

Christmas Travel Window

I have received this update from the Secretary of State for Transport:

Dear John

I am writing to provide you with an update on the Government's preparations for the Christmas period.

The Government recently published guidance to help families and friends see each other over the Christmas period – and to do so as safely as possible. Between 23rd and 27th of December or between 22nd and 28th of December for those travelling to and from Northern Ireland, travel restrictions across the UK and between tiers will be lifted to allow three households to come together. Once at their destination, people should follow the rules in that tier.

We are working with transport operators to help people see their loved ones, safely. We ask everyone to closely consider their journey, plan and book ahead, be patient, and be considerate of fellow passengers – and particularly staff who have worked so hard all year – by following the guidance carefully, including keeping space and wearing a face covering on public transport.

To help people travel safely and minimise disruption as far as possible over the Christmas period, we are deploying a series of measures.

- On our strategic road network of motorways and trunk roads, Highways England have **cleared a total of 778 miles of roadworks**, meaning that 96% of the network will be unaffected. Where essential work must continue, speed limits will be set at 60mph (rather than 50mph) where possible to keep disruption to a minimum.
- Ministers have written to all Local Authorities in England with the request that they lift as many roadworks as possible and **ensure bus services are running reliably** over the period, to ease traffic on local roads.
- Network Rail will ensure that **over 95% of the network will be unaffected by engineering works** over the Christmas period. Where essential works must continue, replacement buses will be available.
- We are also working with train operators, a number of whom have already confirmed they will **run longer trains** and increase service levels. For example, longer trains will run on Anglo-Scotland and Liverpool routes to boost the number of seats at anticipated busy times on the West Coast Main Line. Chiltern Railway will also run additional services on the 27 December, and East Midlands Railway will run a full intercity timetable over the Christmas period.
- The Government is also **waiving change of journey admin fees** for Advance rail tickets sold before the announcement of new Covid tiers on 26th November, ensuring passengers are not left out of pocket for changing

their tickets to comply with the guidance.

To provide further support to passengers, Network Rail and train operators have been asked to ensure extra staff are in place at key stations to provide assistance. British Transport Police will also be deploying extra officers to help keep passengers safe.

All transport operators have been asked to increase the clarity and regularity of communications with passengers, to help them plan their journeys, warn of any disruption and offer support.

Finally, to protect and support the resilience of transport workers on the frontline, we are working closely with the Department of Health and Social Care and transport operators on rapid testing at selected sites, the first of which is going live next week.

Further details on these measures can be found in the annex.

To help provide rigorous scrutiny of these plans, the Government has appointed Sir Peter Hendy – Chair of Network Rail – who will work alongside operators and the Department for Transport. He will ensure there is a collective focus across the transport industry on minimising disruption and supporting passengers.

We are also continuing to work with the Devolved Administrations on our plans to ensure we take an aligned approach as far as possible.

I am confident that the measures set out above will ensure that people can travel as safely and reliably as possible if they choose to, and we are doing everything we can to help people see their loved ones safely this Christmas.

Yours ever,

Rt Hon Grant Shapps MP

SECRETARY OF STATE FOR TRANSPORT

[Consultation concerning a ban on live animal exports](#)

You will be interested to know that the Government has now launched a consultation concerning a ban on live animal exports:

<https://consult.defra.gov.uk/transforming-farm-animal-health-and-welfare-team/improvements-to-animal-welfare-in-transport/>

The consultation gives you an opportunity to register your views and will be

open until 28 January 2021.

Vaccines change the situation

Many governments, health services and the world health bodies have always wanted a vaccine to be the eventual way out of the pandemic. Yesterday they got much nearer to that outcome, with the announcement of the formal recognition of the safety and efficacy of the Pfizer BioN Tech vaccine by the UK's Medicines and Healthcare Products Regulatory Agency, and the roll out of the Sputnik V vaccine as an approved treatment in Russia.

Dr June Raine, the CEO of the MHRA, was keen to tell UK residents that "the public's safety has always been at the forefront of our minds – safety is our watchword." She assured her audience that they had not taken any short cuts and had pored over much data before concluding the product meets both their safety and their efficacy standards.

The Pfizer vaccine uses a relatively new technique, mRNA, to trigger immune responses should the virus attack. So too does the Moderna product, which may soon follow with a permission. The Astra Zeneca Oxford University vaccine may be third to get approval, and uses a Replication deficient viral vector. They needed to supply more information on their tests given the different doses actually deployed with different results.

I always point out this site does not give medical advice, as I am not qualified. Individuals thinking of accepting a vaccination need to make their own decisions based on the information provided by the companies supplying the product and the NHS, and may take their own doctor's advice if they have concerns.

If enough people volunteer for the vaccination, as seems likely given the strong encouragement from the NHS and from the government's own medical experts, it will be easier to secure a removal of controls over our lives.

There should be no question of people having to take the vaccine, nor of vaccine passports being used as a lever to get more people to take the vaccine. The vaccine should stand on its own merits. The more information the Regulators can share with the public the better, as confidence comes from an open approach, not from hectoring and limited communication of the facts.

First use of the first vaccine is likely to be in hospitals who have the specialist equipment to store the vaccine. There will be guidance about who has priority to receive it.

My contribution to the debate on Public Health, 1 December 2020

Sir John Redwood (Wokingham) (Con): Many of my constituents are very angry that west Berkshire and Wokingham have been placed in tier 2 when we were in tier 1 before the national lockdown and we still have very low figures. On all the evidence that the Government say they look at—case numbers, trends in cases and available hospital capacity—there seems a very clear case that we should not be worse off as we come out of national lockdown than we were when we went in, and my constituents will expect me to reflect their anger in the way that I vote tonight.

I would far rather work with the Government, and I think that on the whole they are doing a very good job in a very difficult circumstance, but they could make life easier for themselves if they identified more policies that both bear down on the virus problem and allow the much-needed economic recovery so that we rescue and encourage more livelihoods.

The first policy is this: why can we not have expanded isolation capacity in the NHS to deal with covid-19, with volunteers properly backed up with all the equipment and safety protocols they need so that we free up many more of the district generals to do the general work that they need to do and free up their staff from the possibility of cross-infection and cross-contamination? One of the problems in the NHS at the moment is that there are too many staff who have had to self-isolate. Can we not do better on infection control, isolation, and specialisation? Money is no longer a problem, I am pleased to see. I am very happy for more money to go into the health service, but it must buy the staff and make sure that the staff are properly looked after, so that we have that extra capacity.

The second issue is the capacity of our hospitality industry. I encouraged the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy and the Department of Health and Social Care to do work some time ago on safer methods of extracting air quickly from hospitality venues, so that more people can use a hospitality venue safely. I believe that some of that work has shown some fruit, and that experts agree that we can create much safer environments if we reverse overflows and extract air quickly. We are now told by the experts that the main transmission threat is aerial transmission by being in an enclosed space with people with the disease. Can we not have more public prominence for that work? Perhaps we could have some grant systems for small businesses and proper technical assistance from the Government and from those the Government retain so that more venues can trade sensibly and profitably without being threatening in any way.

Can we please also have a proper package for all the self-employed and the small business people? Why do some groups of the self-employed get omitted from the packages every time? These are the people who go the extra distance, provide the flexible service, work all the hours God made, and do not often get much reward for it. These are also the people who have suffered the most

from these compulsory closures. If a person works for a large company, they are, in many cases, paid their salary, even if that company cannot operate properly, but if they work for their own business, there is no income coming in. They cannot put food on the table unless they get public support or can trade profitably. I urge the Government to look again at their totally inadequate packages for the self-employed and small businesses and understand just how much we are going to need them when we get into recovery mode proper.

My final point in the brief time allotted is that we desperately need to give people hope about livelihoods and economic growth again. We desperately need to have a full recovery programme sector by sector, including for small businesses and the self-employed, and understand that some people will need to retrain and some will need to go from the employment they have lost into self-employment. Can we not hear a lot more about this and be positive? We need to cheer up the country up as well as control the virus.

Tiers at vote time

Yesterday in the debate I urged the government to take those measures which both help control the virus and allow economic recovery.

I pressed the government again on where are the results of the tests of other drugs that might help treat CV 19 patients. After the good break-through with the steroid it would be good to hear about other possibilities.

I urged them to work harder with the hospitality industry on air extraction and other measures which would enable safer working in inside spaces, as many hospitality businesses will only survive if they can earn more money soon.

I asked them to reconsider the issue of compensation and support for the self employed, where many small business owners who work in their own business do not qualify for the support.

I have regularly raised the issue of creating specialist isolation hospitals for CV 19 so there is more capacity in the District Generals for all other medical problems. This of course means continuing the extra recruitment of staff the government has promised, and requires suitable Training and protective clothing for the volunteers staffing the CV 19 facilities.

I raised the issue that many of my constituents feel strongly about. Why are West Berkshire and Wokingham in Tier 2 when numbers are quite low and we were in Tier 1 before the lockdown. I voted against the Regulations.