

**UK labour disputes**

## New bid to resolve UK rail strike as Boris Johnson urges sector to modernise

Echoes of lockdown as employees work from home and business leaders warn of painful economic impact



Rail services will be severely curtailed, with only one-fifth of mainline trains expected to run and many lines closed entirely © Reuters/Getty/Bloomberg

**Philip Georgiadis, Delphine Strauss and Emma Dunkley** in London AN HOUR AGO

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The RMT union will hold fresh talks with railway bosses **in a bid to** avoid more strikes later this week, as Boris Johnson warned the sector needed to modernise or “**go bust**” and the industry pressed on with job cuts.

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Talks will resume on Wednesday after large parts of Britain ground to a halt on Tuesday in the biggest strike to hit the country's railways in 30 years. Passengers have been forced to stay at home after warnings to avoid all but essential travel, with only around one-fifth of mainline trains running and many lines closed entirely.

With only skeleton services running for commuters into London and other cities,

there were no trains on large sections of the network all day.

The UK prime minister called for “union barons to sit down with Network Rail and the train companies” to agree to reforms such as **phasing out** ticket offices.

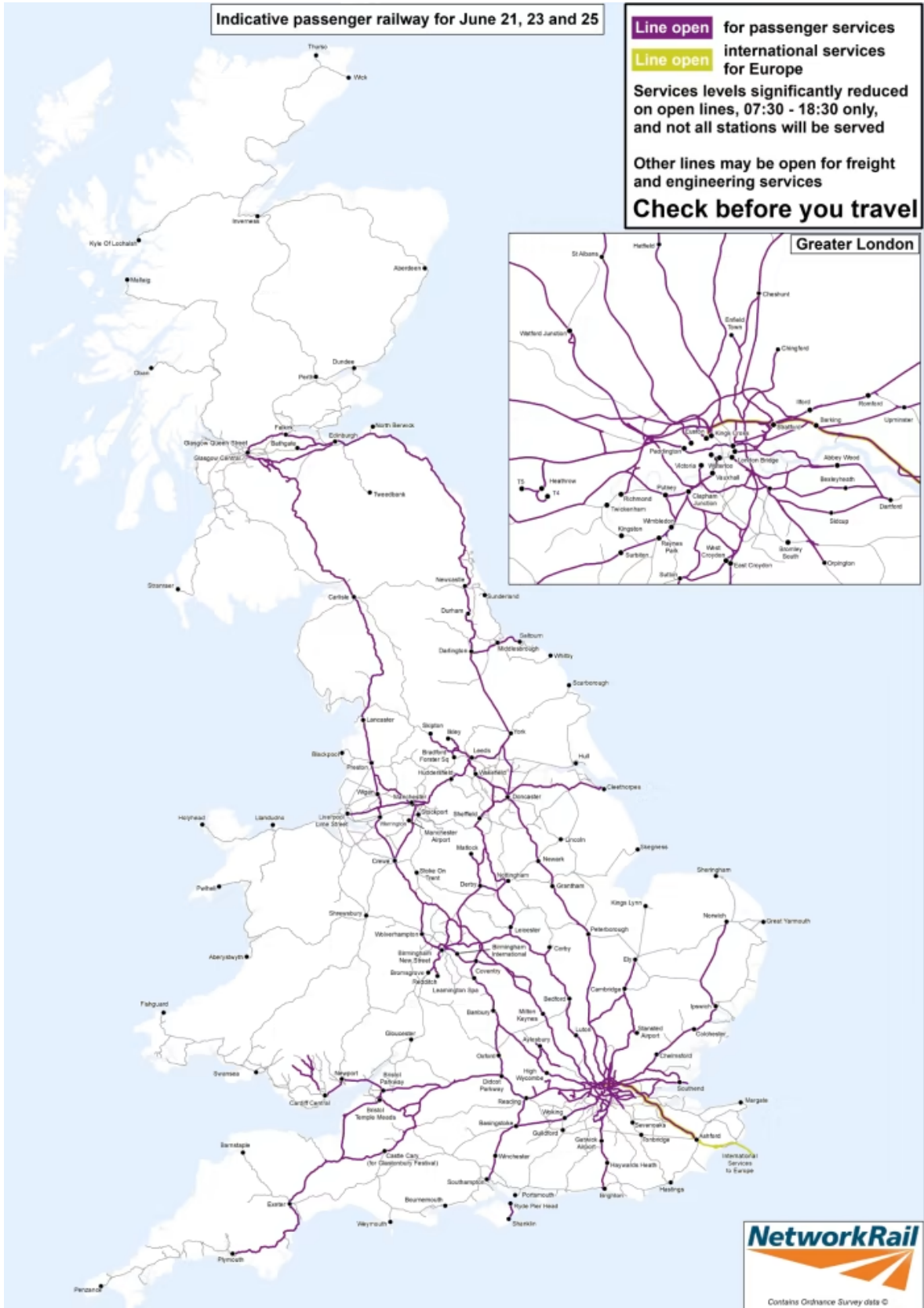
逐步淘汰

After talks failed on Monday night, Network Rail wrote to the RMT announcing plans to consult on 1,800 job losses and changes to working practices. The public body said it hoped the “vast majority” of job losses could be voluntary, but the RMT has said the two sides are still far from a deal

Mick Lynch, the leader of the [RMT rail union](#) organising the strike, which involves 40,000 employees at infrastructure owner Network Rail and staff at 13 train operating companies, said his priority was a settlement ensuring no **compulsory redundancies**.

强制裁员

More [strikes](#) are planned for Thursday and Saturday if no agreement is reached, while London Underground staff also went on strike for one day on Tuesday.



A Network Rail executive said the two sides came close to a last-minute deal late on Monday, but added that the RMT did not go far enough on modernising maintenance practices in return for a higher pay deal.

The RMT leadership is pushing for pay rises of 7 to 8 per cent to compensate for inflation expected to hit 11 per cent this year. But Johnson called at a **cabinet** 内阁会议 **meeting** on Tuesday for **pay discipline** 薪酬纪律 to limit inflationary pressures, while arguing that rail modernisation was essential.

“I say this to the country as a whole: we need to get ready to **stay the course**,” he added. “These improvements in the way we run our railways are in the interests of the travelling public . . . If we don’t do this, these great companies, this great industry, will face further financial pressure, it will go bust.”

The leader of the TUC has warned strikes could spread to other industries, and on Tuesday the Communication Workers Union said it would ballot members over industrial action at Royal Mail in a row over pay.



Mick Lynch, head of the RMT, said the union 'had no choice' but to proceed with the strike © Stefan Rousseau/PA

Andrew Haines, Network Rail’s chief executive, said he was “**profoundly** sorry” to passengers for the disruption caused by the train strike but blamed the RMT for refusing to compromise including on “**archaic**” working practices.   
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Haines added that ministers had agreed [Network Rail](#) could go beyond the public sector pay cap and offer a rise of more than 3 per cent because of the huge scope for productivity gains within the industry.

Lynch said agreeing a pay package was only his third priority, after protecting jobs and terms and conditions. He added that the rail companies viewed the negotiation “from the other end of the telescope”.

While the government has refused to directly negotiate with the RMT, in effect ministers control the industry’s finances.

Network Rail is state-owned, while the Department for Transport sets annual budgets for the services run by private train operating companies under coronavirus pandemic-era changes.

Business leaders warned that the strikes would hit the sectors hardest that were just recovering from the economic impact of Covid-19.

UKHospitality estimated the strike would cost its sector £540mn-£1bn as thousands of people would be unable to travel across the country, harming bars, hotels, clubs, theatres and restaurants.

The strike means [more people are likely to stay at home](#) during the week than at any time since the last pandemic lockdown, delivering another hit to businesses in city centres.

But the Covid-driven adaptation to remote working has meant that the industrial action is unlikely to be as disruptive as previous **stoppages**.

[货运服务](#) **Freight services** [停工](#) will be prioritised during the week but the UK’s supply chains will be put under renewed strain. Between 30 and 40 per cent less freight is expected to move by train across the week and the strikes will “add extra risk into already fragile supply chains”, said Maggie Simpson, head of the Rail Freight Group.

The rail skeleton service will close down by 6.30pm on Tuesday, with the [last trains between London and cities](#) such as Birmingham, Manchester, Leeds and Edinburgh all departing before 4pm.

Train drivers are members of a different union and are not on strike, while the industry has drafted managers and other staff on to the frontline to work on platforms and in signal boxes.

The disruption is likely to persist on the days between the official strikes, particularly in the morning, because trains will be out of place for their timetabled runs.

*Additional reporting by Jim Pickard and Daniel Thomas*

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