

Temporary suspension of Gatwick Express services from Monday 30 March 2020

As you may be aware, Govia Thameslink Railway is in the process of introducing a revised timetable from Monday 30 March 2020 to ensure that services remain as sustainable as possible in a scenario of reduced passengers and potentially reduced staff availability, especially train crew and other safety-critical staff. Our message to customers is to only travel if it is essential.

The fully revised timetable from the 30 March onwards will be an adaptation of our existing Sunday timetable, with earlier start and later finish times to provide extra services for emergency and other key workers. A briefing from Friday with more detail on this process is reproduced below for your reference.

As an additional change to be aware of, from Monday 30 March, we will temporarily suspend the Gatwick Express shuttle service which operates between Gatwick Airport and London Victoria. This is to help us to keep other train services running and is in response to a significant fall in passenger numbers at the airport.

As reassurance, the airport will remain well connected with train services. As an example of the repeating hourly pattern (e.g. 12:00-13:00), the airport will have five services to London Victoria and six services to London Bridge in each direction per hour.

This change will enable our Gatwick Express drivers to support other train services across the Brighton Main Line. It means, in practical terms that some "Southern" services operating between Brighton and London Victoria will be covered by red Gatwick Express trains until further notice. Southern fares will apply and Gatwick Express tickets are no longer on sale.

To explain, as you may be aware, train drivers have specific traction (train) and route knowledge. A driver cannot drive a new route or a different type of train without specific and extensive training. Gatwick Express drivers are qualified for the entire route from London Victoria to Brighton (instead of simply the airport portion) and there is considerable overlap with Southern drivers who operate the "off-peak" Southern service

between London Victoria and Brighton. Some of these Southern drivers, crucially, also have the right training to operate other services such as the Coastway routes to and from Eastbourne and Littlehampton. Because of this change, these Southern drivers can now be released from Brighton Main Line duties (and covered by Gatwick Express trains and crew) providing significantly more resilience across the network.

Revised GTR services and update on COVID-19 response

Introduction of a revised timetable

Our staff are impacted by COVID-19, and some may become ill or will need to care for family members. We are doing everything we can to keep our staff and their families healthy, but we are planning for potentially reduced staff availability, especially train crew and other safety-critical staff.

To manage and protect train services for key workers, the UK rail industry is introducing a revised train timetable that is expected to be sustainable in this scenario. Our staff will keep people moving.

This timetable will be introduced gradually from Monday 23 March 2020 and will culminate in a revised timetable from Monday 30 March 2020. The timetable will remain in effect until further notice.

The tapering of services between the 23 March and 30 March is owing to the complexity of the GTR network and to provide a gradual introduction for customers. It will enable us to complete driver planning, update customer-facing information and move trains and crew into position for the 30 March.

Information for customers to plan their journeys will be available on the homepage of any of our websites:

www.southernrailway.com

www.thameslinkrailway.com

www.greatnorthernrail.com

www.gatwickexpress.com

As reassurance, we recognise that our train services provide an essential role for key workers. Trains will cater for shift work patterns.

To provide a sense of what to anticipate, the fully revised timetable from the 30 March onwards will be an adaption of our existing Sunday timetable, with earlier start and later finish times to provide extra services for key workers.

This timetable provides existing customer familiarity and enables us to introduce a timetable with known driver planning, routes, train timings and interactions at sections of constrained infrastructure such as the Thameslink core between St Pancras International and London Blackfriars. It also means that interactions and connections with other non-GTR operated train services are known, robust, understood and stress-tested plans exist.

While a change to the timetable, it is based on a proven base and will provide a high degree of reliability in the circumstances, which is what we know those who absolutely must travel will need.

We will keep you updated.

Cleaning

The health and wellbeing of everyone who uses the railway and our staff is always our priority. We know people have concerns and the rail industry is being proactive and coordinated in our response. We are doing more to ensure our trains and stations are clean. As a summary of our response for your reference:

- Our busiest stations have a full-time cleaning team in place. These include Gatwick, Brighton, Luton, East Croydon, City Thameslink, Blackfriars, Luton Airport Parkway, Luton, Hitchin, Finsbury Park and West Hampstead. Smaller stations are maintained by station teams and mobile cleaning teams covering sets of stations.

- Cleaning teams have increased the frequency of all cleaning onboard trains and at stations. We are focusing on all contact surfaces (handrails, toilet flushes, door handles and controls, ticket machines) as this understood to be the most common way of the virus transferring between people.
- We have replaced existing cleaning products with virucides such as bleach. These enhancements exceed current guidance as advised by Public Health England. We are supplementing these measures with steam cleaning and other appropriate methods.
- We have worked with Network Rail to lift restrictions on recharging water tanks on trains, and soap will be topped up at every train turn-around. In addition, we are aware that some customers are concerned about the efficacy of the soap on Class 700 Thameslink units. By way of reassurance, the soap is as effective as any other, but is a deliberately lower viscosity product manufactured by ZEP especially for Siemens. This is because a thicker product was the cause of sink and pipe blockages last year.
- Intensive cleaning is also underway at our train and crew depots and office facilities.
- Our safety team is continuing to review our cleaning regime, methods and equipment used as information is released by Government, Public Health England and the Rail Delivery Group, and we are always reviewing our equipment, chemicals and methods, to ensure that current systems are the most effective available. These include reviewing specialist equipment, such as dry steam and microfibre, widely used across the NHS. Trials are currently being organised.

Tickets and refunds

Information on tickets and refunds is available on our websites, such as this link on the Southern webpage: <https://www.southernrailway.com/travel-information/plan-your-journey/coronavirus-information>

We are working closely with the Department for Transport to deliver our approach and have agreed the following changes:

- Day tickets such as Anytime, Off-Peak or Super Off-Peak fares can be refunded in full without any administration charges if purchased directly from GTR (e.g. at a ticket office, via our websites etc). Third-party retailers such as [trainline.com](https://www.trainline.com) may have different policies.

- Advance fares such as Southern £5 advance fares (purchased for specific dates and times) can be exchanged for an alternative journey free of charge.

Under current policy, our customer relations team is ensuring that annual season ticket holders that expect to travel more than forty weeks per calendar year in future are making as informed a choice as possible in the circumstances before opting for a refund.

This is because annual season tickets are priced on the value of forty weeks of weekly season tickets, with twelve weeks free. This means that for a refund, our customer services team will work out how much it would have cost a customer to travel up to the point when they stopped using their season ticket using weekly season tickets. We will then refund the difference between that amount and how much a customer paid for their season ticket. Employer season ticket loan schemes are usually paid in ten, rather than twelve instalments to account for how the system works.

We are continuing to work closely with the Department for Transport on additional measures to support customers but wanted to provide an update on the status as of today.