

RMT announce three days of national strike action across the railway network

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Rail union RMT launch three days of national strike action across the railway network involving more than 50,000 railway workers, in the biggest dispute on the network since 1989.

The union says it will shut down the country's railway network on 21st, 23rd and 25th June, due to the inability of the rail employers to come to a negotiated settlement with RMT.

In response, Network Rail's chief executive Andrew Haines says they will keep talking to the unions and "through common sense on both sides, we hope to find a solution and avoid the damage that strike action would cause all involved".

Announcing the strike action, RMT says Network Rail and the train operating companies have subjected their staff to multiyear pay freezes and plan to cut thousands of jobs which will make the railways unsafe.

Despite intense talks with the rail bosses, RMT has not been able to secure a pay proposal nor a guarantee of no compulsory redundancies.

In a separate dispute over pensions and job losses, London Underground RMT members will take strike action on June 21st.

RMT general secretary Mick Lynch said: “Railway workers have been treated appallingly and despite our best efforts in negotiations, the rail industry with the support of the government has failed to take their concerns seriously.

“We have a cost-of-living crisis, and it is unacceptable for railway workers to either lose their jobs or face another year of a pay freeze when inflation is at 11.1pc and rising.

“Our union will now embark on a sustained campaign of industrial action which will shut down the railway system.

“Rail companies are making at least £500m a year in profits, whilst fat cat rail bosses have been paid millions during the Covid-19 pandemic.

“This unfairness is fuelling our members anger and their determination to win a fair settlement.

“RMT is open to meaningful negotiations with rail bosses and ministers, but they will need to come up with new proposals to prevent months of disruption on our railways.”

Network Rail says if it goes ahead, strike action would cost the organisation around £30 million each day, undermining its ability to afford pay increases.

Andrew Haines, Network Rail’s chief executive, said: “We continue to meet with our trades unions to discuss their pay concerns and we’re doing everything we can to avoid strike action on the railway. We know that the cost of living has increased and we want to give our people a pay rise, but the RMT must recognise we are a public body and any pay increase has to be affordable for taxpayers and passengers.

“Travel habits have changed forever and the railway must change as well. We cannot expect to take more than our fair share of public funds, and so we must modernise our industry to put it on a sound financial footing for the future. Failure to modernise will only lead to industry decline and more job losses in the long run.

“There are a few weeks until the first strike is planned. We will use this time to keep talking to our unions and, through compromise and common sense on both sides, we hope to find a solution and avoid the damage that strike action would cause all involved.”

The rail industry is urging the RMT leadership to continue discussions and call off strike action. In a release the Rail Delivery Group says reform is necessary to secure a long-term future for the railway, which has received over £16bn since the beginning of the pandemic to keep services running. This sum – equating to nearly £600 per household – means the industry is taking more than its fair share from other public services.

With passenger numbers only at around 75% of pre pandemic levels, it is not sustainable to expect

increased levels of funding indefinitely. Industry needs to change both to become more efficient, and to bring it up to date with how people work and travel today so that it can ultimately attract more passengers back.

Rail Delivery Group Chair Steve Montgomery, said: “Today’s announcement is disappointing. We urge the RMT’s leadership to call off needless and damaging strikes and continue to work with us to ensure a fair deal for our people and for the taxpayer while securing the long-term future of the railways.

“No one wins in the event of a strike. Staff lose pay, the industry loses vital revenue making it harder to afford pay increases, and passengers and businesses are disrupted.

“While we will keep as many services running as possible, sadly if this action goes ahead, significant disruption will be inevitable. We therefore urge passengers to plan their journeys carefully and find alternative ways to travel during the strike period where possible.”

The industry will now work together to finalise its timetable for strike days which will be announced shortly. Information on ticketing and refund policy during strikes can be found at www.nationalrail.co.uk/industrialaction

Photo credit: Network Rail