

## 20/3 – Reduced rail timetable agreed to protect train services and staff

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- Government and rail operators across the UK agree reductions in service levels following reduced passenger demand as people change their travel patterns to help tackle spread of COVID-19
- Move will keep core services running to ensure those who need to get to work, including emergency services and NHS can continue to do so
- Joint decision also enables important freight services to continue, ensuring sector can support movement of goods and supplies while passenger services continue for those most at need

The government and the UK rail industry have agreed a plan that will see a gradual reduction in train services across the country to reflect lower passenger demand, while keeping vital rail services running.

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

The move reflects a decrease in passenger demand as people stop all unnecessary travel and decrease non-essential social contact in line with government advice to help stop the spread of the virus. Running reduced services will also help protect the welfare of frontline railway staff essential for day-to-day operations.

Rail services will be reduced from Monday 23rd March and kept under review, with operators providing clear communications to ensure passengers who need to travel are well-informed of the changes.

There will be a gradual move towards introducing reduced service levels on wide parts of the network over the longer term. To minimise disruption, services will be reduced progressively across the network over the coming days.

The plan will also ensure key freight services can continue to move around the country, allowing vital goods to continue to be shipped where needed.

Secretary of State for Transport Grant Shapps, said: “We are taking decisive action to protect the public which means reducing travel for the time being, whilst still ensuring keyworker heroes can get to their jobs to keep this nation running.

“For passengers in crucial roles, including essential workers in our emergency services and NHS, alongside people who need to attend medical appointments or care for loved ones, these changes protect the services they rely on.

“Our railways are at the heart of this country’s transport links, and we continue to work closely with the industry to develop measures that protects operators in these challenging times.”

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 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.”

The government has been working together with the operators, freight groups and trade unions to ensure there is a collective focus during this crucial time and to ensure all areas of the industry and its people have the support needed.

Similar measures have been agreed by the Scottish and Welsh governments to ensure this package is implemented across operators in Scotland and Wales. Transport for London has already announced a similar reduction in usual services.

Scottish Transport Secretary Michael Matheson said: “Following discussions with rail industry partners, passenger services will see a reduction as we continue to tackle the coronavirus.

“We know that rail provides an important service in moving passengers and goods around the country. However, we will reach a point where travel is reduced to essential journeys only.

“Moving to a reduced timetable will not only help ensure some passenger services continue to run, it will enable freight to be prioritised so goods and emergency supplies such as medicines can be moved around the country.

“Constructive dialogue has been held with rail unions with discussion focused on protecting rail staff while they make a significant contribution to keeping passengers and goods moving as much as possible in these challenging circumstances.”

Ken Skates AM, Welsh Government Minister for Economy and Transport, said: “In Wales the railway is crucial to ensuring key workers like nurses, police officers and firefighters can get to work and also provides a vital supply line for our power stations and supermarkets.

“From Monday, Transport for Wales will be moving to a timetable designed to reflect the reduced number of travellers, whilst also providing transport for those key workers. This action aims to balance the current significantly reduced levels of passenger demand as people follow the guidelines to socially isolate with the need to reduce the number of people required to run the network.

“This contingency measure will help to ensure there are enough staff to keep services running over the coming weeks and months.”

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