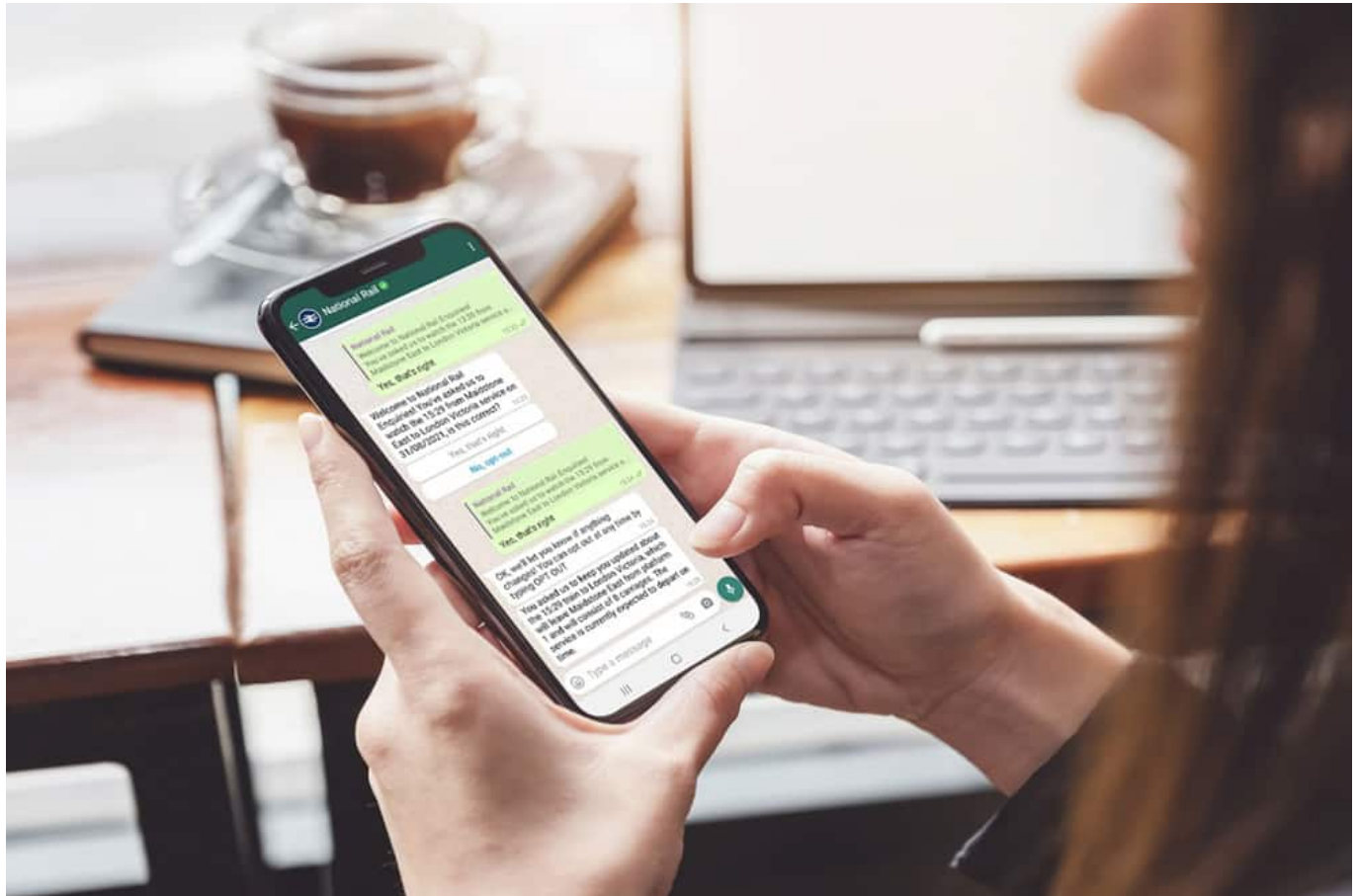


# Rail industry helps commuters return after the summer holiday with launch of new WhatsApp service

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UK rail passengers returning after the summer holidays can now access customised real-time travel information for their journeys through WhatsApp, the most popular private communications service in the world.

The launch of '*Alert me by WhatsApp*' by National Rail Enquiries marks a step-change in passenger communications by delivering personalised journey information directly through the channels people use the most.

Rail passengers can now opt-in to receive personalised journey information generated using revolutionary AI-based data technology developed by British company Zipabout and sent proactively via WhatsApp. Updates include real-time details of delays, disruption and alternative travel routes.

Rail passengers can access the new service by planning their journey using the National Rail Enquiries website and clicking 'Keep me updated by WhatsApp'. National Rail has sent almost 3m million

personalised journey updates to passengers as part of its 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.

Anyone using the *Alert Me* service between now and October can opt-in to receive rewards such as a free cup of coffee from train station retailers such as Upper Crust during their journey, as part of a retail pilot that rewards customers for travelling by train or taking an alternative service if their chosen train is predicted to be busy.

*Alert Me by Whatsapp* is just one of a number of measures the rail industry has implemented to support passengers as they return to work and education after the summer holidays. From the introduction of the Flexi Season ticket, which gives commuters the freedom and flexibility to divide their time between home and the office, to additional cleaning and ventilation on trains as part of its Safer Travel Pledge.

Jacqueline Starr, Chief Executive of the Rail Delivery Group (RDG), the company that manages National Rail on behalf of the rail industry, said: "As people working from home begin commuting to their place of work again, we want to ensure they're able to travel with confidence, which is why we are providing passengers access to personalised journey information via the channels they use the most. Customers who use the *National Rail Alert Me* service and travel frequently, or decide to take a less busy train if their chosen service is predicted to be busy, could get themselves a free drink or snack as part of a Retail Pilot that we're exploring as one of the ways to incentivise people back to rail."

Rail Minister Chris Heaton Harris said: "This is a brilliant new way of making rail journeys even easier. By sending helpful updates through the apps people already use, passengers can get the information they need quickly, simply and wherever they are on the rail network."

Dan Lenan, Director of Partnerships at WhatsApp, said: "WhatsApp is already used by millions of people around the world to connect with businesses, to ask questions and order a product or service. This partnership truly leverages the power of messaging on WhatsApp to connect consumers to their specific journey. The service makes great use of the features available to businesses on the WhatsApp API, and is a great example of the potential of messaging via an automated 1:1 channel."

Alex Froom, Chief Executive of Zipabout, said: "WhatsApp is the most popular app in the UK and presents a great opportunity for the rail industry to engage with a huge audience. Alert Me by WhatsApp is not a chatbot and is the first instance of anyone using the app to share personalised updates in real-time on their preferred, pre-existing communication channels."

*Photo credit: Rail Delivery Group*