

More travel misery for rail passengers as strike action continues

Rail passengers are suffering fresh travel misery as tens of thousands of workers strike again in the long-running dispute over pay, jobs and conditions.

Members of the Rail, Maritime and Transport union (RMT), the Transport Salaried Staffs' Association (TSSA) and [Unite](#) walked out for 24 hours on Saturday, affecting [Network Rail](#) and a number of train companies across the country.

RMT members at Network Rail and 14 train operators, [TSSA](#) members at seven companies, and Unite members at NR are striking, along with London United bus drivers.

Sunday morning train services will also be affected by the knock-on effect of the action.

(PA Graphics) / PA Graphics

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Only around one in five trains are expected to run on Saturday, with some areas having no services all day, as the

unions stage their second stoppage in three days.

Football and cricket fans, tourists and holidaymakers are among those affected by the disruption.

The sides are as far apart as ever in resolving the row despite months of talks aimed at breaking the deadlock, with increasing union anger at the refusal of Transport Secretary [Grant Shapps](#) to get involved in negotiations.

The strike follows a walkout on Friday by London Underground workers and some bus drivers in the capital in separate disputes, which caused travel chaos.

RMT general secretary [Mick Lynch](#) rejected suggestions that rail workers would agree to the current offer on the table if the union put it to a vote.

Asked on BBC Breakfast on Saturday whether he has evidence to the contrary, Mr Lynch said: "Absolutely, I did a meeting on Wednesday evening the night before the strike of 14,000 RMT members in an online rally and our members are out today demonstrating.

"I speak to thousands of our members every week, we consult at least 600 Network Rail reps on a weekly basis, and we know exactly what the mood of our members is."

TSSA members taking action include staff working in ticket offices, stations, control rooms, engineering, as well as planning, timetabling and other support roles.

The union is seeking guarantees of no compulsory redundancies, a pay rise in line with the cost of living, and promises of no unilateral alterations to job terms and conditions.

Mr Shapps said: "It's clear, from their co-ordinated approach, that the unions are hell-bent on causing as much misery as possible to the very same taxpayers who stumped up £600 per

household to ensure not a single rail worker lost their job during the pandemic.

“Sadly, union chiefs have short memories and will be repaying this act of good faith by ruining millions of hard-working people’s summer plans.”

The rail unions reacted furiously to a warning by the Transport Secretary that changes employers are seeking, which are at the heart of the current train strikes, could be imposed.

Mr Shapps said he would have to enact legislation referred to as a “section 188” to force through some of the measures.

Empty platforms at Wandsworth Common Station in south London during Saturday’s rail strike (Kirsty O’Connor/PA) / PA Wire
He told Sky News on Friday: “What I do know and I can say for sure is if we can’t get this settled in the way that we are proposing, which is, ‘Please put the deal to your membership’, then we will have to move to what is called a section 188; it is a process of actually requiring these changes to go into place so it becomes mandated.

“That is the direction that this is moving in now.”

The TSSA accused the Transport Secretary of “advocating fire and rehire” tactics.

The union said section 188 of the Trade Union and Labour Relations Act is a duty requiring employers to consult trade union representatives, but is not a mechanism for imposing unilateral change.

Such notice for compulsory redundancies has already been issued by Network Rail with its proposal to cut up to 1,900 jobs from the industry, said the TSSA, adding it is not “reform” but “cuts”.

A spokesman said: “Many of the changes being proposed require

big changes to people's contracts of employment including rosters, more night shifts and working practices. These require agreement between unions and the employer. This is another reason we are on strike."

General secretary of the Transport Salaried Staffs' Association Manuel Cortes (Rick Findler/PA) / PA Archive

"Grant Shapps has not attended any talks with trade unions during the months-long dispute, despite repeated calls for him to come to the table or allow employers to negotiate freely without his and his department's interference."

Manuel Cortes, TSSA general secretary, said: "This is yet more desperate stuff from Shapps intended to distract from the real issues in the rail dispute. He's now actively advocating fire and rehire.

"Grant Shapps is touring TV studios spouting anti-worker nonsense when it's actually within his gift as Transport Secretary to resolve this dispute.

"At every turn his actions ramp up the dispute and make it harder to get a resolution. It seems clear that he wants negotiations to fail. Any responsible government or employer would understand the devastating impact of their policies on the railway workforce and seek to negotiate with their unions to find a fair and just way forward.

"Tightening the screw on trade unions won't resolve the Tory cost-of-living crisis and the desperate calls from people across our country for a pay rise after years of pay freezes."