

Train operating companies announce increase in services for as schools return

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Greater Anglia and West Midlands Railway have announced they will add additional services as school pupils return back to school.

Meanwhile Merseyrail says it will be increasing its services across most lines from Sunday 14 March. This is in response to more staff being available as the number of new COVID-19 cases continue to fall nationally.

Merseyrail

West Midlands Railway will introduce a small number of additional services on routes via Birmingham Snow Hill from next week as school pupils prepare to return to the classroom.

From Monday 8 March, six extra trains will run on the route each weekday afternoon to help provide capacity for students using the railway to travel home from lessons.

The Birmingham Snow Hill lines serve communities across the south of Birmingham as well as destinations including Stratford-upon-Avon, Worcester and Hereford.

Passengers are being reminded that the railway should be used for essential journeys only while the current Government restrictions remain in place.

Jonny Wiseman, customer experience director for West Midlands Railway, said: “Our routes via Birmingham Snow Hill serve destinations close to a number of large schools which is why we are introducing extra trains from Monday to help returning pupils travel with confidence.

“We encourage pupils using the train to maintain social distancing on board and remind all customers that everyone aged over 11 must wear a face covering by law, unless exempt on medical grounds.”

Passengers are advised to check their train times before setting out.

Meanwhile, passengers are also being reminded the Stourbridge Town branch line will be closed from Tuesday 9 March – Friday 12 March while Network Rail carries out essential track maintenance work. Rail replacement transport will be in operation.

Greater Anglia will have extra trains on weekday afternoons and more staff at stations when pupils go back to school and college on Monday 8 March.

The company will run more trains from 3pm on Monday 8 March so that students and school children can get home more quickly.

Greater Anglia

Greater Anglia will also deploy extra staff and managers at key stations close to schools and colleges, in the mornings and afternoons to make sure all passengers can travel safely, reminding them to use the entire length of trains and platforms.

The company is currently running a revised timetable, with off peak trains reduced to one every two hours on some routes.

Changes to the current Monday to Friday afternoon timetable will see an hourly service re-introduced from 3pm onwards during the week on the following services:

- Between Norwich and Cambridge, Lowestoft, Sheringham and Great Yarmouth
- Between Ipswich and Cambridge, Felixstowe and Lowestoft
- Marks Tey – Sudbury
- Wickford – Southminster
- Colchester – Walton-on-the-Naze
- Manningtree – Harwich

The current intercity and Stansted Express services will remain unchanged, with hourly services between Norwich and London and Liverpool Street all week and two or three trains an hour on the Stansted Express route Monday to Fridays.

Passengers are reminded to check before they travel using the Greater Anglia website or app where revised timetables are available.

Jamie Burles, Greater Anglia managing director, said: "We're constantly monitoring passenger numbers to make sure we put on the right number of trains and that they're the right length for people to socially distance.

"Passenger numbers are still very low, but obviously with all schools and colleges going back on Monday 8 March, we anticipate more people travelling.

"I'd like to reassure all passengers that we're doing everything we can to keep them safe - from cleaning and sanitising trains and stations, to making it easier to socially distance at stations. So if you are catching our trains for legally permissible reasons, you can travel with confidence.

"Please remember to wear a face covering - over your mouth and nose - for all of your journey - including at the station, unless you're exempt."

Merseyrail

Merseyrail will be increasing its services across most lines from Sunday 14 March. This is in response to more staff being available as the number of new COVID-19 cases continue to fall nationally.

Trains will run every 20 minutes Monday to Saturday until 19:30 across the network with the exception of the Ellesmere Port line which will continue to operate a 30-minute service all day.

After 19:30 a 30-minute service will run across the network. There will also be a 30-minute service in operation on Sundays.

The operator is continuing to remind passengers that they must follow government-issued advice and only travel for work if essential or for other legally permitted reasons.

Those who do need to travel are encouraged to adhere to the following guidance when travelling:

- Avoid peak travel if you can (between 07:00-09:30 and 16:00-18:30)
- Allow extra time for your journey
- Face coverings must be worn at all times at stations or on trains, unless exempt. Maximum fines of £6,400 can be issued by British Transport Police for those refusing to comply
- Use contactless payments where possible
- Wash or sanitise hands as soon as possible before and after travel
- Remain seated where you can

- Maintain social distancing where possible
- Follow advice from staff and be considerate to other passengers
- Do not use public transport if you, or a member of your household, has COVID-19 symptoms or you have been instructed to self-isolate
- Aim to reduce the number of journeys you make where possible.

Full timetable information and COVID-19 travel advice can be found here:

www.merseyrail.org/COVIDAdvice. Further information on government guidance and restrictions can be found at www.gov.uk.

Merseyrail will continue to monitor patronage levels, capacity and staff availability as restrictions ease to help the network meet demand. Passengers are still encouraged to check before they travel. This can be done by visiting the website www.merseyrail.org or the Merseyrail Twitter account @merseyrail for the latest information.

Andy Heath, Managing Director at Merseyrail, said: “As schools prepare to reopen across the region, we are pleased to be able to increase services on our network again due to an improvement in staff availability.

“While this will be welcome news to the people of the Liverpool City Region, I must reiterate government advice that public transport is for essential journeys only at this moment in time.

“For those who need to travel, please be assured that our safety measures – such as increased cleaning – will continue as a priority to keep passengers and staff as safe as possible.”

Photo credit: West Midlands Trains