

Reduced rail timetable agreed to protect train services and staff

- government and rail operators across the UK agree reductions in service levels following reduced passenger demand as people change their travel patterns to help tackle spread of COVID-19
- move will keep core services running to ensure those who need to get to work, including emergency services and NHS can continue to do so
- joint decision also enables important freight services to continue, ensuring sector can support movement of goods and supplies while passenger services continue for those most at need

The government and the UK rail industry have agreed a plan that will see a gradual reduction in train services across the country to reflect lower passenger demand, while keeping vital rail services running.

Operators will continue to run core services ensuring people remain able to get to work, can travel to access medical appointments and the flow of goods continues across the UK.

The move reflects a decrease in passenger demand as people stop all unnecessary travel and decrease non-essential social contact in line with government advice to help stop the spread of the virus. Running reduced services will also help protect the welfare of frontline railway staff essential for day-to-day operations.

Rail services will be reduced from Monday 23rd March and kept under review, with operators providing clear communications to ensure passengers who need to travel are well-informed of the changes.

There will be a gradual move towards introducing reduced service levels on wide parts of the network over the longer term. To minimise disruption, services will be reduced progressively across the network over the coming days.

The plan will also ensure key freight services can continue to move around the country, allowing vital goods to continue to be shipped where needed.

Secretary of State for Transport Grant Shapps, said:

We are taking decisive action to protect the public which means reducing travel for the time being, whilst still ensuring keyworker heroes can get to their jobs to keep this nation running.

For passengers in crucial roles, including essential workers in our emergency services and NHS, alongside people who need to attend medical appointments or care for loved ones, these changes protect the services they rely on.

Our railways are at the heart of this country's transport links, and we continue to work closely with the industry to develop measures that protects operators in these challenging times.

Robert Nisbet, Director of Nations and Regions at the Rail Delivery Group, which represents train operators and Network Rail, said:

At a time of extraordinary national challenge, the measures rail companies are putting in place with government will preserve services so that we can continue to get key workers to where they need to be, deliver food to supermarkets and get fuel to power stations.

This is not a decision we take lightly. However, implementing these measures now will mean that we can continue to operate trains over a prolonged period with fewer railway workers, who like so many others are to be commended for putting the needs of the country first, and whose safety remains front of mind.

We are monitoring demand closely and should it become necessary in the weeks ahead, we will adjust services and timetables to ensure they're being delivered to best effect where they're needed most, in accordance with our plan. We would advise anybody who has to travel to check the time of their train on the National Rail Enquiries website before they set out.

The government has been working together with the operators, freight groups and trade unions to ensure there is a collective focus during this crucial time and to ensure all areas of the industry and its people have the support needed.

Similar measures have been agreed by the Scottish and Welsh governments to ensure this package is implemented across operators in Scotland and Wales. Transport for London has already announced a similar reduction in usual services.

Scottish Transport Secretary Michael Matheson said:

Following discussions with rail industry partners, passenger services will see a reduction as we continue to tackle the coronavirus.

We know that rail provides an important service in moving passengers and goods around the country. However, we will reach a point where travel is reduced to essential journeys only.

Moving to a reduced timetable will not only help ensure some passenger services continue to run, it will enable freight to be prioritised so goods and emergency supplies such as medicines can

be moved around the country.

Constructive dialogue has been held with rail unions with discussion focused on protecting rail staff while they make a significant contribution to keeping passengers and goods moving as much as possible in these challenging circumstances.

Ken Skates AM, Welsh Government Minister for Economy and Transport, said:

In Wales the railway is crucial to ensuring key workers like nurses, police officers and firefighters can get to work and also provides a vital supply line for our power stations and supermarkets.

From Monday, Transport for Wales will be moving to a timetable designed to reflect the reduced number of travellers, whilst also providing transport for those key workers. This action aims to balance the current significantly reduced levels of passenger demand as people follow the guidelines to socially isolate with the need to reduce the number of people required to run the network.

This contingency measure will help to ensure there are enough staff to keep services running over the coming weeks and months.

[Coelleira report and flyer published](#)

Our report on the loss of the long-liner Coelleira on Ve Skerries, a low-lying reef off the west coast of the Shetland Islands, Scotland on 4 August 2019, is now published.

The report contains details of what happened, the subsequent actions taken and recommendations made: [read more](#).

A [safety flyer](#) to the fishing industry summarising the accident and detailing the safety lessons learned, has also been produced.

Press enquiries

Press enquiries during office hours 01932 440015

Press enquiries out of hours 020 7944 4292

PM call with Taoiseach Leo Varadkar: 19 March 2020

The Prime Minister spoke to the Irish Taoiseach Leo Varadkar today about the ongoing coronavirus pandemic.

He set out the UK's science-based approach and the measures the government has already taken to stop the spread of the virus and protect the public.

The leaders agreed on the importance of international coordination to support the global health response and minimise the economic impact on our citizens.

They also resolved to continue working together to strengthen our bilateral relationship and to support the Northern Ireland Assembly at Stormont.

Update on the Withdrawal Agreement Joint Committee

Today (19 March), European Commission Vice-President Maroš Šefčovič and the UK Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster, the Rt Hon Michael Gove, in their capacity as co-chairs of the EU-UK Joint Committee under the Withdrawal Agreement, had a constructive exchange by telephone to prepare the first meeting of the Withdrawal Agreement Joint Committee.

To maintain the planned schedule (30 March) and launch the work of the Joint Committee and the Specialised Committees, they formally agreed on a provisional agenda for the first meeting of the Joint Committee. Given the extraordinary COVID-19 developments, they also agreed to explore alternatives to meeting in person on 30 March, for instance by means of a video conference. As established by the Withdrawal Agreement, they confirmed the Joint Committee discussions will focus on the implementation of the Agreement, not on the future relationship between the UK and EU.

Vice-President Šefčovič and Minister Gove sent their best wishes for a speedy recovery to Michel Barnier and all those affected by the coronavirus pandemic.

PM statement on coronavirus: 19 March 2020

I want to begin by thanking everyone, by thanking you, in the media, and also thanking everyone for the huge efforts that the country is making to comply with the advice that we've been given

And we're asking such a huge amount,

asking students to put their education on hold,

we're asking people not to socialise in the normal way

And already we can see the impact that this is having on the UK economy and on business, on great, great companies

And so it's vital that we in Government stand behind them when what we are asking everyone to do is so crucial for saving literally thousands of lives by defeating this virus

And I am conscious as the days have gone by that people will want to know how long we are expecting them to keep it up

And I wanted to try to say something today about how I see the timescale of this campaign and where we're going and what we need to do

I do think, looking at it all, that we can turn the tide within the next 12 weeks

And I am absolutely confident that we can send coronavirus packing in this country but only if we take the steps, we all take the steps we have outlined,

And that is vital because that is how we are going to reduce the peak

and once we've achieved that, and I think that we will, if take the steps that I have said,

then the scientific progress that we're making will really start to come into play and I wanted to discuss a little bit of that this afternoon with you

because we are rapidly becoming so much better at understanding the genomics at the heart of this virus, a lot of that is going on in this country,

we're getting better at understanding the medicines that may treat and cure it

And today we have put the first British corona patient into a randomised trial for drugs that may treat the disease

UK experts and scientists expect to start trials for the first vaccine within

a month

And above all we are getting better at testing

This crisis is so difficult because the enemy is invisible

And the answer is to remove the cloak of invisibility

And to identify the virus, and to be able to know which of us, is carrying it or who has actually had it and now got over it

And to give you an idea of what is coming down the track

We are in negotiations today to buy a so called antibody test

As simple as a pregnancy test

That could tell whether you have had the disease

And it's early days, but if it works as its proponents claim then we will buy literally hundreds of thousands of these kits as soon as practicable because obviously it has the potential to be a total gamechanger

Because once you know that you have had it, you know that you are likely to be less vulnerable, you're less likely to pass it on, and you can go back to work

And of course by the same token we are massively increasing the testing to see whether you have it now

And ramping up daily testing from 5000 a day to 10,000 to 25,000 and then up to 250,000

And that knowledge of where the virus is, will make a huge difference to our management of the disease and our ability to reduce disruption and economic difficulties

And I wanted to set that out because this is rapidly coming down the track as I say, but it will take time to come on stream

And that is why in the meantime, to get back to a theme that you know I'm going to repeat, it is absolutely vital that we follow the advice that we've been hearing over the last few days,

The announcements we've already made about staying at home if you have the symptoms, if your family has the symptoms,

about avoiding unnecessary contact

Avoiding gatherings where you may pick up the disease

pubs, bars, restaurants

Please, please follow all that advice scrupulously

Work from home if you possibly can

Wash your hands, wash your hands

And it's by this combination of ruthless, determined, collective action and scientific progress that we're already seeing that we will succeed

And I know how difficult it may be, or it may seem right now, but if we do this together we will save, as I say, many many thousands of lives

and to everybody in the UK, business world, everybody who is worried about their jobs, and everybody who faces difficulties because of the advice that we are giving,

I say to business, stand by your employees, stand by your workers because we will stand by you

And you'll be hearing more about that in the course of the next day or so

And that is how, by a mixture of determined, collective action and scientific progress, I have absolutely no doubt that we will turn the tide of this disease and beat it together.