

Dear Friend

I hope you are staying safe.

I invite you to our meeting on **Tuesday 4<sup>th</sup> November at 19:30 on Zoom**; I am targeting a finish by 20:45; definitely by 21:00.

Our next two meetings are then:

- **Saturday 6<sup>th</sup> December -in-person social in Central London** – meet 12:15 adjacent to the platforms 9-10 Gateline (but see below on possible fine tuning)
- **Wednesday 14<sup>th</sup> January 2026 19:30 on Zoom.**

Join Zoom Meeting:

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/88450315544?pwd=d3krdCtiUHlrMExQcGtMWm1zVU9Qdz09>; alternatively join manually via <https://zoom.us/join>, then Meeting ID: 884 5031 5544 & Passcode: 910342.

*If your PC doesn't have a microphone, then use the link above to open (and download, if needed) the software and, once connected, click the up arrow next to the microphone or join audio icon (bottom left) and follow the "switch to phone audio link" If you don't have a PC, tablet or Smartphone available, call one of the 3 numbers below, enter the Meeting ID [then '#'] at the first prompt; at the second prompt just press '#' and at the third prompt, enter the password [then '#']. Phone numbers to dial: 0131 460 1196 | 020 3481 5237 | 020 3481 5240.*

## Topics for meeting

1. Welcome
2. December social finalisation (more below)
3. Current campaigning issues (all more below)
  - TfL & GN Inners
  - East West Rail, Universal and Wixams
  - Gatwick Express (mainly a FYI)
  - LNER Simpler Fares
  - Contactless extensions
4. The revised reprise of local campaigning priorities (more below)
5. Performance (more below)
6. EWR opening date Milton Keynes to Oxford – a ride? (more below)
7. Round table

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### Saturday 6<sup>th</sup> December lunchtime social

I have a planned meeting point and time for this – which is next to the platform 9/10 gateline at Kings Cross. Tentatively, we will go to the Parcel Yard (about 50 steps away). But happy to hear of alternatives – eg I had a good meal at this [nearby casual Italian](#). Watch out for the possibility of a slight change in time and meeting point if a different restaurant / pub is chosen.

### TfL seeking control of GN Inners

TfL has made a bid to operate the GN Inners – see, eg, the [Passenger Transport](#) website.

My thought process is in an update I sent Richard Bowry, LSE Chair as follows:

The main concerns are:

1. Considerable doubt that after incremental costs have been incurred, there is a business case. Two well known likely cost increases are:
  - a. Drivers have an agreement that they only drive into Moorgate twice a day (noise, dust etc). That is much mitigated by a shared pool of drivers between inner & outer services
  - b. GTR get a lot of synergy from shared maintenance of class 717s and 700s at Hornsey – make that more inefficient in anyway (and chuck a contract in between is enough...)
2. Another operator on the ECML – not good news – we need more command & control
3. The deficit in governance – these services are key to some parts of Herts and Herts has no meaningful control of what the Mayor is up to.

More generally, the point is “show us a decent business case that properly stacks up and you’re in business”. But cynically, to make it stack up for the residents of Hertfordshire, the good residents of London will need to put some cash in the pot – and will that really happen? We look at the Croxley link and that foundered on an unwillingness by TfL to take on risk.

That the Mayor has more control is less contentious – but that democratic deficit issue is real when a line is of much importance to those living outside the GLA as it is to those inside.

I am not sure what the next steps are, and think that practically, unless there is breaking new, the next step is try and find out more at the GTR Stakeholder Gathering in early December.

In particular, I wonder what the DfT and politicians view is to “privatisation” – as on GTR’s move to the DfT Operator, it will then be a fully nationalised service...

### East West Rail

I have no useful news on progress or decisions to share on this; good to hear any breaking news from others. I will follow up.

We do need to be aware of an expected change in the next phases of consultation – see, eg, this Rail Magazine [article](#). This include these comments:

‘with the change driven by the Planning and Infrastructure Bill now before Parliament.’

'It explained that the Bill might allow "a more tailored approach to engagement with local communities and stakeholders". It said it would aim to "deliver a programme of engagement early in 2026".'

### **Gatwick Express**

Mainly for information, but to note that Railfuture "south of the river" (but including Metro) is campaigning for changes to Gatwick Airport services – In summary:

- Removing Gatwick Express as a virtual operator and running these services as Southern ones
- Rationalising fares.

For more information read the [letter and report](#) sent to the Rail Minister, Lord Hendy and also the [Press Release](#).

The report does not envisage any changes that directly impact Thameslink (other than the fare rationalisation between London and Gatwick). But Thameslink is an important part of the story – in the very earliest days our route to Gatwick would have included the Victoria Line and a service from Victoria, but Thameslink took that preference away from MML users early on, then more recently for ECML users – and also those with a convenient Elizabeth line station. So an important part of the context.

### **LNER Simpler Fares**

LNER launched this as a trial in February 2024, with a stated life expectancy of 2 years, so it is coming to an end imminently.

Any feedback – bad or good much, appreciated as we formulate our view. We already know we don't like the disappearance of the off-peak ticket, but detail appreciated. Also, what do we want instead – I don't think "Cancel it and go back to previous world" will fly as an adopted option.

### **Contactless extensions**

I have written to GTR on the next phase of extension for Thameslink and Great Northern stations. This is expected to include Luton, Leagrave, Harlington, Welwyn North, Knebworth, Watton-at-Stone, Stevenage, Hitchin, Letchworth Garden City & Baldock, specifically on retention of the existing model for stations to Luton Airport Parkway, Hertford North and Welwyn Garden City – ie Contactless fares are added on top of existing fares, not replacing them.

So far as Herts and Beds is concerned, there are no changes for the next phase for LNWR/WMT stations on the West Coast Mainline. On the West Anglia Mainline there is an extension to Stansted Airport, including Sawbridgeworth and Bishops Stortford in Hertfordshire. I must profess to ignorance on the interaction between existing fares and contactless restrictions – but very happy to be educated!

### **A reprise of local campaigning topics**

In our October newsletter I provided a list of local campaigning topics which was then reviewed at the meeting. I hope the list below now reflects these updates.

Any further feedback appreciated.

#### **East Coast Mainline**

##### *Active*

- LNER Simpler Fares – This is now back as a focus area, as the end of the initial trial period is in sight. It is not the Flex fare (that's a useful addition to the portfolio), but the disappearance of the off-peak fare, and so the loss of a flexible option at a tolerable price and for must travel "some time today", the guaranteed fare is now very high. Activity planned.
- Hadley Wood Toilet opening – which is really a proxy for the principle that toilets can be open at any station when it is unstaffed. Activity planned.

- GN Inners operator – bidding by TfL has reappeared. To me, the challenge is the business case, when there are clear downsides to be offset (loss of maintenance efficiencies, another operator on the ECML etc). No activity planned on this at present.
- Extensions of Contactless – seeking the retention of more fare choices than just peak and off-peak, most notably weekend fares. Activity planned.
- Performance on GN Inners and Outers. Still below par, so we should all continue to press for improvements as opportunities allow.
- Crews Hill “New Town” – up to 21,000 new homes – so a train service effective for that extra demand, including better GN Inner service levels – seeking 4 trains per hour.
  - Hertford North: In step with new town development. Be more proactive.
  - ECML via Potters Bar: Opportunist lobbying, but limited proactiveness.

## *Inactive*

- December 2025 Timetable – it has been a long time coming, but for us a net benefit
  - Plus: Our trains will stop at Cambridge South when it opens early next year. No activity planned.
  - Minus: Slower Journeys between intermediate stations, particularly when a change is required (eg Hatfield / Cambridge in the evening peak)
- LNER stops at Stevenage – From December these will be pick up only travelling north and set down only going south. “Big picture” this is a rational move, and something I think we can expect more of from GBR. However, what I / we should do is complain when, due to disruption, we think there should have been a short term easement due to lack of imminent GN/TL services.
- Digswell viaduct 4 tracking (aka the viaduct just north of Welwyn Garden City) – or the partial alternative of options for one / two more tracks at Welwyn North.

## **West Anglia Mainline**

### *Inactive*

- Capacity improvements including 4 tracking.

### *Other*

- Outside our patch, the ECML observation re Cambridge South ie relevant; also Stansted is due to get contactless fares imminently.

## **HERT (Hertfordshire Essex Rapid Transit)**

### *Inactive*

- Just a watching task at present.

## **West Coast Mainline, including the Abbey Line**

### *Active*

- Performance – Still below par, so we should all continue to press for improvements as opportunities allow. Specifically, watching for decisions to not resource the Abbey line and cancel services there. I don't really have any WMT local contacts, so this will be opportunist activity / support for RUGs.
- Recent extensions of Contactless – seeking the return of more fare choices than just peak and off-peak, most notably weekend fares. Activity planned.
- Watford Junction changes – development likely – support RUGs as needed.
- Euston station operational performance – still an intermittent issue (eg late announcement of platforms for departing trains) – monitor and respond as opportunity allows.

## *Inactive*

- Apsley Station accessibility improvements – driven by developer activity / investment – support as opportunities occur.
- Remodelling Hemel Hempstead and/or Tring to provide extra platforms for either new service opportunities or for better service recovery after incidents.
- Crossrail extensions to Tring.

### **Watford**

## *Inactive*

- Link between Metropolitan line and Watford junction and other opportunities for the track bed for Croxley Green. Only activity will be reactive.

### **Marston Vale line and East West Rail**

## *Active*

- For the current service, performance can be an issue, and as with the Abbey line watching for decisions to not resource the MVL and cancel services there. I don't really have any WMT local contacts, so this will be opportunist activity / support for RUGs.
- On the EWR, the main issues for us are:
  - How Universal Studios will impact the design of the new EWR services, most notably because of passenger flows for customers and, critically, workers at the site (be proactive).
  - That Bedford station gets an up fast platform on the Midland Mainline (be proactive).
  - That St Neots gets a station (mainly supporting EA Branch).
  - Retention of the current route through Bedford Midland (be proactive)
  - Working with Railfuture Thames Valley and East Anglia as appropriate (be proactive).

### **Midland Mainline**

## *Active*

- Thameslink performance is below par, so continue to press for improvement as opportunities arise (including creating those opportunities. For EMR performance, it is a watching brief only at present.
- Extensions of Contactless – seeking the retention of more fare choices than just peak and off-peak, most notably weekend fares. One to be proactive on.
- Wixams – seeking for the new design also suitable for Universal traffic to be delivered as early as possible. One to be proactive on.
  - Consider options for a turn back a la St Albans (mainly because of likely regular closures of Bedford for EWR construction)
- Radlett, Leagrave & Flitwick – support intentions for lifts as opportunity allows / is created (in the case of Flitwick, moving from commitment to delivery).
- Luton (Town) – Support the substantial improvement to this station, including lifts as opportunity allows / is created.

### **All of Herts & Beds**

## *Active*

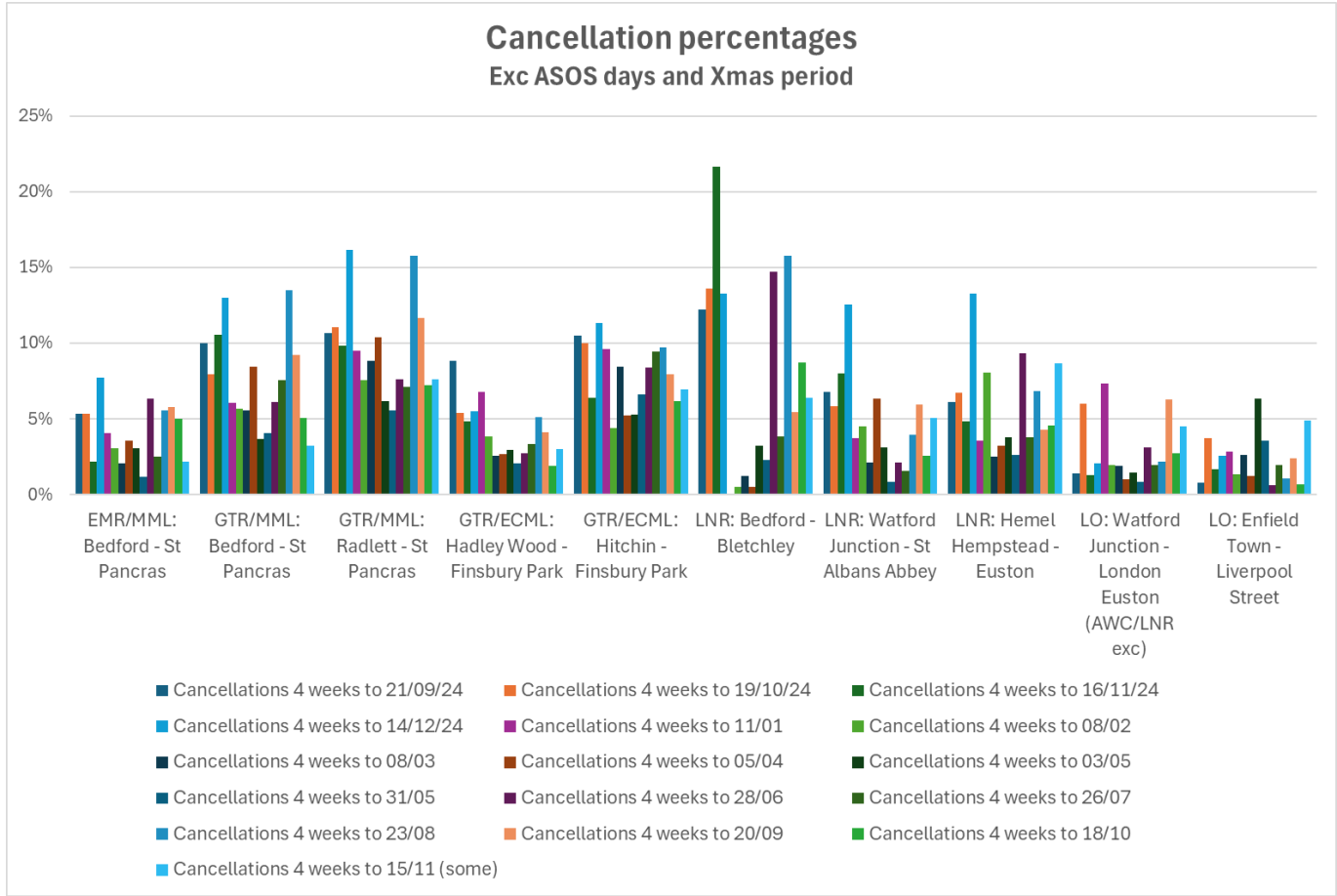
- Passenger information during disruption – seek improvement – as opportunities allow (specifically leveraging any bad experiences).
- Engineering blockades – improving notice periods. Currently on hold due to lack of time, but to be taken forward.

Omission from the above is now because I've probably just forgotten about it – do remind / ask me!

**Performance**

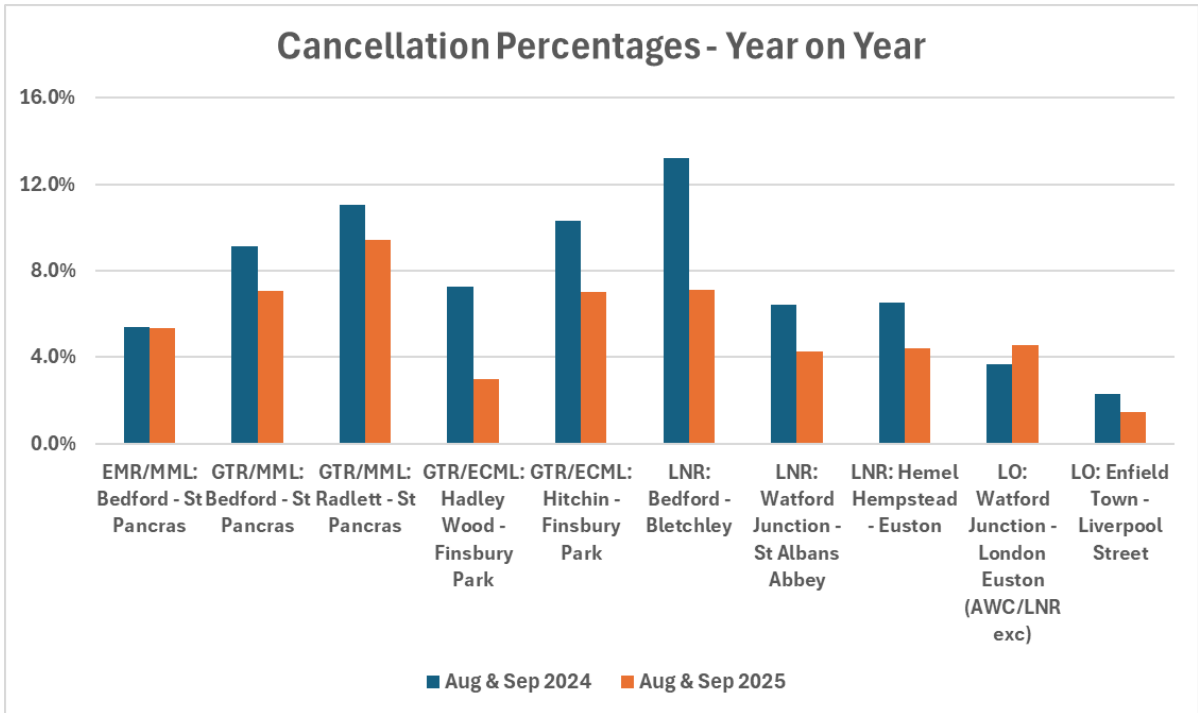
I have continued to collect the performance data for our main services via Recent Train Times.

**Cancellations over time**

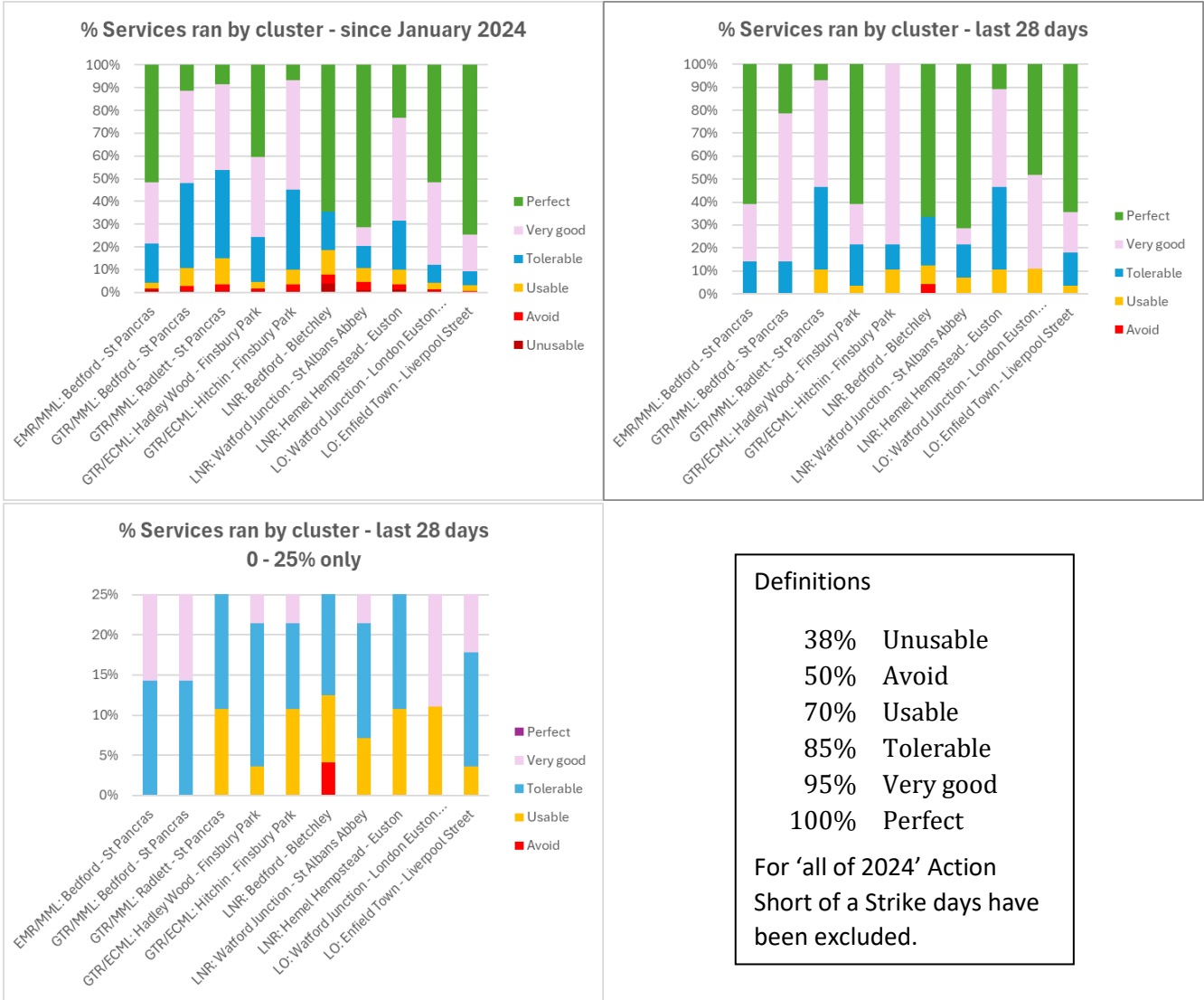


This graph is also available in landscape at the end of the newsletter

**Cancellations year on year**

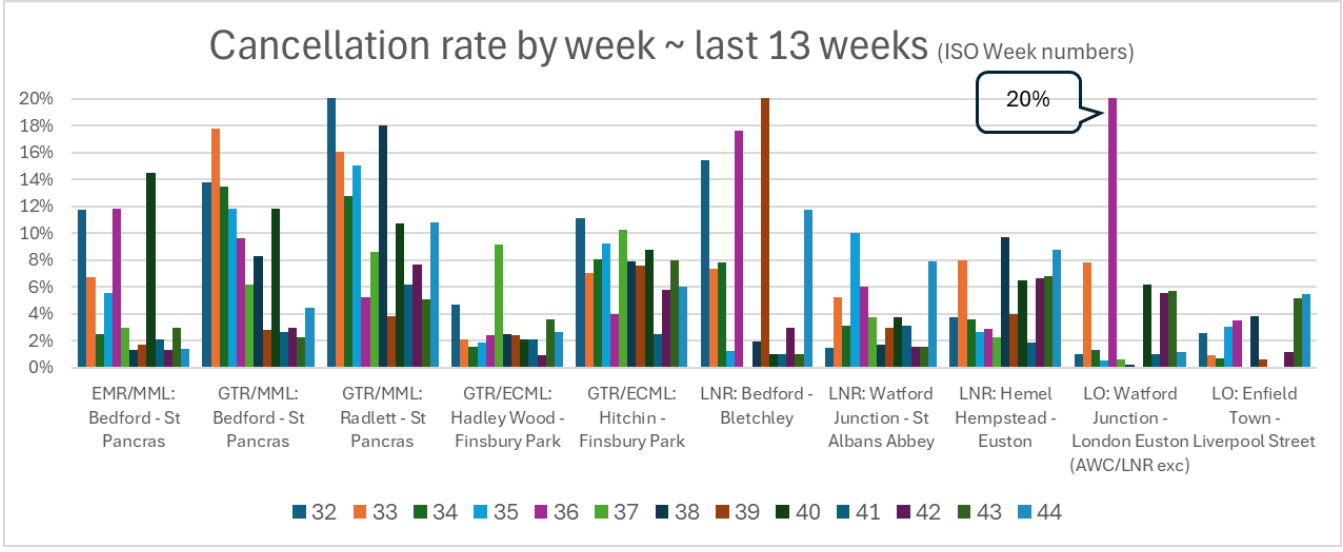


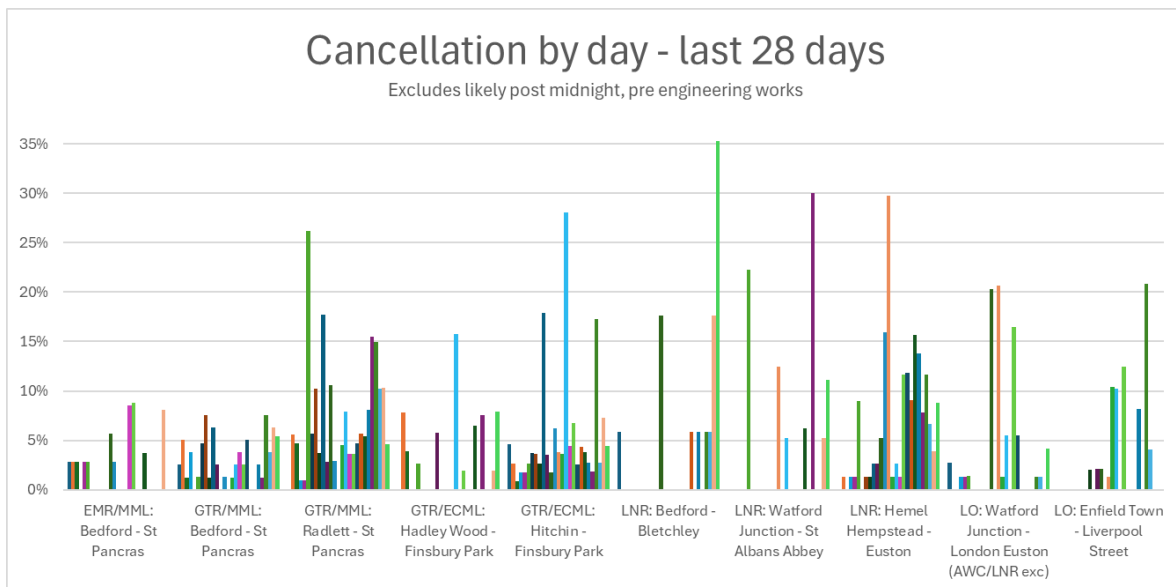
**Spread of cancellations**



Because I am measuring this statistic across at the “whole of day” level, I do not detect long gaps within the day.

**Cancellations by week / day of the week**





### EWR between Milton Keynes and Oxford

I've not seen any official announcements about a postponement to 2026, but this seems inevitable. When searching for information for this item, I did note that the National Rail page for Winslow station comments "This new station is expected to open in 2026". From what I read it's about disagreement on Driver Controlled Doors.

When it does open, subject to my diary I hope to ride it on the first day. The view of the October meeting was others want to do the same and so I will organise an outing once everything is clear.

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Stay Safe.

*Neil*

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## Cancellation percentages Exc ASOS days and Xmas period

