

Rail industry hits back at media reports that Christmas works should not go ahead

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The Railway Industry Association (RIA), the trade body for UK rail suppliers, has hit back at recent reports that essential upgrades to the railways over Christmas should not go ahead.

It comes as a surge in travel is expected over the five-day Christmas period as families form festive bubbles during a temporary easing of coronavirus restrictions.

The UK Government has agreed a temporary relaxation of measures which allows three households to mix in a bubble from December 23 to 27.

However there are concerns that the surge is expected at a time when Network Rail will be worked at dozens of locations to carry out vital projects to renew key pieces of rail infrastructure, timed to take place at a time that would normally be quieter on the railways.

Darren Caplan, Chief Executive of the Railway Industry Association (RIA), said: "The work that rail suppliers deliver over the Christmas period is essential to ensuring our railways continue to run effectively and reliably. Despite recent reports suggesting this work is unnecessary, the vast majority of the rail network,

around 95%, will be unaffected by these engineering projects, and the work that does take place is vital to keeping the network moving for the future.

“The claim that this work should have been brought forward fails to recognise that a significant amount of work has been, with over £550m of work being undertaken over the first lockdown by Network Rail and its supply chain – that’s nearly a quarter of the entire country’s capital investment activity at the time. And it can often take time to plan and get the necessary permissions to get access to railway works, meaning all opportunities to deliver these vital schemes need to be taken when they can be.

“We should all be grateful that this Christmas, whilst we are spending time with our families, railway workers across the country will be working hard, as they have done through this whole challenging year. The rail supply sector, working in particular with Network Rail, will ensure our network continues to run for the benefit of communities in all parts of the UK.”

Photo credit: Network Rail

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