

# #TheFutureIsFlexible: new era of rail travel arrives with new flexible season tickets

- 2 and 3 day-a-week commuters given control over their commute and offered potential savings of hundreds of pounds against daily and season tickets
- government's plans include a new Great British Railways ticket website and app, a retail revolution with simple digital ticketing, contactless pay-as-you-go travel and straightforward compensation

A new national flexible rail ticket, matching modern working habits and saving passengers hundreds of pounds, will be available to commuters across England once travel restrictions are lifted.

As the government publishes the Williams-Shapps Plan for Rail today (20 May 2021), setting out the path towards a truly passenger-focused railway, Transport Secretary Grant Shapps has announced that "the future is flexible".

The new flexible ticket will be on-sale on 21 June, for use by 28 June.

The paperless tickets will allow travel on any 8 days in a 28-day period, with passengers able to tap smartcards or scan mobiles at the station, with no need to select the days of travel in advance.

The change has the potential to save commuters hundreds of pounds, providing greater choice and flexibility.

Grant Shapps Transport Secretary said:

For many, the idea of travelling 5 days a week to the office is fast becoming a relic of the past.

The future is flexible: passengers want a simple, stress-free option, and new flexible tickets make fares fairer.

As we kickstart the biggest reform of our railways in a generation, we're committed to creating a modern railway that works for its passengers.

Exact details of savings will be provided before tickets go on sale. However, analysis shows that 2 day-a-week commuters buying multiple new flexible season tickets could save the following in a year when compared to the cost of daily tickets:

- over £250 from Woking to London

- over £200 from York to Leeds
- over £60 from Southampton Central to Winchester
- over £160 from Stafford to Birmingham
- over £220 from Liverpool to Manchester

Three day-a-week commuters could save:

- over £220 from St Albans City to London
- over £120 from Bromsgrove to Birmingham
- over £90 from Weston-Super-Mare to Bristol Temple Meads
- over £330 from Chelmsford to Stratford

This new national offer also reflects the long-term decline in the use of traditional season tickets, with a change in working practices having been accelerated by the outbreak of COVID-19.

With the pandemic sweeping away the traditional commute and leading to a significant increase in home-working, this ticket reflects the new priorities of the public.

Flexible season tickets and greater discounts are just one of a package of measures to reform the railways to put passengers first. The government has also announced today it will explore new 'design and ride' standards to eradicate 'ironing-board seating', and efforts to ensure fewer repetitious and annoying pre-recorded announcements.

See also [Great British Railways: for the passenger](#) press notice, 20 May 2021

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## **Building back better from COVID-19 and building lasting peace across Africa**

Thank you, State Councillor Wang, for convening this timely debate.

As we've heard today, this devastating pandemic presents fresh challenges to building a lasting peace across the African continent. The virus indeed has disproportionately impacted those affected by conflict, particularly women, children, refugees and internally displaced persons.

The challenges of recovery are numerous and interconnected. And that's why we must work together through a comprehensive approach across human rights, peace, security and development.

The UK has worked with all our international partners for equitable access to COVID vaccines for people around the world. Under our G7 presidency, the G7 has doubled contributions to COVAX, and we're proud to be one of the largest bilateral donors, committing \$770 million.

More than 160 million people are at risk of being excluded from these vaccination campaigns because of instability and conflict. A multilateral approach is the only viable way to ensure that rapid, equitable access to safe and effective vaccines, including in conflict affected areas through vaccination ceasefires.

However, as we consider pandemic recovery, we need to look beyond vaccines and consider how to ensure everyone – particularly women, girls, the young, the excluded – has the opportunity to build their potential. This requires increased access to healthcare and ending preventable deaths. It requires quality education, which is why the UK is part of and is indeed the largest global donor to the Global Partnership for Education, reaching 24 million children since 2015 – the majority of which are in Africa. We look forward to the Global Education Partnership's replenishment Summit in July with our Kenyan friends, and we call on all countries to step up their efforts in this regard.

Addressing health and education shortcomings will reduce poverty, but we must also address the undeniable links between poverty and conflict. By 2030, 80 per cent of the world's extreme poor will be living in fragile states. Climate change will continue to magnify this trend, driving food insecurity, drought and exacerbating conflict. That's why we've already pledged over \$15 billion of international climate finance over the next five years.

There's a chance to support Africa not only to recover from the pandemic, but rebuild better than before. Unleashing the potential women and young people is central to this. Health and education and climate support not only will change lives for the better, but it will only do so if it's not undermined by conflict.

So we must address the underlying grievances that cause people to take up arms. Development gains and fragile peace can be lost if large parts of the population are marginalised or human rights are not respected. That's why in Somalia, for example, the UK places such importance of promoting full, equal and meaningful participation of women and community leaders in elections and also in peace processes.

That's why ending horrendous levels of sexual and gender based violence that we're witnessing in Tigray is so, so urgent.

Peace can only be built from the foundations of strong institutions, the rule of law and open, inclusive societies. The UN and African Union are working stronger together than ever before. Early interventions, including by the African Union, will need to be coupled with long-term engagement and development programmes by the UN and its partners.

We've seen this in Sudan, where Prime Minister Hamdok continues to make progress towards peace, prosperity and democracy.

In Mali, the UK is supporting UN stabilisation efforts and increasing the meaningful participation of women in the peace process through our peacekeeping deployment, and also by working with UN agencies to strengthen

civil-military cooperation.

The UK also strongly supports the sustaining peace agenda, which builds an inclusive cross-pillar approach to peacebuilding that draws on expertise of the whole UN system. We're proud to support the Peacebuilding Commission and Peacebuilding Fund, to which the UK has been a top donor, having donated £220 million since its inception.

To conclude, there is more to do if we're to reduce the dangers that poverty, marginalisation and the pandemic pose to African peace and development, and global stability more generally. We need countries to come together to support an integrated approach to post-pandemic recovery, because only by working together can we address the underlying drivers of conflicts and achieve a lasting peace for Africa – a peace we all want.

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## Health and Social Care Secretary's statement on coronavirus (COVID-19): 19 May 2021

Good afternoon and welcome to Downing Street for today's coronavirus briefing.

I'm joined by Deputy Chief Medical Officer Professor Jonathan Van-Tam, and Dr Jenny Harries, Chief Executive of UKHSA, the UK Health Security Agency.

I'd like to update you on what we're doing to fight this virus at home and abroad.

First, to what's happening here in the UK.

I'll ask Professor Van-Tam to set out the numbers and the details in a moment.

Overall hospitalisations and deaths remain very low, meaning we've been able carefully to take away more restrictions this week as we've taken step 3 of the roadmap.

But we must proceed with vigilance and everyone taking personal responsibility.

We've always known one of the things that has the potential to knock us off track would be a new variant.

That's why we made the presence of a new variant that could do that one of our 4 tests when we set out the roadmap, which are the steps we must pass before going down each step of the roadmap.

The early evidence suggests that the B.1.617.2 variant, first discovered in India, passes on more easily from person to person than the B.117 variant, first discovered in Kent.

But as the Prime Minister said at lunchtime, we have increasing confidence that the vaccines are effective against it.

That means our strategy is the right one: to carefully replace the restrictions on freedom with the protection from the vaccine.

What it means is that it is even more important that people get vaccinated.

As I've reported to the House of the Commons, there are now 2,967 cases known of this variant in the UK. We are determined to do all we can to ensure this new variant doesn't put our recovery at risk.

So we've acted fast, to guard the gains that we've made together.

We now have an incredibly sensitive biosecurity surveillance system here in the UK, and I'm going to tell you some new details about that in a moment.

This surveillance system spotted the cases in Bolton and Blackburn early.

Through surge testing and increased vaccinations, we're throwing everything at it there.

The weekly case rate in Bolton is now 283 per 100,000 people, and it's doubled in the last week.

There are now 25 people in Bolton hospital with COVID. The majority are unvaccinated.

Nearly 90% have not yet had 2 vaccines.

This shows the importance of getting vaccinated not once, but twice. So when you get the call, get the jab.

Almost 14,000 vaccines have been given in Blackburn and Bolton since Friday and over 26,000 doses have been given in the last week, the highest weekly total in these areas.

We've also surged testing, and delivered 75,000 extra tests to the 2 areas and we're using 12 testing sites and a 100-strong team going door to door.

But these are not the only areas where we have cause for concern.

We're seeing other areas where case rates are rising, and where we need to act fast as we have with Bolton and Blackburn.

We know that this playbook that we're using in Bolton and Blackburn worked in South London against the South African (SA) variant where we had a series of cases of the SA variant and we brought that under control. And we've used our extensive surveillance system, and new techniques, to identify the areas we are most concerned about.

We of course look at the data on cases, number of identified variants and hospitalisations, and we publish all of this data.

But we are now able to use 2 further tools.

Mobility data shows travel patterns in different areas, and we look at this in deciding where the virus is at risk of spreading.

Next, we now analyse wastewater in 70% of the country, and we can spot the virus, and the variants in the water, and that can help us identify communities where there is spread.

As a result of all this analysis, we are now surge testing and increasing vaccinations in:

- Bedford
- Burnley
- Leicester
- Kirklees
- North Tyneside
- Hounslow in London

And we're supporting the Scottish Government, who are taking similar action in Glasgow and Moray.

What this means in practice is putting in place more testing – more testing sites – and on vaccinations, we are making more vaccinations available to everyone who's eligible.

To everybody across the whole country, I'd urge vigilance as we open up and of course, as soon as you're able to, to get the jab.

To everyone in these areas, please exercise caution. Get a test, and as soon as you're eligible, get the jab.

As we carefully replace this shield of restrictions, with the sword of our vaccination programme to give us protection for the long term, we keep driving the vaccination programme as fast as we can.

I'm delighted to say that as of midnight last night, 7 out of 10 adults in the UK have now had their first dose.

That's 7 in 10 people who have a big degree of protection against the virus.

I'm also delighted that almost 4 in 10 have had the extra protection that comes from having 2 doses.

I'd like to show you a chart which puts this into context, shows what this protection looks like across the country and also explain why we've taken the recent decision to change our dosing interval from 12 to 8 weeks for the most vulnerable.

This chart shows the proportion of people who've had a jab, according to age

group.

Green bars represent people who've had 1 dose, and blue bars represent people who've had 2.

As you can see, from the amount of green, uptake of the first dose has been phenomenally high. And we've followed the strategy of getting the first dose to as many people as possible, as quickly as possible. And for that read the over-50s in particular. You can see the very very high uptake rates and we are incredibly proud of how people have stepped forward.

But there's still a little bit of a gap between the green bars and the 100%. What the experience of Bolton shows is that it's incredibly important that we get vaccination even to the final few percent and encourage that take-up.

The blue bars show the second doses and we can see that the uptake of the second doses has been incredibly high too. But again there's a little bit of green showing and we need to get the blue bars, the second doses, up to everybody who has had the first dose.

And as you go down the age range towards the left of the chart, fewer people have had 2 doses because it has been less time since they've had the first dose.

This is why getting the second dose into those who are most vulnerable to ending up in hospital and dying of the disease is so important.

Academic studies have shown that this decision to have 12 weeks between the 2 doses has saved around 12,000 lives.

But those figures are not yet 100% and we will not rest until we get them there.

And crucially, this acceleration now of second doses for the over-50s, for the most vulnerable, is all about getting the maximum possible protection to those at the greatest risk.

And while we deliver first and second doses, we are also working on our booster programme too.

And I just want to update you on that. This is all about making sure our vaccines stay ahead of the virus and this includes new vaccines specifically targeted at variants of concern.

I'm delighted to announce a [new clinical trial](#) backed by £19 million of taxpayers' money to look at the use of current COVID vaccines as booster vaccines, and to see what combination and what part they can play in keeping us safe for the long term.

You can sign up to be a part of this trial at [www.covboost.org.uk](http://www.covboost.org.uk).

This will be the first clinical study in the world to look at the impact of a booster jab and I'm very pleased that we're leading the way with this

scientific endeavour, just as we've done so many times in this crisis.

Take, for example, the huge advances we've made in genomic sequencing.

Today we've published our [Genome UK implementation plan](#) for how we can build on this genomic science even further, including our commitment to sequence 1 million whole genomes. And I want to thank all the scientists and all those at Genomics England who have been involved in delivering this.

Which has also, through their genomic work, played such an important part in our tackling of the pandemic. Genomics saves lives, we've learned that in this pandemic so clearly and I'm determined the UK stays at the forefront of this scientific endeavour as well.

But we're not just focused on the effort at home.

A few words on how we're working to protect people all around the world.

We've donated over half a billion pounds to COVAX, which has now delivered life-saving COVID-19 vaccines to 120 countries and territories.

But over and above our cash commitment, the UK has probably done more than any other nation to help vaccinate the world's poorest.

That's thanks to the gift to the world of the Oxford/AstraZeneca vaccine, which is available at cost – no charge for the intellectual property. We invested: the British Government, Oxford University and AstraZeneca.

The 3 of us, we invested in the research and came together to develop and deliver a vaccine at cost for everyone.

And for context in terms of the scale of this decision, almost 1.5 billion vaccines have been delivered across the world.

More than 400 million of them have been the Oxford/AstraZeneca vaccine. In total, the Oxford/ AstraZeneca vaccine has now been delivered in 160 countries.

Two thirds of this – 400 million does – has been injected into the arms of people in low and middle-income countries, including 170 million doses in India, which has been so badly affected by this virus.

And of the 67 million doses delivered through COVAX, over 65 million of them have been the Oxford/AstraZeneca vaccine.

This vaccination programme is a vaccination programme for the world, using the Oxford/AstraZeneca vaccine. It's something every British taxpayer has had a part in supporting and everyone in this United Kingdom should be incredibly proud of.

Rather than changing the rules, as we got as many jabs in arms, right across the world, we just got on with delivering this at cost without any profit and I want to thank the team at Oxford and at AstraZeneca for the incredibly

progressive and forward-looking approach that they took over a year ago now to set this up. And it is having an impact everywhere.

Just as we fight this virus at home, we'll stand side by side with other nations all across the world.

I just want to add one more thing.

Because if this pandemic has taught us anything, it's that our health is intertwined together.

Next month, I'll be welcoming health ministers from G7 nations to Oxford – the birthplace of this vaccine that has saved so many lives

There we'll hold the G7 Health Ministers Forum. It's not just about how to fight this pandemic in the here and now, but how we'll emerge, stronger, healthier and safer, with the great democracies of the world working together.

This is a virus that attacks all of humanity and it calls upon everyone to step up and think about what we can do, and you can play your part in that too in the same way that everyone has so far.

So, please remember the basics: hands, face, space and fresh air. And even as we take these steps together, get your rapid, regular tests and when you get the call, get the jab.

Now I'd like to hand over to Professor Van-Tam for the latest data.

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## [New award to recognise exceptional practice in adult social care workforce](#)

- Gold and silver awards will recognise outstanding contribution to adult social care
- The award will bring recognition to social care workers in line with NHS workforce awards

Professor Deborah Sturdy has today (Wednesday 19 May) outlined her commitment to recognise the outstanding contribution made by social care workers and nurses in England and their enormous range of skills, expertise and enduring compassion.

The awards will mirror the Chief Nursing Officer Ruth May's awards for the NHS, and aim to celebrate nurses and care workers in adult social care who go above and beyond their everyday roles to provide excellent care, leadership

and inspiration.

Presented as gold and silver awards, they represent an important step towards bringing recognition in line with the NHS workforce and recognise the extraordinary commitment of the adult social care workforce.

Chief Nurse for Adult Social Care Professor Deborah Study said:

The pandemic has shone a light on the exemplary efforts of our dedicated social care workforce, and I am committed to ensuring we recognise the selfless hard work they do day in and day out.

The social care workforce more than ever continues to demonstrate unwavering compassion, professionalism and dedication. Not only during the pandemic but every year.

I am extremely proud to present these awards to colleagues in social care which reflect those for colleagues in the NHS.

These individual awards recognise exceptional practice and care and rightly give recognition, acknowledgement and appreciation that those individuals deserve.

The awards come at an important time, to celebrate the huge contribution of the nursing and wider care workforce in the past year as well as building on the system-wide collaboration across health and social care we've seen during the pandemic.

This new award is the first of its kind for adult social care and is open to the workforce from all settings and parts of the sector.

The awards will be on an application basis and awarded throughout the year.

Nominations will be considered by a panel of NHS and adult social care chief nursing officers and adult social care sector representatives. The Chief Nurse for Adult Social Care aims to present the first award later this year.

The gold award will recognise outstanding achievements and performance demonstrated by a nurse or social care worker in their sphere of practice. This may be clinical practice, education, research or leadership. The award recognises the exceptional contribution by an individual with a distinguished career in nursing or social care.

The silver award recognises performance that goes above and beyond the expectations of the everyday role that the nurse or social care worker is expected to perform. Again, this could be demonstrated in education, research, patient and carer experience, leadership, tackling diversity and health inequalities, and could be awarded to either an individual or a team.

The awards will not be limited to registered nurses and will be extended to include all carers across all care settings, not only care homes.

Applications are available as a form which should be supported by 2 signatories:

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## [Belarus: UK responds to crackdown on journalists](#)

Press release

The Foreign Secretary has issued a statement following the recent crackdown on journalists in Belarus.



Foreign Secretary Dominic Raab said:

Criminalising opposition voices and independent media in Belarus will fuel rather than quell the people's thirst for democracy and freedom.

The Belarusian authorities must halt this campaign of oppression, release those held on political grounds, and engage in meaningful and constructive dialogue.

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