

South Western Railway strike survey

The 27-day strike by South Western Railway RMT guards in December means that SWR is able to run only just over fifty per cent of its regular service. The strike started on 2 December and is set to continue until 2 January 2020. It was suspended on polling day, 12 December.

Transport Focus wanted to find about the impact of the strike action on the daily lives of SWR passengers, including what alternative travel arrangements they have made and whether passengers thought that the information provided was effective. We ran a survey using our Transport User Panel asking commuters, business and leisure travellers who were affected what the strike action had meant for them.

Impact on passengers

The strike appears to have had a significant impact on many of our panellists. 62 per cent of those affected made a journey which was disrupted. 25 per cent of people told us they had not been able to make the journey that they wanted to make, bringing disruption to both work lives and leisure plans.

“I have had to change many of my work appointments. I have had to stay at other people's houses so I can use a different train line. I have altered evening plans as the last train back from LDN is at 11pm. I have declined my works Christmas party in Central LDN as I cannot rely on SWT getting me home. I won't be going into LDN to enjoy the Christmas activities this year. Overall, I have found this very stressful.”
Commuter, travelling from Surbiton

“I run a small craft business and attend a lot of Christmas fairs, school fairs within about 100 radius using public transport. I have had to simply cancel some markets because I am struggling to arrive at fairs in time or get reliable information regarding train arrival, departures. And its compounded by the lack of buses. So, Christmas is my best time for sales etc I dread to think of the knock on effect by February.”
Business traveller from Weymouth

“I had bought and paid for tickets to an event which I had to cancel due to the trains not running late enough to get me home. My mother will not commit to Christmas plans as she is so anxious about using the trains in this period. As none of us have a car, Christmas plans are now on hold.”
Leisure passenger travelling from Waterloo

“With no trains AT ALL at my station (Mottisfont & Dunbridge.) I have had to leave home earlier than usual, drive eight miles to park, catch a normal bus to Winchester, stay at a hotel in London overnight, leave work early to make my way home via train - bus - drive. Extra expense and inconvenience.”
Commuter from Mottisfont and Dunbridge

The majority of passengers have had to allow more time for their journey because of the strike. Others have used different modes of public transport, worked from home, or cancelled appointments and trips out. Many people reported travelling on overcrowded trains, which has also impacted other forms of public transport such as buses.

“Means leaving the house at 6am instead of 6.45 and not getting back until 2100 instead of 1930 because of fewer trains and awful queues at Waterloo Station.”
Commuter from Surbiton

“I could walk to my SWR station and get a train to London Waterloo. Instead I need to get a taxi and get into London Paddington which makes my journey more difficult at the other end. I will be late for a planned meeting.”
Commuter from Cranbrook (Devon)

“The revised timetable has increased my journey ... this now means that I can't see my children in the evenings or read them a story before they go to bed. They are suffering because of the selfish actions of a few.”
Commuter from Thames Ditton

Passenger information

We also asked passengers about the quality of information provided by SWR. Among those who made a journey, almost everybody was aware before they arrived at the station that their train would be affected in some way. SWR appear to have done a good job of informing people: a large proportion of our panellists were aware because of information on the SWR website or at stations.

Enhanced compensation

Transport Focus has called for enhanced compensation for passengers affected by the strike action and this sentiment is shared by some of our panellists.

“I have had to change my travel times to suit revised timetable and the journey is longer both in to work and the return journey. I very often have to wait longer in the evenings for train to my destination as they are less frequent. I have a first-class season ticket and seats have not been available for all or part of the journey in the first class area and even when I have the area gets overcrowded as the train fills up when it stops at suburban stations en route. No offer of a refund for this inconvenience considering the amount of money it costs me to purchase ticket.”
Business traveller from Farnborough

“I am very disappointed that I have not been able to travel on my normal trains and have been late to work on every day I have managed to get a train, I am now very stressed when I have to travel to work and back home. I'm very annoyed that I have just brought my season ticket for over £4,000 and I'm not able to use the trains as I should be able to for the money I have paid! and am not allowed to claim a refund.”
Commuter from Basingstoke

“Fewer trains, impossible to board some of them. No refunds on my monthly season ticket. Even the scheduled trains on the revised timetable have been either cancelled or late.” Commuter from Raynes Park

Transport Focus will continue to monitor the situation and call on both sides to find a resolution to this dispute. The watchdog is also calling on SWR to offer additional compensation to passengers affected by the reduced service.

Survey method

Transport Focus used its Transport User Panel to survey 289 South Western Railway passengers between 5 and 12 December 2016.

Note on interpretation of the data: data is representative of members of Transport Focus’s Transport User Panel and therefore should be seen as indicative, rather than statistically representative, of the view of passengers generally. Data is unweighted.