

# Rail Delivery Group says more COVID timetable changes could be on the way

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The Rail Delivery Group (RDG) is reminding people that many of the train operators it represents are having to make timetable adjustments to counter the effects of COVID-19 — and says more will be introducing such measures in the coming fortnight.

It says temporary timetables will focus on known peak travel times to provide trains for key workers, school pupils and those who cannot work from home. The new timetables will also ensure key freight services can continue to move vital goods such as medicines and food around the country.

The temporary changes are for the most part being triggered by the highly-contagious Omicron variant of COVID-19 — which is resulting in both a drop in demand for trains as well as increasing staff absence.

The hope is the changes will result in less short-notice cancellations.

More carriages are also being added to services where possible to assist social distancing. Cleaning measures are in place, and the 'Book with Confidence' programme means customers are able to cancel up to the evening before travel without facing a fee.

Passengers can also use their ticket on another train if the service they have booked is cancelled.

Susie Homan, director of people, operations and railway strategy at the Rail Delivery Group, which represents train operators and Network Rail, said: “The temporary timetables that rail companies are putting in place, with government support, will help ensure more reliable services with fewer short notice cancellations so that we can continue to get people and goods to where they need to be.

“The government has supported the railway with over £15 billion since the start of the pandemic and it makes sense to better match the number of trains that are running with the number of people travelling so that the industry gets the most out of every taxpayer pound and doesn’t take more than its fair share of public money.

“We would advise anyone travelling to check online before they set out on their journey or to sign up for automatic alerts from National Rail Alert Me.”

Anthony Smith, chief executive of the independent watchdog Transport Focus, said: “Amending timetables is a pragmatic response to rising staff illness if it prevents chaotic last-minute cancellations. But services must still meet the needs of those who have to travel, especially key sector workers.

“Operators must protect first and last services, provide enough space to keep passengers at a safe distance from each other and flexibility so that tickets can be used on alternative routes or times. Passengers will want to see a reliable timetable and accurate information so they can plan their journey with confidence.”