

## Statements and chief executive blogs on coronavirus

These can also be viewed at: <https://www.transportfocus.org.uk/>

### Bus

#### **News release: Passengers welcome emergency support for bus industry - 3rd April 2020**

(<https://www.transportfocus.org.uk/news-events-media/news/passengers-welcome-emergency-support-for-bus-industry/>)

Commenting on the emergency support for the bus industry through coronavirus, Transport Focus and London TravelWatch Chief Executive Anthony Smith said:

“Around half of bus passengers tell us that the bus is the only real means of transport available to them, so it is right that the Government has recognised the exceptional circumstances posed by coronavirus.

“Bus operators and transport authorities must keep services running for key workers and those who must travel for medical care and essential shopping. It is vital that services are protected so they can get back up and running as soon as this crisis is over.”

#### **Anthony Smith blog: Keeping our buses running - 3rd April 2020**

<https://www.transportfocus.org.uk/news-events-media/blog/keeping-our-buses-running/>

We know that buses are the workhorse of our public transport system. Transport Focus also knows that passengers absolutely depend on their local bus service. Around half of the near 44,000 passengers who took part in the latest [Bus Passenger Survey](#), told us they had no other easy access to transport.

In these immensely challenging times, with passenger numbers falling by around 90 per cent, bus operators and local transport authorities have responded to the impact of the coronavirus outbreak. Changes to bus services meant that they must now reasonably meet the needs of NHS staff, other key workers and those who must travel for medical care or for essential shopping.

From our many discussions with bus operators it is clear the dramatic and sudden fall in the number of passengers travelling is having a profound impact on the financial stability of the sector

It is therefore welcome news today to see the [Government's announcement](#) of a funding package that will ‘keep England's buses running’. It is right that the Government has recognised the exceptional circumstances posed by coronavirus.

Bus operators and transport authorities must keep services running for the foreseeable future. It is also vital that services are protected so they are ready to get back up and running as soon as this crisis is over and be there for all of us who depend on our bus service.

## Rail

### **Anthony Smith Blog: Coronavirus season ticket refunds: keep passengers in the loop - 1st April 2020**

<https://www.transportfocus.org.uk/news-events-media/blog/coronavirus-season-ticket-refunds-keep-passengers-in-the-loop/>

Commuters with season tickets and passengers with advance purchase tickets now have tickets that cannot be used. With unprecedented demand for refunds from passengers Transport Focus has looked at the information provided by transport operators to see how easy it is to make a claim.

Transport Focus has successfully pressed for refunds on Advance tickets. We were pleased Government and operators recognised these exceptional circumstances and changed the refund policy. While it is good that some train operators have waived the usual £10 admin fee for season tickets, the other existing terms and conditions for season ticket refunds continue to apply.

The Government's travel advice and revised timetables has resulted in operators being inundated with refund requests from hundreds of thousands of passengers. Customer relations teams at operators are hugely stretched with fewer staff working due to illness, staff in self-isolation and introducing home working for staff.

Passengers will need to allow the rail industry more time than usual to deal with the record-high number of refund requests. However, some passengers with season tickets will worry that each day that passes means a reduction in the refund value. A consistent approach reassuring that season ticket refunds will be backdated to at least 17 March could remove some of the heat.

Some operators are coping better than others. In the [West Midlands](#) good clear advice about how to change your ticket or apply for a refund outlines that a new online process is being set up. This means passengers can avoid the need to go to the station and provides reassurance that refunds will be based on the date passengers stopped travelling.

Elsewhere, while it's welcome Transport for Wales has waived the £10 admin fee, it's clear refunds will take a long time. [Transport for Wales](#) has warned passengers to allow up to 56 days to receive the refund. Disappointingly, there is no clear commitment to refund based on the day passengers stopped travelling as the operator says it will calculate season ticket refunds 'based on how much you used up to the date we receive it back. So please return your ticket as soon as you can'.

Across the different public transport modes Blackpool Transport is [pausing all active monthly mobile tickets](#). This allows passengers to choose when to begin using tickets again by re-activating them. More good practice from [Transport for West Midlands](#), it has developed a 'pro-rata' refund scheme, backdated to 16 March, for various ticket products including the Swift smartcard.

We all understand the logistical problems faced by many sectors right now. Good clear information to help establish realistic expectations is vital and clarity about season ticket calculations will help.

Check your own calculations before submitting your refund request – so you know roughly what to expect. The National Rail website [season ticket calculator](#) can help you do this. Transport Focus has produced a [summary](#) of what different transport companies are saying about ticket refunds. We will keep this updated as the situation changes.

## Road

**Anthony Smith blog: Coronavirus and our roads: traffic down, but the law still applies and new things for drivers to think about - 2nd April 2020**

<https://www.transportfocus.org.uk/news-events-media/blog/coronavirus-and-our-roads/>

Most of us are heeding Government coronavirus [advice](#) to stay at home, protect the NHS and save lives. The list of reasons anybody should be going anywhere is short. Highways England, the AA, RAC and others tell us that traffic volumes are down. We hear they were 64 per cent lower than normal on England's motorways and major 'A' roads on Tuesday. Mind you, that is still a lot of traffic and I don't envy the police officers who need to judge whether a journey is or isn't within the guidelines. In some of the cases that have hit the [headlines](#) it was probably a fairly straightforward call! Unless you are going to work (that can't be done at home), delivering vital supplies or providing another essential service there aren't too many reasons to be on the road.

Because the roads are much quieter it seems that a tiny minority have decided to put their foot down – ignoring speed limits. Tempting it may be, but it's still illegal and still dangerous. And if it results in a crash, it puts extra pressure on the NHS and blocks the road for everybody else – including the lorries with food and medical equipment on them. For the benefit of everyone, please be sensible and stick to the law. Many chief constables have made it clear that they'll keep enforcing it!

As in many areas of life, the Covid-19 restrictions have resulted in new things for road users to think about. MOT certificates have been [extended](#), but how do you keep your car in good order if your garage is struggling with staff numbers? If you aren't using your vehicle do you need to insure it? If it's parked on a public road, yes. If it's not then, in theory, perhaps you

could save a few pounds – but it would be risky if something unexpected happened on your drive. Pros and cons, as ever.

One of the issues which came up while discussing current issues with the AA and RAC this week, was that some vehicles will be parked for days and weeks on end. Popping to the supermarket once a week will usually be enough to keep the battery charged up. But for those of us who are strolling to the shops, keeping two metres apart from everybody we meet, it could be a problem when you next need the car. Both the [AA](#) and [RAC](#) have information about battery health, fuel, brakes and tyres on their websites. Incidentally, the AA is doing free breakdown cover for [NHS staff](#).

Finally, it's interesting to note the different approaches to tolls and charges at the moment. Here's a selection:

- Dartford crossing: normal rates
- London congestion charge: suspended
- M6 toll: normal rates
- Mersey tunnels: charges suspended
- Tamar bridge: charges suspended
- Tyne tunnels: normal rates.

### **Anthony Smith blog: Coronavirus: motorway services remain crucial - 27th March 2020**

<https://www.transportfocus.org.uk/news-events-media/blog/coronavirus-motorway-services-remain-crucial/>

It's clear that slowing the spread of coronavirus means we are all having to do things very differently. Leaving our homes only for the very limited purposes outlined by the [Prime Minister on Monday](#) has resulted in a huge overall drop in travel demand. Transport, by any means, is for the time being for essential purposes only.

One of those essential purposes is getting key workers, including NHS and social care staff, to and from work. Another is getting medical supplies to hospitals and food to the shops. England's motorways and major 'A' roads are key to this and it's good to see [Highways England](#) setting out how it will play its part in keeping the country going. Without its roads open there would be very little on the supermarket shelves!

Motorway services remain an integral part of Highways England's roads, not least for lorry drivers. As well as the rest required to ensure safe driving, there's the practical issue of refuelling – vehicles and drivers – on longer journeys. Partly to comply with Government advice, and partly because there are many fewer customers, there is now a much-reduced range of outlets open at most motorway services. Fuel, toilets and food to take back to your car are still available.

Throughout the coronavirus crisis, lorry drivers delivering food, NHS volunteers taking medical supplies around the country and others making essential journeys will still need to

rest, refuel, go to the toilet and have something to eat and drink. Our [Motorway Services User Survey](#) shows that motorway services are doing a great job in the eyes of their customers. It's so important that they can keep doing so in the coming months, despite the inevitable sudden, dramatic fall in sales. With the limit on lorry drivers' hours [raised temporarily to 11 hours each day](#), facilities for them to rest are even more important than usual.

Finally, it was good to see that the [Government](#) has taken steps to help car owners avoid unnecessary travel and remain legal by extending, for six months, MOT certificates expiring on or after 30 March 2020. Cars must still be roadworthy and it's important to note that garages are allowed to keep operating.