

Transport Committee

Oral evidence: [Rail timetable changes](#), HC 1163

Monday 9 July 2018

Ordered by the House of Commons to be published on 9 July 2018.

[Watch the meeting](#)

Members present: Lilian Greenwood (Chair); Jack Brereton; Huw Merriman; Grahame Morris; Luke Pollard; Graham Stringer; Daniel Zeichner.

Questions 207 - 372

Witnesses

I: Chris Gibb, Chair, Thameslink 2018 Industry Readiness Board; and Chris Green, Chair, Thameslink 2018 Industry Readiness Board's Independent Assurance Panel.

Examination of witnesses

Witnesses: Chris Gibb and Chris Green.

Q207 **Chair:** Welcome, and thank you for coming along today. For the record of our proceedings, would you please introduce yourselves?

Chris Gibb: I am Chris Gibb. I am the chairman of the Thameslink Industry Readiness Board. I am also a non-executive director of Network Rail and currently an adviser to GTR.

Chris Green: I am Chris Green, chairman of the independent assurance panel that reports to Chris Gibb. I am a retired railwayman.

Luke Pollard: I declare an interest. I used to work for Go-Ahead and GTR before I was elected.

Q208 **Chair:** Mr Gibb, the Industry Readiness Board was meant to help to ensure the smooth introduction of the new Thameslink programme. We have all seen the problems that ensued and the disruption that passengers have had to endure. What went wrong?

Chris Gibb: First, I am absolutely mortified that things have gone wrong. I have committed my whole life, as has my colleague Mr Green, to improving rail services. Having spent the last 18 months working on this particular project, I am extremely sorry that passengers have been inconvenienced, as well as all the staff on stations, the drivers and the control offices. They have had to deal with the consequences of what has gone wrong. Those people are working really hard to improve the service from next week on.

That said, where did the Industry Readiness Board come from? It came from a report I was asked to write two years ago on what was going on in Southern and the wider GTR. One of my recommendations was that the industry needed to work closer together to deliver the Thameslink project. I did not feel that there was enough cross-industry co-operation at that time. I recommended that the Thameslink Industry Readiness Board was created. I recommended who should attend it, and I was then invited to chair it.

That had not been my plan. I had written the report on Southern, and it was just one of 34 recommendations in that report. I was asked to chair it and I accepted that request. The Industry Readiness Board started in January 2017.

Q209 **Chair:** With the benefit of hindsight, do you think that the Industry Readiness Board had the right people on it? Was it operated in the right way? Why didn't the Industry Readiness Board spot that the implementation of the 20 May timetable was going to go so badly wrong?

Chris Gibb: First, I will explain what the Industry Readiness Board is. It is a collection of the companies involved in delivery of the Thameslink project: all the train companies extending from what is now London North



HOUSE OF COMMONS

Eastern Railway to GTR, Southeastern and Arriva Rail London, all the Network Rail routes, the Network Rail system operator, the Department for Transport and the ORR. There are about 20 people on the board.

They have a mixture of different experience. Some of them are old railway people such as Mr Green and me. Others have lots of experience in other industries and bring a different line of questioning. Having chaired that board for some 18 months, it is really tough to chair. It meets every fourth Friday, in the afternoon. Everybody comes, very diligently, and everybody has an opinion and a contribution. There is lots of disagreement. There are people with different contractual obligations. There are different opinions, and it is a tough meeting to chair.

The board has chewed over hundreds of issues in the last 18 months and resolved many of the issues. On the particular issue of delivery of the timetable on 20 May, unfortunately, with the benefit of hindsight, it would seem that time simply ran out. With a little bit more time, all the issues faced on 20 May could have been dealt with, but the time ran out. I do not think the industry understood the consequences of the time running out in the way it did.

Q210 Chair: With those very senior people on the board, as you described, from the train operators and from Network Rail, and including those with responsibility for oversight—the DfT and the ORR—why did the best brains in the industry not work out or spot what was going to happen? Or did they, and not say anything? What do you think happened?

Chris Gibb: First, I am sure that nobody believed something and did not say it. As I said earlier, it was a tough meeting to chair. Everybody had an opinion on everything. Literally hundreds of issues were dealt with over the course of the 18 months. Almost all of them were dealt with successfully.

For example, we knew that drivers had to learn the section of railway between Blackfriars and New Cross Gate, which had been completely rebuilt and was very complex. It was challenging for a driver to learn. We knew that they had to do that, and we advanced the opening date of that bit of new railway to January this year so that trains could run round that route and drivers could start to accumulate the knowledge. We knew that there were challenges with driver route learning from the very outset. Many of us in the board had a background in that kind of discipline. I have been a train crew roster clerk and a train crew supervisor, so I experienced all those things at the frontline during my career.

We believed, and we were told at the board, that all the issues we were presented with on 4 May could be mitigated, that there were ways to deal with the challenges and that it would work on 20 May. Between 4 May and 20 May, time really ran out and it was impossible to get enough drivers in the right places with the right skills, working to the very inefficient plan that had been prepared at the very last moment when the



HOUSE OF COMMONS

timetable was eventually agreed. If we had had more time on any level, we would have made a better job of it as an industry.

When the readiness board met on 4 May, it believed that we were ready to go on 20 May, with a few cancellations. Tens of cancellations was the scale that we believed it to be. That is what we had been told. Nobody at the board disagreed with that analysis at the time.

Q211 Chair: We are going to drill down a bit more into some of the things that you said. I want to understand your role and how you came to be in that position. The DfT asked you to report on the problems on Southern. They then asked you to chair the Industry Readiness Board, as you said. More recently, they directly asked you to advise GTR on sorting out the current timetabling problems in the short term. Have you been paid directly by DfT for those different roles?

Chris Gibb: I have been paid by different people for different things. GTR paid me to advise them in the last few weeks, at the request of the DfT. Obviously, there are potential conflicts of interest there, so I declared my roles to the Network Rail board and to the GTR board. My advising GTR is a very short-term thing. My motivation is purely to do what I can, personally, to help the train service recover as quickly as possible; but I am here as the chair of the IRB, and I am not able to represent GTR in that capacity.

Q212 Chair: Can we be confident that your advice to them is free from conflicts of interest, given your wider roles?

Chris Gibb: I am very clear to them about what I do. GTR know very well that I am a non-executive director of Network Rail, and they know that I am the chairman of the IRB. At the moment, everybody is very focused on restoring a good passenger service on the Thameslink and Great Northern network as quickly as possible. That is their priority. As soon as some progress can be made on that, I will step away from my involvement with GTR.

Q213 Chair: The Department for Transport, or the Secretary of State, have put a great deal of trust on your shoulders. Do you think they are perhaps over-reliant on one person, albeit someone with a great deal of experience?

Chris Gibb: It is not just me. I chair a board, and it is the board that participates. As I said, nearly 20 people attend the board meetings and have a say. It is a tough board to chair. Yes, I have an opinion of my own at those board meetings and I influence proceedings, as any chair should, but I focus very much on how we can improve the railway. Everybody on the board is very focused on improving services to passengers. That is what we do as a railway. It is often very difficult to do, but we work very hard at doing it.

Q214 Chair: I do not doubt that the Industry Readiness Board had some very experienced and capable people on it, but, given what you have said,



HOUSE OF COMMONS

would the DfT benefit from a more diverse range of advice? Essentially, the IRB did not get it right, did they? Would someone else have reached a different conclusion? Is there someone with a more independent train of thought who might have brought something different to it?

Chris Gibb: The board got many things right and has delivered a lot of things. A lot of achievements have been made; a lot of infrastructure and operations have been delivered. Yes, the timetable introduction on 20 May has not gone smoothly, so that has not been successfully delivered at this time and has caused a lot of inconvenience.

I was asked to do the role. I do not know what process was gone through in choosing me. I was willing to help. I did not seek the role; I have not sought any work recently at all. I have done it when I have been asked to do it and when I felt that I was capable of doing it and could make a difference.

Q215 **Chair:** You described a pattern of success in dealing with and mitigating issues that had arisen. Do you think you were complacent about the scale of the challenge of the timetable implementation itself, on the basis that other things had gone well?

Chris Gibb: No, I was not complacent. Two years ago, when I wrote the report about Southern and the involvement in Thameslink, I did not believe that the project could be successfully delivered at that time if we carried on in the way we were. My report makes it very clear that, for example, there were inadequate sidings to park trains at night; and that unless something was done about that pretty quickly, it would not be possible to deliver the operation. Over the course of the last 18 months issues such as that have been dealt with. They have been very difficult to deal with, but they have been dealt with. There are now enough places to park the trains at night to run the train service. It is a pretty basic requirement, but if you do not get it right, clearly the train service will not operate.

Q216 **Chair:** Coming to the final period, when the key issue to be addressed was the introduction of the timetable, you said a moment ago that you felt that the problems and issues could be mitigated. Yes, there might be a small number of cancellations, but it would be all right. If you were told that those issues could be mitigated by the other people who were present at the IRB, was there a process for checking that the mitigations were put in place and that they were going to be effective? What was that checking process, particularly in the latter period?

Chris Gibb: There were several people and organisations advising the Industry Readiness Board. The board did not just rely on its members for its opinion on things. It had an independent assurance panel, which I recommended in the report two years ago. Having viewed what I thought was good practice in Crossrail, I recommended setting up an independent assurance panel, chaired by Mr Green, because he had chaired a similar panel at Crossrail and is still doing so.



HOUSE OF COMMONS

I wanted to share best practice between Crossrail and Thameslink. There were a lot of similarities. The independent assessment panel looks at subjects and does deep dives in great detail, and has done so for the last 18 months. It then presents its findings to the Industry Readiness Board. The board also takes comments from other train companies if they are sceptical about the way things are being delivered. There are lots of ways of feeding into the Industry Readiness Board. The board takes on all of those issues, chews them over, calls in the expert who is delivering the particular issue—whether Network Rail or a train company—and discusses with them what they are doing about mitigating those issues.

We have had dozens of reds—potential showstoppers—coming across our table over the last 18 months. Most of those reds were mitigated and turned into ambers and greens over the course of the 18 months.

Q217 Chair: What were the reds that were not mitigated and led to the timetable collapsing, or being delivered in a completely inappropriate way?

Chris Gibb: There were reds about driver availability, more particularly driver skills, right up to the last minute. Twice, at the meeting at the beginning of March and the meeting at the beginning of May, we reviewed input from the independent assurance panel that had looked at driver skills. We had presentations from GTR themselves to the whole of the board, setting out the readiness and mitigations, with things like drivers to be piloted and the availability of drivers. We went through all of that again on 4 May. In fact, at the end of the meeting on 4 May, I looked around the boardroom table and asked if there was anything else that anybody felt could get in the way of a successful 20 May launch. Nobody said anything.

Q218 Chair: Who does the responsibility sit with for the failure to deliver on 20 May? Does it sit with GTR for giving you that assurance on 4 May? Does it sit with Mr Green, who was chairing the assurance panel, for not identifying that GTR did not have the correct drivers with the correct skills? Does it sit with you as the chair of the IRB?

Chris Gibb: It is a combined thing across the industry. It is really three-pronged. We have not mentioned the late conclusion of the timetable. That was one of the factors. The late process led to the timetable being late and the decisions that were taken contributed to the timetable being late, not all of them in the south-east of England of course. There was slow progress of that timetable, and GTR did not anticipate the impact of the late timetable on their driver resources. When they found out the impact, it was too late to fully mitigate it.

Q219 Chair: But by 4 May they must have had a pretty clear idea. They knew they did not have a completed timetable at that point.

Chris Gibb: They were struggling with the timetable at that point, but the drivers' diagrams—the deployment of the driver each day—and the rosters were still in their very early stages. I have learned over many



HOUSE OF COMMONS

years of experience that, until the drivers' roster is completed and agreed with their representatives and posted on the notice board, you cannot be absolutely sure that everything is going to work. Drivers' rosters are normally posted two weeks before the train service begins, so there is an element of risk right up to that stage.

Q220 Chair: Mr Green, if driver availability and driver skills were being identified as one of the red risks that was not properly mitigated, and that led to the timetable not being delivered as expected, what work did you do to assure yourself and the panel that they had things in place?

Chris Green: First, I will give a bit of background on how the panel worked and then I will answer the direct question. The panel met monthly. I recruited three additional independent members to give it diversity. There was one with driver skills, one with timetable skills and one with train fleet skills. We added four executive members, so that we were inside the machine—two from GTR and two from Network Rail. We then agreed an agenda.

The agenda was based on eight areas of readiness, which included train crew, timetables and six other areas. We went through those issues every single month. We called expert witnesses to go through them. In each area, there must have been a dozen detailed items, so something like 80 issues were rotating. In the early days, timetable was the most important, because timetable comes before diagrams. Huge emphasis went on the timetable. We reported in writing every four weeks to the Industry Readiness Board and we colour-coded it—red, amber and green—to prioritise the issues and, frankly, to attract attention to those that needed the most attention. I attended and presented at the Industry Readiness Board.

On train crew, by January the physical works on Thameslink were finished. The timetable should have been finished, but was not, so there were big issues about how to get it finished in time for the diagrams. In February, we had an all-day meeting where we doubled the number of experts and witnesses, and spent over an hour on timetable and over an hour on train crew.

It was quite clear that not enough drivers would be trained for May, and that was not a surprise on a big change of this scale; on the railways you cannot physically do it, so you have some trained and some not trained on the day. The issue was how we were going to mitigate the gap. We were given a very detailed mitigation plan, depot by depot, route by route and week by week on how that would be done. It added up and it made sense, so we presented it to the Industry Readiness Board, where Chris Gibb asked for the same witness to go through exactly the same presentation, updated, with the same detail.

On both occasions, GTR were absolutely convinced that they had the right solution and that the mitigations were right. They were the normal mitigations I would have expected. If the driver did not know the whole



HOUSE OF COMMONS

route, you would change the driver halfway through. That was a planned change. If you were in trouble on any section of the route, you had a pilot driver ready, and they had something like 60 pilot drivers planned for that, which is highly professional. They got Southeastern drivers to help on another route. They openly said that the first three weeks would be difficult, and they had asked the Department for some planned cancellations. It is hard to see what more they could have done in that situation.

Q221 **Chair:** Why didn't it work?

Chris Green: We delved into the detail depot by depot and week by week, with spreadsheets and mitigation plans for each route. Up to 4 May, they were probably right; it was, in their own words, "tight but doable". Something went wrong after 4 May, and that is what is unusual about this situation. As you heard before, I think it was because the timetable still was not shut down. It kept slipping and they could not start doing the diagrams.

By the time they could start doing their diagrams, it was beyond the panel. The last meeting was 4 May and the diagrams got done in one computer run. Normally, you would do one computer run, then a massive manual iteration to get the errors out and then another iteration to make it more efficient, and the fourth iteration to make it work. They did not have time for that, and that is where it went wrong. They needed another 50 drivers at that point, at 10 days' notice, which is the entire establishment of a small train company.

Q222 **Chair:** I understand the logic of what you have both described, but should someone not have said, "There's too much risk that we're not going to be able to mitigate all these potential problems"?

Chris Green: In hindsight, yes, but it was not obvious at the time, on 4 May. It looked doable, and GTR were determined they could do it. We questioned them for over an hour on the subject—20 of us—and they were determined that they could do it. It was not an obvious one to blow the whistle on at that stage, but, in hindsight, yes.

Chris Gibb: Of course, the Thameslink/Great Northern bit of the railway was not the only bit of the railway undergoing change on 20 May. The Southern network, which I had done a lot of work on and where I knew there were many issues, also had a new timetable. That timetable has largely worked okay. The drivers' diagrams and rosters are working okay. The performance of a completely new timetable on Southern is pretty good. It is subtly different. It is not as complex. The drivers did not have a range of different skills in the way Thameslink has, and there was no new railway involved, but many bits of the railway worked successfully on 20 May, even though timetables were late.

Q223 **Chair:** But thousands and thousands of passengers have had a worse service since 20 May—substantially worse in some cases, haven't they?



HOUSE OF COMMONS

Chris Gibb: They have, yes.

Chris Green: When the diagrams said they needed another 50 drivers, the only way they could get them was by taking the pilot drivers, who were key to the mitigation plan, off piloting and on to driving trains, so they were driving one train instead of piloting 10 or 15 trains. That is why the thing fell apart. The mitigation plan no longer worked, so what was a sensible mitigation plan on 4 May was not on 20 May. I do not know what more you could have done at that point, other than have an emergency timetable one week before the event.

Chair: We are going to move on and delve a bit deeper. Jack will take us forward on respective roles and responsibilities.

Q224 **Graham Stringer:** I have one question first. Mr Gibb, the Government have appointed you to the role of advising Govia Thameslink. What advice have you given them, and what has changed since you have been in that position?

Chris Gibb: I am not able to go into the detail of what I have been doing with GTR. My role here is as the chairman of the IRB and I do not have authorisation to represent GTR. Without commenting on exactly what I have been doing in GTR, I can say that I am an experienced railway operator. I understand diagrams, rosters and emergency timetables. I have done that all my life. I can do that very quickly. I have a practical application—

Q225 **Graham Stringer:** I am not questioning your experience. As a Committee, we are trying to understand what has happened and whether you are improving the situation, as I am sure is your intention. We would like to know if GTR have told you to keep your advice secret.

Chris Gibb: I have signed, as is normal when you work for somebody, a confidentiality undertaking, yes.

Graham Stringer: I will come back to that later, if I may.

Q226 **Jack Brereton:** From the evidence we have heard from the operators and Network Rail, I was quite struck that they struggled to identify who had the ability to make the necessary decisions and who was accountable for what went wrong. Do you think there really was no single individual or body who had the powers and ability to make the decisions necessary when things did go wrong?

Chris Gibb: The accountabilities and responsibilities for everybody involved in the Thameslink project are set out in the Thameslink programme industry governance arrangements, a lengthy document that sets out the terms of reference for the Industry Readiness Board and the independent assurance panel, and everybody else involved in the project— every other organisation and body. The document says very clearly who to give advice to, who to make recommendations to, and who to give assurance to. That is where I draw my governance arrangements from.



HOUSE OF COMMONS

Q227 **Jack Brereton:** But the Industry Readiness Board does not have any executive power, does it?

Chris Gibb: It does not. They are probably fed up with it at the meetings, but I begin every meeting by saying, "Can I remind members that this board has no executive authority, but in this room are people with every bit of executive authority necessary to make this project happen successfully?" That is the status of it. The Industry Readiness Board reports to a DfT board called the Thameslink programme board, which I normally attend. When I cannot attend, Mr Green attends for me. That board makes recommendations to the Secretary of State. It is also my role to give recommendations at the same time to the Secretary of State. The Secretary of State receives several opinions on the project.

Q228 **Jack Brereton:** You would not have had any power to decide unilaterally that the timetable should have been delayed.

Chris Gibb: If I had felt that the project was not deliverable or that any particular part of the industry was getting in the way, or not delivering it, I would not have hesitated to go to the Secretary of State to tell him of my concerns.

Q229 **Jack Brereton:** But you would not have had the power, through the Industry Readiness Board, to make those decisions.

Chris Gibb: I would not have had the power personally. The board could—

Q230 **Jack Brereton:** Was that what you envisaged when it was first set up?

Chris Gibb: Yes. I am used to being a non-executive. In the Industry Readiness Board, there are plenty of executives; they do not need any more executives. Attending that meeting are three route managing directors for Network Rail and somebody from the system operator team in Network Rail. Those people have those responsibilities.

Q231 **Jack Brereton:** Should it have been called more of an advisory body than an executive body?

Chris Gibb: It was never called an executive body. It was the Industry Readiness Board, and I felt that that described it. I cannot remember the origin of the phrase, but that was what it came from.

Q232 **Jack Brereton:** Do you think it is appropriate that those powers stay as they are, or do you think there should be some change to improve clarity around the leadership and who has those powers and responsibilities?

Chris Gibb: The governance arrangements for this project are necessarily complicated. I am sure that the ORR investigation will look at the governance arrangements in detail. I expect them to make recommendations as to how governance of projects can be improved in the future.

Q233 **Jack Brereton:** What are your views on that?



HOUSE OF COMMONS

Chris Gibb: My view is that the board did its absolute best. As I said before, we are talking about 20 experienced and very committed people. The board did its best to deliver the project very successfully and made a big difference, but not enough difference.

Q234 **Jack Brereton:** What changes would you make to improve and streamline the governance so that it is more effective?

Chris Gibb: I would not necessarily make a change to the governance. I would simply say that the key lesson to be learned from this, in my interpretation at this stage, is that we should respect the timetable planning deadlines. They are there for a reason. They have been put there by experience over many years. The industry should know how long it takes to plan a timetable, turn it into drivers' diagrams and rosters and make the thing work. Everybody round the table has had that kind of experience.

We should respect that experience, but it is not just an industry process. Other people feed into the process. Stakeholders have demands for timetable changes, often very late in the day. As an industry, we have to have the courage to turn round to people and say, "I'm sorry, you cannot have that extra stop at three days' notice because the timetable just won't work with it." We are not very good at that. As an industry, we try very hard to embrace everybody's demands on the system, however late they are sometimes, in the most ambitious fashion we can. Often, that works, but occasionally it does not work.

Q235 **Huw Merriman:** We have been supplied with the standard approach to timetable development, which starts 16 months in advance, when Network Rail looks at the engineering requirements. It goes all the way down to T minus three months, T being the timetable day. At each of those stages, who is responsible, from an independent perspective, for signing off to say that they have the appropriate stakeholder's consent that that aspect has been delivered?

Chris Gibb: It depends which stakeholder you are talking about.

Q236 **Huw Merriman:** We have Network Rail and we have the train operators. I am not talking about them as individuals. All of a sudden you are reliant on them giving you assurances, which may not be the case. Are they required to sign up to both the sponsor and the project manager to say, "I am done at this stage. Over to you"?

Chris Gibb: The process is normally, in theory, very disciplined in that nature, yes. There is a firm handover date: "We have now completed the timetable validation. Here is your offer and here are the services that have been rejected."

Q237 **Huw Merriman:** Who would have been collecting that sign-off in this project?

Chris Gibb: That would be in the system operator team in Network Rail.



HOUSE OF COMMONS

Q238 **Huw Merriman:** But Network Rail are the ones actually doing the work. Who, independently, is saying, "Yes, Network Rail have just signed here. They are done at this stage. Over to the train and freight operating companies because they have to do the action 14 months in advance"?

Chris Gibb: To my knowledge, there is no independent verification of that process as a matter of routine. In respect of the Thameslink project, the Industry Readiness Board was keeping very careful note of the progress of the process and had a system operator representative at every Industry Readiness Board telling us what progress was with that process.

Q239 **Huw Merriman:** Hindsight is always a wonderful thing, but one of the things that has struck me throughout this inquiry is the approach you have just laid out. For a massive change management programme, where there was so much reliance on one party doing something by a certain date, or a knock-on, there seemed to be comfort that that organisation had their own project management team, but there was nothing linking it. I find that absolutely staggering. It does not surprise me that we are where we are, because when we go back I do not see the sponsor, I do not see the project manager and I do not see the stakeholders having signed off in blood that they are ready at a certain point in time. None of this comes as a surprise to me at all.

Chris Gibb: The industry changes the timetable twice a year. The process that you have in front of you sets out how that happens and what the rules are.

Q240 **Huw Merriman:** But on such a massive scale as this.

Chris Gibb: Yes. The process applies regardless of the scale of the timetable change.

Q241 **Huw Merriman:** But it cannot be as big as this, otherwise it would have been the same procedure before and it would have broken down the last time there was a change.

Chris Gibb: I have in my career done some pretty significant timetable changes. The west coast main line in 2008 was probably the biggest. There were differences in the way that timetable change was undertaken; for example, other operators on the line were obliged to co-operate with the Virgin West Coast timetable changes.

Q242 **Huw Merriman:** I appreciate that, but this was a national change and we have been told how vast it was. I cannot quite compare it. I am struggling with the comparison, because this was such a big national change.

Chris Gibb: It has been said that it is the biggest timetable change for many years so, yes, it is a huge timetable change, but everybody knew that it was that scale of change and the system operator took it on. There were agreements at various stages along the way, but it was not a simple timetable change.



HOUSE OF COMMONS

Q243 **Huw Merriman:** I agree with that, Mr Gibb, but my point would then be this. If we cannot identify that there was a project manager sitting externally, which I believe is the case, who was the sponsor? Was the Department for Transport driving all of this change? Which was the one organisation that was the sponsor?

Chris Gibb: The Department for Transport sets out the contractual train service specification to the train operator. The train operator then develops that into a timetable and bids that to Network Rail. Network Rail then amalgamates it into a national timetable and responds to the train operator to say what is possible and what is not possible.

Q244 **Huw Merriman:** Do you believe that in December 2018 the roles and responsibilities I have just described are likely to be more formulated?

Chris Gibb: I believe there has been an announcement today that there will be significantly less change in December. Many operators will not change their timetable at all in December while we take stock and reflect on what has happened, and make sure, as an industry, that it does not happen again.

Q245 **Jack Brereton:** Following Huw's point, Northern particularly made the point that they had to entirely restart their process in February. The amount of time they had to do what is, as you have just acknowledged, one of the largest timetable changes that has ever happened was significantly reduced below what would normally be the case. Would you agree that this is not following exactly the lines it should have done?

Chris Gibb: I think we knowingly broke the rules quite a number of times, but we did so with a detailed knowledge of the process. People agreed to break the rules and adopt a different process. Network Rail and the train operators agreed to do things differently. The GTR timetable, a bit like the Northern timetable, although I am not so familiar with that, went through several cycles. It was the view of the Industry Readiness Board in early 2017 that to run 20 trains an hour from May this year was too ambitious to do in one go. The original requirement to GTR had been to do the entire timetable in two phases, in May and December 2018. The Industry Readiness Board considered that and recommended to GTR and DfT that it was done in more stages, and spread between January 2018 and December 2019—over two years.

GTR and Network Rail accepted that recommendation, and GTR went away to get approval from the Department for Transport to amend the timetable in that phased fashion. That was agreed at the end of October last year, and GTR were then able to bid to Network Rail for a modified timetable that phased the introduction. Network Rail agreed to GTR submitting in that way and at that time.

With the benefit of hindsight, it was a challenging thing to commit to, but, back in November last year, nobody said that the system could not cope with it—not Network Rail, GTR or anybody else around the table. They did not say, "Are we not being a bit heroic here?" Nobody said that.



HOUSE OF COMMONS

In fact, back in November, if we had said, "We want to delay the whole Thameslink project because the timetable is late," I do not think we would have been taken seriously at that point.

At that stage, back in November, we did not know that there were going to be issues in northern England with a major timetable rewrite there. Network Rail thought that they could undertake the necessary timetable phasing alterations for GTR in the timescale available.

There was a parallel process to consult stakeholders and passengers on the intended changes and the way the phased timetable was to operate. There was feedback from that to the system to say, "We want these changes and those changes," and GTR did their best to accommodate the changes. It was not simply a decision to phase the timetable; there were other changes to the timetable at that time as well, all of which added to the task of getting the timetable done.

When the timetable came back to GTR, hundreds of services had been rejected, which means that Network Rail had found they were not compliant with one part of the rules or another, or that they had a conflict with another train or with engineering works or something like that. When that happens, the train operator is given a reason and it has to rework its timetable and resubmit it to Network Rail. That was a big task as well.

Yes, with the benefit of hindsight, with all the other things going on across other parts of the network, it was an extremely challenging thing to do. We were aware of that as a board. We were keeping tabs on it and we were very interested in the detail. The other operators in the room had their own experiences of the timetabling process, so they knew that things were difficult. We had the system operator present as part of all the deliberations.

Q246 Jack Brereton: Did you feel that the information provided to the board was completely accurate and presented an accurate picture to your board, considering its inability to predict what happened later on in May?

Chris Gibb: Yes, I believe so. We went through a lot of information. When the Committee sees the meeting minutes and the meeting pack, you will see the sort of information we were provided with. It was very comprehensive and not many things were—how shall we say?—reviewed and then agreed and moved on. Everything was thoroughly debated and discussed, because not everybody agreed on a lot of the issues.

Q247 Jack Brereton: It was not down to analysis of the data and understanding the data that there was lack of prediction of what was going to happen.

Chris Gibb: I do not believe so. I believe that everybody in the room understood. Everybody had different experience and different backgrounds, but that prompted some very good lines of questioning. I saw my role as chairman to make sure that everybody had contributed



HOUSE OF COMMONS

and that everybody had an opinion. Everybody was very determined to make the project work and be successful. Everybody was working very hard to do that, but that did not mean they were so blinkered that they could not spot an issue, had it arisen and not been satisfactorily dealt with.

Q248 Chair: Do you think all the incentives and focus were on implementing the new timetable? Was anybody thinking about the passengers, who are the ones who have endured all the disruption, and asking, "How do we avoid things going wrong?" Do you see what I mean? It seems to me that nobody was thinking about what it would look like if it did not work.

Chris Gibb: In my report on Southern two years ago, I engaged extensively with passenger bodies at that time. I had two passengers on the board overseeing the report, and they made excellent contributions. I assure you that at the Industry Readiness Board each train operator represented their passengers very effectively, almost aggressively.

For example, the managing director of East Midlands Trains raised at every single meeting the impact for passengers on the East Midlands route, and how those trains were not going to be able to stop at Bedford and would take longer to get from Sheffield to London. He brought those issues to the table at every single meeting, and he did so with evidence, detail and feedback from passengers and stakeholders. We had that from every operator. Squeezing that timetable into the very busy national network was extremely difficult. There were several reviews along the way to make sure that it would still deliver the benefits for which the project had initially been created.

Q249 Chair: I understand what you have just said about individual operators thinking about the impact on their passengers. I am glad to hear Jake Kelly was doing that, and I have no doubt that he did. But who was looking at the overall picture? It is not about trying to argue the corner for their passengers, but saying, "What is going to be the overall impact on passengers' experience of these things when they come together?" Every day, I see passengers' experiences and they are, frankly, appalling.

Chris Green: We all saw the mission as getting 40,000 more seats on to the tracks, so that passengers would not be travelling in such uncomfortable conditions. The mission was without doubt to help the passengers. What we did not foresee was how it was going to collapse at the last minute. You may say we could have had a last-minute emergency timetable, but I do not think we could have done more to help the passengers than get 40,000 extra seats on to the tracks. It was, and is, one of the most overcrowded railways in the country.

Q250 Chair: Do you think there are now some happy passengers who we are not hearing from?

Chris Gibb: On the Thameslink network, no, I do not think so. I hope very much that the industry can improve that service very quickly.



HOUSE OF COMMONS

If I can return to the subject of incentives, everybody around the boardroom table had different incentives in this project. Some people had contractual obligations to make the Thameslink project work. Others had contractual obligations to provide excellent services on East Midlands or Arriva Rail London, or Virgin East Coast. Others, like Network Rail, had contractual obligations to meet performance targets. The Department for Transport was taking Thameslink passenger revenue into account as well. There were a lot of different incentives around the table.

Q251 Chair: Were they compatible?

Chris Gibb: At times, they were not compatible. Absolutely not. I saw my job as chair to try to juggle everybody's incentives and to get everybody's professional input into the meetings, as well as recognising that different organisations had different incentives.

Q252 Luke Pollard: GTR told us that it reported a red risk of service cancellations at the Industry Readiness Board meeting on 4 May. What was the first indication you had that the May timetable change was in danger of going seriously wrong?

Chris Gibb: At the beginning of May, we were expecting, at the Industry Readiness Board and in communications to me, a degree of cancellations. It was described to me as tens of cancellations that would probably impact mostly on the night service for the first few weeks of the operation. That is what I understood things to be.

I met the Secretary of State on 2 May, with the chief executive of GTR. That was described to him at that point. At that meeting, my biggest concern was the reliability of the infrastructure on the Thameslink network. I was, and still am, concerned about the reliability of the infrastructure to deliver the ambitious train service that we have planned. There are lots of actions in place to improve that infrastructure.

After the 2 May meeting and the Industry Readiness Board on 4 May, things snowballed pretty rapidly into larger-scale cancellations. The worst thing of all was the random nature of the cancellations at times; it depends on which drivers are on which roster each day. That has been the most difficult thing to communicate to passengers. It is the kind of thing that no railway professional ever wants to see in their career.

Q253 Luke Pollard: For people who are not familiar with how the IRB works, the idea of having a red risk seems pretty serious. Is it normal for train operators to present a red risk so close to a timetable change of this size?

Chris Gibb: Yes. As Mr Green has already said, red risks meant that they had the potential to be a showstopper, and they were to get the attention of the Industry Readiness Board. Every red risk that was brought to the Industry Readiness Board was discussed in detail. They got fewer and fewer as the months went by. Some of them would sometimes go from red to green and then back to red. Others would be green and would go to red and then back to green. We had every combination of possibilities



HOUSE OF COMMONS

over the 18 months. Some things that we thought had been dealt with reappeared as issues.

Q254 Luke Pollard: In relation to the red risk that caused all the problems, when that went to red, what did the IRB do with the information?

Chris Gibb: We questioned GTR at that May IRB about their mitigations. That was on the agenda. We listened to how they were going to manage. At that stage, they were not anticipating the scale of shortfall of driver skills that they ended up experiencing. At that point, they had mitigations in process. They were not over-imaginative. They were the sort of mitigations that every train operator in the room understood, and had either employed at some time or was employing at that time. They were not, "I will go down the street and train another 10 drivers in two weeks." It was nothing like that. They were sensible, pragmatic mitigations that the board believed would be effective.

Q255 Luke Pollard: In relation to how the IRB works, you told us earlier that no one believed something and did not say it. Should there be someone whose job it is to challenge that? It seems to be a very comfortable place. GTR had problems with driver availability on quite a few occasions leading up to this. Is it anyone's job to scrutinise and say, "Are you telling us this? Is this correct?" It seems that that did not happen in this case.

Chris Gibb: For a start, there was lots of challenge at the Industry Readiness Board. As I said earlier, they were tough meetings to chair. I did not necessarily look forward to those Friday afternoon meetings because I knew that they would be really hard work. I chair different meetings across the industry so I have some experience of doing that.

That is not the only assurance process. There is a separate Department for Transport programme board with its own programme systems integration team that assures large areas of the project. Other people can be brought in to look at certain parts of the project as well. There are lots of different levels of assurance, reporting to different meetings, whether it be the Industry Readiness Board or the DfT programme board. There is plenty of that, but none of it was effective in this case. I look to the ORR investigation to see how it will recommend ways of improving governance.

Absolutely nobody came to the Industry Readiness Board with the intent of in some way causing this to happen. Everybody was very single-minded on what they could do to make it work. There was plenty of challenge all around the table as to whether everything would work.

Q256 Luke Pollard: When did you think that it was not going to work? Was it only after you had that meeting with the Secretary of State, or did you have serious doubts ahead of the meeting with the Secretary of State and GTR you have just told us about?

Chris Gibb: We didn't have any meetings between 4 May and the beginning of June. On the second day of the timetable, I spent several



HOUSE OF COMMONS

hours on the platform at St Pancras to have a look for myself in my own time. During those two hours, on that platform, every train ran and every train was on time. I thought, "Okay, maybe we will get through this." Within a couple of days, I realised that we were not going to get through it. I understood by then the level of the rostering challenge, and I realised that we were not going to get through it without a complete rewrite of the drivers' rosters and diagrams.

Going back to the subject of time, if the problem had been known about earlier in the process—back in April or March—we would have been able to do that rerun then, and 20 May would have worked out much better than it did.

Q257 Luke Pollard: There is a piece in *RAIL* magazine about the delay in your recommendations being acted on by DfT being four to six months. If that had started earlier, and there had not been that delay by the DfT, do you think the problems could have been avoided?

Chris Gibb: I was not party to the discussions between GTR and the DfT. Those are commercial discussions that did not involve me. I knew that the process to get approval was going on, because a train operator cannot bid a timetable that is not compliant with its contractual obligations. That is part of the contract. That is the way the system works. It has to wait until it has DfT approval before it can submit a bid that is not compliant with its contract.

I was told on 31 October last year that approval had been granted, and it was reported to the Industry Readiness Board on 17 November. On that date, and at that board meeting, everybody noted that approval had been given and that GTR was bidding. Nobody said, "Well, this is really late. We will never achieve this." There was none of that, because none of the other things had happened in other parts of the country, I suspect. Again, that will have to be for the ORR discussion, but at no point at the Industry Readiness Board in November, which I think included the system operator representative as usual, did anybody say, "This is not going to work."

In fact, that was probably the time, with the benefit of hindsight, when we had a small window of opportunity to take stock, rethink and delay. As I said earlier, if we had said, not just to the Secretary of State but to the wider population, "We are not going to be able to do the timetable change that we were planning to do in May and it is going to be late; and the reason it is going to be late is that the timetable is going to be late," I do not think anybody would have really taken it too seriously.

Q258 Grahame Morris: I want to explore what you said. You realise that the Secretary of State is blaming you, don't you, in his responses to the Committee and his statement to the House on 4 June? I want to follow up what you said about when you had a reasonable expectation or when there was an opportunity to do something about it. I refer to evidence that previous witnesses have given to the Committee, in particular David



HOUSE OF COMMONS

Brown, Northern's chief executive.

He suggested that the Northern bit of the franchise could not move forward with the timetable because the timetable was not ready, and that was because of infrastructure issues. One element of the network that should have been electrified was not ready, so the electric trains that they had planned to run on that section of the Northern rail network could not be run on the section. He told us: "The decision was taken on 5 January this year that the scheme could not be delivered at the time we needed for our plans in May," and therefore would be delayed beyond the May introduction of the timetable. He said that in practical terms that meant that Northern "had to plan the whole timetable in a period of 16 weeks rather than 40 weeks." That is a big chunk of the network; 10% or 11%. What I am interested to know is whether, if Northern made it known in January that its preferred option was to delay the implementation of the national timetable because it did not have sufficient time to be ready for the 20 May implementation, you as the IRB were informed.

Chris Gibb: The IRB is for the Thameslink project, but I remember some discussion early in 2018 by representatives of Network Rail about what was going on in other parts of the country. We were aware of what was going on in other parts of the country, but at that stage we could not see any connection to the Thameslink operation. There was no proposed change to services on the East Midlands Trains route or the east coast route, so we did not believe that what was going on in Northern would have any direct impact.

As I have just said, the window of opportunity for changing the Thameslink timetable was probably in November. The decision to delay what was going on in Northern, taken in January, was after that window had closed.

Q259 **Grahame Morris:** Was there any direct communication or any mechanism for communication between the IRB and those responsible for the assurance of the Great North rail project? You told us earlier that there would be a knock-on effect to GTR's services with Northern, but is there any mechanism?

Chris Gibb: The mechanism is through Network Rail's system operator team who attend and participate in the IRB. There is no other direct relationship between the Thameslink project and the Northern rail project.

Q260 **Grahame Morris:** You have told the Committee that you thought the decision to avert the crisis would have had to be taken in November. Given that it was flagged up in January, is your view that it was too late then to do anything about it? What would have happened if action had been taken in January when it was flagged up by the northern part of Northern that there was a major issue?



HOUSE OF COMMONS

Chris Gibb: The timetable for northern England and the timetable for the Thameslink route have very limited connection between them. It is probably limited to trains between Sheffield and St Pancras, which share the railway around Sheffield with Northern trains, and share the railway south of Bedford with Thameslink trains. East Midlands Trains told us at every board meeting what the current state of play was on their timetable development. We felt well informed about that.

Again, we could see no direct connection from what was going on in Northern to the Thameslink project. With the benefit of hindsight, that connection turned out to be the timetabling team in Network Rail and how fast they could turn timetables around. That was the common factor between the two projects, but it was not apparent to the Industry Readiness Board until much later in the process.

Q261 **Grahame Morris:** Given the concerns that were raised by Northern about the northern network, which operators objected to a delay in January? Or were all the operators of a mind either that they did not believe Northern or that the impact would not be such that it could not be mitigated elsewhere in the network? Which of the operators objected to a delay in January?

Chris Gibb: In respect of the Northern operation?

Q262 **Grahame Morris:** I presume, because of the knock-on effect, on the whole of the timetable. Was there unanimity?

Chris Gibb: In respect of the Thameslink readiness board, that was not a discussion that was relevant to us at that time.

Q263 **Grahame Morris:** Nobody objected at all.

Chris Gibb: There was no proposal to change or not change the Thameslink timetable. The Thameslink timetable was proceeding as planned at that stage, both in November and January. Everybody who was critical to the successful delivery of that timetable believed, in November and January, that the timetable would work successfully.

Q264 **Grahame Morris:** Going back two years, to 2016, the report from the IRB on improving services on Southern recommended the establishment of a "better identified, empowered and trusted" system operator to "act as custodian of overall system integrity." We touched on it a little earlier, but what has been lacking in Network Rail's system operator function that prevented it from averting the crisis? It is more complicated than I thought, from listening to your evidence. It seems as if a very large number of people and organisations are involved, but what is it within the governance arrangements that did not identify the problem, to allow us to avert the chaos that occurred come May?

Chris Gibb: First, the report you are referring to was written by myself in 2016, looking at the Southern issues. I have the report here, and the graphic about the system operator was something I wrote up in that



HOUSE OF COMMONS

report, recommending the creation of a system operator organisation. I was not the only one to make such a recommendation. The Office of Rail and Road had made a similar recommendation some months earlier, which I supported.

I was pleased to note after finishing that report that Network Rail adopted a system operator team, and developed a system operator organisation. As to what exactly happened in the organisation, you would have to put those questions to Network Rail.

Q265 Grahame Morris: I do not want to labour the point, but is the issue that the system operator set up on your recommendation, from that report in 2016, just did not have sufficient powers to act in the interests of the service?

Chris Gibb: Did it not have sufficient powers?

Q266 Grahame Morris: Yes.

Chris Gibb: I think it had a lot of powers. It had a process with which to adopt an amended timetable. Clearly, that did not succeed in every respect. Some of that was caused by late provision of infrastructure. Some of it was caused by changes of plan. Some of it was caused by late trains being available. The process of preparing the timetable got behind. As I said earlier, we started to run out of time. That was the critical factor. In all of this, if we had had more time, and if the deadlines had been adhered to rigorously in accordance with the documented procedure that I believe you have seen, we would have had a timetable that worked. We would have had more time to adapt the drivers' diagrams in different ways and implement successful contingency plans. It was capable of doing that, but the whole system did not deliver on this occasion. The ORR investigation will look at that in detail.

Q267 Grahame Morris: I am grateful for that. I will finish on a point my colleague Huw Merriman alluded to earlier, when he was talking about whether there was a designated person or a project manager with overall responsibility. You yourself, Mr Gibb, said that, although the Industry Readiness Board did not have statutory responsibility, there was a room of 20 people with the authority and the powers to take the decisions that were needed.

Given that those decisions were not taken, does it demonstrate a more fundamental problem? There was no one person or body with sufficient understanding, authority or power to say, "Look, this isn't going to work and we need to put the brakes on until we have the prerequisites in place to get it right." I am sorry it is not a railway analogy.

Chris Gibb: In my report on Southern, I recognised that there needed to be closer industry co-operation to make the project work. I proposed the Industry Readiness Board because I felt it would make a difference. Every train operator and every part of Network Rail agreed to come. I had no powers to compel them to come to the Industry Readiness Board.



HOUSE OF COMMONS

Everybody came along and co-operated as hard as they possibly could to make everything a success.

Was that enough? Perhaps it was not, but there was no lack of determination to co-operate. Is there a single project manager responsible for every element of the timetable change across the whole of the UK? No, there is not. I do not believe that role is achievable. You are asking somebody to verify that a train between Kyle of Lochalsh and Inverness is correctly timetabled, will have a driver and a trainset, and that they will all be competent, and to do that across the whole of the UK every six months.

Each organisation has its own accountabilities. A train company has its own responsibilities, not just for the efficient operation of the railway but for the safe operation of the railway. I do not think we should take away that accountability and park it with somebody located somewhere, overseeing the whole of the system in that way. Network Rail has very clear accountability for preparing the timetable and developing the infrastructure. The train operator has responsibility for operating the trains, providing the drivers and guards. People in the industry are clear where accountability sits, but there is no single controlling mind.

I expect that the ORR will look at that and consider whether there needs to be, and whether indeed there could be. I will fully co-operate with that inquiry to get to the bottom of that valuable question.

Q268 Grahame Morris: Mr Gibb, please do not misunderstand me. I am not suggesting in any way that safety should be compromised. It must be at all times the No. 1 priority of the industry, the operators and the bodies that oversee it.

You are saying that there is no one person who is in overall charge and should take responsibility. I do not expect in a large Department that the Minister knows every single thing and every aspect of every activity that is taken on. I am not just thinking about Transport. I am thinking about a number of other things. But ultimately somebody carries the can when things go wrong. Some people have suggested that you should carry the can. Would that be a reasonable contention?

Chris Gibb: As I said earlier, I am absolutely mortified at the outcome of this project. I have spent my whole career, I like to think, making passenger rail services and some freight rail services better, so I am very disappointed at this outcome. I am doing everything I can to improve the service right now for passengers on the railway. I take some responsibility for that, as do my colleagues in the industry. We as an industry have let the Government down on this particular project. We have not delivered what we said we would as an industry, and I am very disappointed by that.

Chair: We want to look at transparency issues in relation to the Industry Readiness Board.



HOUSE OF COMMONS

Q269 **Graham Stringer:** You are both very experienced railmen. One of the surprising things—at least it was surprising to me—we learned when we had the Northern rail franchise and Network Rail before us was that Network Rail employs 750 people to do timetabling. That is what we were told. I assume that those people are person-marked, almost one to one, by the train operating companies. The regulator may also have people doing it.

As experienced people, can you give us any comparison between those numbers and the numbers that British Rail would have employed to do timetabling?

Chris Gibb: I would not have that information.

Q270 **Graham Stringer:** What is the order of magnitude? Would it be 10 people, 100 people or 1,000 people?

Chris Green: It was in five places for British Rail, which makes it even harder. It was timetabled regionally rather than nationally. What has changed now is that there is one national centre, which makes the numbers look huge. Honestly, I have no idea exactly how many we had in those days.

Q271 **Graham Stringer:** That is fair enough. If you have no idea, you have no idea. Are you going to provide the Committee with the IRB minutes?

Chris Gibb: There is a process to go through to produce the minutes and the meeting papers. That process is going on right now. I have no objection to releasing the papers and the minutes. The Committee will receive them as soon as possible.

Q272 **Graham Stringer:** Do you mean a process beyond them being typed?

Chris Gibb: They have all been typed and produced, but there are lots of companies referred to in those minutes. There are commercial negotiations and other things, and there is a process to go through to approve the release of those minutes and papers.

Q273 **Graham Stringer:** Do you understand why the public might be suspicious and possibly even outraged at this level of secrecy when there has been so much inconvenience in a scheme that has cost £25 billion of capital? Do you not feel accountable for that taxpayers' money, and to the public?

Chris Gibb: It is not within my gift as the chair of the board to release the minutes and meeting papers. The consent of each of the participants is needed, and that is going on and will be concluded as soon as possible.

Q274 **Graham Stringer:** That was not quite the question I asked.

Chris Gibb: I have no problem with the release of the papers and the minutes of the meetings, but there is a process to go through.

Q275 **Graham Stringer:** When will they be released?



HOUSE OF COMMONS

Chris Gibb: As soon as is possible.

Q276 **Graham Stringer:** That is not an answer.

Chris Gibb: It is not me overseeing that process, but that process is going on right now.

Q277 **Graham Stringer:** The trade unions believe that, in spite of what the Secretary of State says, the company Govia Thameslink is unsackable. Is that the case?

Chris Gibb: That is a matter for the Department for Transport and not for—

Q278 **Graham Stringer:** Are you not aware of the management contract and the contractual details?

Chris Gibb: I am aware of the franchise agreement. I have read the franchise agreement that is available on the Department for Transport website.

Q279 **Graham Stringer:** Can you tell us whether the franchisee is sackable?

Chris Gibb: I cannot tell you that. That is not my area of speciality or knowledge.

Q280 **Graham Stringer:** But you have read the document.

Chris Gibb: I have read the document, yes.

Q281 **Graham Stringer:** Does that mean you do not understand it, or that you are not prepared to tell us?

Chris Gibb: No. The document is not complete. It has sections redacted. But it is not for me to judge how it should be managed.

Q282 **Graham Stringer:** It is not a judgment. I am asking for information. You are not giving us that information.

It is also the belief of the trade unions that, since Peter Wilkinson said he believed the trade unions should be broken, a lot of the secrecy surrounding this contract is because that is still the Department's determination, and that is what has led to a great deal of the disruption. Can you comment on that? A trade union put out a statement today saying just that.

Chris Gibb: I have no knowledge of that. That is a question that you would need to put to the Department for Transport.

Q283 **Graham Stringer:** I am putting it to you because you have given us a lot of very detailed and complicated answers as an experienced railman. I appreciate that, but in the background to this, if the Department or the managing director of the section responsible is saying that he wants to break the unions, and we cannot find out whether the contract can be expunged, we are not getting a full picture from you. In fact, having



HOUSE OF COMMONS

looked at this as an experienced man, you must have views on it.

Chris Gibb: I had views on it when I wrote the report in 2016, and that report is available on the Department for Transport website to be read. I have no particular view on it at the moment. The subject of secrecy has not got in the way of the deliberations of the readiness board.

Q284 **Graham Stringer:** But it is getting in the way of us understanding what is going on.

Chris Gibb: It is a question that you would need to put to the Department for Transport, particularly if it relates to contractual issues for GTR. I am not managing the contractual relationship with GTR.

Q285 **Graham Stringer:** No, but you are advising them. In advising them, you must come to views on what the real causes of the problems are, otherwise you would not be able to give them sensible advice. I know you have refused to tell us what that advice is, but you must have come to views on what is causing the problem. I do not see how you can be in that situation without having a view. You may refuse to tell us again.

Chris Gibb: I am here as the chair of the Industry Readiness Board, not as a GTR—

Q286 **Graham Stringer:** But we are here trying to find out what is going on, and you have a number of hats.

Chris Gibb: Yes. I am purely advising GTR on how best to restore the service for passengers as quickly as possible.

Q287 **Graham Stringer:** But that will be made more difficult if the Department is determined to break the unions.

Chris Gibb: I am not involved in the relationship between GTR and the Department or anything of that matter.

Q288 **Graham Stringer:** The Government have promised to pay compensation to passengers who have been inconvenienced and have not been able to get to work or wherever they are going. Who is going to pay for that?

Chris Gibb: I am not part of the arrangements for compensation.

Q289 **Graham Stringer:** Even though you have read the—

Chris Gibb: I am not part of the arrangements for passenger compensation that GTR has agreed with the Department for Transport. I am not part of that discussion.

Q290 **Graham Stringer:** Do you know who is going to pay?

Chris Gibb: I am not part of that discussion.

Q291 **Graham Stringer:** I understood that and I know what that means, which is why I am asking a different question. Do you know who is going to pay?



HOUSE OF COMMONS

Chris Gibb: I do not know the detail of that agreement.

Q292 **Graham Stringer:** Do you know who is going to pay?

Chris Gibb: I do not.

Graham Stringer: Finally. Thank you.

Q293 **Chair:** You said that the Industry Readiness Board minutes will be released to us when that is possible. Obviously you are not the person responsible for making that decision. Who is taking the decisions on what will be released to us and when?

Chris Gibb: The Department for Transport and Network Rail are co-ordinating the release of the papers and minutes.

Q294 **Chair:** Do you know who specifically?

Chris Gibb: No, I am not sure off the top of my head.

Q295 **Luke Pollard:** I wonder whether an agenda item for your next meeting might be to get everybody around the table to agree that the minutes can be published without delay from now on. There is genuine public interest in what is discussed at the meetings. There is genuine public concern that the Secretary of State is blaming lots of people in the industry and not taking his fair share of responsibility. The bits of paper that will answer many of those questions are conveniently not being published until this has all died down. Perhaps that could be discussed with members.

Chris Gibb: I will take that request on board.

Q296 **Luke Pollard:** Was the timetable change ever achievable or was its start simply misplaced? Has there been an irreconcilable tension between the political objectives of the Thameslink programme and the reality of trying to implement it?

Chris Gibb: No, I do not believe so.

Q297 **Luke Pollard:** Even though they have come apart so fundamentally.

Chris Gibb: I have outlined some of the reasons why they came apart. They should not have come apart; we could have delivered the project as envisaged. It is quite right for Government to set the rail industry challenging objectives, especially when a lot of money is at stake. The rail industry responded to that challenge. In fact, the challenge of delivering the Thameslink project has been going on for some 20 years. It is not a new project. The Government are right to set a demanding bar and have been repeatedly assured by generations of senior railway people that it could be delivered.

Q298 **Luke Pollard:** You are right. I remember it being called Thameslink 2000 at one point, as a futuristic railway. In terms of where the Department for Transport sits, do you think there is sufficient understanding of the levels of complexity and difficulty involved in these ambitious targets and the



HOUSE OF COMMONS

reality of how GTR and Network Rail and other partners are able to implement them?

Chris Gibb: The Department relies on the industry to do that. When the industry promises to do something, it should follow through and do it. On this occasion, the industry had a very clear remit from the Department for Transport and we have not successfully delivered it. That is the industry's fault.

Q299 **Luke Pollard:** From your point of view, does the DfT have sufficient competence, experience and capacity in the teams responsible for this area to manage it properly?

Chris Gibb: The Department for Transport is not populated with experienced railway people such as Mr Green and myself. It is populated with professional civil servants, who have a different kind of role to play.

Q300 **Luke Pollard:** Do you think it should be? The GTR franchise is called a franchise but it is not; it is a management contract. Effectively, the revenue risk is being taken by the Department and not the franchisee. Do you think DfT officials have sufficient competence to understand the implications? What they are taking on is greater responsibility and greater risk than under other franchises.

Chris Gibb: I cannot really comment on the issue around revenue risk. What I have seen is the delivery of the project over the last 18 months. Department for Transport officials have been extremely committed, hard-working and diligent in what they have been doing. They are as mortified as the rest of us, and professionally hurt by the experience. They are very disappointed at what passengers are experiencing.

Q301 **Luke Pollard:** From your point of view, do you think Ministers allocated enough resource and focus to help those officials? There have been massive reductions in the headcount in the DfT. They have lost an awful lot of experienced people. From your point of view, as an experienced person who understands the industry, is there sufficient resource and expertise in that team? Is there sufficient focus from Ministers to resource it properly to be able to deliver that railway?

Chris Gibb: I have seen no sign of anything other than that. I have seen meetings attended by the right people from the Department, who have participated. I have not seen any sign of that. Clearly there are things that the ORR investigation will need to look into, and the interaction between the industry and the Department for Transport is part of that. The ability of the industry to drive significant change in this way is also part of it, but I expect the ORR will look at the skills of the industry in timetabling, driver rostering and diagramming.

Personally, I would rather see any resulting investment and improvement plan aimed at the people who do the timetabling, diagramming and rostering, and not at having lots more people doing assurance and governance. As an industry, we might not have the right governance at



HOUSE OF COMMONS

the right time delivering all the projects all the time right now, but we have plenty of governance and we have plenty of assurance. We need to invest in our own people, to upskill the people who prepare the timetables, the driver rosters, the diagrams and all the fundamental building bricks on which a railway operation is built.

Q302 Luke Pollard: I appreciate you are saying that the responsibility lies with industry on this one. In terms of the interactions with officials and Ministers, what responsibility lies with them for these problems?

Chris Gibb: I had plenty of opportunity to say to Ministers and the Secretary of State that the project was not going right and should be stopped. I did not say that to the Secretary of State. I said there were concerns. I listed the concerns to the Secretary of State on several occasions. He took action to overcome those concerns, investing an additional £300 million in the infrastructure the Thameslink rail network depends on. That money is being spent right now to improve it.

Q303 Luke Pollard: You feel that you and your team are sufficiently empowered to be able to challenge the Secretary of State and to challenge assumptions that the DfT is working on.

Chris Gibb: My authority, as I have said before, was as chairman of the board. I represented the board's views to the Secretary of State on several occasions. I highlighted the risks. My opinion was that the project should go ahead. Right up to 3 May, everything appeared to be on track at that stage. From all the information the board was receiving, we believed there was going to be a successful timetable launch, with a few caveats that I have already mentioned—a few tens of cancellations for the first few weeks. We did not anticipate that we were going to have the problems that we have had.

Q304 Luke Pollard: You were implementing two massive enhancements: the Thameslink project and the Great Northern project. There were huge timetable changes at the same time. Was there never a point when you felt that you should step in and say, "These are very large projects. It has been requested that they be implemented on a phased basis. Due to decisions or timetable problems, they may no longer be implemented. This is too big for us to handle"?

Chris Gibb: Can I just clarify? When you said Thameslink and Great Northern, what did you mean by that?

Q305 Luke Pollard: Sorry. It was in terms of the Northern franchise.

Chris Gibb: I thought you probably meant that. The board responsibility was entirely to the Thameslink project. Members of the board had individual exposure to what was going on at Northern. It was common knowledge across the industry. There was dialogue between executives at Northern and other train companies, so people knew what was going on, but early on we did not understand that there was any inter-dependability with the Thameslink project.



HOUSE OF COMMONS

Q306 Luke Pollard: What I do not understand, and I am sure people watching this at home will not be able to fathom it, is that the original proposals for the timetable change were supposed to be spread over a number of different upgrades and timetable revisions. For various reasons, they were compressed into the timetable change that we saw in chaos earlier on and the one that could still end in chaos later this year. At no point did all the people involved with it say, "We were supposed to spread it out and bite-size it, and now suddenly it is all hitting us at the same time."

Chris Gibb: No, it was completely the opposite way round. The original contract for GTR was to do it on enormous scale on 20 May, and then a slightly smaller one in December 2018, in just two phases. I and the board were not in favour of doing that. We felt it was too big a change on 20 May, so we set about persuading GTR, who did not take much persuading, and the Department for Transport in 2017, that we should phase the timetable, depending on how you view it, into as many as eight different segments, spreading from January 2018 through to December 2019. May was the third of those changes.

We had already broken it down, because we believed it to be too ambitious to do on 20 May. That involved bringing infrastructure into use earlier than originally planned. It involved contractual change for GTR. Lots of things had to happen to make that happen, and they happened largely during 2017. We believed we were on track to deliver the timetable change in phases between January 2018 and December 2019.

Q307 Luke Pollard: You were aware that it was potentially a very risky project and you had already put mitigations in, but you had not asked the question about the point of no return and the point when the red risks were going to engulf you.

Chris Gibb: I think we knew where the points of no return were, and we went past those points believing that we were able to deliver a successful timetable change. Had the board decided that we should still do almost everything on 20 May 2018, I would not have supported that decision. It was too ambitious. That was referred to in my report on Southern in 2016, and if I had been faced with everybody saying to me that we should do everything as originally planned in May 2018, it would have left me as chair in a very difficult position because I would absolutely not have supported that.

Q308 Luke Pollard: If you were doing a timetable change of this magnitude again, would you be supportive of greater and even smaller splits in terms of the upgrades than we have seen so far?

Chris Gibb: The critical thing is to stick to the timescales. The key lesson out of this for me, at this stage, not prejudicing the ORR inquiry, is that we have to stick to the timescales. It is not just the railway industry, but the stakeholders and the people who want us to stop extra trains at extra stations and introduce new services. Everybody has to respect the



HOUSE OF COMMONS

timescales. They are available for anybody to see on the Network Rail website. They are quite complicated, but they are there.

If we want the railway to run smoothly, we all have to work to those timescales. It is no good if people say, "Well, we can bend the rules on this occasion and do this or do that; it is only one extra stop." It does not work like that. An extra stop late in the evening adds typically three minutes to a schedule. That may push a driver's diagram over the maximum amount of hours a driver can do, and immediately you require another driver. If you make that decision a week before the train runs, you are never going to be able to get another driver in a week. We all have to do this.

The railway industry is not an industry that hides behind deadlines and dates and says, "No, we cannot make this change because we would be breaking this rule." The railway industry is very determined to make things happen and change things when passengers ask for extra stops, extra trains and things like that. We go to great lengths to introduce those things. We do not want to be an industry that pulls down the shutters and says, "Sorry, we can't help. The timetable has finished now; you've got 18 months to wait." We cannot behave like that. That is not a customer-focused industry. We have to take on board what stakeholders want, but we all have to do so knowing that it may jeopardise the reliability of the service at the end of the day.

Q309 Chair: Shouldn't you sometimes just be prepared to say no? That sounds like part of the problem. You did not say, "No, that is not doable or achievable."

Chris Gibb: Yes, and with hindsight we should have said no more often, and to more people. Right now, there are requests coming in for changes to timetables that start next week. I do not think we can say no to all of them because it is too late. We have to think about them and we have to consider them. In a few months' time, the railway will have a reputation for constantly saying no. I worry about that. I do not want the railway to have that reputation. We have to strike the right balance between respecting all the deadlines and saying no on occasion. After this horrendous event, I hope people will think twice before asking the railway to change a timetable at a moment's notice.

Q310 Chair: My worry is that people will stop using the railway, if they have a choice, because they do not trust their train to get them to where they need to be on time. That is a very serious risk.

Chris Gibb: It is an extremely serious concern. As somebody who has spent their entire life trying to get more passengers on trains, with some success in my career, that is exactly what I am not trying to achieve. The railway needs to deliver on service reliability as quickly as possible in these parts of the country. The only way to do that is not to promise to do it but to actually get on and do it.



HOUSE OF COMMONS

Q311 Chair: Two questions came out of the series of questions that Luke asked you. One of them is about capability and understanding in DfT. Given that their initial proposal was a big bang timetable change on 20 May 2018, and the only reason we do not have that is that you told them it would not work, what does that say about capability and understanding in the Department for Transport? They were trying to propose something that simply was not achievable.

Chris Gibb: My honest answer to that is that I really do not know. That decision was taken some years ago and the people I have been dealing with were not part of that decision. It is widely known across the industry, and has been very clear in some of the National Audit Office reports in recent months, that changes in the franchising specification process have been required, and are being progressively implemented.

The GTR franchise dates from several years ago and I was not in any way involved in setting it up, so I really cannot trace back to the exact origins of it. All I can say is that, when I read it, I understood that what had happened was that Network Rail, as was highlighted in the National Audit Office report, had not approved the timetable that was put in the franchise agreement and then let as the GTR franchise. Now Network Rail is required to approve what goes into franchise specifications when they are issued to bidders. As I understand it, the system operator does that. That is pretty fundamental and important, but there are still quite a number of franchises out there that date from the previous era.

Q312 Chair: What I take from that is that at some point in the not too distant past there is a question mark over the capability and understanding of DfT. You are saying that measures have now been taken to correct some of the mistakes that were made in terms of what was put in franchise agreements. Would that be fair?

Chris Gibb: I think so. From what I have seen, and I am not at the frontline of that now, that appears to be the right thing, and it will be the right thing going forward. We need to look back on it in 10 years' time and take another view of it.

Q313 Chair: One of my concerns at the moment, and one of the concerns of GTR passengers, is, when is the service going to get better? They know that the Department for Transport allowed GTR to buy out their performance penalties right through to September this year. On the bottom line, GTR is not suffering as a company as a result of its appalling performance. Where Network Rail is responsible, it will receive compensation from Network Rail. The Public Accounts Committee tells us that it is absolutely not credible that the Secretary of State could strip GTR of its contract. Does that not suggest a huge mistake by DfT in its performance management of this system?

Chris Gibb: In the time that I have committed to the Industry Readiness Board, I have focused entirely on making trains run and not on the contractual relationship between GTR and the Department for Transport.



HOUSE OF COMMONS

Q314 **Chair:** But those contractual arrangements could be working against the very things that you are no doubt very committed to trying to do.

Chris Gibb: I have already said that everybody around the boardroom table had different contractual obligations.

Q315 **Chair:** But, focusing specifically on GTR's obligations, there are no incentives, are there?

Chris Gibb: It was not part of my input to the board meetings as to what their obligations were or were not. My focus was very much on delivering what was planned for the Thameslink rail project. I was focused on that and not trying to sort out anybody's contractual issues. There were lots of different contractual issues in all of this. It was not just GTR. Lots of other people needed contract changes for all sorts of things—franchises, Network Rail or other people. That was something we needed to overcome and the board did that quite well. We made things happen.

We made people go away and sort out their contractual issues, and come back and tell us at the next meeting that it had been done. We had a pretty near total success record on that kind of thing. Nobody ever came back to us and told us, "Sorry, we cannot change this because of what the contract says." People changed things; they made it happen.

Q316 **Chair:** Mr Green, you are a very experienced railwayman. You are looking at it from the outside. The person responsible, providing the contract and the service, does not appear to have any penalties for failing to do so. Isn't that a problem? GTR have already bought out their performance penalties, right through to September. Because they have been allowed to do that, it effectively makes it look as though they cannot be stripped of the franchise.

Chris Green: I have never met a train company that wants to fail. GTR feel huge shame at what has happened. The reputational hit on them is as bad as anything can be. I have been in situations where train companies have failed and it is a horrible feeling. You do not go into this with any idea of trying to cheat on the money. You are trying to make the thing work for passengers.

Q317 **Chair:** You do not think that the absence of performance or financial penalties matters, because they have a reputation—if they still have a reputation?

Chris Green: To the train company people we meet, no. Their focus is on trying to make it all work. It was a very stressful six months for them.

Chair: We have a few more questions about phasing.

Q318 **Grahame Morris:** We touched on it in the questions from my colleague, Luke Pollard. Network Rail said that the Department for Transport's late decision on the phasing in of the additional Thameslink services was a critical factor in its late delivery of the finalised timetables. Can you remind the Committee—I think you may have told us in an earlier



HOUSE OF COMMONS

answer—when the decision was made to move away from phasing in services over the two timetabling changes originally proposed, in May and December, and to phase them in instead by the end of 2019? When was that decision made?

Chris Green: It was at the IRB meeting of 17 November, which was far later than it should have been, and triggered all the problems that followed. If you say that you are going to have timetable discipline, 40 weeks before the new timetable is when you bid, and anything you do after that will put the timetable at risk. The date when that decision should have been made was 10 August.

The panel was pushing for it, the IRB was pushing for it and our DfT project people were pushing for it, but, for whatever reason, it took until 17 November before it could be done. Then the DfT required public consultation, which took almost until Christmas. That produced some worthy changes of the sort Mr Gibb has just mentioned, which meant that by January we had quite a massive change as opposed to a very simple one.

Q319 **Grahame Morris:** I am slightly alarmed by that characterisation. I understand that there is a willingness to be “can do” and to achieve the challenging goals set by Government to meet the ambitious plans to improve the network and improve access. Given the enormous disruption and the consequences of the timetable chaos, there comes a time when you have to recognise that there are no mitigations that can deliver. But we are not interested in my thoughts; we are interested in your expert opinion. You first recommended more gradual phasing in December 2016. Is that correct?

Chris Gibb: It was a little bit later than that. I made recommendations in my report in December 2016.

Q320 **Grahame Morris:** Is that the one you referred to earlier?

Chris Gibb: Yes. I made recommendations about some changes and the need to have an industry readiness board to look at the phasing in detail. By early 2017, it was clear that everybody on the readiness board wanted it phased. Nobody believed that it could be done in one go in May. It was April 2017 when GTR recommended re-phasing to the Department for Transport, and various loops went around. Eventually I was told, on 31 October 2017, that it had been approved. When it was approved, and came to the Industry Readiness Board on 17 November, it was accepted that that was achievable.

Q321 **Grahame Morris:** Why did it take the Department for Transport so long to come to that conclusion, when the operators and everyone else were in agreement?

Chris Gibb: I do not know. You need to ask the Department for Transport, but I presume it assumed that it was a contractual change.



HOUSE OF COMMONS

Q322 **Grahame Morris:** Is it possible that Network Rail was not aware of the decision until fairly late?

Chris Gibb: Network Rail was at all the Industry Readiness Board meetings in force, including the system operator; they knew every part of every discussion on the subject.

Q323 **Grahame Morris:** Even before the final decision had been taken by the Department for Transport.

Chris Gibb: Yes.

Grahame Morris: Okay. I am grateful for that.

Q324 **Chair:** Do you know what DfT was doing about it between April 2017 and October 2017? Why the delay? Why would it have taken that many months?

Chris Gibb: I cannot answer that without going back through all my emails on the subject, but there was no lack of asking when we were going to get answers and no lack of provoking the Department. As I said, eventually they informed me on 31 October and the readiness board on 17 November.

Q325 **Chair:** What difference would it have made if the DfT had approved the phasing earlier? Would it have made any difference to the outcome?

Chris Gibb: It may have, with the benefit of hindsight, but at that stage, in November, we still believed that a successful timetable could be launched. We had agreement between Network Rail and GTR on a process for submitting an amended timetable, getting it approved and all the rest of it. People believed that it could be done.

Q326 **Chair:** I accept that, but you talked about the importance of sticking to timetables. You made the key point that, if you had had more time, you would have been able to solve this. You made the recommendation in April, and the Department took until October to give it the go-ahead—the end of October, you said, 31 October. If that had been done much more promptly, am I right in thinking that it would potentially have given the extra time, which would have helped?

Chris Gibb: With hindsight, yes. We know that in November 2017, Network Rail had accepted and processed the operators' bids. Where Thameslink shares the railway with other operators, the timetabling process was going full tilt at that stage, and doing so without the final Thameslink timetable.

Chris Green: It would have reduced the risk significantly, I would suggest. We would have started 40 weeks before with the right timetable, we would have got it into the Network Rail machine before all their problems hit in the north, and we would probably have hit the 12-week plan when we could start diagramming and rostering.

Q327 **Chair:** That delay sounds quite significant to me.



HOUSE OF COMMONS

Chris Green: Yes, but it mushroomed. It was not just one decision that went wrong; it was a whole trigger for things.

Chair: We are going to look further at the nature of GTR's franchise and how that impacted.

Q328 **Graham Stringer:** My briefing notes say that one fifth of passenger rail journeys are on GTR, so it is a huge franchise. Has that sheer magnitude made it more difficult?

Chris Gibb: I wrote about that in my report on Southern in 2016, and it has also been explored in detail by two National Audit Office reports. I do not think that I really have anything to add to what has already been said. A lot has been said on that subject, and a lot of conclusions have been come to, along the lines of, "We wouldn't do this in this way again." It is a challenge, yes.

Q329 **Graham Stringer:** That would be a yes.

Chris Gibb: A yes, as in we would not do it again. We would have to find a better way of doing it, if we were doing exactly the same thing over again.

Q330 **Graham Stringer:** The concept behind Thameslink is a great one—getting trains through London, north and south, quicker—but did it need a franchise as big as this?

Chris Gibb: The logic at the time was that, to bring about that scale of change, we needed to put all the services affected in the same group and then move them around within that group, including all the people. Let us not forget the thousands of people that the franchise employs as well, who needed to be moved from Southern to Thameslink to Great Northern, and all that kind of thing. There is still considerable merit in doing it that way, but a big train company of that nature is a challenge. It is hard to run. Mr Green and I have run several train companies, and this one is bigger than any of them. It is a tough challenge.

Q331 **Graham Stringer:** Do you think that the industrial relations problems have affected the willingness of drivers to co-operate with the implementation of the new timetable?

Chris Gibb: No, on the contrary. From what I understand, the drivers have been absolutely fabulous in their determination to make the new timetable work. In the last few weeks, they have gone to great lengths to deliver the best possible service to passengers, and I feel sure that they will be every bit as determined as the Committee to see services improve on 15 July. Like me, the drivers are professional railway people, and they want to deliver a good service.

Q332 **Graham Stringer:** Some commentators have noted the practice of conducting driver training on drivers' rest days and have speculated that that could be adding or contributing to the difficulty in getting sufficient drivers trained. Would you agree with that, or do you think it is unfair



HOUSE OF COMMONS

criticism?

Chris Green: I do not think there has been an issue.

Graham Stringer: That is an absolutely clear answer. Thank you.

Q333 **Chair:** I want to clarify some of the issues around reporting lines to the Department for Transport. First, who are the DfT's representatives at the Industry Readiness Board meetings? Is it always the same person? Do they vary from month to month?

Chris Gibb: The Thameslink programme industry governance arrangements document I referred to earlier lists the participants. Do you wish me to read them out, or just the DfT ones?

Q334 **Chair:** Just the DfT people. Is it the same person, or is it a number of people?

Chris Gibb: It is always a number of people. It is normally led by the major projects director, Matthew Lodge, and the franchise markets director, Jane Cornthwaite, but there are normally four or five people present. Normally, there is one person from the Office of Rail and Road as well.

Q335 **Chair:** Can you send us a link to the document you are referring to?

Chris Gibb: I shall make some inquiries as to how the Committee will get access to that document.

Q336 **Chair:** Thank you. Is there a direct reporting line from the Industry Readiness Board to DfT Ministers?

Chris Gibb: The role of the Industry Readiness Board is to report to the Thameslink programme board, chaired by the DfT, and to provide advice, assurance and recommendations to the Secretary of State, which is what I have done on behalf of the board.

Q337 **Chair:** Are you saying that, no, there is no direct link, because information goes to the Thameslink programme board, or that, yes, there is, via you?

Chris Gibb: I cannot remember exactly how it was all set up, but I find that it has worked well. I have reported regularly to the programme board on lots of routine matters, always in the knowledge that, if something was happening that I absolutely did not agree to, I could insist on seeing the Secretary of State and, within a few days, we would have a decision. I was always confident that he would hear me if I was not happy. I never needed to use that, but the people in the Industry Readiness Board knew that, if necessary, I would go to see him.

Q338 **Chair:** The Secretary of State said that, up until the very last minute, the IRB and the IAP, "had been given no information to suggest that the new timetable should not be implemented as planned." Do you agree with that statement?



HOUSE OF COMMONS

Chris Gibb: Yes.

Chris Green: Yes, because the problems came in those last few days. I think even GTR was surprised at that very late stage.

Q339 **Chair:** Was the red risk raised by GTR on 4 May and Northern's request for a postponement in January—albeit you were not specifically aware of that—not sufficient for you to discuss the possibility of delay with the Secretary of State?

Chris Gibb: We had lots of red risks raised at the IRB. When you see the papers, you will see a lot of red ink on them. As my colleague, Mr Green, has already said, one of the purposes of raising things as red was to get attention and make sure that they were discussed. I saw my role as the chair to make sure that anything that was red—and indeed most of the amber issues—was discussed as a board. I needed to make time to discuss all of them without exception. We absolutely did that, and we always had the right expert in the room to say, "Yes, I know you've graded this one as red, but here's what we're doing about it. Here are the mitigations, our contingency plans and the work-arounds."

We did that repeatedly for 18 months. I am not pretending for a moment that it was an easy project. We had a lot of reds, and there were lots of reasons why we could have decided to delay the project over the course of the 18 months.

Q340 **Chair:** But 16 days before the new timetable was due to come into place, a remaining red risk was raised at that meeting. It was your decision not to raise it directly with Ministers; you were sufficiently confident that it was going to be mitigated.

Chris Gibb: With GTR, I had seen the Secretary of State on 2 May, just before that IRB. GTR assured him that there would be some difficulties in the first few weeks, with a few tens of cancellations, and outlined some of the reasons. I said that I supported that, but that I was still concerned about the infrastructure reliability. At that stage, with two weeks to go, had we somehow decided to delay the whole 20 May timetable, the consequences for the performance of train services across south-east England would have been worse than what we are experiencing now.

Q341 **Chair:** At that point, even if you had known what was going to happen—what has happened—you would still have said, "Go ahead," because what has happened is less bad than it would have been if you had delayed it.

Chris Gibb: At that stage, on 4 May, it was pretty much on that scale. The things that happened after 4 May happened very quickly, and there would not have been time in those few days, given that there were still several stages to go through. On 4 May, they had not finished the drivers' diagrams or rosters. All that took a good 10 days. Then the scale of the problem was apparent. With the benefit of hindsight, if we had known about all those issues back in March, it would have been possible at the IRB on 4 March to say, "This isn't going to work. We need to implement a



HOUSE OF COMMONS

plan B.” That plan B would probably have looked similar to the timetable that will come in on 15 July.

Q342 **Chair:** You have already identified that there was a window of opportunity back in November, or, potentially, earlier than that; if you had got the decision on the new phasing for Thameslink, it would have made a difference. You think that there was a further window in March, which would not have been ideal but would have prevented the chaos that ensued.

Chris Gibb: The further window in March would have resulted in a reduced timetable.

Q343 **Chair:** But a predictable reduced timetable.

Chris Gibb: In the space from March to 20 May, it was probably possible to do what will be done on 15 July. I have already given my opinion about the earlier windows, in November and earlier in 2017. If we had said, in those circumstances, back in November 2017, that we wanted to delay the 20 May timetable because the timetabling process was running late, and that there might be an electrification project in northern England that might be late—the word “might” would have tripped off my tongue many times—and if I had had a crystal ball that told me all those things, we would have opened that window of opportunity and jumped through it, because we would have known what was going to happen. We really did not know, and everybody bought into it. They did not need to be pushed into it. They bought into it, and we went forward in November.

With hindsight, yes, of course we should have been much more sceptical at that stage. Regardless of the Secretary of State, I do not know how I would have told a carriage load of passengers, “I’m sorry. We can’t write a timetable for six months’ time, and you’re going to have to wait a bit longer for these services.” I cannot envisage how I would have done that in November.

Q344 **Chair:** How often have you spoken to the Secretary of State about Thameslink implementation this year?

Chris Gibb: This year? Three or four times, I think.

Q345 **Chair:** You said that you spoke to him, alongside GTR, on 2 May. Was that the last date you spoke to him before the timetable came?

Chris Gibb: It was the last day I spoke to him, yes.

Q346 **Chair:** I was going to ask whether you warned him that there could be disruption. It sounds like you said that there could be minor disruption, tens of services rather than hundreds.

Chris Gibb: I would not call tens of cancellations minor disruption, especially if you are a passenger who wants to get those services.

Q347 **Chair:** But relative to what we have seen.



HOUSE OF COMMONS

Chris Gibb: There would have been tens of cancellations for a few weeks and risks to the infrastructure. GTR in particular outlined those risks to the Secretary of State, and I supported that viewpoint.

Q348 **Chair:** Do you have regular discussions about Thameslink implementation with any other Ministers?

Chris Gibb: Several of the meetings I have been to since then have been attended by Jo Johnson.

Q349 **Chair:** Since 20 May.

Chris Gibb: Yes, I had meetings with them on 29 May and 4 June.

Chair: We want to ask a few questions about the ORR investigation.

Q350 **Daniel Zeichner:** I apologise for missing the start of your evidence; there are some other things happening in the main Chamber today.

You may have already covered one question I wanted to ask, in which case I apologise. Through this whole discussion, one of the points consistently made is that the problem was that it was too late to train drivers on new routes, and that takes a fair amount of time to do. What I have never understood about that is that the train operating companies must have known that new routes were going to be implemented, so why couldn't the training start earlier?

Chris Gibb: When you introduce a new service, you train a group of people. You do not train everybody who is eventually going to drive on that route because, after a while, if they are not driving over a route, their knowledge of the route lapses. We generally take a guideline of about six months, but on a very complicated railway it could be less than that. In the case of Thameslink, there is a lot of complicated railway, and, of course, it involves driving in the dark, the fog and the snow, and things like that. We take the knowledge extremely seriously.

If you introduce a new service, as I have done on a few occasions, you train a small group of drivers. They start the service running on the first day and the first few weeks, and, as soon as it is running, you send other drivers out with them to learn. You get a commitment that the first group of drivers will drive all the trains on that line until their colleagues have learned it. That is by far the best way to learn the route, because you also have to learn it for a particular type of train.

Driving technique on a route varies from train to train. We take that very seriously. I would not want to train hundreds of drivers on a new route who did not use that knowledge and then suddenly, on one day, started doing it. That would not be a good way to do it. The IAP reviewed GTR's training plans and saw that they were in the normal fashion—training many of the people and all the rest later on, once the services were in use. Even today, drivers in large numbers are learning routes for new services.



HOUSE OF COMMONS

Q351 Daniel Zeichner: My understanding is that one of the problems was that the timeframes got compressed because everything was late. That was the reason given for why it was not possible to train the appropriate number of drivers in that short timeframe. Given that it was known that the date for the timetable change was coming, why couldn't that training have started earlier, even if the fine detail or the rostering was not fully agreed at that point?

Chris Gibb: The training did start early; it started last year on many routes. It is not just training on the routes, it is training on the new trains as well, so there is an enormous training task for GTR. In my and our opinion, it began at an appropriate stage, and has continued ever since at an appropriate pace. The board questioned that in some detail. It was made up of other train company managing directors who knew a thing or two about driver training, so they were pretty robust questioners, and GTR's plan stood that challenge and test.

A lot of people were trained. On the day, on 20 May, the training did not turn out to be enough on the right routes at certain depots, and drivers who had knowledge, because they were rostered on a job that did not use it, were in effect wasted. A driver going to King's Lynn might have learned the route down to Brighton and back. He was wasted going to King's Lynn. His mate might be going to Brighton and would not have the route knowledge. There is a very complicated matrix of skills and training, which evaporates if you do not use it, and quite rightly so. Getting it right and doing the training at the right moment, just before you need it, is part of running a train company.

Q352 Daniel Zeichner: Thank you; that is helpful. In the terms of reference for the ORR investigation, there are a lot of things that it has been asked to look at. Should it be used as a chance for a fundamental overhaul of how the timetabling system works? Should it be a bit bigger than what the ORR has been asked to look at?

Chris Gibb: That would be a very reasonable challenge and aspiration for the ORR. Its first task, if I remember rightly from the terms of reference, is to look at what has gone wrong. If it finds that the timetabling process has not worked properly, I am sure that it will make recommendations to improve that process.

Q353 Daniel Zeichner: One worry that someone looking at this from the outside might have is that it was actually involved; it had representation on your board. That might make one worry about just how independent such an investigation can be. Are they the right people to be doing it?

Chris Gibb: The ORR was involved in lots of different elements of the project, obviously. It regulated the train planning and timetabling process in the first place, as well as having an individual on the board who helped us significantly in a number of areas where we needed ORR support to change things, and played an active part on the board. It has the skills, ability and powers to conduct an effective investigation. It was not my



HOUSE OF COMMONS

choice to have it do the investigation, but I see no reason why it should not conduct a thorough and effective investigation.

Q354 **Daniel Zeichner:** Can you understand why passengers, for instance, might look at that and say, "Hang on, these are the same people investigating themselves"?

Chris Gibb: I could understand that, yes.

Q355 **Daniel Zeichner:** Would it have been wiser to have a genuinely independent body looking at it, perhaps calling on the ORR's advice, rather than asking the ORR to do it?

Chris Gibb: I cannot answer that, because it has not happened. The ORR has been asked to do it, has the powers to do it and is allowed to be asked to give advice to the Secretary of State. It is expert in the rail industry, and will no doubt have a team of experts looking at this particular issue.

Q356 **Daniel Zeichner:** Would it be wise for it to make sure that to some extent it separates internally the people doing the investigation from those who were in any way involved?

Chris Gibb: Yes, and I believe that that is the case.

Q357 **Daniel Zeichner:** The ORR has been asked to do it by the end of the year, which to some will sound like quite a long time, but it is being set a complicated task. Could the work that it is doing in the end distract from some of the work that your board and GTR need to do to get stuff sorted out? Could it become an impediment?

Chris Gibb: They are not the only people investigating what has gone on. The straight answer to that is yes, they could be an impediment; they want to talk to the same people who are trying to sort out the train service right now. Yes, that is a possibility.

Q358 **Daniel Zeichner:** I hate to put it like this, but is it a reasonable timetable for them to carry out such a detailed investigation by the end of the year?

Chris Gibb: People rightly want answers.

Daniel Zeichner: They do.

Chris Gibb: And the industry wants to get the answers and put them into action as soon as possible. As I said earlier, I believe there was an announcement today about delaying, or not having at all, a timetable change in December across a whole load of train companies. It sounds the obvious thing to do—not to change the timetable while you have this problem—but it will mean that some people have to wait a bit longer for their improved services and benefits, and stuff like that. It is not an easy decision to take, so we need the ORR investigation to conclude as soon as is reasonably practicable to give us some answers for the way forward.



HOUSE OF COMMONS

Q359 **Daniel Zeichner:** That brings me to a final supplementary question. Throughout all this, exactly as you have said, there is a series of trade-offs: risk versus potential improvements, and the rest of it. In the end, that is a judgment by somebody. The other day, in the Chamber, I asked the Rail Minister who was in charge, and I am afraid that he did not give a very satisfactory answer. Someone has to make a judgment on this, don't they? Where should that finally lie?

Chris Gibb: A judgment on what, precisely?

Q360 **Daniel Zeichner:** On how you make those trade-offs, exactly as you have just explained, between giving certainty to the poor people who are suffering in the constituency that I represent, and many others, against the possibility of improvement for somebody somewhere else.

Chris Gibb: The decision making for that is spread in different places. Some of it rests with the rail regulator, some of it with the Department for Transport and some of it with individual train companies, depending on the nature of their contracts. That is the industry we have under the 1994 legislation.

Q361 **Daniel Zeichner:** But isn't that part of the problem? There is almost a structural problem, in that we have a system that does not really make it possible to do those trade-offs.

Chris Gibb: I guess I have spent most of my career making that system work, because that is the system we have. It has delivered lots of benefits across the rail industry in the UK: more trains, more passengers and the safest railway in Europe, and all those sorts of measures. It has lots of benefits, and we must be very careful before we toss it aside and do something different.

My peers and I have made that system work to the benefit of millions of passengers. I am not here to defend it or to criticise it. In the window of the Industry Readiness Board, I and the rest of the board have been absolutely determined to make the system work to deliver a successful Thameslink project, and we remain determined to do that. We have not packed up our bags and disappeared; we are still meeting and we are still determined to make it work. Of course, we are hanging our heads collectively in shame that it has not worked, but we are not going to walk away. We need to fix it now and make it work.

Q362 **Daniel Zeichner:** Unless, of course, part of the problem is that a fragmented system has led to this problem in the first place.

Chris Gibb: I am determined that for as long as that system is there I will make it work. I am sure that is the case for the vast majority of railway managers.

Q363 **Chair:** I have a couple of quick last questions. We hear in the media that there has been a decision to shelve plans for the new timetable in December. Were you consulted about that? Did you have any input in



HOUSE OF COMMONS

that decision?

Chris Gibb: I was aware of the process going on, and it was discussed at the last Industry Readiness Board. Clearly, at the next Industry Readiness Board we will reflect on what it means for GTR and the other train companies involved.

Q364 **Chair:** Did the Industry Readiness Board take a view on whether that was the right thing to do?

Chris Gibb: I don't believe we took a view at the last meeting. We knew that other people were taking a view on it, and we would react to that view.

Q365 **Chair:** You were not part of determining that view.

Chris Gibb: No, not as the Industry Readiness Board.

Q366 **Chair:** What is your understanding of who made the decision?

Chris Gibb: I am not sure. I have not read the statement today, so I am really not sure who made the decision.

Q367 **Chair:** My understanding was that, as part of the process of implementing the new timetable on GTR, some passengers who saw a worse service in the May timetable, or who lost some services, would have expected to see them restored in the December timetable. Is that right?

Chris Gibb: Yes, that is the case, for a small minority of passengers.

Q368 **Chair:** When you say a small minority, what sort of numbers of passengers might be affected by a decision not to implement a new timetable in December?

Chris Gibb: I cannot answer that. I do not have the detail, and I am not sure that it has been established yet. I am not yet sure exactly what GTR is planning to do in December, or how, and everything else. As an Industry Readiness Board, we need to see exactly what will happen to the timetable. Clearly, there are services not operating in the current timetable at the moment, and that is the priority. What happens beyond that we need to take stock of in the light of today's decision, and take it forward from there.

Q369 **Chair:** How confident are you that passengers will see a major improvement on 15 July?

Chris Gibb: On 15 July? I am very much aiming at that as the outcome. I do not want to be mortified any longer.

Q370 **Chair:** You said that you wanted to stay and make sure that things happened and improved. Did you at any point consider your position? We had the boss of GTR in front of us. He has resigned from his position. Have you ever considered your own position in relation to this?



HOUSE OF COMMONS

Chris Gibb: Yes, every day since the beginning of May.

Q371 **Chair:** Will you consider your position if 15 July is not a successful improvement?

Chris Gibb: I will continue considering my position. I point out that it is not really a job. I am here to help—it is a part-time role, chairing a board. I did not apply for it or ask for it; I am doing it because I want to help.

Q372 **Chair:** Presumably, you are remunerated for it.

Chris Gibb: I am, yes. I am remunerated for it. I recall that my remuneration was in the media some months ago. I will continue to consider my position, and, if I felt that it would in any way help, I would absolutely resign from this role. Right now, I have been told that I can help to improve things, which is exactly what I want to do.

Chair: I am sure we all want to see an improvement for passengers, so we hope that is successful. Thank you very much for giving evidence this afternoon.