Rail strikes: Warning of disruption as passengers return to work after new year

R
ail passengers are suffering fresh travel disruption as tens of thousands of workers take strike action set to last all week in bitter disputes over pay, jobs and conditions.

About 40,000 members of the Rail, Maritime and Transport union (RMT) at Network Rail and 14 train operators are staging a 48-hour walkout, with another to follow on Friday, while drivers in the Aslef union will strike on Thursday.

Picket lines were again mounted outside railway stations across the country in a repeat of what became a familiar sight last year.

Passengers, including those returning to work after the festive break, are being warned to expect "significant disruption" as only a limited number of trains will run.

The advice is to only travel if absolutely necessary, allow extra time and check when first and last trains will depart.

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On RMT strike days, around half of the network will shut down, with only about 20% of normal services running.

Trains that do run will start later and finish much earlier than usual – with services typically running between 7.30am and 6.30pm on the day of the strike.

The Elizabeth Line is also disrupted with no service betwen Paddington and Heathrow/Reading and Liverpool Street to Shenfield. London Overground services have also been hit along with parts of the Bakerloo and District lines.

Meanwhile, Network Rail's chief negotiator said on Tuesday morning that a deal to stop rail strikes is in "touching distance".

"We only need 2,000 people who voted no last time to change their vote and the deal will pass. So, we think that's within touching distance," he said.

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Strikes will go beyond May 'unless reasonable offer made' – union

Mick Lynch has said industrial action will need to continue beyond May unless a reasonable offer is made to the RMT.

Speaking from a picket line at Euston station in London, he said: "They (the strikes) are likely to go ahead if there's no offer that we can work on.

"We would like to get into a situation where we're negotiating

constantly with the companies and where we didn't have to have strike action, and then work up a settlement that our members could vote on and accept.

"But if we don't get that there will have to be more action, and we've got a mandate that runs through to May this year, and if we have to go further, that's what we'll need to do. We don't want that, though."

He added: "Our members are taking action right across the country, from the north of Scotland to the tip of Cornwall. The railway service has ground to a halt and it will be severely disrupted this week – we don't take any pleasure in that."

1672740468

Rail strikes 'totally selfish', say stranded commuters

Other commuters have spoken of how they have been prevented from getting to work over the strikes, *writes John Dunne.*

Lydia Sweeney, a 21-year-old hairdresser, said: "It's all very well the train strikers stopping work over pay but I don't earn a lot and they are either stopping me getting to work or making me late every day. There's a cost of living crisis for all of us not just them. It's totally selfish."

Aisha Bhati, a 26-year-old student, said: "I need to get to college. I'm training to work in the NHS so I can do something worthwhile and these strikes are making life more difficult. I'm in favour of the nurses' strike but I think the rail workers striking over Christmas and New Year has not helped their cause."

Meanwhile, Monica and Mark Sheppard had been in London with her daughter Isabella after travelling down from Hull. They had booked to go to the Warner Bros Harry Potter Experience in

Watford and were desperately trying to get a train.

Mr Sheppard said: “We are still hoping to get there, Isabella has been looking forward to it but the strike has made it a stressful journey. We don’t want to let her down.”

Mick Lynch at Euston Station picket line on Tuesday

/ Jeremy Selwyn

1672736930

Talks to end strikes to take place next week

More negotiations over the rail strikes will take place next week, the Transport Secretary has said.

Asked about talks between the unions and employers, Mark Harper told ITV’s Good Morning Britain: “First of all, the deal is not going to be done in TV studios, it is going to be done around a negotiating table between the trade unions, the train operating companies that run the trains, and Network Rail that run the track and the signalling.

“We have got to get people back around the table.”

He added: “We had some good meetings before Christmas, we have got some more meetings scheduled next week.

“I would, frankly, rather they were taking place this week rather than the strikes happening, but that was a matter for the unions.

“It is RMT and Aslef that have scheduled strikes for this week; I would rather they were sat around the negotiating table.”

1672733955

Government ‘needs to tell us their proposals’ to stop strike – Lynch

The Government needs to set out its exact proposals to move forward rail strike negotiations, RMT boss Mick Lynch said.

In another interview from the picket line, he told Sky News: “I would go and meet him (Transport Secretary Mark Harper) now if he wants, or he can come here and meet me, and we can hammer some things out.

“What we keep hearing is the same stuff from the Government across the sectors that they want to facilitate an agreement, but they don’t actually do anything.

“I met the rail minister on December 15 along with the companies. We have heard nothing tangible since then, we have heard a few warm words and Mark Harper conducts himself in a pleasant way, in a good way, and that is fine.

“What we need to hear now from the Government is exactly what it is they are going to propose to us.”

Mr Lynch also suggested ministers were “undermining efforts to get a settlement” and had “torpedoed” an agreement in December – an allegation Mr Harper has denied.

1672733398

Transport Secretary denies Government intervened to stop deal with strikers

The Transport Secretary has denied a claim that ministers intervened in rail strike negotiations in December to stop a deal.

Asked about the claims, Mark Harper told Sky News: “That absolutely isn’t true.

“In fact, since I became Transport Secretary a couple of month ago I met all the union leaders, I tried to change the tone of the discussions and I said that ministers would help facilitate the trade unions and the employers, that is the train operating companies and Network Rail, getting around the table.”

He later added: “There is a fair and reasonable pay offer on the table. There is not a bottomless pit of taxpayers’ money here.”

1672731444

Deal to stop strikes ‘within touching distance’, says Network Rail

Tim Shoveller, Network Rail’s chief negotiator, has said a deal to stop rail strikes is in “touching distance”.

He told BBC Radio 4’s Today programme: “Some members are coming back to work, and we are seeing increasing numbers come back to work, but that’s not the way to resolve the problem or the dispute.

“The way to resolve that dispute is through an agreement and what we’re saying to the RMT is that it’s very clear from the referendum that they held, they did it very quickly, it was only open for a few days, that actually that was rushed, and it didn’t allow and give time for people to ask genuine questions there are associated with the reform elements of this deal.

“So, what we’re saying to the RMT is that we know which areas had been misunderstood by some of our staff, their members, and we want to make sure that we can work with the RMT now to make clarifications where there’s been misunderstanding and put the deal out again.

“We only need 2,000 people who voted no last time to change

their vote and the deal will pass. So, we think that's within touching distance."

1672731296

Lynch: 'We still have support of the public and want to negotiate'

Mick Lynch, the RMT's boss, has said the union still has the support of the public as the walkout brings services to a standstill, *writes John Dunne.*

Mr Lynch who was on the picket line at Euston told the Standard: "We want to negotiate but the government will not. We want a change in the weather as do the public.. The rail companies are still making plenty of dosh. We still have the support of the travelling public."

He added that the union had regularly spoken to rail company chiefs but the government was ignoring their demands.

1672730796

Rail unions told: Let London get back to work by calling off strikes

Rail unions have been told to let London "get back to work" by calling off strikes crippling the transport network today and this week.

Many people are having to work from home on Tuesday rather than join the "Great Return to Work" after the Christmas break because so few trains are running.

Former Cabinet minister Theresa Villiers told the Standard: "These strikes are unjustified deeply irresponsible. They will cause misery to millions, as well as damaging the recovery of rail passenger numbers after Covid."

The Conservative MP for Chipping Barnet added: “The unions should call off their industrial action right now so that our capital city can get back to work.”

Cities of London and Westminster Tory MP Nickie Aiken stressed: “It’s disappointing that the unions insist on continuing their disruption.”

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