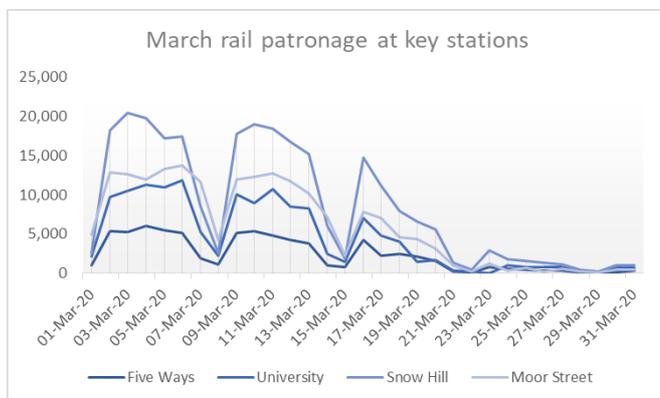


August 2020

## Passenger numbers

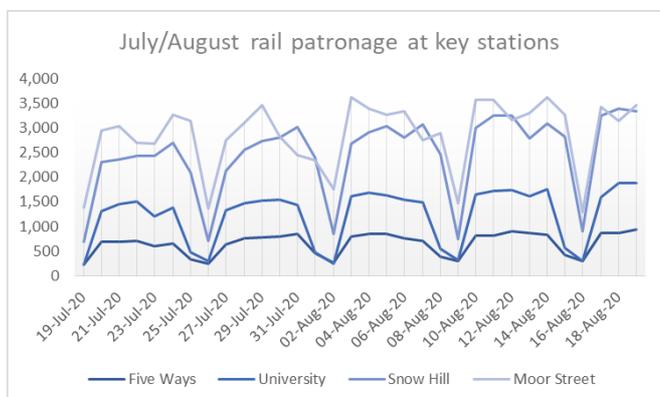
### Initial phase

As lockdown was introduced in March, rail passenger numbers fell dramatically by around 95%. On a typical weekday, New Street station would see around 200,000 people travelling through; this fell to between 6,000 and 12,000 per day as a result of lockdown. Trajectories at other key stations across the West Midlands rail network are shown below:



### Recovery phase

As lockdown measures have been eased, passenger numbers have started to recover from the initial sharp drop. This recovery has, however, been slow and patronage still sits at less than 30% of pre-COVID levels. Compared to other transport modes, rail usage has been slower to recover<sup>1</sup>.



<sup>1</sup> For comparison, bus ridership is around 50% of pre-COVID levels and traffic levels on the highway network are already back up to 85% of levels prior to lockdown.

## Timetable changes

### Initial phase

In response to the vastly reduced numbers of passengers travelling on the network, as well as an increasing number of staff self-isolating, the rail industry introduced emergency timetables which reduced service frequencies across the region. These timetables initially took effect on the 23<sup>rd</sup> March, with further changes to services coming on the 6<sup>th</sup> April. The below table gives an example of how these timetables affected services on one line in the region:

#### Cross-City south line<sup>2</sup> trains per hour (tph)

Pre-COVID timetable	3tph Birmingham to Redditch 3tph Birmingham to Bromsgrove
23 <sup>rd</sup> March timetable	2tph Birmingham to Redditch 2tph Birmingham to Bromsgrove
6 <sup>th</sup> April timetable	2tph Birmingham to Redditch 1tph Birmingham to Bromsgrove

### Recovery phase

On the 18<sup>th</sup> May, as passenger numbers stabilised and in order to prepare for future easing of lockdown, an enhanced timetable was introduced which saw limited increases in frequency on some routes compared to the 6<sup>th</sup> April. Further uplifts in frequency came with another change to the timetable on the 6<sup>th</sup> July. An example of how these timetable changes in the recovery phase affected services is below:

#### Avanti West Coast trains per hour (tph) to London

Pre-COVID timetable	3tph Birmingham to London
6 <sup>th</sup> April timetable	1tph Birmingham to London
6 <sup>th</sup> July timetable	3tph Birmingham to London

<sup>2</sup> Cross City electric services only, does not include additional Worcester/Hereford services which also serve Bromsgrove

### Future timetable changes

From the 7th September, a further timetable change will restore many routes across the region to near normal levels (approximately 90%-95% of pre-COVID services). There are then no further material timetable changes planned until 2021.

### Capacity

Requirements for social distancing mean that passengers should, where possible, not travel in close proximity to other passengers. For rail, which usually relies on people travelling at close quarters (both seated and standing) to deliver its maximum capacity, this presents challenges. Train operators have individually assessed the new maximum capacity that is available in order to facilitate social distancing. Inevitably, this leads to a significantly reduced number of passengers per train that can be accommodated. Combined with reduced service frequencies, albeit offset with longer trains in some cases, the total capacity of the rail network is currently much reduced from pre-COVID levels. This will remain the case for as long as social distancing measures are required, even with a return to a near full timetable. West Midlands Rail Executive has carried out an assessment of seated capacity levels on key routes in the region taking into account the changes in timetable, train lengths and social distancing requirements. The results are summarised in the table below, assuming a 1m+ social distancing requirement<sup>3</sup>:

Route	Pre-COVID spph*	COVID spph*	% of normal capacity
<b>Cross City line</b>	2,312	696	30%
<b>Wolverhampton line</b>	2,829	1075	38%
<b>Coventry line</b>	3,073	1174	38%
<b>Leamington Spa-Coventry-Nuneaton</b>	124	50	40%

<sup>3</sup> Based on the 6<sup>th</sup> July timetable and assuming social distancing requirements of 1m+ (i.e. passengers need to be 1m away from each other, with other social distancing measures in place). Note that this compares seated capacity, when standing capacity is factored in to pre-COVID services, the difference will be greater.

<b>Worcester and the South West</b>	1,062	400	38%
<b>Stourbridge shuttle</b>	150	60	40%
<b>Snow Hill lines: Stourbridge</b>	1,668	448	27%
<b>Snow Hill lines: Stratford</b>	834	224	27%
<b>Snow Hill lines: Solihull/Dorridge</b>	1,602	422	26%
<b>Leicester/ Nottingham/ N. East</b>	1,344	368	27%
<b>Trent Valley</b>	238	96	40%

\*seated passengers per hour

### Social distancing measures

#### Messaging to passengers

During the early stages of lockdown, a clear message of “essential travel only” was communicated to passengers. In line with messaging co-ordinated at a national level by the Rail Delivery Group, this was designed to keep rail capacity free for key workers. As lockdown has relaxed, this message has softened to “travel safely this summer”. Passengers are encouraged to follow social distancing guidelines and, where possible, to travel outside busy periods.

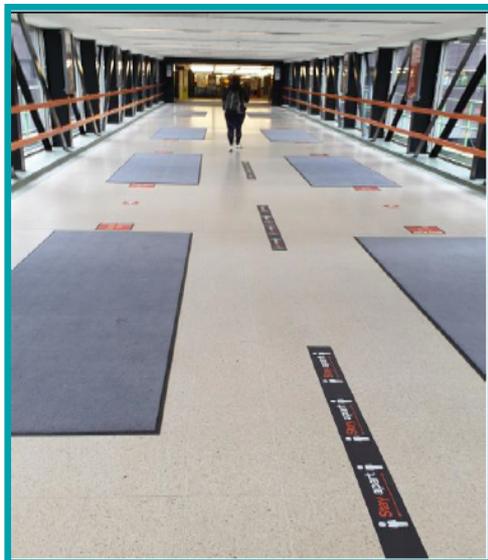
A number of social distancing measures have been implemented across the network, both at stations and on board trains. A selection of these are outlined below.

#### At stations

- Each individual station has a specific COVID plan in place, reflecting local circumstances
- Enhanced cleaning regimes with a focus on high touch point areas
- Hand sanitiser points installed at some stations
- Signing and other visual indications to remind passengers of the importance of social distancing
- Wearing of face mask in enclosed areas of stations is mandatory for most passengers, with some exemptions
- At some larger stations, one way systems have been introduced

### 3 | Briefing note – impact of COVID19 on the West Midlands rail network

- Perspex dividers have been installed at stations where ticket offices have multiple windows



Above: floor signing in place at Birmingham Snow Hill station



Above: social distancing signing in place on board a CrossCountry train

#### On board trains

- Wearing of face masks on board trains is mandatory for most passengers, with some exemptions
- Signing to encourage passengers to observe social distancing
- Extra on board announcements to remind passengers of social distancing requirements
- Long distance operators Avanti and CrossCountry are encouraging passengers to book on specific trains prior to travel; it has been clarified that this is a specific measure to manage demand rather than an attempt to stop walk-on travel in the West Midlands
- Enhanced on board cleaning measures
- Passengers are encouraged to sit in a socially distanced way: Avanti booking systems will only allow certain seats to be booked and CrossCountry is encouraging passengers to use only window seats

#### Operational delivery

The rail industry's approach to enforcing social distancing measures is based on the 5 Es:

- Encourage
- Explain
- Encourage
- Enable
- Enforce

Enforcement is intentionally the last measure that will be used where other approaches have not been successful. Rail staff are enabling but not attempting to enforce social distancing. British Transport Police have the power to remove non-compliant passengers and are able to issue fines where appropriate. This approach is being carried out with an awareness that some passengers will be exempt from complying with certain measures e.g. wearing of face masks.

Train operators are monitoring capacity closely. In order to encourage passengers to choose trains which are less busy, West Midlands Trains is providing both live information on social distancing issues across its network and information for future travel on which trains are likely to be near to or at social distancing capacity<sup>4</sup>. An example from the West Midlands Railway website is illustrated below<sup>5</sup>:

<sup>4</sup> See <https://www.westmidlandsrailway.co.uk/travel-information/journey-planning/social-distancing-live-updates>

<sup>5</sup> Example for trains travelling from Birmingham New Street towards Rugeley

## 4 | Briefing note – impact of COVID19 on the West Midlands rail network

11:12		8	11:59	47 mins	230		<a href="#">Details</a>
12:12		8	13:00	48 mins	230		<a href="#">Details</a>
13:12		8	13:59	47 mins	230		<a href="#">Details</a>
14:12		8	15:03	51 mins	230		<a href="#">Details</a>
15:12		8	15:59	47 mins	230		<a href="#">Details</a>

With patronage across the network still well below pre-COVID levels, services are generally coping well with social distancing measures in place. A few peak services on the Rugeley and Snow Hill lines are the only current West Midlands Railway services which are operating near to their socially distanced capacity.

### Rail industry structural changes

On the 23rd March, in response to the downturn in passenger numbers precipitated by COVID and the consequent significantly changed commercial circumstances, the Department for Transport (DfT) offered all train operating companies the opportunity to transfer to temporary Emergency Measures Agreements (EMAs). These EMAs effectively suspended the normal contractual franchise arrangements and transferred cost and revenue risk from the train operators to the DfT. For the West Midlands Railway franchise, West Midlands Rail Executive (WMRE) has been working closely with the DfT to ensure that these new contractual arrangements are implemented with a view to driving the best possible outcomes for passengers in the region under the current circumstances.

The EMAs are due to expire on the 20th September. The DfT is currently exploring options for the contractual arrangements that will apply to the rail industry after this date. It is unlikely that train operators will go back to pre-COVID franchise arrangements, as the continuing low passenger numbers make these contracts commercially unviable. WMRE will continue to work hand-in-hand with the DfT to implement whatever new arrangements are put in place for West Midlands Railway.

Irrespective of how the contractual structure changes, delivery of the wider rail service across the region will still be overseen via the multi-lateral Grand Rail Collaboration, an organisation that has been working across the region's different rail organisations to support the delivery of the West Midlands rail service response to COVID-19.

#### Further Information

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