



RMT GUIDANCE FOR REPRESENTATIVES ON THE APPLICATION OF THE RAIL INDUSTRY CORONAVIRUS FORUM (RICF) DOCUMENT:

Principles for managing the risk of exposure to COVID 19 to passengers and employees across the GB mainline rail industry

Introduction

During the 2020 Coronavirus – Covid-19 Pandemic the Governments of England and the devolved nations instituted a series of measures that greatly restricted freedom of movement that included measures where employers could, where possible allow workers to work from home, be furloughed or stood-down. This resulted in a significant reduction in the requirements for public transport and as a result rail usage was restricted to essential use only. Although the industry has continued to run rail services these have been reduced to circa 50% for passengers with 12,700 services operating each day. Passenger usage is however down to only 5% of normal levels with predominately key and essential workers currently travelling.

With the Prime Ministerial statement of 10th May 2020 the Government have begun to talk about easing restrictions on lockdown and work and, more importantly to RMT members employed in the rail industry, potential relaxations on travel restrictions.

Although RMT have a fundamental disagreement with the timing of any return to normal rail services we have contributed to a work stream involving representatives of the other rail trade unions, the rail industry, the Office of Road and Rail. This has resulted in a document being produced which sets out a series of high level principles which, if rigorously applied, could be a template for easing of restrictions. The document - 'Principles for managing the risk of exposure to COVID 19 to passengers and employees across the GB mainline rail industry' is attached as Appendix 1. The document is further supported by two additional documents – a letter from RICF Chair, Andy Meadows to the General Secretaries of the rail trade unions and a Guidance note on application of the Principles. Both documents are attached as Appendix 2 and 3.

The documents referred to have been discussed by the National Executive Committee who have instructed that this Guidance is made available to our representatives.

The primary method of restricting transmission of Covid-19 is to maintain social distancing principles as described in the guidance provided by the public health organisations in England, Scotland and Wales, and which are summarised below:

1. Do not attend work or travel if symptomatic. Employees and their household members who are displaying symptoms of Covid-19 are encouraged to make use of government testing.
2. Hand hygiene – employees should wash their hands regularly using soap and water for at least 20 seconds and particularly after blowing their nose, sneezing or coughing and before eating -and after travel to and from work.
3. Working from home where possible and in line with current Government advice.
4. Social distancing i.e. being at least 2 metres away from other people, where this is practicable. If the two metres cannot be maintained then PPE should be considered.

RMT Lead Officers have been instructed to organise teams of appropriate representatives to engage with each employer through the machinery and to oversee and approve the design of SSOW that cover all areas of railway operation in a way that minimises the risks to worker and passenger health. However it should be remembered that the risks to worker health and safety will need to include non-public operations and workplaces including depots, signalling locations and offices.

The most recent NEC position sets out direct guidance for members in the workplace during the increase in passenger services and numbers:

- *Ensure any arrangements are based on rail passenger usage being limited to 20% as per the RICF Principles document.*
- *Social distancing must remain in place at 2m.*
- *If there are essential tasks that must be carried out where 2m is not possible then agreed mitigations must be in place.*
- *In regard to the provision of surgical-type masks in many areas, especially in engineering functions and depots, agreed mitigations to the 2m rule are already in place. In such situations surgical-type masks can provide mutual assurance between wearers that the spread of the infection may be limited by their use if worn by those in proximity to each other. Where such agreements are in place and reps and members are satisfied with their operation, the arrangements can continue.*
- *The purpose of the RMT advice, above, is to avoid inadequate PPE being used by employers as mitigation for an inability to maintain 2m social distancing as a result of unmanageable passenger numbers or demands to run an unmanageable level of service.*

- *Surgical-type masks are not themselves protection from infection and are not mitigation for any failure to implement 2m social distancing.*
- *In other situations there may be a need for further protection where consideration must be given to Personnel Protective Equipment that is of a standard that is designed to protect the worker such as face masks (FFP3 or equivalent), visors and gloves. Such situations may include, but are not limited to, working on gatelines, providing passenger assistance and interaction with passengers on board trains.*
- *Social distancing must be possible in staff areas after any increase in services*
- *Members must be advised of any specific local/company level problems and clear advice given on specific applications of worksafe/refusal to work process.*
- *Reps should be advised to adopt these principles in any discussions they are having with employers. Further, reps should seek to issue specific advice to members in their constituencies about how local arrangements being implemented by employers meet these principles.*
- *Our Representatives are to be fully engaged in risk assessments to be carried out prior to any proposed increase in services and staffing levels.*

RMT Guidance

While RMT representatives at a national level have had input into the development of the high level principles it is now the responsibility of individual rail companies to design and implement safe systems of work to implement these principles in a way that protects the health and safety of their staff and of the travelling public. RMT will not accept any plan that we believe increases the level of risk for our members and will take whatever steps are necessary to protect those members.

While RMT is discussing these issues with the employers we believe that a ramp up of services may present risks that may be greater than those presented during the ramping down of the industry at the start of the Pandemic. There is a real danger that increasing levels of traffic and usage of the railway before the general and sustained suppression of the infection rates of the virus could mean that the railway itself becomes a transmission system for the spread of the virus between users, staff and communities across the country. Rather than a return to normality - a premature increment in railway service could bring about a return to cross infection.

The RICF high level principles are applicable to all employers in the GB rail industry and this includes Network Rail and the Train Operating Companies. In addition it also applies to other organisations contracted to carry out work for these principle companies including

train maintenance and train cleaning companies, rail infrastructure maintenance companies, catering companies and security personnel companies.

This Guidance is designed to assist our representatives who may be involved with any of these employers. RMT expect consultation to take place with industrial and health and safety representatives. Consultation with health and safety representatives should be in accordance with the Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations and the Railways and Other Guided Transport Systems (Safety) Regulations.

The biggest and most obvious problem facing the industry is one of controlling the numbers and flow of passengers on stations and on trains. If the industry cannot demonstrate it can control the numbers safely, then it is not in a position to ramp up for any partial phased lifting of restrictions.

Instead the industry may well have to advise HMG that the only way of achieving an ALARP position, is to wait until the medical and scientific advice is given for a full un-lock, and plan accordingly.

RMT's concerns are broken down into specific railway operations that present their own problems and we expect each railway employer to make a full consideration of their own method of operation in each applicable area.

STATIONS

- What measures can be put in place to control the numbers entering normally busy stations, some with multiple entrance/exits and interchanges.
- What measures will be in place at busy un-staffed stations.
- How will gateline staff carry out social distancing and protect themselves, when passenger numbers significantly increase
- How will dispatch staff carry out social distancing and protect themselves, when passenger numbers significantly increase
- How will mobility assistance staff carry out social distancing and protect themselves, when passenger numbers significantly increase
- How will information desk staff carry out social distancing and protect themselves, when passenger numbers significantly increase
- How will floor-walking staff carry out social distancing and protect themselves, when passenger numbers significantly increase
- How will security staff carry out social distancing and protect themselves, when passenger numbers significantly increase
- If for any reason a station has to be evacuated, how will this be done whilst maintaining social distancing, and how will staff protect themselves during an evacuation

- Who will control access to platforms, and how will this be done on non gateline stations/platforms
- How will passengers with reservations be sifted
- What measures will be put in place to maintain social distancing in areas such as, station concourses, escalators, over-bridges ticket windows, TVMs, passageways, retail outlets and on platforms themselves.
- What measures will be in place at interchanges which feed into the network such as Airports and Bus Stations
- How can social distancing be maintained when ticket offices need to increase the number of staff on duty to deal with the significant increase in passenger numbers

TRAINS

- What measures can be put in place to control numbers of passengers on trains in company's without seat reservations
- How will door operation and dispatch duties be carried out on stock that can only be operated by in carriage door panels
- How will dispatch duties be carried out if the platform is busy
- The industry has been plagued by short formations on busy services for years, how do on-train staff maintain safe social distancing in such circumstances, when passenger numbers increase significantly
- What instructions are to be given to traincrew when arriving at a station with a busy train, and the platform is already quite crowded.
- How will traincrew evacuate a busy train should the need arise, while maintaining social distancing
- Will traincrew be requested to carry out non emergency in train functions, such as ticket sales/checks, and how can this be done while maintaining social distancing
- Will any forms of on-train catering be required, and how can this be done while maintaining social distancing, and protecting the staff
- How will on train mobile cleaners carry out social distancing and protect themselves, when there is a significant increase in passengers
- How will turn round cleans be carried out safely, given a significant increase in loadings generating more risk of the train being contaminated
- When trains arrive at fleet maintenance facilities following a diagram of carrying significantly increased numbers of passenger, which greatly increases the risk that the unit is contaminated. What measures are to be put in place to ensure the protection of train maintenance and train presentation staff from such an increased risk

NON-PUBLIC OPERATIONS

The railway is currently operating at a much reduced traffic and intensity and consequently signalling, control and maintenance of infrastructure of rolling stock has been stepped back which has allowed rotational lower staff attendance, detailed social distancing and changes of work practice revisions which has allowed significant protections to be agreed and implemented. At higher timetable, traffic and intensity many of these mitigations and revisions would likely be compromised. The return to any increased service would therefore require a complete review and agreement of new mitigations and methods in Network Rail and TOC/Rolling Stock company maintenance facilities

There will also be consequential effects on the entire rail sector of increasing the numbers of services and passengers on them to anything above the present levels. It is likely that in signalling and control centres; infrastructure maintenance depots; fleet engineering facilities and elsewhere the levels of traffic and maintenance schedules will be increased such that the current regime of social distancing will not be sustainable and that staff will be required to work in very close proximity increasing the likelihood of the transmission of the virus among staff and their families.

Messrooms, particularly traincrew messrooms will present a problem with any ramp up. It took a major effort and a considerable length of time at the start of the pandemic to impose any sort of social distancing in messroom areas. What measures are to be put in place before any increases in the number of staff can be safely authorised

PPE

PPE is the last step in the hierarchy of control so each activity and task would need to be reviewed, risk assessed and relevant safe systems of work created that are directly attuned to operating the railway at a higher level of service while maintaining social distancing.

- Levels of PPE need to be identified, with particular kit identified within each level
- All tasks must be risk assessed for PPE given the increased passenger numbers

It must be clear across the industry, as to which staff get issued what level of PPE in which circumstances. It must be demonstrated that a robust supply chain is in place for the replenishment of all PPE, and that measures for collection and disposal of used PPE is in place at each location. Finally there must be a procedure in place that sets out the measures that will be expected of staff if there is no PPE available.

RMT's expectations of the employers

RMT expect the employers to engage in consultation with our representatives and where possible to reach agreement as to how best to protect worker and passenger health and

safety. We will expect the employers to take our representative's concerns and work together to provide mutually agreeable solutions. If at any stage our representatives find their views are being ignored or downplayed then they should, in the first instance report this to our Lead Officers who will take appropriate steps to seek advice from Head Office as to how to proceed.