

Operational Update

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I wrote to you on 19th July to update you on the unprecedented challenges we are currently facing, and the steps we are taking to improve our services for the benefit of the customers and communities that we are proud to serve.

Unfortunately, we had to write to you again on 1st August due to unofficial strike action, which means we are facing multiple short-notice cancellations on our network. This is likely to continue until the current industrial dispute is settled. As a result, from August 14th, until further notice, we will be introducing a reduced timetable on our services – moving to 4+ trains per hour.

This is due to the current industrial relations climate which has resulted in severe staff shortages in some grades through increased sickness levels, as well as unofficial strike action by ASLEF members.

In the past few months, we have regularly and reliably seen around 400 services a week worked by drivers on their rest day. It's now dropped suddenly to fewer than 50, a fall of nearly 90% almost overnight.

The previous level of rest day working has been necessary, and to this point supported by our drivers, to enable and expedite the recruitment and training of over 250 new drivers that was paused during the pandemic due to social distancing restrictions. This training takes between 12 and 18 months, so this unofficial action will impact future training and recruitment and the increase in services that we want to deliver.

The reduced timetable is being introduced to ensure a reliable service is delivered so our customers can travel with greater certainty. This decision was not taken lightly, and we are sorry for the enormous frustration and inconvenience this will cause.

We urge the rail unions to engage in meaningful industry reform talks around modernising working practices and developing a railway fit for the 21st century and the industry remains open for talks at any time.

4tph+ Timetable

From Sunday 14 August until further notice, we will introduce a '4tph+' timetable which remains subject to ongoing review of workload and resource.

Route	Service
Manchester	One tph to Manchester; calling at Milton Keynes, Stoke on Trent, Macclesfield and Stockport.
West Midlands and Edinburgh/Blackpool	1tph to Wolverhampton, calling at Watford Junction, Milton Keynes, Rugby, Coventry, Birmingham International, Birmingham New Street, Sandwell and Dudley, Wolverhampton, Crewe, Warrington, Wigan, and Preston. One train every two hours will continue to Edinburgh, and one train every two hours will continue to Blackpool or terminate at Preston.
Glasgow	One tph going direct to Glasgow, calling at Crewe, Warrington, Wigan, Preston, then stopping points as in the current timetable.
Liverpool	One tph going direct to Liverpool, calling at Stafford, Crewe, and Runcorn.
Holyhead/Chester, Shrewsbury/Wrexham	Shuttles between Holyhead and Crewe. Limited service but with connectivity to Shrewsbury and Wrexham.

This timetable aims to balance capacity with connectivity alongside other operators on parallel routes by maintaining a service across most of our network. Based on demand data and collaboration with partners, we have sought maintenance of service frequency on the Anglo-Scot, Liverpool, and Euston-Birmingham-Scotland services to support growth.

Where extra relief services are needed, for example around sporting events, we will do everything we can to put on additional services, however the resourcing requirements to do this will remain challenging.

Strikes are also taking place on 13th, 18th and 20th August which will significantly affect the number of services we are able to run. We are working to confirm timetables, but it is expected that our trains will be limited. Once we have more information, this will be updated on our website. Anyone who booked with us directly will receive an email once the timetable is confirmed to let them know if they're affected.

Continuous review – we want to uplift our services as soon as we are able

The short-term and evolving nature of this situation will challenge standard industry planning processes. Our approach considers this, and has been developed to balance the need for greater certainty for customers, with the need to deliver revised timetables and communicate them clearly ahead of travel.

While the new timetable is finalised, we've temporarily suspended ticket sales and closed reservations from 14 August is to minimise the number of people disrupted. We expect tickets to be back on sale around the middle of this week. If the situation continues, we will suspend sales for future dates in due course.

Customers are being contacted and information shared on wider communications channels. Anyone who is booked to travel and whose train is cancelled, their ticket will be accepted on the Avanti West Coast service before or after the original train. Alternatively, passengers booked to travel with us can claim a full, fee-free refund from your point of purchase if you no longer wish to travel due to the amended timetable. Find out how, [here](#).

We're obviously disappointed by ASLEF's decision to go on strike on 13th August, which we believe is unnecessary and premature. On the 13th, our route will be severely impacted. As a result, we're telling customers not to travel and instead make their journeys on another date or claim a full refund. Many destinations will have no rail connectivity on this day, so anyone who needs to travel should seek alternative transport.

Any customers with existing tickets dated for travel on 13th August can use those tickets anytime between can travel the day before or up to & including 16 August. Alternatively, customers with tickets for the affected day can claim a full refund.

We will continue to work with NR and other Operators to ensure alignment between plans and provide as accurate information as possible, as early as possible – and in line with ongoing feedback from Transport Focus.

Similarly, we will provide timely and clear customer and stakeholder information as regards services and tickets on upcoming strike days in due course, when these plans are finalised. We will continue to review customer loadings, whether adaptations to the plan are required, and the traincrew availability position to inform our approach.

Thank you for your ongoing support and engagement. We remain committed to the recovery of our network, attracting passengers back to rail, and to building the railway of the future for the benefit of the customers and communities we are proud to serve.

In the spirit of collaboration, we remain open to **further discussion**. If you would find that helpful, please contact stakeholders@avantiwestcoast.co.uk or your Regional Growth Manager.

Yours sincerely



Phil Whittingham
Managing Director