

National Rail to help passengers make more informed decisions when travelling thanks to latest technology

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Rail passengers returning to the train over coming months will be able to feel even more in control of their journeys with the launch of a new feature that will send them the transport options to help them complete the last leg of their journey with ease.

The *Alert Me by Messenger* technology, which was announced by Transport Secretary Grant Shapps in May 2020, tells rail users how disruption and crowding may affect their journey, providing alternative routes and helping people maintain social distancing when they need to travel. This service will also be made available to customers via WhatsApp later this spring and offered by most train companies by the end of the year.

The new feature, which has been developed by British company Zipabout, is the first of its kind to be made available nationwide and will provide train users throughout Britain with weather sensitive transport options to help them complete their journey after taking the train. Using what3words in addition to other location feeds, passengers will receive customised travel information that includes travel duration and all

modes available. Micro-mobility – including Voi's e-scooters – will be listed alongside all other passenger transport options, including bus, bike, and walking. Where e-scooters are available passengers will be able to book their e-scooter from their seat and collect it from the scooter hire on arrival.

Since May 2020, National Rail has sent over 6.7m personalised journey updates to passengers as part of our safer travel pledge during the pandemic. The updates include busyness alerts that are based on unique forecast demand data, disruption information, and alternative travel routes.

Users can be safe in the knowledge that they will be provided with the most up to date information about their journey, in a way that's most convenient to them. And what's more, the information provided will cover any delays greater than 10% of the total journey time, so they'll know straight away if they need to adjust their plans or will be eligible for compensation.

Alert Me by Messenger is just one of a number of measures the rail industry has introduced whilst passengers have been away, to make journeys better for when they come back. Around £6bn has been invested in the improvements to the network since the pandemic started.

Since the first national lockdown (16th March 2020) rail companies have:

- Refunded over £540m to customers whose travel plans changed
- Designed timetables to meet passenger demand and maximise services where necessary at the busiest stations and times of day to make extra room to help with social distancing
- Worked with the British Transport Police to further improve face covering compliance
- Installed hand sanitiser points in over 300 stations
- Been using powerful anti-viral cleaning products and cleaning trains and stations more frequently, in addition to ventilation systems fitted on most trains, which refresh air in the carriage every six minutes

Robert Nisbet, Director of Nations and Regions at the Rail Delivery Group, the company that manages National Rail on behalf of the rail industry said: "As we begin to come out of lockdown we're doing more to help people make their door-to-door journeys with ease, which is why we've worked with Zipabout and government to provide passengers with a choice of sustainable travel options to help them complete the last mile of their journey when they travel by train."

"As part of our safer travel pledge, we want to help passengers travel with confidence which is why the industry has been developing innovative technology to help them travel at quieter times and find alternative routes if their chosen train is delayed or predicted to be busy."

Alex Froom, Co-founder and CEO, Zipabout, said: "We're delighted to be working with the rail industry to help passengers travel easily and safely. Zipabout is providing the platform and vision that means all transport modes and providers, including micro-mobility companies, can be fully integrated into the public transport system both in the UK and around the world."

To tackle the spread of Coronavirus, people should follow government guidance and keep their journeys to a minimum. Anyone planning to travel should plan ahead, wear a face covering unless exempt, wash their hands before and after their journey and socially distance where possible.

Transport Secretary Grant Shapps said: “This new technology will allow passengers to benefit from a personalised information service in the palm of their hand, helping them avoid disruption, travel safely and enjoy seamless journeys. As we build back better from this pandemic, smoother and safer journeys will help passengers travel with confidence and consider new ways to complete their journey.”

Anthony Smith, chief executive of the independent watchdog Transport Focus, said: “As more people return to public transport in the coming weeks, reliable information will be vital to help passengers plan, avoid busier services and maintain social distancing. In our research passengers found the *Alert Me by Messenger* service simple and easy to use and valued the ability to adjust their plans if they knew about disruption or potential crowding on services.”

For more information visit nationalrail.co.uk/alertme

Photo credit: Rail Delivery Group