

# Improving performance on Thameslink and Southern



Govia Thameslink Railway (GTR), Southern and Network Rail are working together to improve performance on Thameslink and Southern.



# Improving performance on Thameslink and Southern

We know that passengers have endured poor reliability on Thameslink and Southern in recent months, and that we need to put this right. There are many factors that have led to this situation. Some are failings on our part, and others involve circumstances beyond our control.

We run trains on a network that is under ever-increasing pressure. With London's runaway success more people use the railway to get to work and do business. The number of passengers on Thameslink has grown by 40% over the past five years, and by 32% on Southern.

So train companies have added more and longer trains to the timetable. And the infrastructure upgrades have proved to be insufficient to cope with the growth in passenger numbers. This has all led to congestion and a noticeable decrease in performance of the train service.

The Thameslink Programme will solve many of these problems, but it was always going to cause disruption, particularly in the current phase – the major works at London Bridge.

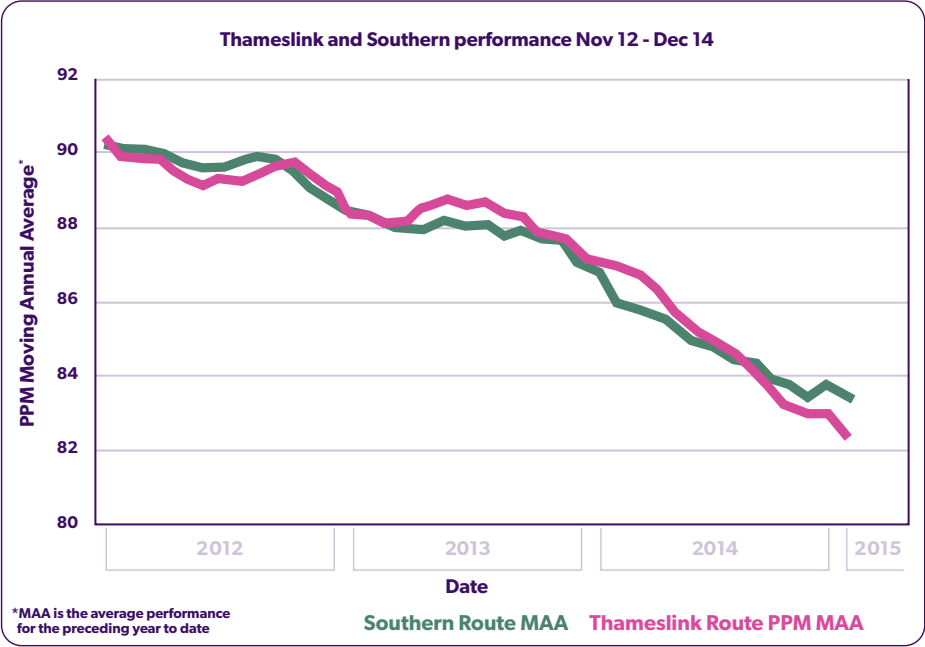
During the upgrades we can only use three of the four approach tracks, and our drivers and signallers had to err on the side of caution until they were familiar with the new layout. This all had an effect on the punctuality of the trains. And while we tried to timetable as many services as possible – 22 an hour in the peak – so passengers did not lose out, we have discovered that this number is not feasible during the works.

In addition, when GTR took over the Thameslink service, we found that there were too few drivers. There have also been problems with the infrastructure on the Brighton Main Line, and upgrades on the Midland Main Line have caused some disruption.

And finally, there have been an unusual number of one-off incidents that are out of our control, such as high numbers of fatalities and trespassers on the line, and the water mains leak at Farringdon.

While these are all genuine reasons for the current problems, we know that you want to be assured that we are going to solve them. This updated report explains how we in the rail industry are urgently working together to turn things around for our passengers, and the targets we have set to improve our performance.

# Performance



The decline in performance has been going on for the past three years. On Thameslink it has gone down from 90.35% to 82.93% and on Southern 90.21% to 83.72%.

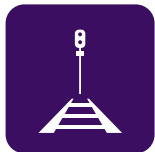
## How are we going to solve it?

We are acutely aware that you simply want to see the service return to one passengers can rely on to go about their lives as planned. So what are we going to do to solve it?

We are working in partnership across the industry to improve performance on Thameslink and Southern. GTR, Southern and Network Rail have formed an alliance and we are working together to deliver a recovery plan with realistic targets.

# Key areas of improvement

There are six key areas where we are making changes to improve performance. You can find further details about these on pages 8 to 11.



Infrastructure



Fleet



Timetable



Drivers



Day-to-day  
management of  
operations



Customer experience

## Time frame

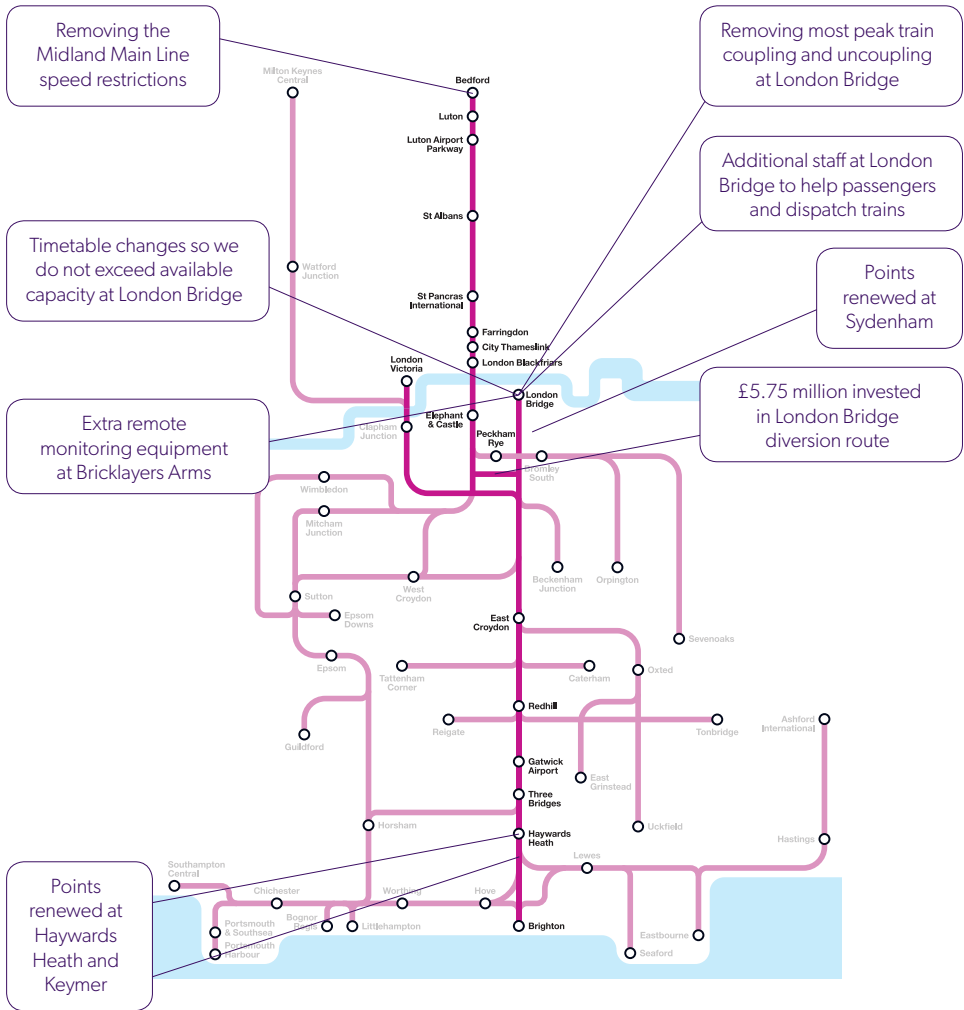
We have set out a realistic time frame, delivering the improvement schemes over three periods:

- Short term: to May 2015
- Medium term: to December 2015
- Long term: to December 2018

## Holding us to account

We are committed to working with our stakeholders to improve the service for all our passengers. We will keep you informed at all stages, with four-weekly updates on our websites about our progress in meeting the targets and delivering the initiatives described in this document.

# Immediate actions



We are also increasing our response, maintenance and support staff to reduce the time it takes to fix infrastructure failures.

# Improving performance in 2015

We have already made a raft of improvements that have stopped our performance deteriorating. It has levelled out at around 80% on Southern and 81% on Thameslink.

However, we are now operating in a new environment caused by the works at London Bridge. The fact that we can only use three tracks rather than four until 2017 means that we have to run fewer trains, and if something goes wrong it is likely to have a greater effect on subsequent services.

In addition, we are still working to stabilise the evening peak period as we have less capacity in the evening than the morning at London Bridge. This is because it takes longer to dispatch full trains than empty ones, and while all trains are full in the evening, over 30% of the morning trains are not in service when they leave the station.

All this will inevitably have an impact on our performance over the next three years. So the performance improvements you will see over the coming months are measured against a new baseline – where we are now rather than where we were before the London Bridge works.

## Recent improvements

We reviewed our train schedule and made changes to the timetable, which have brought noticeable improvements to the punctuality of our trains.

In addition, we have stopped most of the coupling and uncoupling of trains at London Bridge to help the station run more efficiently. And the recent work we have done on the infrastructure has greatly improved its reliability.

We have installed new information screens at London Bridge and improved the way train crew and station staff communicate with passengers, so reducing delays at stations.

Drivers and signallers are now familiar with the changes to the layout at London Bridge, so trains can run a little faster and signallers can solve problems more quickly.

# Our targets for improvement

Over the next five years we aim to improve performance on Thameslink and Southern by 6.4% and have set targets for year on year progress.

The increase is calculated from the difference between our baseline in 2015/16 and our target in 2018/19. We have set the baseline as our performance in early 2015 with the new infrastructure in place at London Bridge. This means that the figures will reflect the real improvements in reliability and punctuality that you will experience over the coming years.

Year end MAA	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19
Target	-	81.3%	82.7%	83.9%	86.6%
Baseline	82.8%	80.2%	80.2%	80.2%	80.2%

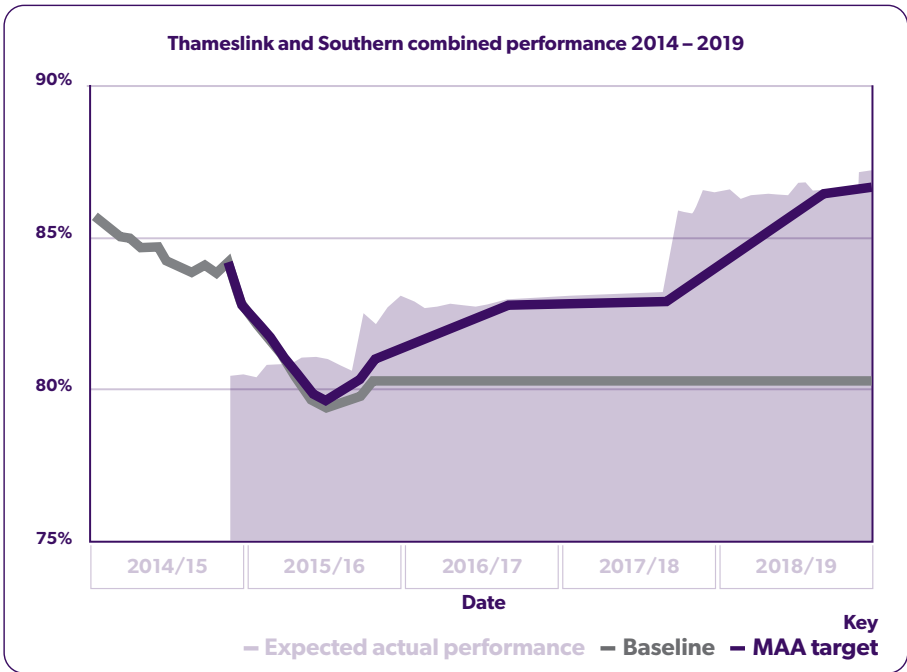
There are three key factors that will make a significant contribution to this increase in performance:

- The new timetable in December 2015
- Our review of train scheduling in December 2017
- The re-opening of the fourth track at London Bridge in 2017

In addition, we are committed to a further 33 improvement schemes, which are either already underway or planned to start in the next few years. The overall budget for these is £200 million.

You will notice real improvements from now onwards in the punctuality and reliability of our trains. And this trend will continue upwards as we deliver more improvement schemes over the next few years.





## Moving annual average figures

The reason the figures show a decline in performance at the start of 2015/16 is due to the figure the rail industry uses to calculate performance – the Moving Annual Average (MAA). This is made up of an average of performance for the year previous to the given date. For example, the figure for May 2015 will average out our performance from June 2014 to May 2015.

This method of calculation means that in general any small or uncharacteristic fluctuations are ironed out, but in our case it does mean that until a full year on from our 2014 deterioration in performance, that decline will be included in the calculation. So our actual performance in May 2015 will be higher than the projected MAA figure.

## Expected actual performance

The expected actual performance shows the improvements in punctuality and reliability we have predicted for the next few years. The drop in performance in autumn is standard across all train operators – it is because of the effect of seasonal weather conditions.

## Infrastructure

We are taking actions to reduce problems caused by the infrastructure. These include:

- Additional nighttime working for maintenance crews to remove infrastructure defects
- A dedicated team to inspect and improve the infrastructure at 38 key locations
- Removing the Midland Main Line speed restrictions
- Introducing the first UK mobile maintenance trains to reduce the time it takes to do maintenance work and improve staff safety
- Schemes to improve drainage and reduce flooding
- Reinstatement of the fourth approach track at London Bridge in 2017

## Fleet

One of the keys to good performance is the train fleet. Older trains need more maintenance to keep them running on time. So we are making changes to the fleet now that will give passengers more comfortable and reliable journeys.

We are already running the first of our brand new, air conditioned class 387 trains on the Bedford to Brighton route – this January we were able to lengthen two over-crowded morning services from Brighton. By May all 29 new trains will be in service.

We have also hired three extra class 319 units so that we are able to run the scheduled length of trains on the Bedford to Brighton services.

We are modifying all of Thameslink's and some of Southern's class 377s, and also Southern's class 171s to improve reliability.

From next year we will start to introduce the new Siemens trains on Thameslink.



## **Timetable**

The timetable is critical to running a reliable service on the Brighton Main Line. The off peak changes planned for December 2015 will remove many of the problems in the current schedule. The timing between trains will be more evenly spaced so if there is a problem with one service it is less likely to have a knock on effect on the following ones.

We have made some changes recently so that passengers can rely on the published timetable and plan accordingly. At present this includes removing some peak Southern services between London Bridge and West Croydon.

We are also concerned that reliability of the evening peak services is somewhat fragile at the moment due to the problems with capacity at London Bridge. So while we will maintain the current volume of services, we are reviewing the pattern and will make further adjustments in the coming weeks. We will let you know about any changes as soon as we can.

The major timetable changes we will make in December 2015 will reflect the lessons we have learnt now, as will the final Thameslink Programme timetable in December 2018.





## Drivers

We are actively recruiting drivers for Thameslink to make up the current shortfall. While it takes 15 months to train a new driver, we already have 12 trainees who will be fully qualified by May, and a further 10 by December. On Southern we are training 29 new drivers who will be ready to join our team by May. We are also training all Thameslink drivers on our new rolling stock.

We have been relying on drivers to work voluntary overtime to cover shifts on Thameslink, but we are now working to reduce this so that we always have enough drivers for each shift.



## Day-to-day management of operations

Our immediate concern is to make sure we have enough people on the front line to manage the service on a minute-by-minute basis. This means we will be able to respond faster to problems such as signal failure and return the services to normal more quickly.

So we are looking to extend the shift patterns of operations coordinators to cover longer periods, bringing forward the appointment of 10 station performance managers, and creating new roles in our route operations centre.

In order to reduce delays on the route we are reviewing how signallers control the flow of services. And we are going to introduce a new traffic management system.

We are looking into the feasibility of running class 387 trains at 110 mph on the northern part of Thameslink to get back to normal service levels faster after an incident.



## Customer experience

We have brought forward the introduction of passenger service directors on our routes. These directors have direct responsibility to passengers at a local level, leading the delivery of our service.

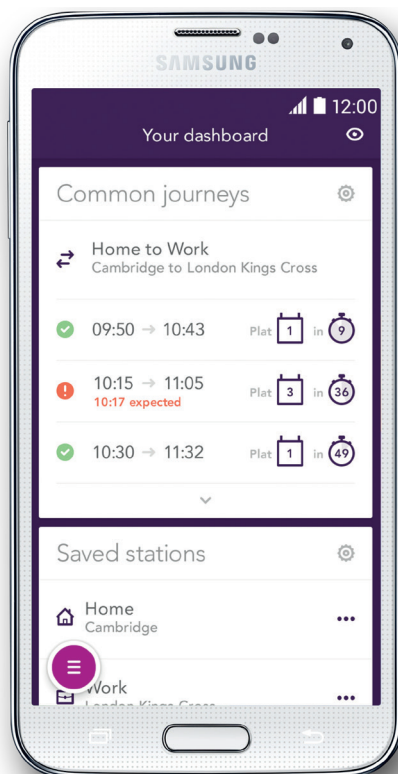
Following passenger feedback, we have changed the method we use to calculate Delay Repay on Thameslink. There is also an enhanced compensation package in place for Thameslink and Southern season ticket holders – you can find details on our websites.

At major London stations such as London Bridge and Victoria we will use advertising screens to show information about delays and cancellations when there is disruption. Network Rail will also train a group of customer service staff, which we will send to major London stations when there is severe disruption to help passengers.

Our Twitter feed is now manned 24 hours a day, every day, and we are merging our Thameslink and Southern social media teams so they can share information and respond to passengers more efficiently. We are also introducing a new system that will automatically update our station screens, apps and websites from a single information source, giving passengers consistent, accurate service details.

We have made improvements to Thameslink's website and Thameslink's and Southern's apps, such as banner alerts that pop up automatically when trains are delayed or cancelled; storing recent journey searches so that next time the information appears faster; and more personalised filtering of search results so passengers get the information that is most relevant to them.

We are constantly working to improve the way we display information on our websites and apps, and make it more personally relevant to every passenger.





# Governance

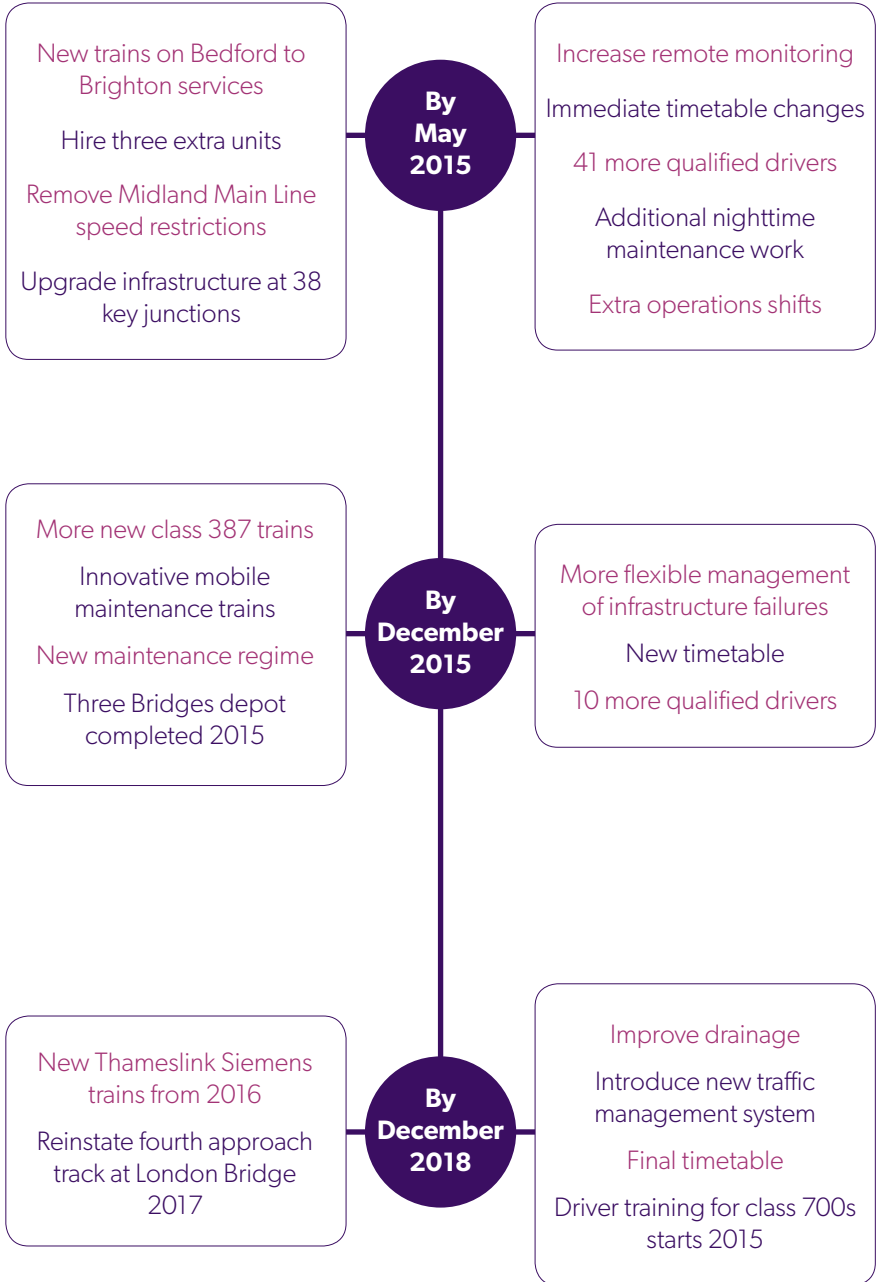
We have set up an Alliance Board to take responsibility for, and oversee the improvement work that we have committed to. It includes Thameslink, Southern and Network Rail directors and the heads of the Thameslink Programme, performance, projects, timetabling and customer services.

Meeting every four weeks, it focuses on projects that we are working on together. It has substantial decision-making powers, with the ability to sanction expenditure and move resources around our organisations to make sure the initiatives have all the necessary support.

The Department for Transport and the Office of Rail Regulation regularly review the board's activity and hold us to account for delivery of our improvement plan.



# What we are doing and when



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Our apps: Thameslink On Track and Southern On Track. Download them for free from the App Store or Google Play

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