

PM introduces new legislation to keep Britain moving during strikes

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It's been a busy day for Liz Truss. This afternoon saw her dramatic resignation ([read more here](#)), but it had already been a hectic morning.

Today also saw the first steps of her controversial new legislation, the [Transport Strikes \(Minimum Service Levels\) Bill](#), having its first hearing.

Although Ms Truss' controversial premiership has not garnered many positive reactions from the nation, following months of strikes across the transport network, many passengers will be pleased to hear that the Prime Minister has pressed ahead with the legal moves required to introduce the bill, which mandates legal minimum service levels in case of industrial action.

A new PM is set to be in place by the end of the week following a snap leadership election, and the bill should remain in action, unless they see fit to pause or change the plans.

The law is designed to ensure that even during the most disruptive strikes, a certain level of services will still continue to run. The minimum service levels that the bill sets out are:

- The new legislation means that a certain number of services must run during a strike. If this is not delivered, the unions lose any legal protection from damages.
- Employers will specify the workforce required to meet an adequate service level during strikes and unions must take reasonable steps to ensure an appropriate number of specified workers still work on strike days
- Specified workers who still take strike action will lose their protection from automatic unfair dismissal

Relevant employers and unions are to agree a minimum service level to continue running during all strikes over a three-month period. If such a level cannot be agreed, an independent arbitrator – the Central Arbitration Committee – will determine the minimum number of services.

The controversial bill is undertaking its first reading today, following months of industrial action by railway workers in disputes over pay, jobs and conditions. The legislation, expected to come into force on transport services across the country in 2023, follows similar rules already in place in countries across Europe, including France and Spain.

Economists predicted that the first wave of rail strikes in summer cost the economy almost £100 million – with the country's finances on their knees, it is no surprise that the government are keen to avoid this happening in the future.

Prime Minister Liz Truss said: “Hardworking people and businesses should not be held to ransom by strike action which has repeatedly crippled our transport network this year.

“This legislation delivers on our 2019 manifesto and will not only limit the unions’ ability to paralyse our economy, but will ensure passengers across the country can rightly continue to get to work, school or hospital.”

Whilst there is no doubt that it is the rail sector that has forced the Prime Minister's hand on this bill, it sets out the legal framework to allow minimum service levels to be set across the entire transport sector.

Transport Secretary Anne-Marie Trevelyan said: “Strikes have affected nearly all of us over this last year – whether that means losing out on a day's pay at work, having to close your business, missing vital medical appointments or stopping our children from getting to school.

“It is vital that public transport users have some continuity of service to keep Britain moving and growing. This legislation will give everyone the certainty they need to carry on with their daily lives.”

The union view

Whilst the bill may be seen as a positive by some, the unions are clearly not quite so thrilled.

RMT general secretary Mick Lynch said: “This cynical piece of legislation outlaws effective legal industrial action on our railways.

“It is an autocratic move from an increasingly despotic Prime Minister trying to cling on to her fledging

premiership.

“All democrats whether inside or outside parliament must oppose this draconian attempt to clamp down on the fundamental human right to strike.

“RMT and the entire trade union movement will not accept unjust anti union laws and I call upon all workers in Britain to mount the fiercest civil resistance possible, in the proud traditions of the chartists and suffragettes.”

ASLEF, the train drivers’ trade union, which represents 96% of the train drivers in England, Scotland, and Wales, says the government’s proposed minimum service levels won’t work.

Mick Whelan, ASLEF general secretary, said: “We know that this Tory government – in disarray as it is after crashing the economy – is determined to drive down wages and do everything it can to prevent ordinary, decent, hard-working people protecting their pensions, their terms & conditions at work, and their pay. That’s why Liz Truss, although clearly a busted flush, is determined to try to make industrial action ineffective.

“The trouble is that Truss doesn’t understand the way the railway works. The train companies don’t want to run minimum service levels because they know it’s a stupid idea. What happens when 100% of passengers try to get on 40% minimum service level trains? And the rolling stock will, next day, be in the wrong place. Which will mess up the normal timetable.

“The government claims that similar legislation exists in other European countries, such as Germany, France, Italy, and Spain. Yes, it does. But what the government doesn’t know – or doesn’t choose to say – is that it is not enforced. Because they know it doesn’t work.

“The lack of full establishments – most of the companies don’t have enough drivers to run the services they promise passengers they will provide – will be another problem.

“And, of course, every individual, in our free society, has the right not to cross a picket line and no new law can – or should – force people to break their conscience.

“The reality, as everyone in the rail industry knows, is that this proposed Bill, if passed into law, will only lead to industrial strife lasting longer.”

Louise Haigh MP, Labour’s Shadow Transport Secretary isn’t sold either. She said: “This Prime Minister crashed the economy and hiked up mortgage rates for millions of working people, and now she is attempting to undermine their right to negotiate better pay and conditions.

“These unworkable plans are desperate attempt from the Tories to distract from the chaos engulfing their government. “Instead of attacking working people, ministers should finally do the job of a responsible government, get around the table and find a resolution to this dispute.”