

# Time for Whitehall to drop advice to avoid trains

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The chairman of the campaign group Railfuture says there's an "urgent need to get the rail system working effectively to support economic recovery".

Chris Page says they are concerned "the rail industry and Government are not giving this matter the attention it deserves".

He said: "Cities in Britain depend on effective public transport to function and many people can't return to work given the present levels of service and various restrictions imposed."

The group has released a five-point plan to restore confidence in rail:

- The full train service should be restored as soon as possible. This will create capacity to minimise risks of overcrowding.
- There has to be a consistent application of distance rules across all transport modes. If it is safe to effectively ignore the 2 metre rule on aeroplanes, why is this not acceptable on trains?
- There should be an agreed national standard on hygiene levels, for example, sanitisation of surfaces, which should be made fully public. This would not only help protect users, but would restore confidence in using the rail system.
- The rail industry should urgently look at best practice elsewhere and adopt this. New York appears to be adopting a much more balanced position on social distancing for example, as is much of mainland Europe.
- The restrictions on 'necessary journeys only' should be eased as soon as train services are restored to normal levels. It's inconsistent to allow the public to engage in leisure activity, but not allow rail to play a part in that.

Chris said: "This is not about protecting the bottom line of the rail industry, although obviously we want the industry to thrive and be economically sustainable. There's a real risk of damage to the credibility of public transport, which has huge implications for the environment. The long-term effects of climate change have not gone away because of the present crisis. If rail use declines and use of private cars increases as a result of the actions taken by the rail industry and Government, the long-term consequences of this will be serious. There has to be a balanced approach to this, and getting the railway back to normal is a key component to economic and environmental health.

"Rail has an important part to play in supporting the wider economy, and that in turn helps to pay for the health service. Railways can help to sustain retail in our towns and cities now that the restrictions have been eased there, and support tourism in our national parks and seaside towns. Every human activity has risks, and we recognise that the virus is still out there, but while there are inconsistent standards applied, and widespread flouting of the rules in non-transport environments, the restrictions on rail transport seem disproportionate."