

Widespread rail strikes planned as passengers return to work after festive break

Rail passengers will face fresh travel disruption this week because of strikes by tens of thousands of workers in bitter disputes over pay, jobs and conditions.

Members of the Rail, Maritime and Transport union (RMT) at [Network Rail](#) and 14 train operators will stage two 48-hour walkouts from Tuesday and Friday, while drivers in the [Aslef](#) union will strike on Thursday.

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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There may also be disruption to services on Sunday January 8 as the striking workers return to their duties.

On RMT strike days, around half of the network will shut down and 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 train drivers strike on January 5 will affect 15 operators and will result in even fewer services running, with some companies operating “very significantly reduced” timetables.

The RMT also has an overtime ban in place at 14 train operating companies until Monday that will continue to affect the level of cancellations and the punctuality of some services.

Daniel Mann, director of industry operations at the Rail Delivery Group, said: “No-one wants to see these strikes go ahead and we can only apologise to passengers and to the many businesses who will be hit by this unnecessary and damaging disruption.

They expect train drivers at these companies to take a real-terms pay cut – to work just as hard for considerably less – when inflation is running at north of 14%

“We would advise passengers to only travel if it is absolutely necessary during this period, allow extra time and check when their first and last train will depart.

“Passengers with tickets for between 3-7 January can use their ticket the day before the ticket date, or up to and including Tuesday January 10.

“This dispute will only be resolved by agreeing the long overdue reforms to working arrangements needed to put the industry on a sustainable footing, rather than unions condemning their members to losing more pay in the new year.”

Aslef general secretary [Mick Whelan](#) told the PA news agency that the union is “in it for the long haul”, adding: “We don’t want to go on strike but the companies have pushed us into this place.

“They have not offered our members a penny, and these are people who have not had an increase since April 2019.

“That means they expect train drivers at these companies to take a real-terms pay cut – to work just as hard for considerably less – when inflation is running at north of 14%.

“The train companies say their hands have been tied by the [Government](#). While the Government – which does not employ us – says it’s up to the companies to negotiate with us.

Inflation-matching pay increases for all public sector workers would cost everyone more in the long-term – worsening debt, fuelling inflation, and costing every household an extra £1,000

“We are always happy to negotiate – we never refuse to sit down at the table and talk – but these companies have offered us nothing, and that is unacceptable.”

[Mick Lynch](#), general secretary of the RMT, has accused the Government of blocking a deal to end the long running dispute.

He says he is willing to negotiate, but is calling for an offer on pay, jobs and conditions his members can vote on.

The RMT is campaigning against plans to close ticket offices, cut jobs and move the industry to widespread driver-only operation.

A Department for Transport spokesperson said: "Passengers have rightly had enough of rail strikes and want the disruption to end.

"The Government has demonstrated it is being reasonable and stands ready to facilitate a resolution to rail disputes. It's time the unions came to the table and played their part as well.

"Inflation-matching pay increases for all public sector workers would cost everyone more in the long-term – worsening debt, fuelling inflation, and costing every household an extra £1,000.

"Unions should step back from this strike action so we can start 2023 by ending this damaging dispute."

Mr Whelan added: "We keep coming to the table but the table is bare. Six months after we asked for a pay rise for train drivers who have, now, not had one for nearly four years, we have still not had an offer from the train companies which employ us.

"The ball is in their court. The companies, or this Tory Government which stands behind them, could end this dispute now by making a serious and sensible pay offer. It is up to them."