



Department
for Transport

From the Secretary of State
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To: All MPs

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Dear Colleague,

CHRISTMAS TRAVEL WINDOW

I am writing to provide you with an update on the Government's preparations for the Christmas period.

The Government recently published guidance to help families and friends see each other over the Christmas period – and to do so as safely as possible. Between 23rd and 27th of December or between 22nd and 28th of December for those travelling to and from Northern Ireland, travel restrictions across the UK and between tiers will be lifted to allow three households to come together. Once at their destination, people should follow the rules in that tier.

We are working with transport operators to help people see their loved ones, safely. We ask everyone to closely consider their journey, plan and book ahead, be patient, and be considerate of fellow passengers – and particularly staff who have worked so hard all year - by following the guidance carefully, including keeping space and wearing a face covering on public transport.

To help people travel safely and minimise disruption as far as possible over the Christmas period, we are deploying a series of measures.

- On our strategic road network of motorways and trunk roads, Highways England have **cleared a total of 778 miles of roadworks**, meaning that 96% of the network will be unaffected. Where essential work must continue, speed limits will be set at 60mph (rather than 50mph) where possible to keep disruption to a minimum.
- Ministers have written to all Local Authorities in England with the request that they lift as many roadworks as possible and **ensure bus**

services are running reliably over the period, to ease traffic on local roads.

- Network Rail will ensure that **over 95% of the network will be unaffected by engineering works** over the Christmas period. Where essential works must continue, replacement buses will be available.
- We are also working with train operators, a number of whom have already confirmed they will **run longer trains** and increase service levels. For example, longer trains will run on Anglo-Scotland and Liverpool routes to boost the number of seats at anticipated busy times on the West Coast Main Line. Chiltern Railway will also run additional services on the 27 December, and East Midlands Railway will run a full intercity timetable over the Christmas period.
- The Government is also **waiving change of journey admin fees** for Advance rail tickets sold before the announcement of new Covid tiers on 26th November, ensuring passengers are not left out of pocket for changing their tickets to comply with the guidance.

To provide further support to passengers, Network Rail and train operators have been asked to ensure extra staff are in place at key stations to provide assistance. British Transport Police will also be deploying extra officers to help keep passengers safe.

All transport operators have been asked to increase the clarity and regularity of communications with passengers, to help them plan their journeys, warn of any disruption and offer support.

Finally, to protect and support the resilience of transport workers on the frontline, we are working closely with the Department of Health and Social Care and transport operators on rapid testing at selected sites, the first of which is going live next week.

Further details on these measures can be found in the annex.

To help provide rigorous scrutiny of these plans, the Government has appointed Sir Peter Hendy – Chair of Network Rail – who will work alongside operators and the Department for Transport. He will ensure there is a collective focus across the transport industry on minimising disruption and supporting passengers.

We are also continuing to work with the Devolved Administrations on our plans to ensure we take an aligned approach as far as possible.

I am confident that the measures set out above will ensure that people can travel as safely and reliably as possible if they choose to, and we are doing everything we can to help people see their loved ones safely this Christmas.

Yours ever,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Grant Shapps', written in a cursive style.

Rt Hon Grant Shapps MP

SECRETARY OF STATE FOR TRANSPORT

ANNEX – Measures that are being put in place

Rail

- Over 95% of the rail network will be unaffected by engineering works to enable regular services to run.
- Admin fee waivers will apply to Advance tickets purchased before the Covid tiers announcement on 26 November for travel between 2 Dec & 2 January.
- To support journeys between London and Peterborough, GTR will run a close to full service from St. Pancras to enable passengers to access LNER services from Peterborough.
- Avanti West Coast will be running longer trains on Anglo-Scotland and Liverpool routes at anticipated busy times.
- Chiltern will be adding services throughout 27 December (two an hour to Oxford, one an hour to Birmingham).
- East Midlands will be running a full intercity timetable over the Christmas period.
- TransPennine Express will ensure that all services will be running at maximum train length.
- Working with train operators, the Government is ensuring sufficient rail replacement services are in place and arranging more where demand is greatest. For instance, the number of replacement services between Bristol Parkway and Bristol Temple Meads have already been doubled.
- LNER has also procured 70 rail replacement services to boost capacity between York and London, additional fast bus services have been added by South Western between Basingstoke and Salisbury, and West Midlands Railways is ensuring rail replacement buses are on standby at key locations to provide additional capacity as needed.
- Network Rail and train operators will ensure extra staff are in place at major stations to support social distancing and provide extra assistance. British Transport Police will also be deploying extra staff to help keep passengers safe.
- Avanti West Coast have acted to remove peak restrictions across the Christmas period. We will explore extending this to other operators.

Road

- 96% of the road network overseen by Highways England will now be free of works.
- An additional £16 million has already been invested to provide Highways England with 93 brand-new gritters to bolster its winter fleet, and all local councils have been reminded to ensure salt and grit stocks are increased, to help keep roads clear during challenging weather conditions.
- Highways England will step up works to ensure the roads are prepared for bad weather, putting over 400 patrols on duty at any one time to rapidly respond to disruption.

- Over 200 Highways England staff will also be working over Christmas to provide 24/7 cover in Highways England's 7 regional operations centres to keep traffic flowing.

Other

- All transport operators have been asked to increase the clarity and regularity of communications with passengers, to help them plan their journeys, warn of any disruption and offer support.
- Parts of the London Overground will be running for the first time ever on Boxing Day, supported by the Government's financial support to protect the continued running of Transport for London services.
- TfL will also be putting extra resources into their control centres to minimise any potential disruption. Where there are planned engineering works, TfL's journey planner will show the alternative routes available.