

## 17/3 – Coronavirus: The impact on the railways and steps to keep the trains moving

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The government is in talks with rail bosses this week to put emergency measures in place to deal with the problems associated with coronavirus.

Some train operating companies are reporting passenger numbers have dropped by a fifth in recent days. There are talks that some of the UK's rail services could be axed.

A spokesperson for the Rail Delivery Group, which represents train operators and Network Rail, says that train companies are regularly in discussions with the government about a range of things that affect the railway.

The spokesperson said: "The rail industry is monitoring the latest Public Health England guidelines closely and working together on preparations which include planning for a range of different scenarios.

"At the same time, we are ensuring that rail staff are kept aware of the latest advice to maintain good hygiene and keep surfaces clean, particularly in customer facing locations."

**"Safety of passengers, public and workers is priority"**

Network Rail says the safety of passengers, the public and workers is its priority.

It says plans are in place with train operators to keep train services running every day, getting passengers where they need to do.

Among the measures includes more regular cleaning of the surfaces that people touch the most, such as handrails and ticket machines.

Staff are also making sure station toilets are well stocked with soap. Train companies are checking carriages regularly throughout the day and further cleaning is taking place at depots.

Among other steps being taken so far includes East Midlands Railway removing catering options from its onboard service, including no at seat service in First Class or Standard Class trolley service.

Meanwhile ScotRail staff won't be selling tickets on trains to avoid any unnecessary contact to protect their own people and customers.

A ScotRail spokesperson said: "Following the latest government guidance, we will not be able to sell tickets on trains, to avoid any unnecessary risk for our own people and our customers.

"However, customers require a valid ticket to travel on our services and that requirement has not changed.

"Buying a ticket before you board remains the best method of doing that, whether it be online, at a ticket office, or at a ticket machine at our stations."

### **Impacting passenger numbers**

Some train operating companies say passenger numbers have dropped by as much as a fifth as the government advises on all but essential travel.

Among those suffering includes Transport for London, which has said based on government scenarios, it could see a reduction in passenger income of up to £500m.

Simon Kilonback, TfL's Chief Finance Officer, said: "Our best forecast, based on government scenarios, is that the financial impact of the coronavirus could be up to £500m.

"We manage our finances prudently, and have reduced our deficit hugely in recent years. This means that we can manage the impacts on our passenger numbers and finances that are currently envisaged. But, given the nature of the situation, we will be looking to the Government to provide appropriate financial support.

"We continue to follow and communicate Public Health England advice, including that there is no specific risk on public transport. We've also stepped up our cleaning regime from the already very high standards to give our customers and staff further reassurance."

### **National Rail - what is being done**

National Rail says rail companies are working closely with government to take the steps needed to keep the vital services moving, while keeping customer safe.

It has highlighted the work being done:

- Sharing advice and information about how to stay healthy – look for public health posters and other information around stations and on trains.
- Doing more to ensure that surfaces are being kept clean at stations, particularly in busy locations such as handrails and ticket machine touch screens. Trains are also being checked regularly throughout the day in addition to the cleaning which takes place in depots.
- Working with government and trade unions to ensure that it balances the need to keep as many services running to as many places as possible, in line with demand, while at the same time ensuring companies are able to maintain the staffing levels needed to keep services running over coming weeks and months.
- All train companies are suspending the £10 admin fee on refundable train tickets. If you have an Off-peak or Anytime ticket and decide not to travel due to concerns about Coronavirus, you can get a fee-free 100% refund from your ticket retailer. If you have a discounted Advance ticket, all train companies have agreed to waive the £10 admin fee so you can travel at a later date, if you choose. To do this, contact the train company you booked with.

#### **“Working to ensure we can keep Greater Manchester moving”**

While there is a strong sense of working together as a country to overcome the challenges, organisations are also working hard in regions to keep the transport moving.

Stephen Rhodes, Customer Director at Transport for Great Manchester (TfGM) has reassured workers and public transport users.

He said: “Many of us are worried by the threat posed by the Coronavirus and I want to reassure everyone that our primary concern is the safety and well-being of our staff and public transport users.

“While the latest Government guidance advises against the use of public transport unless it’s for essential reasons, we know there will still be people who need tram, train and bus services to get to work, visit loved ones or access essential services.

“This is a dynamic situation which we are continually monitoring alongside all operators and we have already seen a reduction in the number of people using public transport.

“With that number expected to fall further a reduction in frequency of bus, train and tram services is expected in the coming days.

“We will be working closely with our partners to ensure we can keep Greater Manchester moving as best as possible at this challenging time.

“People will of course be worried about the potential spread of the virus and I want to reassure them that we and our colleagues across the transport industry are doing all we can to limit its spread, through robust cleaning regimes and by following the latest advice and information from Public Health England and I’d encourage anyone who does need to travel at this time to check with individual operators ahead of their journey.”