

Angie Doll
Chief Executive
Govia Thameslink Railway

Jake Kelly
Managing Director, Eastern Region
Network Rail

By email

10 November 2023

Dear Angie and Jake

Sunday 3 December – no trains, no replacement buses

We are writing to express strong concern about the situation described in the attached stakeholder communication. We are dismayed at the prospect that the industry is planning to provide neither a train service nor a replacement bus service on 3 December at 16 stations, some of which serve significant centres of population, such as:

- Baldock (population c. 10,500)
- Biggleswade (population c. 22,500)
- Hatfield (population c. 41,500)
- Letchworth (population c. 34,000)
- Royston (population c. 17,500)

Through the East Coast Digital Programme and elsewhere we are aware of the current challenges the railway is having in hiring buses and coaches. However, to conclude that passengers will be left with no service whatsoever is unacceptable. It would be serious on any day, but on a Sunday three weeks before Christmas when there will be additional demand to travel for shopping and festive social events even more so.

We ask you, as a matter of urgency, to:

- review whether truly all avenues have been explored to procure a viable rail replacement service for 3 December. Have you considered increasing the rates you are willing to pay, for instance?
- explore how the engineering works could be modified on that date to increase the number of trains that can run, with buses and coaches filling the remaining gaps

If changes to your current plan are not possible, we ask you to:

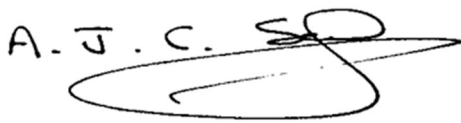
- make arrangements for rail passengers at affected stations to use scheduled buses at no extra charge to reach stations with trains
- to park for free at stations where there is a service
- offer compensation to passengers for the inconvenience caused – perhaps a fares discount on the Sundays either side of 3 December.

We urge you to make changes to the current plans for 3 December and demonstrate that the railway is on passengers' side. But if that is not possible, please set out:

- The steps you took to procure operation of a rail replacement service on a date set long ago, and your analysis of why that approach failed
- The process undertaken to conclude that the engineering works should proceed with no replacement service, rather than be deferred to a date when buses and coaches could run, and how the passenger interest was reflected in that decision
- The steps you will take to ensure that this does not happen again.

We look forward to hearing from you as soon as possible.

Yours sincerely

Handwritten signature of Anthony Smith, consisting of the initials 'A.J.C.' followed by a stylized, cursive signature.

Anthony Smith
Chief Executive, Transport Focus

Handwritten signature of Michael Roberts, written in a cursive style.

Michael Roberts
Chief Executive, London TravelWatch

cc Peter Wilkinson, Managing Director Passenger Services, Department for Transport
John Larkinson, Chief Executive, Office of Rail and Road

Engineering works affecting Great Northern and Thameslink services on Sunday 3 December

Good afternoon <|Firstname|,

I write to let you know that on Sunday 3 December, planned upgrades to both the East Coast Main Line and Cambridge South station works will significantly affect Great Northern and Thameslink train services between London and Peterborough, Cambridge and Kings Lynn.

There will be an extremely limited train and bus service and many stations will not be served for the whole day on Sunday 3 December.

Regrettably, the continued national shortage of bus drivers continues to impact our ability to deliver rail replacement bus services. Based on previous similar weekends of engineering work, we know we will not have enough bus resource to fully cover all routes on Sunday 3 December and to meet the demand our normal train service provides.

We have, therefore, taken the decision to close a number of our stations in the area (see below for the full list of station closures). This will enable us to concentrate our available buses to provide a limited bus service from key locations on the route to take customers to and from stations where they will be able to take a train to/from London.

We know this will be disappointing. Our aim is to be clear with customers so that they can plan their journeys in advance and to improve confidence in advertised bus services.

Train and bus services will be extremely busy, customers may have to queue and there is a possibility that they will not be able to board a service. Therefore, our strong advice for our customers is to **only travel on this date if there is no other alternative option and, where possible, to travel on Saturday 2 December.**

Please see a full summary of our service on 3 December below.

The work is part of the East Coast Digital Programme (ECDP) - to upgrade the signalling on the East Coast Main Line to a digital system, ultimately meaning more reliable journeys for Great Northern and Thameslink customers – and Cambridge South station building works which will serve this growing part of the city.

We will be starting passenger communications – in stations, media and online - towards the end of October. Journey Planners are now fully up-to-date with the latest information. We would appreciate it if you could use all your available channels to help us communicate this message as widely as possible – and encourage customers to plan ahead, check how their journey may be affected at www.nationalrail.co.uk and travel on 2 December, where possible.

Summary of our service on Sunday 3 December

The following stations will have **no service** for the whole day:

- Arlesey
- Ashwell and Morden
- Baldock
- Biggleswade
- Foxton
- Letchworth Garden City
- Meldreth
- Royston
- Sandy
- Shepreth
- Brookmans Park
- Hatfield
- Knebworth
- Watton-at-Stone
- Welham Green
- Welwyn North

There will be NO alternative travel options from these stations.

No trains will run between:

- Potters Bar and St Neots
- Potters Bar and Cambridge
- Hertford North and Stevenage

A reduced train service will run between:

- Kings Cross and Potters Bar (Semi fast)
- Moorgate and Potters Bar (All stations)
- Moorgate and Hertford North (All stations)
- St Neots and Peterborough (All stations)
- Cambridge and Kings Lynn (All stations)

A limited rail replacement bus service will run between:

- St Neots and Bedford
- Luton Airport Parkway and Stevenage via Hitchin
- Cambridge North and Audley End
- St Albans and Welwyn Garden City

Tickets will be accepted on Thameslink services between Bedford, Luton Airport Parkway and London St Pancras, at no additional cost.

Notice of further significant engineering works affecting Great Northern and

Thameslink services between London and Peterborough, Cambridge and Kings Lynn

- 24 December – No trains between Potters Bar and Royston or St Neots and also between Hertford North and Stevenage
- 27 and 28 December – No trains between Royston and Cambridge North
- 29 December - 1 January – No trains between Royston and Cambridge
- 6 and 7 January – No trains between London and Royston or Peterborough, and also between Moorgate and Stevenage via Hertford North
- 13 and 14 January - No trains between London and Royston or Peterborough and also between Moorgate and Stevenage via Hertford North
- 10 and 11 February – No trains between Huntingdon and Peterborough
- 17 to 20 February – No trains between Potters Bar and Royston or Peterborough and also between Hertford North and Stevenage
- 25 February – No trains between Huntingdon and Peterborough

There are also a number of upcoming weekend closures affecting the route between London and Kings Lynn/Cambridge between now and the end of the year. Find out more [here](#).

We will share more details about how Thameslink and Great Northern services will be affected ahead of each closure.

Find out more about the East Coast Digital Programme

You will shortly receive an email from Network Rail inviting you to an online event on Thursday 22nd November, where you will be able to find out more about the East Coast Digital Programme and its benefits for customers. Alongside other Industry Partners, including Network Rail and LNER, we will explain how the upcoming engineering works will contribute to the ongoing development of the East Coast Main Line in addition to how we will be looking after the passenger journeys affected.

In the meantime, if you have any questions about the programme or any of the information in this email, please don't hesitate to get in touch.

On behalf of GTR I would like to thank you in advance for your continued patience while this vital work takes place.

Best wishes,

Lucy