



## The state of Streatham's train service and what needs to be done about it

### March 2019 report prepared by Streatham Action Transport, highlighting action points for Department for Transport (DfT), Network Rail and Govia Thameslink Railway (GTR)

#### Introduction

This report has been prepared by Streatham Action Transport (SAT), which is a part of Streatham's cross-party and non-party political civic forum group for central Streatham, Streatham Action.

SAT has for some years now been in regular contact with commuters travelling from one or more of Streatham's 3 overground stations – Streatham, Streatham Common and Streatham Hill – responding to GTR's inadequate service provision to customers.

Two well-attended public meetings were recently organised by SAT and these have now been followed up with some further research:

- FoI data secured from Network Rail on the number of cancelled and severely late trains, in addition to those trains running more than 5 minutes' late, at each of the three Streatham stations over the course of a thirteen-month period between late June 2017 and late June 2018;
- a SurveyMonkey questionnaire, conducted towards the end of last year, of regular travellers from one or more of Streatham's train stations which received 493 responses.

#### Executive summary

FoI data supplied by Network Rail evidences:

##### a) Trains running severely late:

- *mid-December 2017 – early January 2018*: a spike in % levels of trains running severely late at each of the three stations during this period – likely to be for weather-based reasons;
- *late June 2018*: a further such spike in % levels of trains running severely late at each of the three Streatham stations, which was more surprising on the back of it being only one month after GTR's first iteration of its timetable changes.

##### b) Trains cancelled:

- *mid-December 2017 – early January 2018*: 32% of all trains were either cancelled or severely late;
- *June and July 2018*: at the height of this period of disruption, in early July, 36% of all trains were cancelled or severely late, following on from May's two timetable changes.

Key results from SAT's survey of 500 commuters are as follows:

- 36% of respondents actually changed their journeys to work as a result of the May timetable changes!
- 1 in 5 of all respondents now choose to take a bus to the nearest tube station rather than suffer in silence on Streatham's over-ground services;



- Far from bringing relief to our long-suffering commuters, the timetable changes in May 2018 only made things worse.

The worrying upshot of these results is that despite GTR's 3 changes to timetables on its services through Streatham<sup>1</sup> which have improved service performance, for *users* the net effect is a **reduced service frequency** that has simply encouraged more commuters to abandon the train service and travel by bus and tube – thereby not only bulking up yet further already busy bus services along Streatham High Road to Brixton on the Victoria line, but also leading to an increase in bus service usage to the Northern Line, both on buses travelling to Tooting Bec from close by Streatham station and on buses travelling to Balham from close by Streatham Hill station.

Anecdotal evidence from commuters suggests a worrying reduction in the number of trains operating during peak periods and a reduced number of carriages from the 10 carriages that the three stations can now accommodate.

Commuters tend to blame GTR – be that Southern Rail or Thameslink – for delays or cancellations, when in fact the FOI data that we have received shows that responsibility for at least 30% of all cancellations and severe delays is down to Network Rail – e.g. for signal failures, points failures, leaves on the line/weather-related issues.

**In the light of such worrying statistics, SAT is producing this report to put pressure on the train operators and Network Rail to prioritise the South London metro lines for further improvements to timetable and infrastructure. We particularly need the new moving block signalling as soon as possible to enable more trains per hour to run on the lines during peak times.**

#### 1. Key aspects arising from FOI data

Streatham station has many trains arriving more than 5 minutes' late – around 15-20% - whereas we should be expecting less than 10%:

---

<sup>1</sup> in addition to the first timetable change in early May, subsequent ones occurred in late May & mid-July



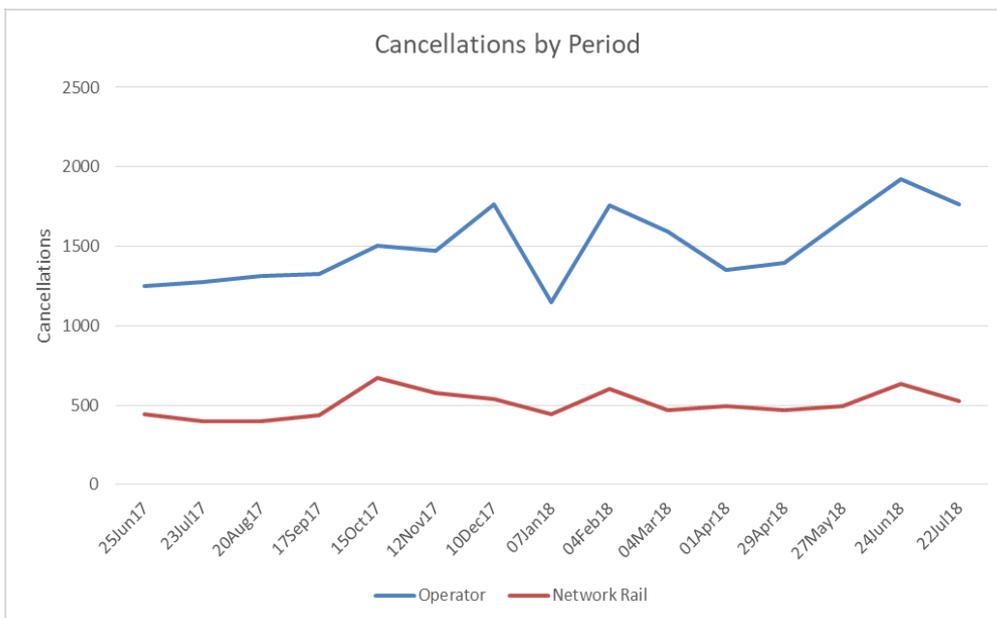
Performance levels at Streatham Common and Streatham Hill have generally been better than at Streatham station. However, even at these two stations there has been an unacceptably high level of late-running trains - 20-25% - during the two “spike periods” of the mid-winter (early December – early January) and early summer (late June – early July) periods, when again we would expect about 10%. There has also been a high level of cancellations during those spike periods, of around 8%. Whilst the third iteration of the timetable (in mid-July) has improved both punctuality and reliability, this has come about too late for many previous users of the three Streatham stations.





## 2. Causes of cancellation

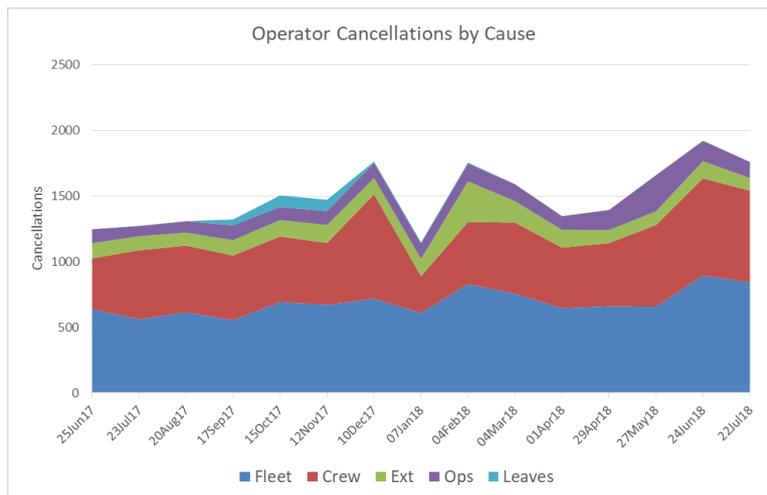
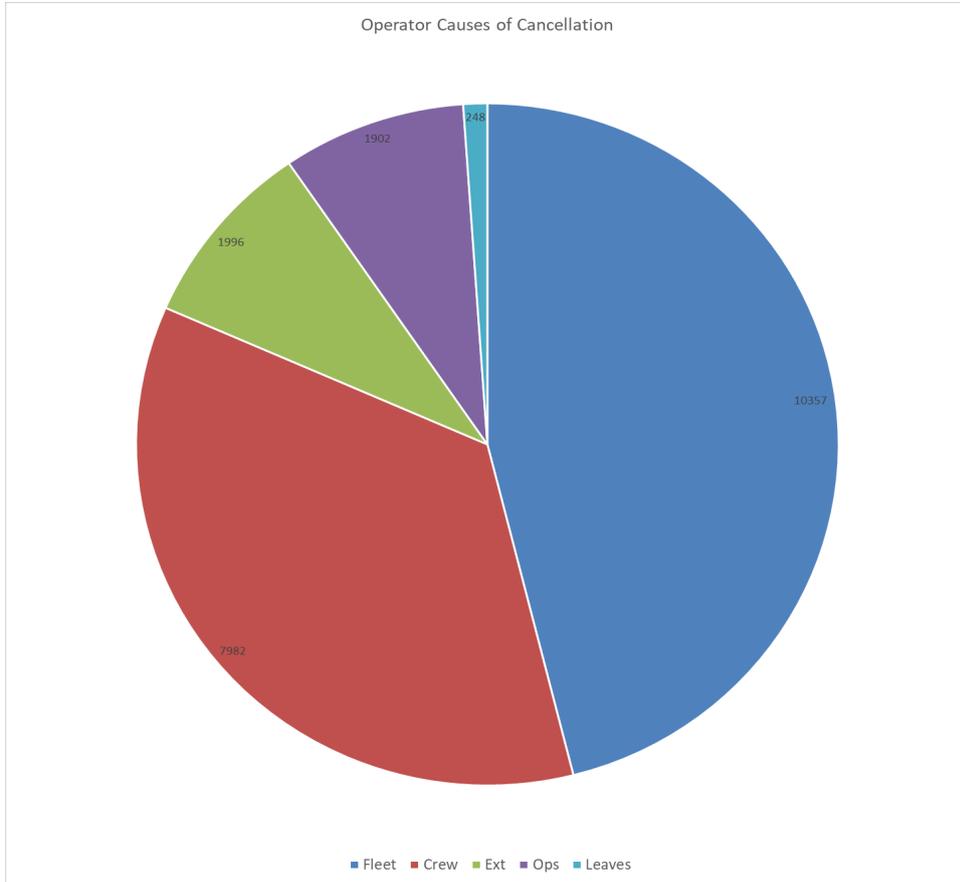
Whilst SAT fully appreciates that during the mid-winter period in particular, causes for cancellation will quite often be Network Rail-related reasons – such as points failures, signal failures or leaves on the line – the number of operator-caused cancellations is still substantially higher than cancellations caused by Network Rail. SAT believes this to be unusual: we would normally expect causes for cancellation either to be split roughly 50:50 between Network Rail and GTR or to be more biased towards Network Rail:



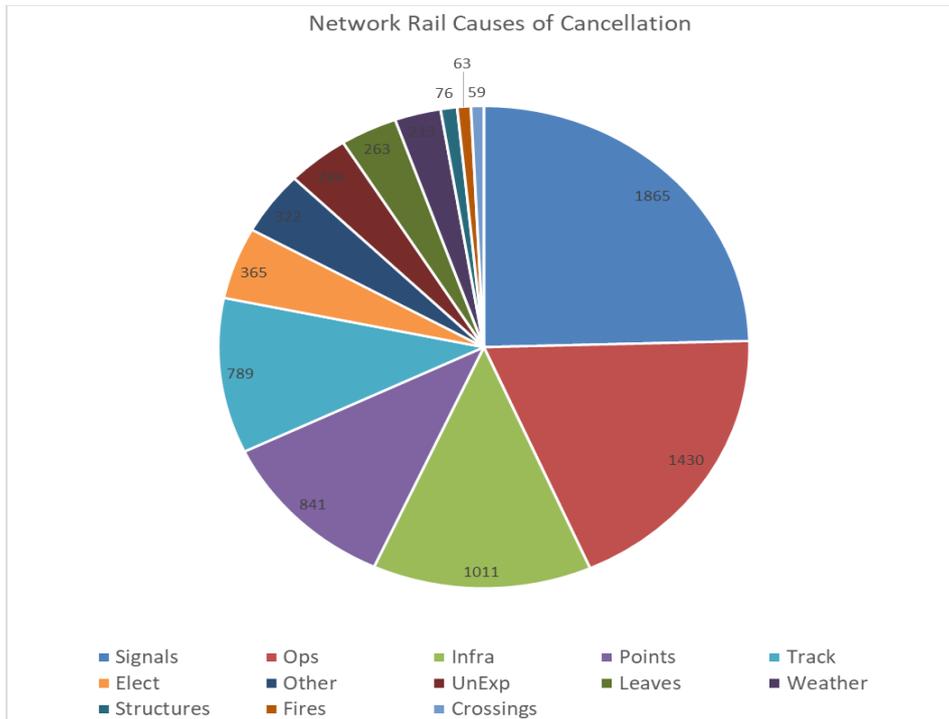
Where cancellations are the responsibility of GTR, the pie chart below clearly demonstrates that 46% of these are caused by defective rolling stock and 35% from a lack of train crew to run the



trains! Both of these percentage levels, in the view of SAT, are unforgiveable for a franchise provider in one of the busiest Greater London commuter belts.

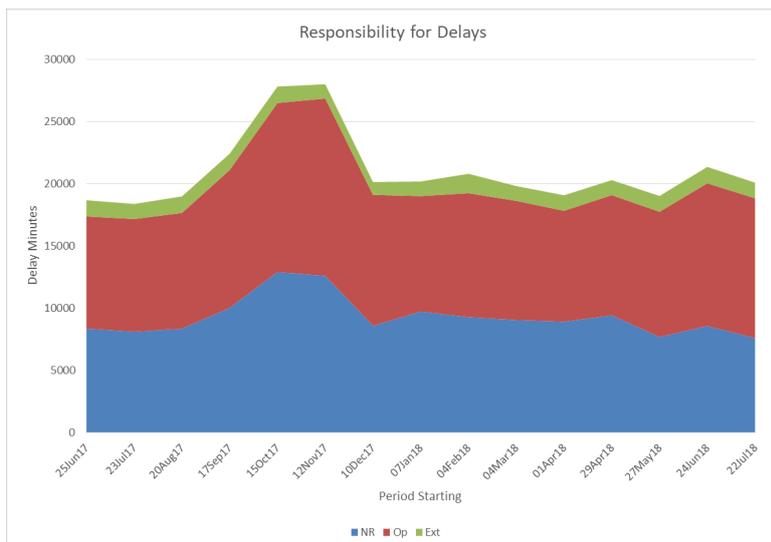


Where cancellations are Network Rail’s responsibility, the pie chart below surprisingly demonstrates that “signals” is the main cause of cancellation, when more normally one would expect to see both “operational” and “infrastructure” aspects as being the more frequent causes:

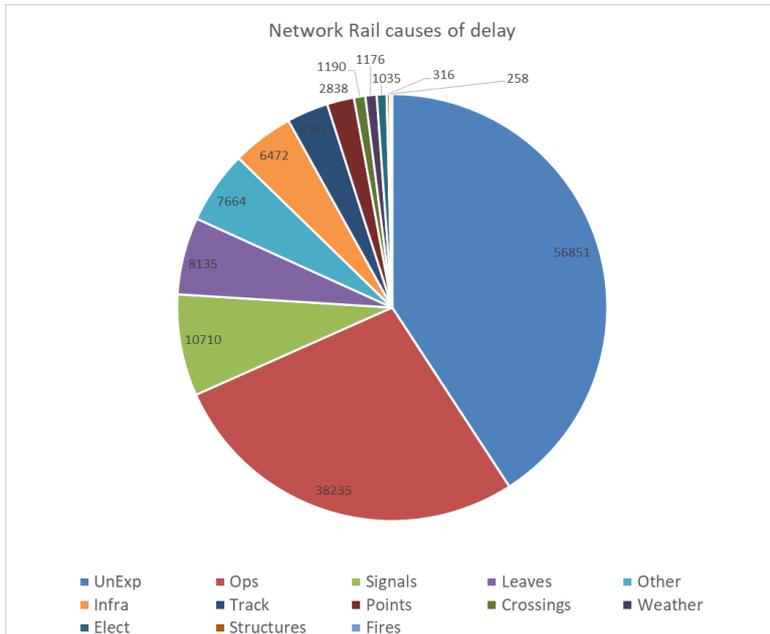


### 3. Causes of delay

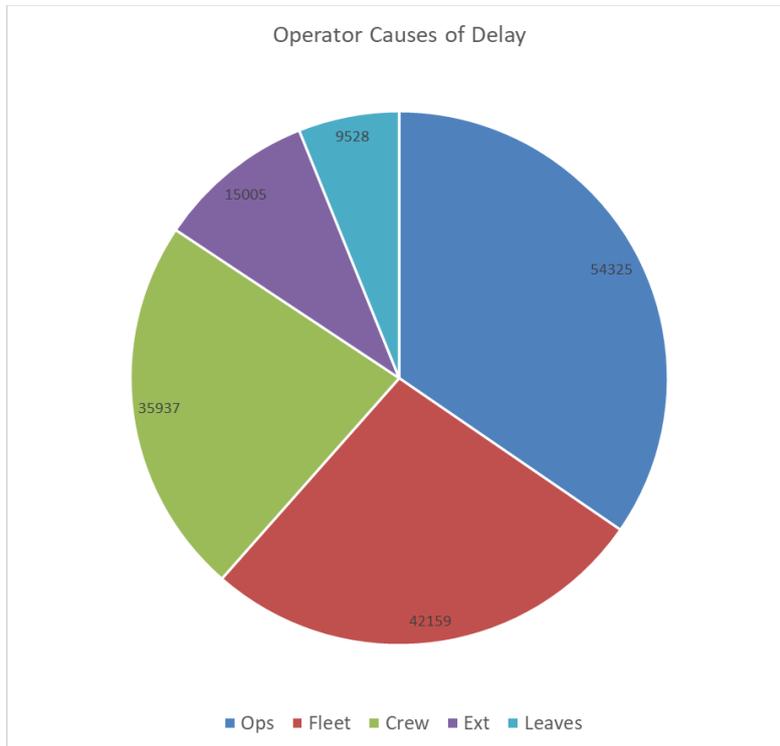
Normally, responsibility for delays to trains tends to be split roughly 66.6%:33.3% (Network Rail : train operator). However, for Streatham stations the FoI data reveals that the train operator is responsible for more train delays than Network Rail:



The Network Rail causes of delay are themselves surprising: normally one would expect to see these causes being split almost equally between operational and infrastructure-related reasons. However, here “unexplained” reasons represent a massive 44% of Network Rail causes of delay. This suggests that Network Rail’s management of delays is extremely poor: we would normally expect only a very small proportion of delay to be unexplained.



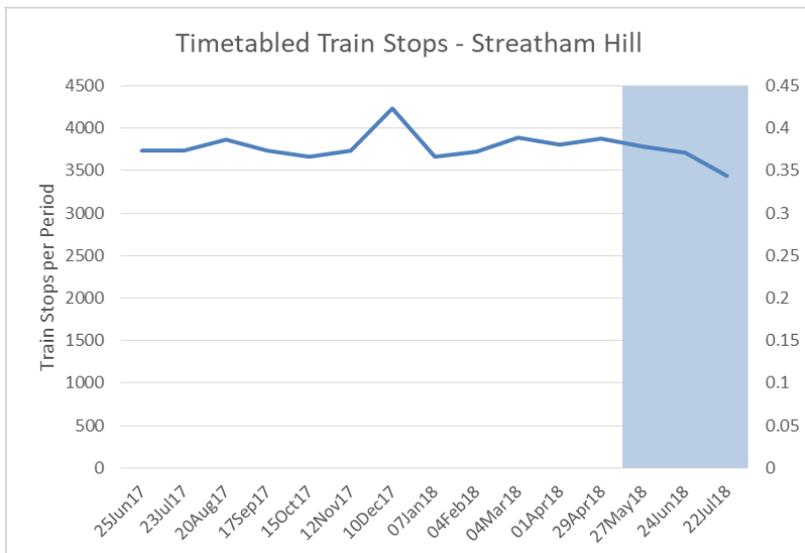
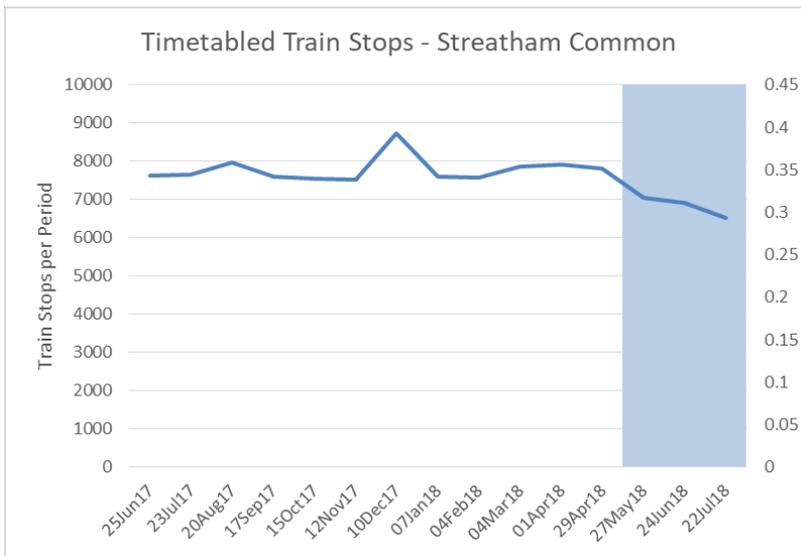
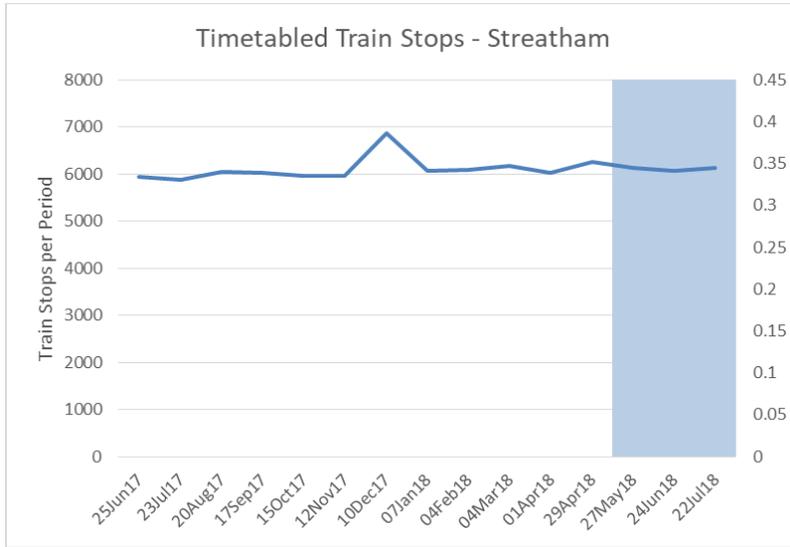
The operator causes of delay have also shown up some surprising and worrying findings, as “operational” reasons comprise over one third (35% in these instances) of the causes of delay, when normally these would be less than both crew and fleet causes. SAT puts this very high figure down to a combination of station overtime – ie the respective train operators failing to get trains in and out of stations in a fully efficient manner – which in turn is then leading to subsequent railway line congestion:



#### 4. Summary of timetable adjustments made

The areas shaded light blue in each of the three below graphs, would indicate the following:

- Streatham Common is the busiest of the three Streatham stations;
- Streatham Hill is by far the least busy and least used of the three Streatham train stations;
- Streatham station would appear to have been impacted far less than either of the other two stations from the timetable changes;
- The reduction in train numbers at each of Streatham Common – where the reduction was quite significantly scaled back at the time of the two timetable changes in May – and Streatham Hill have tended to impact more on a reduced train service during the off peak periods than during the peak periods.





#### 5. Headline feedback from SurveyMonkey questionnaires

SAT was pleased to receive just under 500 responses to its 4<sup>th</sup> quarter 2018 survey of commuters travelling from one or more of Streatham's 3 overground stations. As mentioned in the executive summary above, key results from this survey are as follows:

- 36% of respondents actually changed their journeys to work as a result of the May timetable changes!
- 1 in 5 of all respondents now choose to take a bus to the nearest tube station rather than suffer in silence on Streatham's over-ground services;
- Far from bringing relief to our long-suffering commuters, the changes in May only made things worse.

**The fact that 36% of all respondents changed their journeys to work as a result of the May timetable changes is a very sorry state of affairs, particularly given the fact that a very large number of these respondents chose instead to take a bus to their nearest tube station.**

Anecdotal evidence would tend to suggest significant numbers of bus passengers who live around Streatham High Road catching any one of several buses at peak rush hour time between 07.30 and 08.15 hrs daily and alighting at Brixton to catch the Victoria Line. Some are also catching the 249 or 319 buses to reach either Tooting Bec or Balham on the Northern Line. None of the above scenarios helps anybody on London's various commuter services, given that this situation serves only to "bulk up" an already significantly overcrowded northbound Northern Line and Victoria Line services.

The fact that the survey evidences that 27% of commuters from Streatham station have changed their travel route to work away from use of the overground - in comparison with only 13% who use Streatham Common station regularly and 14% who use Streatham Hill station regularly – would evidence a particular bulking up of buses by previous users of Streatham station.

With regard to Streatham Hill station, the survey received far fewer responses from regular commuters from that station than either of the other two stations, as is evidenced by the fact that most respondents had SW16 rather than SW2 postcodes. **Just under 50% of responses were from commuters from Streatham station, 33% from commuters using Streatham Common station and only 17% from commuters using Streatham Hill station.**

As the three graphs immediately preceding this section demonstrate, Streatham Hill is clearly the least busy of the three Streatham train stations. The fact, however, that only 17% of responses were received from Streatham Hill commuters also serves to emphasise an aspect known to SAT for some time now, namely that many Streatham Hill commuters choose to take one of these many Streatham High Road northbound buses down Brixton Hill to Brixton station on the Victoria Line.

#### 6. Do trains run at the most convenient times?

Only 24% of respondents felt that the result of the timetable changes ensured that "*trains in the morning now run at times that suit them*" and with commuters travelling from Streatham Common station being even more frustrated, in that regard, than commuters using Streatham station. These levels of frustration were just as accentuated in the evening rush-hour period.



Even more worryingly, **37.5% of respondents confirmed that their individual employment has been impacted in some way since the two timetable changes in May.** The fact that 41% of commuters from Streatham Common station and 45% of commuters from Streatham station feel that their employment has been affected either “somewhat” or “to a great extent” over the period since the first timetable change in May, is a statistic that is surely a huge embarrassment both to Southern Rail and to Thameslink. The fact that a much lower percentage – 17% - of respondents from Streatham Hill station have reported that their employment has been adversely affected, would indicate that the service quality on the line from Streatham Hill – Southern Rail only – has been better than at either of the other two stations.

This reduction on train services on the south London metro lines through the Streatham stations during the morning rush hour period in particular would lead SAT to question as to why this reduction has been needed and to whose benefit has been the changes. If it is to present GTR in a more favourable light then this leads **SAT to question as to whether or not GTR’s operational capabilities are fit for purpose.**

As has been evidenced from the FOI data, **the reasons for cancellations and severe delays flag up an unacceptably high level of train crew and fleet problems.** Press comment during the early summer of last year indicated that not only was GTR experiencing problems relating to the introduction of new rolling stock, but also that there was a lack of train drivers. Matters were made worse also by far too regular strike days brought about by either train driver disputes or Southern Rail crew disputes with management.

7. Who do Streatham’s commuters blame for the unforgivably poor level of service received on the South London metro lines?

The fact that more people blame the Department for Transport (4.5%) than Network Rail (2.5%) and, with the bulk of commuters blaming Southern Rail (44.5%) or Thameslink (26.8%) – dependent upon which of the two service lines they use – would evidence that **Network Rail has not been receiving a fair share of the blame for what was a shoddy level of service for much of 2018.**

In this regard, anecdotal evidence suggests that when Southern Rail runs letters of apology from Network Rail on its own website relating to Network Rail causes of delay, commuters still blame Southern Rail.

8. Shortage of rolling stock

**There have been many occasions when trains have been running in the peak hours on these lines that are not carrying 10 carriages,** which once again does not help the problems experienced with overcrowding at the three Streatham stations.

9. Dependence on the train service

The fact that **Streatham has no easy underground station accessibility, short of either a bus ride or a bike ride, emphasises as to just how adversely impacted Streatham’s commuters have been over the months since late May in particular.**

10. Conclusions

**Recommendations to both Network Rail and GTR:**



This SAT report follows nearly four months on from a 26.11.18 GLA Transport Committee Report entitled “Broken Rail – a rail service fit for passengers”. Two of the recommendations from that report were as follows:

- Network Rail needs to deliver a plan to enable more frequent and longer trains to run on existing infrastructure;
- The GLA Transport Committee is recommending that there should be dedicated passenger engagement with each station in London, hence with Network Rail and the train operating companies no doubt facilitating such passenger engagement.

Whilst the GLA transport committee additionally makes several other recommendations, those additional recommendations tend to include TfL, which is not subject matter for this particular report.

SAT fully supports both of the above recommendations coming from the GLA Transport Committee’s recent report. With regard specifically to its recommended new approach to passenger engagement, SAT will endeavour to do all that it can to assist with launching such passenger groups at each of the three Streatham stations.

***Recommendations specific to Network Rail:***

SAT fully appreciates that there is only limited further improvement that Network Rail can bring about without further transport infrastructure improvements.

SAT acknowledges that two of Streatham’s train station platforms, at Streatham Common and Streatham, are now of a length that will accommodate 10 carriages and that the other train station platform, at Streatham Hill, is now of a length that will accommodate 9 carriages.

SAT fully appreciates that the South London metro lines are some of the busiest lines in the country.

**Four years ago, as part of its consultation response to the *South East Route: Sussex Area Route Study*, and subsequent to that at a public meeting held in Streatham with Network Rail in attendance, SAT has lobbied Network Rail management to seek to prioritise the South London metro lines for early stage implementation of moving block signalling. Only by implementing such up-to-date technology will Network Rail be able to run a significantly greater number of trains per hour on these very busy lines.**

SAT’s most recent sight of Network Rail’s plans for implementation of moving block signalling would indicate that our South London metro lines are not scheduled for upgrade until Control Period 7 (CP7), which does not commence until April 2024.

**SAT demands of Network Rail that it look again at the relatively low level of priority currently attributed to the south London metro lines for implementation of moving block signalling and moves these South London Metro lines up the priority list for moving block implementation during the current control period, CP6, which runs over a five-year period which commences next month.**

The fact that, as things currently stand, these South London metro lines are not even currently in the top priority list of those lines singled out for new moving block signalling implementation is, in the view of SAT, just not good enough from the perspective of Network Rail meeting the needs of a vast swathe of south London commuters.



***Recommendations specific to Southern Rail/Thameslink:***

1. **SAT demands that GTR should look again at its timetables on the South London metro lines. These clearly do not currently meet the needs of its commuters.**
2. **At the start of this year, GTR announced price increases of 3.1% for 2019, whilst the Mayor promised in 2016 not to increase tube fares for the whole of his 4-year term of office. This leads SAT to believe that **even more commuters will choose to take a bus to either the Northern Line or the Victoria Line.****
3. **Following on from the GLA Transport Committee's own recommendations of late November, SAT requests that senior management of GTR liaise with SAT to set up passenger groups for Streatham's three stations** by agreeing to run an advertising campaign requesting for a small group of commuters to "step up to the plate" to serve on such groups. SAT requests that, in addition to senior management of Southern Rail and Thameslink agreeing to meet with members of these new passenger groups on a quarterly basis, its own SAT group also provide a representative to sit on that new body.
4. **SAT recommends that Southern Rail should implement new technology at all of its stations to show passengers where there is free capacity – if any – on the 10 carriages coming in to Streatham and Streatham Common stations, or 9 coming in to Streatham Hill station on account of the length of platform at that station currently being slightly shorter than that at the other two stations.** This would thereby allow passengers to move up or down the platform in advance of the train's arrival and allow for reduced dwell times for trains at the stations. Improved efficiency in the time taken for passengers to get on and off Southern and Thameslink trains will no doubt help enormously in helping levels of punctuality in their services.
5. **SAT demands either or both of the following:**
  - a. **that all season ticket holders boarding at any one of the three Streatham train stations should receive a 20% reduction in their next renewal of season ticket – be that renewal undertaken on an annual, quarterly or monthly basis.**
  - b. **For an initially one-year period, commencing as from 1<sup>st</sup> June, TfL and GTR should put their heads together to agree to reclassify Streatham as being in Zone 2 rather than in Zone 3. The reason as to why this would be fairer than a), in the eyes of SAT, is that only 35.5% of respondents to its recent survey indicated that they commute on a five day per week basis – thereby perhaps indicating an increase in the level of employer flexibility to home working on at least one day per week. This feedback from Streatham's commuters leads SAT to believe that b) would be a fairer way of proceeding than a), thereby ensuring that all who use GTR's services regularly from Streatham, but who don't necessarily purchase a season ticket, would benefit over a substantial period of time. One of the additional benefits that may come from this is that it would thereby provide less of an incentive to those many Streatham commuters currently taking a bus to Brixton in order to board a train at an existing Zone 2 station.**

***Recommendations specific to DfT:***



**SAT requests that DfT looks upon the results from this report as evidencing that the current level of service received by commuters on the South London metro lines has been completely unacceptable during 2018.** SAT seeks assurances from the DfT that:

- It will request follow-up on all of the above data on a six-monthly basis to ascertain as to whether or not the first half of 2019 will evidence an improvement in service reliability;
- **If there is no evidence of such improvements by August 2019 that the DfT agree once again to review the current franchise arrangements with GTR** and, if and when necessary, to consider transferring the franchise in to the hands of TfL, providing that TfL is able to evidence that it will be able to bring about improvements on the South London metro lines faster than GTR.
- **SAT sees no reason as to why there should not be a “turn up and go” service available on all South London metro lines, at least as far out of central London as the Croydon area.** Only by providing this frequent a service will Streatham’s commuters be served as well as neighbouring south London conurbations who have both the tube and the overground.
- Following on from a letter that Neil Salt received from the then Minister, Lord Ahmad, two and a quarter years ago, which emphasised that the *Sussex Route Study* proposals “*may offer a better solution to improve the capacity and performance for services stopping at Streatham in future*”, **SAT calls upon the DfT to bolster its demand of Network Rail that it bring forward implementation of moving block signalling on the South London Metro lines to the upcoming five-year control period 6 (CP6)**, which runs between 1 April 2019 and 31 March 2024, from the previously scheduled CP7 period, which latter period commences only from 1 April 2024.

Neil Salt

Chair, Streatham Action Transport Group

13 March 2019