

Be better informed: Christmas during coronavirus

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Staying informed and planning ahead is critical to ensure train journeys run smoothly, particularly during the lifting of travel restrictions over Christmas.

KeTech specialises in the provision of enhanced, real-time information, improving rail customer experience and ensuring that both passengers and operators are better informed throughout the end-to-end journey.

Katie Welsby is the company's marketing content specialist, and has written a piece for railbusinessdaily.com on how its systems have a valuable role to play, particularly over Christmas.

"This Christmas we have a self-invited, unwanted guest with us over the festive period, one that has already outstayed its welcome. No, it's not the outlaws, it's a visitor from overseas, one who doesn't allow more than 6 guests around the dinner table or your annual Christmas Eve drinks in the pub and goes by the name of COVID-19.

It might be too early to crack open the mulled wine, but that doesn't mean that Christmas isn't on the minds of many. After an extremely hard year, people still have a glimmer of hope that we can still have a

relatively normal festive period, safely. The majority of the UK has been placed in tiers 2 and 3, so what might this mean for travellers during a period with lots of engineering works, reduced services, Christmas shoppers and students travelling home for Christmas?

Students living away from home at university in the UK have been given a travel window to return home for the Christmas break, providing they have adhered to reduced social contact and return a negative test before they travel. The window in which students can travel home is the 3rd-9th December. Students have been urged to only travel by train if absolutely necessary and if they do, to book ahead. Research shows that students often book their rail tickets in advance in order to get a cheaper deal and save money. However, this raises the question of whether this behaviour will be affected through students not wanting to risk losing out on money in case of testing positive and therefore being unable to use the pre-paid ticket. This could result in spontaneous travel and unpredictable busier services.

As the holidays fast approach, engineering works at stations and on-tracks are ramping up ahead of the Christmas closure, a new timetable is on the way and many services may be reduced or replaced by coaches throughout December. A combination of students returning home, passengers who rely on trains for work, Christmas shopping and the lift of travel restrictions across the UK from the 23rd-27th December; allowing bubbling with family and friends from different households, means that trains all over the country, especially in major cities, are likely to be busy during this window. Many Train Operating Companies are permitting booked ticket travel only during this window in an attempt to control overcrowding. Transport secretary, Grant Shapps has advised the public to “think very carefully about their travel plans and consider all options available”, whether that means driving home for Christmas or on a little donkey. The railways are expected to be extremely busy throughout December, placing major pressure on the transport infrastructure, public safety and even mental health.

Anxiety levels have soared for some, throughout the last 8 months and have been a defining feature of this public health emergency. Pre-pandemic, passengers reported anxiety regarding delays, busy services, and navigational confusion along with the unique pressures that travelling with children or disabled passengers carry. Coronavirus (1) is amplifying these feelings of anxiety and Train Operating Companies (TOCs) have a duty to both the passenger and the industry to address these issues and do everything they can to ensure passengers feel safe and informed whilst travelling.

Staying informed and planning ahead is critical to ensure every journey runs smoothly, even more so when you couple already busy trains and stations with Christmas and COVID-19. How can TOCs help the general public to feel safe and empowered when travelling by train? Live and contextual journey information is the answer! Since returning to a tiered system it is important that passengers are aware of different restrictions in each region, with potential differences that could have a direct impact on their journey such as service and station protocol, delay notices, facilities information, one-way systems and sanitising stations. With masses of information from conflicting sources, which information is correct, relevant and up to date?

Imagine being able to plan and schedule in advance or last minute. Think; all the different forms of information to the PIS display on a service, route or fleet to timetable changes and all the way through to engineering notices, future events, last services on Christmas Eve, COVID-19 related information and more. All at the click of a button.

Train Operating Companies that already have KeTech's systems don't have to imagine.

Passengers on these trains will experience a significantly smoother journey, with information that is truly meaningful, relevant and tailored to specific fleets, up-coming stations and routes. Simultaneously, TOC's information teams and train crews will benefit from a smoother festive period due to KeTech's ground-breaking technology, freeing up their time to focus on the stuff that really matters. Here at KeTech, we're playing a huge role towards digitalising the railway and bringing it truly up to speed with the wider transport sector.

There doesn't always have to be a compromise, sometimes you really can have it all. After a year of some of the toughest restrictions most of us have ever faced in our lives, KeTech can give TOC's and passengers freedom. Information about what to expect, knowledge of what's to come and assurance that the knowledge you have is accurate. And that is something we could all do with."

Katie Welsby KeTech's marketing content specialist. [Click here for more details.](#)

(1) Transport Focus, Travelling During COVID-19

<https://d3cez36w5wymxj.cloudfront.net/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/20090237/Travel-during-Covid-19-survey-%E2%80%93-20-November-2020.pdf>

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