

Under-fire TransPennine Express urged to hire more drivers after 'abject failure' accusation

TransPennine Express has been urged to hire more drivers after being accused of an "abject failure" to run trains.

The rail operator is currently under fire for cancelling services and is facing calls to be nationalised.

Mick Whelan, general secretary of Aslef, has written to MPs criticising the company for blaming train drivers for its "abject failure" to provide the service they are contracted to deliver, and are paid "handsomely" for by the taxpayer.

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The call comes [after BusinessLive reported](#) that profits were slashed at Transpennine Express during its latest financial year despite the train operator receiving almost £260m from the government.

Mr Whelan said he wanted to explain why the union withdrew from a rest day working agreement, writing: "During the Covid pandemic, Aslef had agreements across rail operators that meant drivers who were 'spare' (on standby in case another driver is unavailable) could wait at home.

"This meant staff were not unnecessarily waiting in busy mess rooms, unable to socially distance, despite it being unlikely that they would even drive a train.

"Aslef had such an agreement with TransPennine Express. They unilaterally tore it up. Other operators did not do this.

“This was a bad faith decision that put the health and safety of our members at risk. It was this that led to the withdrawal of rest day working.”

Mr Whelan said claims that TPE does not have a shortage of drivers “would be laughable if it wasn’t for the fact that they have let down so many passengers and communities”.

He added: “Whilst the pandemic inevitably had an effect on training, the idea that it is solely responsible for the atrocious service offered by TransPennine Express is for the birds. The stark reality is that they simply do not employ enough drivers.”

Aslef says a seven-days-a-week railway should employ enough drivers to run it, without relying on people working on allotted time off, with Mr Whelan adding: “It is time for TransPennine to be honest, face up to their failings and engage with Aslef about the recruitment of more drivers.

“Or better still do the right thing and leave our industry.”

A spokesperson for TransPennine Express said: “TPE provides a hugely important service to communities across the North and Scotland. We know that the service being offered to customers is unacceptable at present and we want to assure our customers throughout the region that we are doing all we can to resolve a number of issues and deliver a train service they can rely on.

“Prolonged disruption has been caused by a combination of ongoing high levels of sickness and an unprecedented training backlog following the pandemic, coupled with increased training demands to support major route and timetable upgrades, together with the withdrawal from overtime working by Aslef drivers which has dramatically reduced our roster flexibility.

“The biggest and most immediate positive impact for customers

would be for Aslef to allow drivers to work overtime again. Late last year we were given authority from DfT (Department for Transport) to make a new overtime offer but this was rejected by Aslef without putting it to their members.

“The offer remains on the table and we encourage everyone who can influence the situation to work together to improve the situation for all.”

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