

Majority of rail network open as usual over festive period as £120m upgrade takes place

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The vast majority of Britain's rail network (more than 95%) will be open as usual over Christmas and New Year as around 300 key investment projects are delivered across the country, but passengers are being urged to plan their journeys in advance.

Andrew Haines, Network Rail chief executive, said: "Christmas is an important time for the railway as it gives us the opportunity to get a lot of work done to improve the railway when trains aren't running, and therefore keep disruption for our passengers at a minimum.

"We've worked closely with our train operators to ensure the vast majority of the network is open for business over the festive period so people can travel by rail to spend time with their families and friends. However, some of these key upgrade projects will have an impact on services, so we're asking passengers to plan their journeys before travelling.

"And a huge thank you to the thousands of rail workers who will be working over this period to keep services running and delivering upgrades to improve our railway, therefore bringing more reliable journeys to passengers in the future."

Railway work taking place over Christmas has been planned months, and in some cases years, in advance. Some of the projects being delivered over this Christmas and New Year period include:

- Bridge reconstruction, switches and crossing refurbishment and track maintenance taking place around London Liverpool Street station from December 25 to January 2 to improve reliability and passenger experience. At Stratford and Forest Gate there will be auto transformer commissioning and track maintenance taking place to improve reliability. This means no services will start or terminate at Liverpool Street station. Greater Anglia trains will run to/from Ingatestone and Billericay, whilst buses will run between Ingatestone and Newbury Park and Billericay and Newbury Park. Cambridge and Stansted Express trains will start and terminate at Tottenham Hale.
- On the c2c lines, work is taking place in the Grays area to replace stretches of overhead wire, reducing the likelihood of equipment failures and power outages. Other maintenance is also being carried out. On the Ockendon line, buses will replace trains on certain days between either Chafford Hundred – Pitsea or Grays – Pitsea. The Rainham line will also not run on some days, so there will be rail replacement between Upminster – Grays.
- Resignalling and track work to improve safety and reliability will take place at Clapham Junction and Balham from Sunday 25 December to Monday 2 January, meaning there will be no Southern or Gatwick Express trains to or from London Victoria during this period. Most Southern trains will be diverted to run to and from London Bridge instead. Replacement buses will run between Clapham Junction and East Croydon. Gatwick Express trains will not operate, but frequent alternative Southern or Thameslink trains are available for travel between Gatwick Airport and London Bridge.
- The final phase of the £700m digital signalling programme at Birmingham New Street to enable faster, more reliable journeys for passengers will be completed when trains aren't running on December 25 & 26.
- Long-distance services to Manchester Piccadilly, Birmingham New Street, Liverpool Lime Street, Birmingham International/Blackpool North/Scotland and Glasgow Central will run to a reduced timetable from London Euston between Saturday 24 and Friday 30 December as track renewals at Harlesden, platform work at Milton Keynes Central and bridge work at Camden and Wolverton take place to improve train performance.
- Signal and track renewals near Lewisham station to improve safety and performance will take place from Saturday 24 December to Monday 2 January. Cannon Street station will be closed on 24 December and some services will start/terminate at London Bridge. Lewisham station will be closed and there will be no trains between New Cross, St Johns and Dartford via Bexleyheath. A replacement bus service will be in operation along the line and Dartford services will run via Greenwich and Sidcup.
- Bridge strengthening work at Queenstown Road will mean a reduced suburban service from London Waterloo between Tuesday 27 December and Sunday 1 January. Buses will replace trains between Wimbledon and Clapham Junction from Tuesday 27 December and Monday 2 January as resignalling work to improve safety and reliability takes place at Earlsfield.

Passengers can find out how their journeys will be affected with their train operator, via National Rail Enquiries, or by following #ChristmasRailWorks on Twitter.