

## 23/3 Rail operators are united to protect train services and staff as changes come into force

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Today sees the start of a plan by the government and the UK rail industry that will train services reduced to help tackle the spread of COVID-19.

Operators have vowed to continue to run core services ensuring people remain able to get to work, can travel to access medical appointments and the flow of goods continue across the UK.

Will Rogers, Managing Director of East Midlands Railway, said: "This is an unprecedented global issue and it is important the railway continues to play its vital role in helping key workers continue to travel safely and reliably.

"Our reduced timetable reflects the significant reduction in demand and reduces the requirements on front line staff but, in partnership with neighbouring operators, does maintain rail services for all of the stations we serve and provides a reliable and carefully planned service.

"I would also like to recognise the extraordinary hard work and dedication of everyone here at EMR, who alongside many other frontline workers, are working around the clock to keep the country moving during

these challenging times.”

The reduction across England, Scotland and Wales, is part of a scheme agreed between the rail industry and the Government, to reflect reduced demand and ensure vital train services for key workers can continue to run throughout a prolonged coronavirus outbreak.

David Simpson, ScotRail Operations Director, said: “We are facing an unprecedented challenge on Scotland’s Railway and the revised timetable will help to provide a critical service for the key workers across the country.

“Our own people are absolutely committed and are working flat out on the frontline to help keep the country moving, while also keeping themselves and customers safe.

“The railway has an important role to play during this crisis and we will work closely with the Scottish Government to do all we can as the situation develops.”

The revised timetables will remain in place until further notice and will be kept under constant review. This will ensure it continues to match the demand of passengers who still need to travel as well as the ability of rail staff to deliver the services and rail infrastructure itself.

As well as a vital artery for Britain, the railway is crucial to ensuring that key workers like nurses, police officers and firefighters can get to work.

Steve White, Chief Operating Officer at Govia Thameslink Railway, said: “This is an unprecedented situation for everyone and we – together with the rest of the rail industry – are doing our utmost to keep an essential service running for key workers who are doing such vital jobs.

“The message from the Government is clear – travel only if you have to. The changes we are making should allow us to sustain a timetable for those who absolutely have to travel such as doctors, nurses and the emergency services. We want to thanks them and our own staff, who are working so hard to keep trains running.”

For West Midlands Railway the reduced timetable from today will equate to just over half the usual weekday level of service across its network.

Julian Edwards, Managing Director of West Midlands Railway, said: “Revising our timetable is the most effective way of making sure we continue to run a regular, reliable service to keep people moving in these exceptional circumstances.

“Like every employer in the country we have a number of our staff currently in self-isolation and attempting to continue with our regular timetable would be impossible.

“Although demand for rail travel has dropped, we know there are many thousands of people who need to keep moving, including NHS workers and others involved in delivering essential public services. That is why our front-line staff will continue coming to work in order to deliver this timetable and help keep the

country moving.”

Southeastern says all of its stations will remain open and on some routes passengers may need to change trains to complete their journeys.

Managing Director David Statham is urging people to only travel if the journey is absolutely essential. He said: “Like many of us, Southeastern train crew and teams can’t work from home, and some of them are also dealing with personal or family issues related to coronavirus.

“We’re grateful to our passengers for their understanding as we take steps to ensure that vital train services for key workers can keep running.”

Meanwhile Transport for Wales says its reduced timetable has been designed to be as resilient as possible.

A spokesperson said: “At Transport for Wales our primary focus is keeping our colleagues and customers safe. In line with the rest of the UK rail industry, and based on advice from public health bodies, we have taken the difficult decision to reduce weekday passenger services moving forward.

“This timetable has been designed to be as resilient as possible, whilst ensuring we balance a reduction in demand, availability of our people and the need to support key workers such as health, food retailers and delivery teams.

“This decision takes into account the latest public health guidance to protect customers and colleagues and fewer people using our services during this unprecedented period. Like everyone, our colleagues and their families will be feeling the impact of the pandemic and we thank all our customers for their patience and understanding.

“We will continue to prioritise peak periods in order to ensure we do not create overly busy traveling conditions and will be monitoring the situation on a daily basis to ensure people that need to travel during the period can still travel when absolutely necessary.”

For anyone who does need to travel, they are being urged to check with the operating company to see the revised timetables.

Robert Nisbet, Director of Nations and Regions at the Rail Delivery Group, which represents train operators and Network Rail, said: “At a time of extraordinary national challenge, the measures rail companies are putting in place with the government will preserve services so that we can continue to get key workers to where they need to be, deliver food to supermarkets and get fuel to power stations.

“This is not a decision we take lightly, however implementing these measures now will mean that we can continue to operate trains over a prolonged period with fewer railway workers, who like so many others are to be commended for putting the needs of the country first, and whose safety remains front of mind.

“We are monitoring demand closely and should it become necessary in the weeks ahead, we will adjust services and timetables to ensure they’re being delivered to best effect where they’re needed most, in

accordance with our plan. We would advise anybody who has to travel to check the time of their train on the National Rail Enquiries website before they set out.”

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