

Rail minister announces launch of the minimum service level consultation for rail

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The rail minister has announced the launch of a 12-week consultation on setting minimum service levels for passenger rail.

In a release, Huw Merriman said: “Our railways play an important role in connecting communities and keeping the economy moving. Whether it’s traveling to a medical appointment, school, work or to visit a relative, for many, our railways are a lifeline.

“Over the last year, passengers, through no fault of their own, have been subject to severe disruption on the railways due to sustained industrial action. This has had a nationwide impact. It has stopped key workers getting to work, children going to school, and restricted people’s access to essential services such as hospital care.

“The government recognises the importance of workers’ ability to take strike action, and this will be protected. Recent industrial action, though, has demonstrated how strikes disproportionately impact people from accessing the services they require.”

The Strikes (Minimum Service Levels) Bill, which is currently before Parliament, will set a legislative framework to balance workers' ability to strike with the public's ability to get to work and access vital services.

The [consultation on setting minimum service levels for passenger rail has opened](#) and will run for 12 weeks from 20 February to 15 May.

Huw added: "The department is seeking views from the public, from the rail sector, trade unions and wider industries to develop a more detailed understanding of the impact of strike activity and how minimum service levels might be applied for passenger rail to reduce the disruptions caused by strikes.

"Subject to the outcome of the consultation, and the Strikes (Minimum Service Levels) Bill receiving Royal Assent, minimum service levels for passenger rail would then be delivered through regulations."

Speaking when the bill was first announced last month, RMT general secretary Mick Lynch, said: "This is an attack on human rights and civil liberties which we will oppose in the courts, Parliament and the workplace.

"One of the most important things in any democratic society is to have free trade unions.

"This law could make effective strike action illegal, and workers may be sacked for exercising their right to withdraw their labour.

"The only reason this draconian legislation is being introduced is because the government have lost the argument and want to punish workers for having the temerity to demand decent pay and working conditions.

"The government's own impact assessment of minimum service levels shows it wouldn't work. They would be better off coming to a negotiated settlement with unions through dialogue."

Photo credit: Network Rail