# Rail upgrades during Christmas threaten widespread disruption and traveller frustration in the UK



Thousands of travellers across the UK are facing significant disruption this Christmas and New Year, thanks to a costly and ill-timed programme of rail upgrades that threaten chaos on key routes. Despite claims of improving safety and reliability, these extensive engineering works—ballooning to over £130 million—are a clear attempt to justify interference with what should be a period of relatively low demand. Instead of making it easier for people to visit loved ones or enjoy a stress-free holiday, Network Rail’s plans will inflict widespread delays and cancellations on the busiest routes, including those connecting London Waterloo, Cambridge, Leeds, York, and the critical West Coast Main Line.

While Network Rail pretends the majority of the network will remain unaffected, the reality is that specific sections will be crippled, leaving travellers stranded or forced into long, inconvenient diversions. For example, no trains will run between Preston and Carlisle until early January—a pointless disruption compounded by the fact that these works could have been scheduled for some other less disruptive time, rather than during the festive season when families are hardest hit. Similar closures on the corridor between Milton Keynes and Rugby and the prolonged suspension from Leeds to York highlight the government’s reckless prioritisation of grand infrastructure projects over the everyday needs of ordinary travellers.

London’s transport hubs will bear the brunt of this unnecessary upheaval. Waterloo and Victoria stations will see full suspensions or limited services during Christmas, disrupting hundreds of thousands of holidaymakers. The closure of key tunnels and stations—such as the Thameslink route from London St Pancras—serves as a stark reminder of how these “upgrades” often mean pain with little gain. Meanwhile, efforts to "strengthen" the rail infrastructure often appear more like costly vanity projects than essential improvements, further draining public funds while inconveniencing the very people who rely on these services.

In Scotland, major works like the installation of a new railway bridge at Bowling will shut down key routes for nearly two weeks, illustrating how these short-term "improvements" seem to be prioritized over maintaining a reliable service for daily commuters. These projects, justified as necessities for weather resilience and future safety, come at a heavy cost—delays, confusion, and a breakdown in trust in our public transport system.

Helen Hamlin, the CEO of Network Rail, insists these works during the festive period are “necessary” and “the best time,” yet her words ring hollow in the face of obvious hardship for millions. It’s a calculated gamble that puts long-term investments above immediate consumer needs. The government’s involvement—lifting roadworks, easing ticket change fees—smacks of desperate PR measures rather than genuine concern for holiday travellers. All the while, the network’s capacity remains overstretched, and passengers are left to navigate a maze of diversions and cancellations.

For those planning last-minute Christmas journeys, the message is clear: verify your travel plans carefully and brace for disruption. The ongoing overhaul might be justified as “modernisation,” but it feels more like a bureaucratic gamble that sacrifices holiday peace for bloated infrastructure budgets and political ambitions. As the nation faces these short-term headaches, one thing is certain: the real goal is not convenience, but pushing through costly projects that benefit a select few, leaving ordinary people to suffer unnecessary inconvenience during the most important time of the year.

Ultimately, these plans reveal a rail infrastructure still dominated by short-term politics and vanity projects, rather than genuine efforts to serve the public’s interests. Instead of wasting scarce resources on ineffective upgrades amid a cost-of-living crisis, a more responsible approach would be to focus on maintaining reliable, accessible services for all. The government’s current strategy hardly suggests a commitment to the everyday traveller—only to grandiose schemes that bring little immediate benefit and plenty of frustration.

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## Bibliography

1. <https://www.express.co.uk/news/uk/2120817/uk-travel-chaos-network-rail-christmas> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.networkrail.co.uk/stories/christmas-rail-works-2023/> - Network Rail outlines £127 million worth of engineering works planned for the 2023 Christmas and New Year period. The projects aim to enhance the safety, modernity, and reliability of the UK's railway system. Key initiatives include station developments, signal upgrades, track renewals, and resilience improvements to protect against extreme weather. The works are scheduled to take place during the festive season to minimise disruption to passengers, with the majority of services expected to operate as normal. Passengers are advised to check their journeys in advance and plan accordingly.
3. <https://www.networkrail.co.uk/our-work/looking-after-the-railway/planned-works/christmas-and-new-year-engineering-works/> - Network Rail announces essential engineering works over the Christmas and New Year period, including bridge replacements over the M6 and upgrades on the West Coast Main Line. The majority of work will commence on 24 December 2025, with some projects continuing until late January 2026. These improvements aim to provide a more reliable railway for the long term. Passengers are encouraged to check their travel plans in advance and stay updated through National Rail Enquiries or their train operator’s website.
4. <https://www.networkrail.co.uk/stories/upgrading-the-thameslink-route-this-christmas/> - Network Rail plans to replace 1,670 metres of track on the Thameslink route between London St Pancras and Herne Hill stations during the Christmas period. The work, scheduled from 25 to 29 December, aims to prevent faults and ensure smoother and more reliable journeys. Passengers are advised that the line will be closed during this period, with alternative arrangements in place. The initiative is part of ongoing efforts to enhance the railway network's efficiency and sustainability.
5. <https://www.networkrail.co.uk/stories/improving-london-liverpool-street-this-christmas/> - Network Rail is undertaking significant improvements at London Liverpool Street station during the Christmas and New Year period. The work includes strengthening the Bishopsgate tunnel and refurbishing the station's roof. The station will be closed for eight days, from Christmas Day to New Year's Day, to facilitate these upgrades. The enhancements aim to provide better and more reliable journeys for passengers using the station.
6. <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/christmas-travel-measures-to-help-passengers-plan-their-journey-and-travel-safely> - The UK government outlines measures to minimise disruption and ensure safe travel during the Christmas period between 23 and 27 December. Initiatives include lifting hundreds of miles of roadworks, enhancing rail services, postponing and accelerating rail engineering works, and waiving administrative fees for changing advance rail tickets. Passengers are urged to plan their journeys carefully, consider quieter routes, and book ahead to ensure a smooth travel experience.
7. <https://www.networkrail.co.uk/running-the-railway/looking-after-the-railway/planned-works/> - Network Rail provides information on planned engineering works aimed at maintaining and improving the UK's railway network. The page details how and when these works are scheduled to minimise disruption to passengers, including during bank holidays and overnight periods. It also explains the importance of such works in ensuring a safe and reliable rail system, and advises passengers to check their travel plans in advance to stay informed about any potential disruptions.