

# More room for passengers as rail industry 'boosts timetable to boost confidence' of those returning to school and work

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Rail companies are adding services to timetables as schools reopen and people increasingly return to workplaces.

From Monday 7<sup>th</sup> September, services will step up to close to pre-pandemic levels, as part of the introduction of a new timetable designed to build on the gains in punctuality performance seen during the lockdown period. Since April, the proportion of trains arriving on time to the minute remains at an all-time high of 80-90% and within five to ten minutes, routinely above 95%.

As more services are gradually introduced, some existing train times will change from Sunday 6<sup>th</sup> September, including on routes into cities. People planning to travel in September are therefore encouraged to check their journeys on their train operator's website, National Rail Enquiries or other travel planning apps.

In designing the new timetable, train operators have worked closely with local schools and education providers to identify potentially busy stations or trains and certain parts of routes that will experience higher demand for travel by school children when they go back. Where possible in these areas, train operators will run more frequent services or add extra carriages to create more room and staff will be on hand to explain to older children the rules on wearing a face covering and maintaining social distancing.

Train operators are also supporting schools in advising parents and school children how to use the network safely, including travelling at quieter times and signing up for personalised alerts through National Rail's 'alert me' app, which flags busy trains. This supports 100,000 rail passengers with more than 1 million personalised messages a month.

As part of the industry's Safer Travel Pledge, rail companies have boosted cleaning on trains and at stations, are providing soap and sanitiser, and have set out clear instructions to maintain social distancing. To keep themselves and others safe, passengers must wear a face covering on trains and at stations unless they are exempt.

Schools in England and Wales are opening in early September, allowing more people with childcare responsibilities to return to workplaces. ScotRail increased services in early August ahead of Scottish schools opening in mid-August, but non-essential workers in Scotland are still advised to work from home.

Jacqueline Starr, Chief Operating Officer at the Rail Delivery Group, representing train operators and Network Rail, said: "We want people to feel confident taking the train as they get back to school and adding services back into the timetable where they're most needed will support that.

"Rail companies are doing everything they can to ensure people start the term with a smooth journey, including boosting cleaning, providing sanitiser at stations and offering better information about busy services. Some train times will change so we're asking people to check before they travel and plan their journeys for quieter times if possible."

Reducing the timetable during the pandemic and then increasing in phases has led to improved performance. Operators and Network Rail are learning the lessons from this, including the real-world effects of 'wear and tear' on infrastructure, the effect of knock on delays on intensely used routes and the time taken at stations. The railway plans to add extra services to the timetable when they are confident this will not affect punctuality long term. More punctual trains will help to manage footfall at stations and make social distancing easier.

*Photo credit: GettyImages*

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