, we have a problem here". What guarantees can you give that you are working differently so that the December timetable change can be implemented smoothly? That is a question for both of you.

Nick Brown (Chief Operating Officer, Govia Thameslink Railway): Can I just pick that up first around the careful steps? You have absolute assurance that we will be taking very careful steps going ahead and shouting even louder than some of us did shout beforehand, but I accept your point. The careful steps are in everybody's interests but most of all has to be in the interests of our passengers. That is first and foremost.

Caroline Pidgeon MBE AM (Chair): Can I just say? Who was shouting beforehand? Who were you shouting at when they were not listening? The DfT?

Nick Brown (Chief Operating Officer, Govia Thameslink Railway): We told you about how at the Industry Readiness Board we raised the issue of the fact that we had the problem of diagrams, which was causing the increase in driver requirement. That was there. Perhaps we could have shouted louder.

Tom Copley AM: That was at three weeks?

Caroline Pidgeon MBE AM (Chair): It would be under that. Two weeks out and nobody was listening?

Nick Brown (Chief Operating Officer, Govia Thameslink Railway): That was on 4 May [2018] when we raised the issue, but --

Joanne McCartney AM: What a can-do attitude.

Nick Brown (Chief Operating Officer, Govia Thameslink Railway): -- the Readiness Board was aware of the issues that we were facing. There were some red flags and there were some yellow flags and all of that sort of stuff, as you would normally expect from a programme and project management appraisal, if you will, or assurance process.

The issue that we were concerned about - and perhaps we could have shouted louder; perhaps it was not so much a shout as, "This is the concern" - and the point is that we wanted to make sure that those steps are all in place before we start to change the timetable as we head towards December. That is really what I want to say there.

John Halsall (Route Managing Director (South East), Network Rail): We have a new Chief Executive who is coming in from Network Rail perspective and the Secretary of State has asked Andrew Haines, our new Chief Executive, to make a recommendation. My understanding is that that is with respect not just to the GTR December timetable but to all of the national timetables because it is a significant change across the country again. Andrew, as I understand it, has made a recommendation to the Secretary of State and the Secretary of State is considering those recommendations with an expectation of an announcement later this week in terms of what will be progressing and what will not happen with respect to the December timetable.

Caroline Russell AM: Presumably, you are not able to speculate on that until that announcement happens, but I am not sure that you have actually answered whether you expect the December timetable change to be implemented smoothly.

John Halsall (Route Managing Director (South East), Network Rail): You are right. No, I have not.

Caroline Russell AM: Do you think what is happening now is going to enable this timetable to be implemented smoothly or do you think you are going to be bogged down in the same old problems?

John Halsall (Route Managing Director (South East), Network Rail): We have learnt a lot of lessons, but we have a lot to do between now and December if we are to roll out the December timetable. Both GTR and Network Rail are of the opinion that even if we could reassure ourselves that we were ready, it would be a difficult message to convince passengers. Therefore, playing to what Nick said earlier, we need to be very conservative in our approach. Some of that thinking has gone into the recommendations that Andrew [Haines] has made to the Secretary of State.

Caroline Russell AM: Do you have a plan B in case you find that you are not ready in December?

John Halsall (Route Managing Director (South East), Network Rail): We do. Do you want to pick that up?

Nick Brown (Chief Operating Officer, Govia Thameslink Railway): Can I just clarify this bit about shouting out? We have been through a lot in the Industry Readiness Board and, whilst risks are raised, they get addressed and mitigated, but that is the whole issue that we faced around the mitigations and the workarounds that we were putting in place. We were not shouting and screaming at every meeting or anything like that. Some risks came and some risks went, but the risks that eventuated with us were ones at the last minute which we raised.

In regard to plan B, it is effectively what we are having to do at the moment which is not where we want to be. The plan for the mid-July timetable will be the one that takes us back on a trajectory that we are comfortable with through to getting the timetable back in place. The timetable is due to step up by two trains going through the centre of London in December. That is subject to the review that John was talking about led by Andrew Haines.

John Halsall (Route Managing Director (South East), Network Rail): I am not trying to be a pain. It is just that I am trying to keep the answers straightforward. A proposition which has been considered would be to take what we are doing now and make incremental improvements between now and December but, rather than put the extra trains in, we do not put those additional trains in. That will provide passengers with a service which is at least as good as it was before the timetable changing and then we can make some incremental improvements beyond that so that it will get better and better. What we are very cautious about is making a more significant step in December and it all falling down again. Until the Secretary of State has made the decision based on the recommendations, I cannot say any more than that, but I have probably explained our thinking.

Caroline Pidgeon MBE AM (Chair): That makes sense.

John Halsall (Route Managing Director (South East), Network Rail): Would it be possible for me just to respond to Ms Eshalomi's question around passengers?

Caroline Pidgeon MBE AM (Chair): Yes, of course, before I bring in other Members.

John Halsall (Route Managing Director (South East), Network Rail): I heard the emotion in your voice. It is very difficult for us not to get emotional about it as well. Nick talked about the experience that we have when we meet passengers. We do meet passengers. We stand at London Bridge and the passengers are understandably keen to share their personal circumstances. We are there because we want to hear it and we want to understand it and we want to emotionally engage in it. We care.

There is another aspect that I guess we all forget about, which is that I have 3,500 people in my team and Nick has an even larger number. These guys and girls get out of bed just to run an effective railway. That is what they do for a living. That is all they care about. The railway is a bit of a family and for those individuals this is devastating. It is devastating because we care and the teams care and they care with a real passion. For people whose livelihood it is to support passengers to see those passengers so upset, they completely understand how passengers feel but everybody is totally heartbroken by the current situation.

Florence Eshalomi AM (Deputy Chair): Just on that, is there additional support for staff? Again, like I said, they are the ones on the receiving end of this frustration from passengers.

John Halsall (Route Managing Director (South East), Network Rail): To be honest, passengers are, despite everything, incredibly helpful in terms of looking after staff. Some of them are perhaps a little bit more challenging but often passengers themselves put a bit of a red flag up. I am not saying that for a sympathy vote in terms of the Network Rail and GTR teams, but they care. We all care passionately to fix this as fast as we can. We really do.

Caroline Pidgeon MBE AM (Chair): Lovely. Thank you for that.

Joanne McCartney AM: My question is to GTR and it is about customer service and particularly passenger information.

On 7 June [2018] I was stuck on a train at the platform at Moorgate, seemingly not going anywhere, and the announcer at one stage stated - I wrote it down - "I cannot give you information because no one is telling me anything". She was desperately trying to tell us whether she had trains coming in or not and where they were going to. She just could not.

I met someone on the train this morning coming in and she told me that last week she got a train to go to Palmers Green. It stopped at Bowes Park because there was a faulty headlight. She got out and got on the next train and it went straight past the station but no one had been told or anything because it was trying to make up time.

As well as many cancellations and delays at the moment, passenger information does seem to be lacking. I am just wondering if you are going to be redressing that?

Nick Brown (Chief Operating Officer, Govia Thameslink Railway): Yes, we are aware of that. I refer to what I said earlier. I am not aware of the Palmers Green-Bowes Park issue specifically, but trying to get information to staff on platforms, which is what you will have had at Moorgate, is challenging. If they are out talking to passengers, they are not in front of a computer screen. If they in front of a computer screen, they are not in front of passengers.

We have created separate teams dedicated to getting information out in our control centre at Three Bridges. A team works continuously, other than through the very small hours of the night, to ensure that we make sure that we can get information to stations as timely as possible. In particular where we are putting in arrangements for extra stops and in the case that you described at Palmers Green and Bowes Park, the following train should have stopped if there was a cancellation.

Joanne McCartney AM: They all stop at Palmers Green. It is one of your busiest stations. That it bypassed it to make up time is bizarre.

Nick Brown (Chief Operating Officer, Govia Thameslink Railway): If that is what the reason was, I am happy to pick up the details afterwards, but it seems a bit bizarre. You would not do that necessarily if the train was running late or whatever. We are not saying we get it right every time, but we try our best on that.

Tom Copley AM: Yes, just going back to this point about whether the timetable should have been delayed. I have not really heard anything that convinces me that you made the right decision. You have had delayed trains, you have had not enough drivers, you have had a timetable that was agreed at the last minute, and this was the biggest shake-up of rail services in the southeast since the privatisation of the railways. In hindsight, was it the wrong decision to press ahead rather than to take a bit of time and be a bit more careful and perhaps have a less cavalier attitude towards this?

Nick Brown (Chief Operating Officer, Govia Thameslink Railway): The key word is possibly “hindsight”, without wanting to replay your question. We did not have a devil-may-care attitude at all. The complexity of what we were trying to deliver -- all parts of the industry, other train operating companies (TOCs) that were involved, the DfT, the ORR, companies adjacent to ourselves, as well as the challenges we had with the existing timetable, as I described in Southern, meant that there were a whole series of steps that we went through very diligently. The fact that circumstances - as John and I have both described - and time were against us has led us to where we are at. However, be assured of our commitment. John and I speak three or four times a day on, “Can we do this? Should we do that?” That is just in the very short term as well as our responsibilities to try to look strategically at how we do the best for this part of the network to the greater good.

On the issue of whether we should have put our foot on the ball, for want of a better description, history will relate at some point when that could or should have been done, but the issue, as John described before, was that there are so many interfaces that if we had done that it could well have caused much greater difficulty for the industry even beyond the southeast because of the interconnectedness. When we designed this timetable and through some of the steps that we were going through in the first quarter of the year, decisions we were making as far as London was concerned were having an impact as far away as Sheffield or Manchester, such is the interconnectedness of the rail network. Exactly as John has described, the review that Andrew Haines is undertaking at the moment as the new Chief Executive of Network Rail is to take a view as to what happens next in terms of some of those major changes.

Tom Copley AM: What about the role of the DfT in all of this? Was there pressure from there to push ahead with the timetable rather than delay it and perhaps review it? Were you getting pressure from the DfT to push ahead?

John Halsall (Route Managing Director (South East), Network Rail): The DfT were on the Industry Readiness Board. They were part of the group of individuals that were trying to create a can-do, “Let us make this happen”. They were probably two of 20-odd people. From that respect, yes, they were pushing things along but along with many of us across the industry. Beyond that, from a Network Rail perspective, I did not

see anything inappropriate. They did not say, “Thou shalt”, or, “We do not care how you do this. Get on with it”. There were never any conversations like that, ever.

Caroline Pidgeon MBE AM (Chair): Thank you very much. I just wanted to finish with *Rail* magazine and Nigel Harris’s piece. He says:

“The bottom line is that the industry and government across the board have comprehensively failed us all here and we need to solve the problem.”

You regularly have referred to the Industry Readiness Board. Twenty-odd people, you say, John, sit on it and that includes the DfT, TOCs, Network Rail, the ORR. Going forward, what are you doing to make that fit for purpose to make sure the next steps on this programme go smoothly?

Nick Brown (Chief Operating Officer, Govia Thameslink Railway): We have had one meeting of the Industry Readiness Board since the timetable went live and it was a very sombre meeting, as you can imagine.

Caroline Pidgeon MBE AM (Chair): I can imagine.

Nick Brown (Chief Operating Officer, Govia Thameslink Railway): We gave a presentation, which I led on behalf of GTR, which was our perspective, quite rightly, as facing up to the passengers and being the last person standing. As we have said before and as we have alluded to, the industry has a lot to learn out of this and we take our share of responsibility as others have done already, but it is back to the small steps that we referred to before. Those need to be very carefully examined.

Above all else, just in closing, if I may, Chair, from my perspective, some of those interdependencies are ones where we need to focus our attention because the industry systems and structures that have got us to where we are cannot be right if they have got us to where we are at the moment.

Caroline Pidgeon MBE AM (Chair): There also needs to be more provision for you to properly analyse and challenge each other’s data rather than just taking the word that this has happened when the reality is that it was not on time or whatever.

Nick Brown (Chief Operating Officer, Govia Thameslink Railway): The expectation to find a workaround.

John Halsall (Route Managing Director (South East), Network Rail): As I am sure the Committee is aware, there is a review which has been commissioned with Stephen Glaister [Emeritus Professor of Transport and Infrastructure, Imperial College London, and Chair, ORR] and that is the crucial output from that review. There is something for both Nick and me in terms of the personal challenge that we give across the different elements of the railway system and we would recognise that.

One of the other points that will emerge from what Stephen Glaister does is something around the single controlling mind. The railway is a highly complicated system and I can completely understand the confusion of passengers and indeed committees that are reviewing this current situation, but you will not find a single individual or body which is responsible for this. I believe that the reason for that is because there is not a single body or individual who is responsible. That is both a cause and also a key point of learning. That would be my take on it.

Caroline Pidgeon MBE AM (Chair): Lovely. Thank you very much, John and Nick, for your openness this morning with us as a Committee.