

Plan to keep train customers moving during cold snap

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Network Rail frontline teams are prepared to keep train customers on the move through snow and ice.

Between London Euston and Carlisle, via the Chilterns, West Midlands and North West, there are six snow ploughs and eight de-icing trains on standby.

Hundreds of staff armed with specialist ice-busting kit are ready to defrost frozen points and signals, and tackle any other weather-related issues.

Phil James, head of operations for Network Rail, said: "Careful planning for the winter months means we have measures in place to help keep trains and passengers moving during cold snaps.

"Our fleet of trains and dedicated teams will help clear ice and snow and deal with rail issues should they arise.

"To be prepared, I would urge passengers to always plan their journeys and check before they travel for the latest information."

Passengers can plan and check their journeys at www.nationalrail.co.uk.

The railway is no different from other modes of transport in being affected by winter weather, including

snow and ice.

Cold weather can impact on rail services in a number of ways, including:

- causing points and mechanical signals to freeze
- snow and ice blocking points, limiting the ability for trains to use certain routes
- ice forming on overhead power lines, affecting power supplies
- falling snow and sleet can reduce drivers' visibility of lineside signs and signals, meaning trains have to travel more slowly.

Network Rail uses a range of tools to deal with cold weather, including:

Weather forecasts: Our weather service provider, MetDesk, provides Network Rail with a specialist forecast on the specific conditions which could affect the tracks and the probability of ice forming on third rails.

Points heaters: Gas and electric heaters prevent points freezing. They are automatically activated when rail temperatures fall below a certain level. During extreme conditions, thousands of staff work night and day to check hundreds of points at key junctions to prevent them freezing.

Snow fences: In certain key locations prone to drifts, snow fences are installed to prevent snow drifting onto the tracks.

Snow/ice clearing: A variety of equipment is available to clear snow when it reaches a depth of six inches or more. These include miniature snow ploughs which fit on the front of trains for smaller volumes of snow. Specialist drift ploughs are used to clear drifts of greater depths.

Anti-icing spray: A fleet of specialist anti-icing trains spray heated anti-freeze onto the third rail. Train operators will also run empty passenger trains, or 'ghost trains,' throughout the night to help prevent ice building up. Some train operators also have de-icing equipment attached to their trains to cover an even larger area.

Emergency timetables: Contingency plans for severe disruption are agreed in advance with train operators and can be activated and communicated to passengers when disruption is likely.

Icicle patrols: Network Rail staff patrol tunnels and under-bridges when the mercury plummets to ensure icicles do not cause obstruction to trains or to overhead power lines.