

# ASLEF announces strike – as RMT adds two more days of industrial action

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The union ASLEF has announced that train drivers are going on strike at the end of the month at eight train operators — as RMT adds two more days to its own industrial action.

The ASLEF strike will take place on 30 July, just days after RMT's previously announced 24 hours of action on 27 July. The eight companies affected by the ASLEF action are: Arriva Rail London, Chiltern Railways, Greater Anglia, Great Western, Hull Trains, LNER, Southeastern and West Midlands Trains.

Meanwhile, RMT has now said 40,000 workers will take industrial action over job security, pay and working conditions on 18 and 20 August.

RMT general secretary Mick Lynch said: "The rail industry and the government need to understand that this dispute will not simply vanish.

"They need to get serious about providing an offer on pay which helps deal with the cost-of-living crisis, job security for our members and provides good conditions at work.

“Recent proposals from Network Rail fell well short on pay and on safety around maintenance work.

“And the train operating companies have not even made us a pay offer in recent negotiations.

“Now Grant Shapps has abandoned his forlorn hopes for the job of Prime Minister, he can now get back to his day job and help sort this mess out.

“We remain open for talks, but we will continue our campaign until we reach a negotiated settlement.”

As reported, Network Rail’s offer of an 8% rise across two years was rejected by the union, which said it had got its members better pay deals in the past, and argued the change to working practices to get the money would be “drastic”.

A spokesperson for the Rail Delivery Group, said: “This is a hugely disappointing announcement from the RMT’s leadership which will upset passengers’ summer plans, undermine struggling businesses and upend the industry’s recovery.

“We want to give our people an increase in pay, but asking taxpayers to shoulder more of the burden when they have already contributed £600 per household during the pandemic, or expecting passengers to fund it by paying more for their tickets, isn’t fair or sustainable. Instead, we have a responsibility to make changes to long-outdated working practices so we can adapt to post-COVID travel patterns, bring our railway up to date and give our passengers a more punctual and reliable service.

“Rather than staging counterproductive strikes, we ask the RMT’s leadership to continue talking so we can come to a deal that works for our people, our passengers and for taxpayers.”

## Drivers’ strike

ASLEF says the dispute triggering its action is about pay not being kept in line with the rising cost of living.

Mick Whelan, general secretary, said: “We don’t want to go on strike – strikes are the result of a failure of negotiation – and this union, since I was elected GS in 2011, has only ever been on strike, until this year, for a handful of days.

“We don’t want to inconvenience passengers – not least because our friends and families use public transport, too, and we believe in building trust in the railways in Britain – and we don’t want to lose money by going on strike.

“But we’ve been forced into this position by the train companies, driven by the Tory government. The drivers at the companies where we are striking have had a real terms pay cut over the last three years – since April 2019.

“And these companies are offering us nothing, saying their hands have been tied by the government. That means, in real terms, with inflation running ahead at 9%, 10%, and even 11% this year, according to which index you use, that they are being told to take a real terms pay cut. And that is not acceptable.

“Strike action is, now, the only option available but we are always open to talks if the train companies, or the government, want to talk to us and make a fair and sensible offer.”

Whelan added: “We want an increase in line with the cost of living – we want to be able to buy, in 2022, what we could buy in 2021 – for those members – who were, you will remember, the people who moved key workers and goods around the country during the pandemic – who have not had a pay rise since 2019.

“It’s not unreasonable to ask your employer to make sure you’re not worse off for a third successive year. Especially as the train companies are doing very nicely, thank you, out of Britain’s railways with handsome profits, dividends for shareholders, and big salaries for managers.”

Whelan also said: ‘We don’t think we’re special; we believe no worker in this country should put up with pay cuts year after year just because this government has allowed inflation to rise,” Whelan said.

“Whatever happened to the Tory wish for good, well-paid, jobs? Obviously that’s only for the CEOs, not for the workers doing the job.

“If a train driver doesn’t get a cost of living increase, it won’t mean that a nurse, or care worker, or cleaner will get one. And this isn’t – or shouldn’t be – about setting one worker against another.”

“Wage rises aren’t exacerbating inflation, anyway. Excess profiteering is. The government isn’t asking companies to cut profits or dividend payments to help manage inflation. Wages are chasing prices, not putting them up.”