



Christmas & New Year travel advice

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Railway investment means changes to trains in the West Midlands this Christmas and New Year

Train customers in the West Midlands are being urged to plan journeys in advance and allow extra time over the festive period while work takes place to make the railway more reliable.

Certain services in and out of Birmingham New Street station will be affected by track and signalling upgrades between there and Wolverhampton.

This work is part of Britain's Railway Upgrade Plan.

Signalling equipment in the Birmingham New Street area is more than 50 years old and needs replacing.

From 9.30pm on Saturday 23 December 2017 to 4am on Wednesday 3 January 2018, Network Rail's Team Orange engineers will be replacing a major junction near Smethwick.

They'll also be bringing into use new signalling equipment on both routes (via Sandwell & Dudley and via Aston) between Birmingham and Wolverhampton.

This will affected train services between New Street and Rugeley Trent Valley after 9.30pm on 23 December. Trains between New Street and Wolverhampton, and on the Cross City line, will be affected between 27 December and 2 January.

Richard Dugdale, Network Rail's senior scheme sponsor for the work, said: "Half the normal number of people travel by train at Christmas and New Year so we are seizing the opportunity to complete a huge amount of signalling and track upgrades. That way we cause the least amount of disruption to the fewest number of people. Train passengers should check before they travel on nationalrail.co.uk and allow extra time for their journeys."

The £246m scheme is part of a wider £600m+ programme to upgrade signalling across the West Midlands including Bromsgrove, Wolverhampton, Walsall, Coventry and on the route between Stourbridge and Banbury via Birmingham Snow Hill.

Early next year the signalling between Birmingham New Street and Birmingham International stations will also be replaced.

Train operators affected by the work this Christmas and New Year include Virgin Trains, West Midlands Trains, Arriva Trains Wales and CrossCountry.

Natasha Grice, general manager for Virgin Trains in the West Midlands, said: "We will be back up and running on 27 December, with two instead of three trains an hour to and from London in addition to our hourly service to

Scotland. Customers at Wolverhampton will need to change trains at either Birmingham New Street or Stafford to get to the capital, and allow for longer journey times. There will be no services calling at Sandwell & Dudley. As always the best advice is to check before you travel. Our normal service will resume on 3 January.”

Richard Brooks, customer service director for West Midlands Railway, said: “These are exciting times with record levels of investment going into railway services. The work planned over Christmas will bring the benefits of this investment a step nearer. So the message over the coming weeks is check before you travel. And remember, at this time of year last trains get very busy , so plan ahead and don’t get left behind.”

Cross Country’s managing director, Andrew Cooper, said: “We understand people don’t want their journeys disrupted, particularly at this time of year, and apologise if any of our customers are delayed by this important work. However, many parts of Britain’s railways need to be replaced or maintained to ensure our customers can travel safely and comfortably, and we have worked alongside our industry partners to keep any disruption to a minimum.”

Phil Edwards, assistant director transportation and connectivity at Birmingham City Council, said: “With the Christmas festivities in full swing, as well as a number of major transport projects and developments taking place, the city continues to be very busy. Our advice remains to leave the car at home and use the various public transport options, walk or cycle whenever possible. It is important to plan ahead and always check services before you travel, not forgetting to plan for the journey home. If you return to work on 2 January train services may still be affected by the improvement works being carried out by Network Rail.”

Passengers can plan their Christmas travel at www.nationalrail.co.uk/christmas. For specific Birmingham New Street information follow @NetworkRailBHM or check with your train operator.

Nationally tens of thousands of passengers will benefit from a better railway as a result of Network Rail's biggest ever Christmas investment programme which will see £160m invested as part of the £50bn Railway Upgrade Plan.

A 32,600-strong workforce will be grafting around the clock this holiday

season to deliver more reliable infrastructure, reduced journey times and improved facilities and services for passengers when they return to work.

Work taking place elsewhere on the railway between London Euston and Carlisle includes a bridge replacement on the West Coast main line between Rugby and Stafford; track renewal between Northampton and Rugby; station work at Liverpool Lime Street and resignalling in the Liverpool area; improvements to the Wyre Viaduct between Preston and Lancaster; and track renewal through platforms 13 and 14 at Manchester Piccadilly.

Ends

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About West Midlands Trains

West Midlands Trains Ltd. will be running the West Midlands rail franchise from 10 December 2017 until 2025/6. Abellio has a 70.1% share of the company, East Japan Railway Company (JRE) and Mitsui & Co., Ltd. (Mitsui) own the remaining 29.9% in a 50:50 split.

About Abellio

Abellio is the international passenger transport subsidiary of the Dutch national railway company, Nederlandse Spoorwegen. Every day our people provide rail, bus and tram services to 1.7m customers across the UK, Germany and in the Netherlands. In the UK we operate buses through Abellio London, as well as ScotRail and Greater Anglia train services, and Merseyrail in a joint venture with Serco. In Germany we operate Abellio Deutschland, serving communities in North Rhine Westfalia, Saxony, Lower Saxony, Saxony-Anhalt, Hesse and Thuringia. Our role in transport extends beyond the journey from a-to-b. With our international heritage and our policy of sharing best practice, not just amongst ourselves, but across the wider transport industry, we provide thought leadership and truly innovative ideas which make a positive contribution to the communities we serve. For more information on Abellio

visit www.abellio.com

About Mitsui

Mitsui is one of the most diversified and comprehensive trading, investment and service enterprises in the world with 139 offices in 66 countries as of March, 2017. Utilising our global operating locations, network and information resources, we are multilaterally pursuing business that ranges from product sales, worldwide logistics and financing, through to the development of major international infrastructure and other projects in the following fields: Iron & Steel Products, Mineral & Metal Resources, Infrastructure Projects, Integrated Transportation Systems, Chemicals, Energy, Food Resources, Food Products & Services, Consumer Services, IT & Communication, and Corporate Development Business. Mitsui is actively taking on challenges for global business innovation around the world. For more information, visit www.mitsui.com.

About JR East

East Japan Railway Company (JR East) was established in 1987, when Japanese National Railways was divided as part of a package of railway reforms. JR East's railway business covers a 7,500 km (approx. 4,660 miles) network in the eastern part of the Japanese main island, including Tokyo Metropolitan area, and provides transportation services, comprising urban, suburban and high speed operations, for 17 million passengers on a daily basis. JR East also undertakes non-transport commercial activities, which account for more than 30% of the total revenue of JR East Group. JR East contributes to passengers and communities it serves by delivering high degrees of punctuality, reliability and comfort and also continues to pursue higher levels of safety and service quality through technical innovation. For more information, visit www.jreast.co.jp/e.

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