

Additional compensation offered to Thameslink and Great Northern passengers

Transport User Panel Survey

December 2018



Background

In July 2018 Govia Thameslink announced details about additional compensation available to passengers travelling on Thameslink and Great Northern services who had been impacted by disruption caused by changes made to the timetables in May.

Throughout the disruption Transport Focus has monitored the impact on these passengers, including asking members of the Transport User Panel about their experiences. In November we re-engaged with these passengers to ask them about their awareness of this additional compensation and their experience of making a claim.

Responses to the survey were collected between 6 and 19 November 2018. 264 panellists completed the survey and results are unweighted; findings should therefore be seen as indicative rather than as statistically significant. The results of the survey are provided below.

Key findings

Awareness of compensation

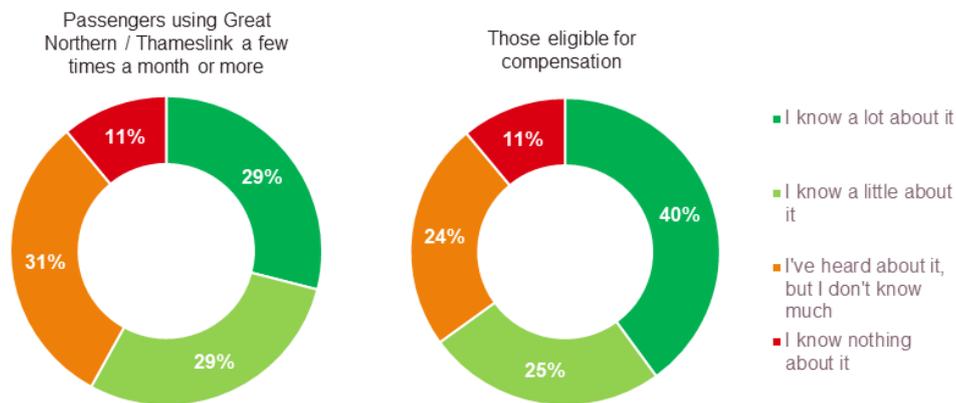
Awareness of the availability of the compensation amongst our panellists who use Thameslink or Great Northern trains at least a few times a month is good. 89 per cent of these passengers say that they have at least heard about the compensation, with 29 per cent saying that they know a lot about it. Just 11 per cent say that they know nothing.

Results indicate that passengers who were making frequent journeys on routes where compensation is available tend to be better informed about the compensation than passengers generally. While a similar proportion of these passengers say that they have heard about the compensation, 40 per cent say that they know a lot about it.

Awareness of compensation

Great Northern / Thameslink have announced additional compensation for some passengers effected by disruption related to changes to the timetable which were made this year.

How much, if anything, would you say that you know about this compensation?



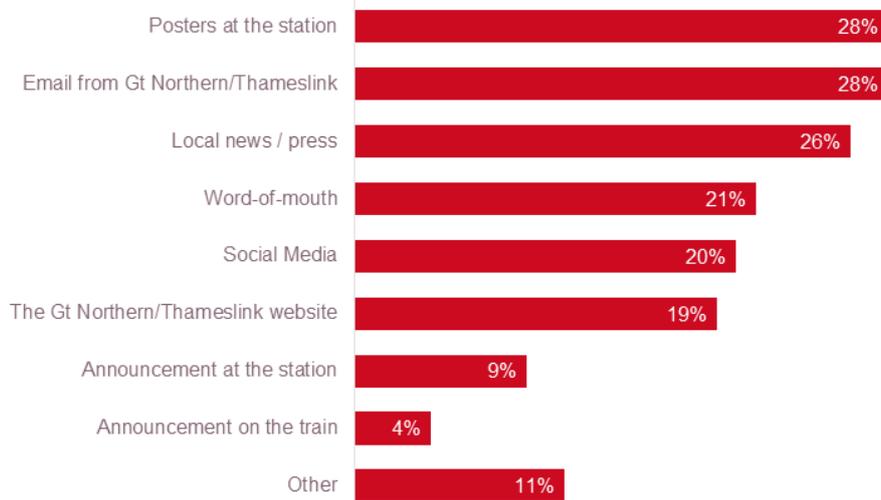
Base: Panelists using Great Northern or Thameslink train services at least a few times a month (228). Those eligible for additional compensation (165)

While it is encouraging that most eligible passengers are aware of the additional compensation we know from other studies that our panel tend to be more engaged than the wider population of transport users. Therefore, the level of awareness of the compensation is likely to be lower amongst those who are eligible more generally. A small number of panellists who appear to be eligible for the compensation still say that they know nothing about it. We therefore encourage Thameslink and Great Northern to continue efforts to increase awareness amongst passengers before the scheme closes. Additional effort may be required to raise awareness amongst those passengers who were travelling on daily tickets or tickets issued by Transport for London.

Panellists using Thameslink and great Northern indicate that a range of sources of information have made passengers aware of the availability of compensation. 28 per cent say that they heard about the compensation through seeing posters at the station and a similar proportion received an email from the train company directly. Slightly fewer passengers heard about the scheme through the local news or press, while around one in five heard about the compensation through word of mouth (21 per cent), social media (20 per cent), and through the train company website (19 per cent)

Sources of information

How did you hear about the availability of this compensation scheme?



Base: Panelists using Great Northern or Thameslink train services at least a few times a month who have heard about the compensation (203)

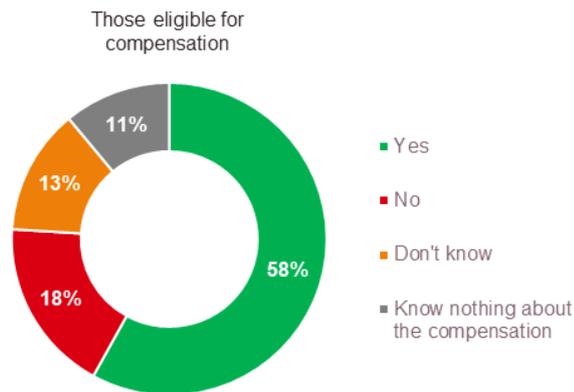
Awareness of entitlement

58 per cent of panellists whose journeys suggest that they would be entitled to the additional compensation believe themselves to be as such. 18 per cent of these passengers do not believe that they are entitled to the compensation, while 13 per cent are unsure, and 11 per cent say that they had not heard about the compensation at all.

Awareness of entitlement

Great Northern / Thameslink have announced additional compensation for some passengers effected by disruption related to changes to the timetable which were made this year.

Do you believe that you may be entitled to the compensation?



Base: Panelists using Great Northern or Thameslink train services who are eligible for additional compensation (165)

Passengers confused about their eligibility tend either to mention that the trains which they were using were not overly disrupted, or that they believe (incorrectly) that holding a TfL ticket (Oyster) makes them ineligible. For some the experience of being ineligible for Delay Repay compensation means they mistakenly believe that their ticket is not valid in this case. Whilst for others, they think themselves ineligible because they claimed delay repay for journeys during the qualifying period; thinking that they are not entitled to both forms of compensation. There are also those who note issues to do with proving their eligibility for the compensation – they don't think they'd be able to provide sufficient evidence.

Confusion among those eligible

Why are you unsure as to whether or not / why do you think that you are not entitled to claim this compensation?

"I assumed it's just for season ticket holders, also I claimed compensation for individual journeys already so don't know if I'm entitled to more."
St Albans City to St Pancras, daily tickets

"Using and Oyster Card prepay I really don't know how this would work through TfL."
Elstree and Borehamwood to Farringdon, Oyster

"I don't know what counts as disruption."
Brighton to City Thameslink, monthly season ticket

"Because I have been travelling irregularly and don't have a season ticket so assume I can't get it."
Bedford to St Pancras, daily tickets bought in advance

"As it's a monthly season ticket not an annual season ticket - I have claimed for individual journeys but not for every journey that has been delayed."
St Albans City to London St Pancras, monthly season ticket

"I haven't retained the tickets for that period. I suspect that without ticket evidence I will not be able to make a claim."
Potters Bar to Kings Cross, weekly season ticket

"The service is provided by Great Northern. How do I claim when I pay by Oyster?"
Grange Park to Highbury and Islington, Pay as you go

"I use a Zone 1 to 5 Oyster Card."
East Croydon to City Thameslink, monthly season ticket

I did not travel enough and did not have a season ticket
Baldock to London Kings Cross, travels 3 or more times a week, daily tickets bought in advance

Base: Those eligible for additional compensation

Intention to claim

The majority of those who believe themselves to be entitled to the compensation say that they have already made a claim. However, there are some who still intend to make one. Comments from panellists who have not yet claimed but intend to do so suggest that some are finding it difficult to gather the evidence that they require. Others are weighing up the time and effort it is likely to take to gather the evidence against the reward that they are likely to receive. Again, we would encourage Thameslink and Great Northern to continue to communicate with passengers about the compensation. Both to raise awareness and increase understanding of the qualifying criteria. Perhaps there is potential for some joint communications with TfL, who will be better placed to identify eligible passengers who travel using Oyster cards?

Other panellists are adamant that they will not be making a claim for compensation. Comments from these panellists suggest that they have decided that it is not worth it given the effort involved in gathering the evidence and the size of the likely award. Others do not think that the size of the award will adequately compensate them for the effects of the disruption.

"Not worth the hassle."

Thameslink passenger, travelling from Kings Cross to Cambridge

“Getting back the price I paid for my ticket is immaterial. I had to cancel dozens of private patients, which cost me THOUSANDS of pounds. That you might offer me the price of my ticket to ‘compensate’ just adds to your catalogue of customer insults.”

Thameslink passenger, travelling from Haywards Heath to Farringdon

Experience of making a claim

It is pleasing to see that contrary to the statements of some panellists, the majority of those who have made a claim for compensation say that they found the process of doing so easy.

Experience of making a claim (1)

Please tell us more about how you found the process of claiming this compensation. What happened?

“The process of claiming was very easy. However, I expected to receive a letter of email informing me of my entitlement as I have an annual ticket on a key smartcard. I receive other emails from Thameslink, but not on this subject.”
Bedford to City Thameslink, annual season ticket

“I was impressed that you took Oyster journey history from August as implying I’d made the same journey May-July. I’d expected an argument.”
London Blackfriars to Elstree and Borehamwood, Monthly season ticket

“I registered for the tier 1 compensation I believe and was then invited to complete the claim online with my bank a/c details. Approx couple of weeks later, I received the compensation which was 1/12th of my annual season ticket.”
Hatfield to Moorgate, annual season ticket

“It was easy enough, but should have been done without my intervention. GTR know I paid for an annual ticket, know what I paid, have the card details (and my bank/PayPal details from compensation claims). They should have automated it all. It also took them months to do and they missed their own deadline, but did not admit this, merely changing the date they quoted and pretending it had always been then. I am still to get compensation for losing a third of the service I paid for..”
Harpenden to City Thameslink, annual season ticket

“I was concerned that as I had acquired my season ticket through work the process for compensation would be complex and arduous however ; this was not the case. I received an email from great Northern, submitted my claim and received my compensation with 28 days.”
Stevenage to London Kings Cross, annual season ticket

Base: Those eligible for additional compensation who have made a claim transportfocus 

However, comments from some panellists suggest that the communication during the claim process has been a little haphazard. Those that held an Annual Season ticket but were not contacted automatically by GTR in Phase 1 expressed particular disappointment. Some report not having received an acknowledgement confirming receipt of the application or a confirmation of the award of compensation. Others indicated confusion over the submission of appropriate evidence. However, those that looked for help online or through the dedicated phonenumber appeared to get the assistance that they needed.

Experience of making a claim (2)

Please tell us more about how you found the process of claiming this compensation. What happened?

"It took a very long time until I was able to apply - I was not amongst the people contacted by GTR in the first wave so I had to wait for the link to go on the website. Once it was online, I then couldn't submit my application on the first day as the website kept crashing. Finally managed the following day after trying several times and reading some advice online."

Royston to Cambridge, monthly season ticket

"I submitted my claim more than 3 weeks but I have not been told if it has been successful. I don't want to be told at the last minute that I need to supply more documentation."

Hornsey to Moorgate, annual season ticket

"The process to claim for compensation is a pain. Because I am on a TFL Railcard, I can't give them everything they wish to make up my journey history. I have to do any number of steps in order to do so; it's neither straightforward or easy. I had to call customer service to get directions and even the person I talked to acknowledged that it was harder than it had to be."

Elstree and Borehamwood to West Hampstead, monthly season ticket

"Ok if you still had old tickets, but who in their right mind keeps them or can get them back from being swallowed by gate-line barriers."

Luton to Farringdon

"Easy to fill in form online but some bugs/ issues so had to phone twice for help. Got through quickly and phone line was able to answer and solve problem."

Knebworth to London Kings Cross, annual season ticket

"I had thought they would contact me as I have an annual ticket bought from the station, however I did have to initiate the process via their website. Once I knew that it was easy to add my details and scan my ticket and the request was dealt with promptly."

Oakleigh Park to Highbury and Islington, annual season ticket

Base: Those eligible for additional compensation who have made a claim

General views on the compensation offered

Panellists provide a range of opinions on the additional compensation which has been offered by Thameslink and Great Northern. For some the amount offered seemed fair, whilst for others it fell short of their expectations. Several of those who felt the amount inadequate suggested that the impact of the disruption; the fact that they were still experiencing delays; and that the May timetable had not been fully implemented, had not been fully appreciated.

The consensus, however, appeared to be that whilst the compensation was welcome it did not really make up for the inconvenience and stress caused. Many commented that they would much rather have a reliable railway, which they could depend on, rather than compensation for poor service.

Opinions on the compensation (1)

How do you feel in general about the compensation which has been offered?

"I'd rather have the money than nothing. But I'd rather have a decent train service than the money. Especially when travelling from Redhill is already so much more expensive than travelling from any other nearby stations into London."

"Pleasantly surprised by the amount, I was not expecting that much. However slightly torn since I understand that the taxpayer is ultimately paying for this."

"OK. Not great and values my time at well below the minimum wage. It also takes absolutely no account of the fact they fraudulently sold me an annual ticket for a service that they then removed a third of (and 75% of at weekends)."
Station origin is Harpenden

"The amount I was paid compensated for the service not provided but did not compensate for the hours of delays, discomfort through over crowding or the hours added to my day to make up for late arrival at work. I also missed or had to cancel several evening engagements. It was a dreadful few weeks."

"The disruption after the timetable change was a total nightmare and utter chaos with train cancellations and long delays. Worst part was not being kept informed accurately. Trains were being delayed further and further minute by minute and then finally cancelled, when it would have been more honest to have just advertised it as cancelled up front. The one month compensation was the least the train companies should have offered for the inconvenience caused, and possibly should have been larger. But the most insulting move will be in January when fares will go up yet again for a service that does not improve year on year. Fares should be frozen this January just as compensation for the this year's disruptions."

"No amount of money will make up for the way this company disrupted people's lives whilst making patronising announcements intended to make us feel sorry for them. I will take whatever money I can just because I can."

Other panellists who think they are ineligible to claim because they either do not use season tickets or won't be able to provide sufficient evidence of their journeys, are generally unhappy. They feel aggrieved that they are 'missing out' despite the inconvenience endured.

Opinions on the compensation (2)

How do you feel in general about the compensation which has been offered?

"Good. It was the least you could do, the whole thing was a disgrace. But I'm glad that remedial action was taken, it was the right thing to do."

"I felt that it was a good decision to compensate affected passengers, and it made me less angry about the experience of commuting during this period. However, I don't feel this begins to tackle the real problems facing the rail network."

"I think it is a reasonable amount and was appreciated as recognition of the disruption caused."

"It represented a months travel costs which had been agreed with Chris Grayling. It was a reasonable gesture, but was not a proper representation of the whole disruption."

"I think the amount is appropriate as it is enough for Thameslink to feel, but not to unjustly enrich ticket holders."

Base: Those travelling more than three times a week on eligible routes

Survey methodology

493 panellists who had told us previously that they use Thameslink or Great Northern trains most often were invited to complete the survey on Tuesday 6 November. Panellists who accessed the survey, but who had not used either Thameslink or Great Northern trains between 20 May and 28 July 2018 were screened out of the survey.

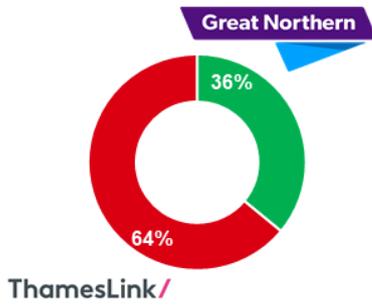
This report concentrates particularly on those panellists responding to the survey who use these trains at least a few times a month, and then on those told us that the journeys that they were making entitles them to claim the compensation that has been offered.

The fieldwork for the survey closed on 19 November with 264 panellists using Thameslink or Great Northern trains at least a few times a month completing the questionnaire. Of these more than a third used Great Northern trains most often in the last month, while 64 per cent used Thameslink trains most often.

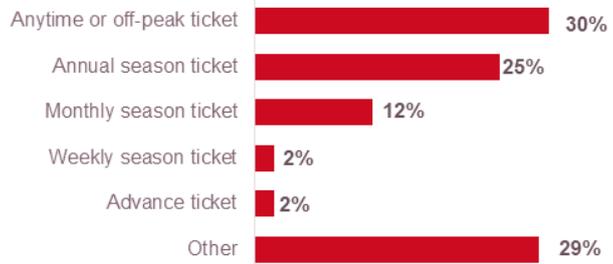
When making their most common journey 39 per cent held a season ticket, while 2 per cent used an advance ticket, and 30 per cent an anytime off-peak ticket. 29 per cent used other means of paying for their travel including Oyster and smart cards, carnet tickets, and freedom passes.

Profile of respondents

Train used most often



Ticket held



Frequency of most common journey



Base: Panelists using Great Northern or Thameslink train services at least a few times a month (230).

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