

Strikes: day three of industrial action

June 25, 2022



A third day of industrial action by the RMT has gone ahead.

As reported, 40,000 members of staff who are in the RMT union voted for the largest industrial action in three years.

The Saturday action is different in that it affects leisure travel, which has become especially important in the post-COVID recovery of passenger rail. From last year, information showed people rushing back to rail for leisure faster than they were to get to work.

In terms of the Tuesday and Thursday strikes, **data suggests** that would-be commuters adjusted, with increases in internet usage evidencing people turning to home working and virtual meeting technology, and highway intelligence painting a picture of minimal road disruption.

But the concern on the weekend, as one operator voiced, is that those who do not use trains day-to-day may be less aware of the industrial action. Some seaside towns are affected, such as Blackpool, Skegness, Llandudno and Margate.

Phil Whittingham, Avanti West Coast managing director, said: "Weekends have seen very strong growth in

passenger numbers over recent months and we're concerned that many who travel at weekends will be less frequent rail users and may not realise the huge impact industrial action will have."

Negotiations

Mick Lynch discussed the current progress of negotiations with Sky News: "We haven't made the advances that we'd like to make, but we will still keep engaging with them."

He said offers so far involved making "very severe" changes to staff terms and conditions that involve the cutting of "thousands of jobs" and to "re-contract virtually everyone that works on the railway on a set of terms and conditions and pay that is lower than we currently have." His interpretation of the offering was a "form of fire and rehire". He added the offers said people would have to adapt to the changes or lose jobs on a scale RMT had not anticipated.

Shapps and RMT make arguments on working practices

Steve Montgomery, chair of the Rail Delivery Group, said: "Two years after COVID struck there has been a huge change in how we use the railways, with fewer people commuting and more people travelling at weekends. The RMT leadership must work with us to bring outdated working practices, such as voluntary working only on a Sunday, out of the past so that we can adapt to changing travel patterns, take no more than our fair share from the taxpayer and achieve a pay offer that works for our people."

Grant Shapps, on Twitter, wrote about how he felt the railways needed to modernise.

He said: "Our railway is a proud part of our history and has served us well for 200 years, but if we want it to serve us for the next 200 then it must move with the times and banish the outdated working practices that are holding it back.

"For instance, did you know, Sunday working laws haven't been updated since 1919. That means, for some Train Operating Companies, Sundays aren't part of the working week and they have to rely on the 'good will' of employees to work them - while receiving substantial overtime pay!

"Maintenance laws are just as bad. The rostering of individuals or training of multiskilled workers isn't allowed. It means for a job that could, in theory, be completed by one person, whole teams have to be sent. Even worse, these teams won't share vans or equipment either.

"Not only that but maintenance teams aren't allowed to cross one geographical boundary to another, even neighbouring ones to carry out vital repairs. It means a team based at Euston wouldn't be able to walk 500 yards to Kings Cross to fix an urgent points failure.

"Practices such as this aren't just archaic, they are hugely damaging to commuters' daily lives and the economy, causing people to be late for work or miss hospital appointments and, as an industry, we must change."

RMT general secretary Mick Lynch said: "Grant Shapps is talking nonsense and is completely ignorant of

how the railways work which is a major shortcoming for a Transport Secretary.

"It is false that that Sunday working practices have not been updated since 1919.

"In many companies we have agreements that Sunday forms part of the working week and agreed provisions for rostering overtime for Sundays where the companies require the staff to work all of their contracted hours between Monday and Saturday with Sunday as extra hours.

"Network Rail has not suggested breaking up maintenance teams. They exist because they are safety critical, with specialist skills and are all drastically different from one another.

"Maintenance workers can work across boundaries as instructed by the company, but they only work across railway regions in emergencies. This is because the engineering assets in regions which derive from the original railway company regions can be very different and the staff may not have the training or competencies to deal with those engineering assets.

"This is both a safety and engineering standards issue, and Network Rail has never put a proposal to RMT to work across regions and many of their maintenance managers are actually opposed to this idea.

"It is an utter fallacy that our members will not travel in vans together.

"Staff are deployed in their specialist teams with the specialist equipment for the tasks they are trained for loaded up into those vehicles.

"It would be pointless sending staff to a location without their gear, equipment and tools which is why the vehicles and associated equipment are sent to site so that all of the kit from all of the engineering disciplines are at the location.

"There are nearly 90 separate engineering skills that our members can utilise to assist each other to get the job done.

"Shapps seems to be suggesting the elimination of engineering specialisms and skills which could be both inefficient and dangerous for the railway.

"Staff need to be properly trained, competent and experienced to work on the specialist equipment in the safety critical environment on track to protect the infrastructure, staff and travelling public.

"One of the greatest inefficiencies which creates spiralling costs is the constant use of agency workers for single tasks that wastes shift time and is largely non-productive and yet generates generous profits for sub-contractors.

"It would be much more cost-effective to bring this work in-house.

"The restructuring at the railway dictated by Shapps' cuts off £2bn meaning that Network Rail has approached this with an attitude of cuts first before considering what the organisation will look like

afterwards.

“Rail industry bosses are making it up as they go along. Their main agenda is to cut the costs and jobs first rather than proposing a coherent, logical and efficient organisation to where the staff can be transferred by agreement with the union.”