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Epsom rail commuters brace for fare increases

26 August 2025



Commuters travelling from Epsom to London terminals are set to pay significantly more for their journeys next year if government policy on rail fares continues unchanged. The current cost of an annual season ticket from Epsom is **£2,676**, but under the projected **5.8% rise in regulated fares for 2026–27**, that figure would climb by around **£155** to reach approximately **£2,831**.

The increase is tied to the government's formula of linking fares to July's Retail Price Index plus one percent. This comes at a time when services from Epsom to Waterloo remain reduced, with only two trains an hour since the Covid pandemic, despite a growing local population.

Epsom & Ewell's MP, **Helen Maguire**, has condemned the proposed rise. She said: *"It is incomprehensible that once again ordinary people in Epsom & Ewell are facing yet another eye-watering rail fare hike, whilst South Western Railway are struggling to go a day without major disruption. Rail passengers should not be paying more for a service that is not delivering."*

Maguire has launched a **petition** calling for the restoration of train frequency to pre-Covid levels, arguing that local commuters should not face higher costs for fewer services.

Her party colleague, **Paul Kohler MP**, the Liberal Democrat transport spokesperson, added that rising fares were "nothing short of ludicrous" and described the policy as "a slap in the face to ordinary people" at a time when punctuality is at its lowest level in years.

Critics point out that fare hikes of this scale risk pushing more people off the railway at a time when the government is urging a shift to more sustainable modes of transport. Meanwhile, passengers are grappling with frequent cancellations, driver shortages, and the delayed rollout of South Western Railway's Arterio fleet.

The Department for Transport has not yet confirmed the final figures or the exact implementation date, but increases are typically introduced in March. Unless ministers intervene, Epsom's commuters face paying hundreds more pounds next year for a service many feel has been in steady decline.

Leatherhead railway station gets access upgrade

26 August 2025



A major upgrade to Leatherhead railway station has officially opened, marking what local MP Helen Maguire has called a "crucial step" in the campaign to make rail travel more accessible across Surrey.

The improvements, delivered through the Department for Transport's Access for All programme, include the installation of two 16-person lifts and a new footbridge linking both platforms. The £6.2 million project also included platform widening, upgraded lighting and CCTV, and enhanced ramp access. The enhancements are designed to make life easier for elderly and disabled passengers, as well as those travelling with pushchairs, bikes or heavy luggage.

The scheme was developed and delivered by Network Rail in partnership with Southern, with much of the work taking place over the past year. Prior to the upgrade, Leatherhead was nominally step-free, but passengers needing to avoid stairs had to take a lengthy, steep detour under a railway bridge outside the station to move between platforms. The new bridge and lifts provide a direct and safe route for all users, replacing what many had described as an awkward and at times treacherous alternative.

Opening the new facilities, Helen Maguire MP praised the scheme as a long-overdue improvement for passengers in the area. "I'm delighted that Leatherhead has become the latest station in my constituency with step-free access," she said.

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“These improvements are absolutely vital for our town, and a crucial step in making rail travel more accessible to my constituents regardless of their need.”

However, the Liberal Democrat MP for Epsom and Ewell also used the occasion to highlight wider concerns about the state of the rail network in her constituency. In particular, she pointed to the reduction in the number of South Western Railway (SWR) services running to and from Waterloo since the Covid pandemic. “South Western Railways should also increase the frequency of the Waterloo service back to pre-Covid levels to ensure that passengers are not overcrowded,” she said, noting that passenger numbers have increased while service levels have not kept pace.

Maguire also raised the ongoing lack of sufficient blue badge parking spaces at local stations, and the need for ticketing systems that are more accessible for people with visual impairments. With SWR now operating under national ownership, she said, passengers would be expecting higher standards of service. “Delays to the Arterio train rollout and extortionate ticket price rises are a worrying start,” she added. “I will keep campaigning to ensure that rail passengers in Epsom, Ewell, Ashtead and Leatherhead get a fair deal.”

Southern, which manages Leatherhead station, has also introduced cycling improvements alongside the accessibility works. A secure cycle hub with 26 spaces and a maintenance area has been installed on Platform 1, while Platform 2 now features a double-deck cycle rack with space for 32 bikes, as well as new motorbike parking. Lighting and CCTV coverage in these areas has also been upgraded.

Jenny Saunders, Customer Services Director at Southern’s parent company Govia Thameslink Railway, welcomed the improvements, saying: “Lifts benefit everyone who finds stairs a barrier, and for some disabled passengers this project has the potential to be life-changing.”

Leatherhead joins a growing list of stations to receive Access for All funding, with similar projects completed in recent months at Barnes, Herne Bay and Motspur Park. The scheme forms part of a wider national programme to modernise railway infrastructure and open up travel to all users, regardless of mobility needs.

Network Rail’s Sussex Route Director Lucy McAuliffe said: “These upgrades have removed a significant barrier to travel at Leatherhead. We’re proud to be making a difference for passengers who, for too long, have had to navigate difficult routes to use our railway.”

While the transformation at Leatherhead station represents a clear step forward, campaigners and passengers alike will be watching closely to see whether service levels and surrounding facilities are brought up to the same standard.

Image: MP Helen Maguire opens Leatherhead upgraded railway station

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Nurse demands 24 hour rail tickets to avoid night-shift double costs

26 August 2025



A specialist NHS nurse is calling for urgent train ticket reform after revealing she spends over £200 a month commuting to her job at Great Ormond Street Hospital. Alicia Arias, a paediatric cardiac intensive care nurse, has launched a campaign urging rail companies to introduce 24-hour train tickets. Her Change.org petition has already gained over 24,000 signatures. Alicia moved from London to Woking a year ago to save on rent and live in a house, said her monthly commuting costs regularly exceed £200 – despite using a discount Flexi Season ticket. She said: “Why am I living in Woking paying all of this money for trains that are always delayed?!”

Working 12-hour shifts, often overnight, Alicia said she is forced to buy two tickets for each shift: one to travel in and another to get home the next morning, as existing train tickets expire at 4:29am. “We go for a horrible night shift, we don’t have a break and then we have to pay for another ticket,” Alicia said. “It’s just not fair. It’s making it fair with 24hr tickets.” Working in paediatric intensive care, no day is the same. But every day can be gruelling. Alicia said: “I offer the treatment the last chance that kids have. It’s really hard but it’s really rewarding.” As a senior nurse, Alicia said her job ranges from teaching and supporting other nursing staff, sometimes taking over the patients, as well as looking after her own patients. “We are always short and we are always busy,” she said.

Although there are other hospitals in Surrey, Alicia said she never wants to leave her current job. “Working at Great Ormond Street Hospital is a great sense of acheivement,” Alicia said. “It’s the best thing I’ve ever done – I love it.” Originally from Spain, Alicia said she was shocked by how expensive and inflexible British transport is. Alicia said she

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moved to the UK 13 years ago, but the “cultural shock” of how expensive and inflexible British transport is has only really come in the last year of moving to Woking. She explained in Madrid you can get transport passes for bus, train and rail for £70 a month. When Alicia lived in central London, she would cycle to work. “I take my bicycle from Waterloo to Great Ormond Street which is really busy,” she said. “I’m pretty sure I’m going to die on the bike one day.”

“I have sometimes regretted [moving to Woking],” Alicia admitted, explaining how she is constantly juggling to find the cheapest way to buy train tickets. Alicia said the campaign is not only for nurses but everyone. “But not only me but the cleaners, the maintenance workers, people in the kitchen, people who have lower salaries than me who are struggling more,” she said. “We’re all NHS. Not only shift workers in Surrey but everywhere in the UK. Shift workers that pay for two tickets and they do it quietly. No, it’s not fair.” Another campaign which Alicia started at the same time is her petition for an NHS railcard which has also reached nearly 3,000 signatures on the House of Commons website.

A Department for Transport spokesperson said: “While we are not planning to introduce 24-hour return tickets, we are overhauling the complex fares system to make rail travel simpler and more flexible for passengers. We’ve already delivered ticketing innovations such as contactless pay as you go to additional stations in Surrey this year, giving passengers the best value ticket for their journey, with additional stations expected to get the technology soon.”

Petition link: https://www.change.org/p/make-train-day-tickets-last-24-hours-support-shift-workers
House of Commons petition link: https://petition.parliament.uk/petitions/729126

Bus station app for visually impaired a first in Surrey

26 August 2025



Surrey County Council is now the first UK local authority to provide a new app to help guide blind and partially sighted passengers around bus stations across the county.

The Aira Explorer app allows customers to place a video call with a trained visual interpreter on speakerphone, who looks through the person’s smartphone camera to guide them around the bus station.

The service is now operating at bus stations in Guildford, Redhill, Staines and Woking.

All app usage at these locations will be free of charge, provided by Surrey County Council using some of its allocation from the Government’s Bus Service Improvement Fund.

Matt Furniss, Cabinet Member for Highways, Transport and Economic Growth at Surrey County Council, said:

“We’re very aware that using buses and navigating bus stations can sometimes be difficult for people with visual impairments. We’re keen to make bus travel accessible for everyone and hope this will support people with sight loss to travel confidently and independently.

As well as helping blind and partially sighted bus users to locate their bus, interpreters can also direct them to a member of staff for assistance, read the timetable for them or explain the way into town.

This initiative is part of our wider investment in buses which also includes £6.3m to provide more ultra-low and zero emission community transport minibuses, £9m in bus priority measures to ensure Surrey buses turn up on time, and £1.4m in improving information for passengers at bus stops. Our Surrey LINK card gives young people half-price bus travel and we’ve expanded our on-demand Surrey Connect bus services to cover areas where there are limited fixed bus routes, giving more options to travel by bus for all residents right across Surrey.

We’ve worked with Govia Thameslink Railway, Sight for Surrey, the Sussex Sight Loss Council and the Surrey Coalition of Disabled People to get this trial underway, which we hope to extend if it proves popular.”

The app is being launched as part of **Better Transport Week**, the annual celebration of how better transport can help connect communities and bring people together. This year, the week takes place from 16 to 22 June and is funded by the UK Government.

Ben Curtis from Campaign for Better Transport, which organises Better Transport Week, said:

“Good public transport networks help connect us to the people we love, the things we need and the places that matter. That’s why I’m really pleased to see first-hand how Surrey County Council is working to improve the local bus network. Buses are key to keeping us connected, and the new Aira app will help ensure that everyone can access and use the county’s buses, building a fairer future for everyone.”

This initiative follows a successful roll out by Govia Thameslink Railway (GTR), who have also partnered with Aira.io to

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support visually impaired passengers get around their rail network more confidently.

More information is available on the Surrey County Council website.

Victory for parent power after axed bus route is replaced

26 August 2025



Campaigning parents whose children were told to bring torches and walk across unlit heathland by Surrey County Council have won a long-fought victory after it was announced that axed school buses would be replaced. Early this year Surrey County Council said it was saving money and cancelling the free bus service between Molesey and Esher High, advising children to instead walk through dark alleyways, unlit heathland and unguarded viaduct sluice gates. The council's decision was made after bureaucrats decided the route was safe and that there would be no alternative provisions put on, to the horror of worried parents.

Now after months of campaigning, petitions and pressure from senior politicians to stop the 'cruel and needless punishment of children', the council has announced Falcon will trial an extra, paid for, 814 service from Molesey to Esher. Parents, though welcoming the news, are asking why the extra service could not have been announced at the same time, saving needless stress and worry, and why it took the community to fight back to make it happen?

Parent Kate Maxwell said: "This whole process has been so stressful on everyone involved, the parents, children, and schools, and for what? I'm thrilled they've seen sense but it could have been handled so much differently. They would have known it would cause a lot of problems for everyone, including the children already using paid buses. Surely, if they wanted, they could have put these arrangements in place when they axed the free buses instead of wasting everyone's time. Why did it take the community fighting back to make this happen?"

In a letter to parents, Esher High School headteacher Andy King said they were pleased to share that an additional 814 bus would be running as a trial from September, following "strong and sustained advocacy from our school and parent community." It added: "This outcome is the result of collective determination. When 81 of our students lost access to free coach transport, we were placed in a deeply challenging position – one we strongly opposed. But thanks to the powerful, united voice of our parents, carers, staff, governors and supporters, a positive step has now been taken. We want to thank everyone who spoke up, wrote in, and stood with us. Your efforts made the difference. While we regret that such a campaign was necessary, we are relieved that this decision has finally been confirmed. This will support our students getting to school safely, reliably, and ready to learn. At Esher C of E High School, we remain committed to doing what's right for our students – and this is an example of what we can achieve together."

MP for Esher and Walton, Monica Harding, has held meetings with the school and written to the council over the matter. She described it as a win for school children who were facing walks of up to three miles across unlit heathland with concerns about safety, after Surrey County Council decided to withdraw the Esher High School bus service. The MP added: "It's a shame this decision took so long, causing so much uncertainty and stress for parents. Surrey must ensure that its policy making is joined up and reflects the lived experience of our children – I'm glad that this time local families have been heard. We now need to know that this much needed bus provision will be sustained over the longer term."

Following Falcon's decision to introduce an additional bus service to transport pupils to and from Esher High School, there will now be four buses on the 814 route. The extra service will initially run as a trial for the first half-term of the 2025/26 academic year with its use monitored before a decision is made on whether it is needed on a longer-term basis.

Matt Furniss, Cabinet Member for Highways, Transport and Economic Growth at Surrey County Council, said, "We're very aware of the challenges raised by parents and carers and have worked with Falcon to address these. As with all bus services, we need to ensure they are used to make them viable, so I encourage parents and carers to take up this new provision. This additional bus is being provided by Falcon at no cost to Surrey County Council."

Image: Esher CofE High School headteacher Andy King (Image Google and Esher High)

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The Surrey school run or walk?

26 August 2025



Parents want their children to walk to school, but what holds them back?

Children are the power brokers that can shift parents' habits on the school run – and could be key to making healthier, greener travel choices the norm, according to a new report from the University of Surrey. Commissioned by Surrey County Council and delivered through the University's Institute for Sustainability Innovation Hub, the report looked at how schools across the UK and internationally are encouraging families to walk, cycle or wheel to school instead of driving.

The report's authors found that while families are generally supportive of safer, more active travel, they're often held back by concerns over road safety, time pressures and infrastructure. The most effective initiatives, the report argues, are those that bring together schools, local authorities, planners and families to tackle these issues head-on.

Professor Benjamin Gardner, lead-author of the report from the University of Surrey, said: "The school run is rarely straightforward. Families support safer, active travel, but if we want more children walking or cycling, we need to stop seeing this as just an issue for school staff and parents to deal with. Schemes and reward programmes can spark interest, but they won't bring about changes to the school run unless the wider system supports change. Parents worry about safety, time and whether their child can travel independently. We need a joined-up approach. Lasting change depends on schools, councils, planners and families working together to make walking or cycling feel like the easy and safe option."

Matt Furniss, Cabinet Member for Highways, Transport and Economic Growth at Surrey County Council, said: "We've commissioned this report to better understand how we can support and encourage parents, carers and children to travel to school sustainably. We're investing £5.5m over the next five years to improve road safety to encourage more walking, cycling and wheeling so children can take safer journeys, and to reduce pollution around schools. We're also continuing to deliver Feet First walking training and Bikeability cycling training to provide lifelong road safety skills for Surrey's school children. We're looking forward to working with our schools and others, to design tailored initiatives and infrastructure that will benefit children now and in the future."

The research team reviewed travel initiatives in the UK, Europe and beyond, including Canada, Australia and Brazil. They found that even young children can play a crucial role in influencing their parents' school run choices, especially when schools engage children through activities, lessons or competitions.

Surrey researchers conducted two focus groups with staff and caregivers at Surrey schools, analysed a range of international case studies, and reviewed both academic and grey literature. They used the COM-B model – which looks at capability, opportunity and motivation – to understand what stops or supports families from choosing active travel on the school run. The findings will help shape the Council's new School Travel Effectiveness of Planning (STEP) tool, designed to measure what's working – and what's not – in encouraging active school travel across Surrey.

About the Innovation Hub

The Innovation Hub is the delivery arm of the University of Surrey's Institute for Sustainability. It brings researchers together with local authorities, businesses and communities to co-create practical responses to real-world challenges. By supporting projects like the School Travel Plan report, the Hub helps translate research into action and strengthen partnerships that benefit both Surrey and the wider region.

To learn more about the project, read the full report at www.surrey.ac.uk/news/promoting-active-school-travel

Image: Benjamin Vautier Snow scene (Children leaving school) VA – PICRYL – Public Domain Media

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Surrey examines a plea for a 20mph road

26 August 2025

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A campaigner says a Surrey council is “missing the point” about safety as hopes for a 20mph speed limit on a rural road have been scuppered.

Surrey County Council (SCC) claim the traffic measures on Ford Road in Bisley would be too costly.

Dr Ayres started a petition for a 20mph speed limit, arguing residents should be able to got to the shops without “such fear and intimidation that they experienced when confronted by coaches and HGVs at 30mph”.

He presented his campaign at a SCC Highways, Transport and Economic Growth meeting on June 3.

Over 120 people signed the petition calling for the current 30mph speed limit to be lowered to protect pedestrians, cyclists, horse riders and other road users from the increase in traffic, particularly HGVs.

Several large commercial premises are located on Lucas Green Road. Often HGVs will come off the A322 Guildford Road, drive through Ford Road to get to their destination.

Matt Furniss, cabinet member for Highways, Transport and Economic Growth Decisions, said he recognises the concerns raised but said that drivers generally comply with the 30mph speed limit on the narrow rural road and that it has a relatively good safety record.

But Dr Ayres slammed the council’s response for “missing the fundamental point of this petition” by focusing on the HGVs and drivers on the road. He said it was about “the safety and wellbeing of the vulnerable road users who frequent Ford Road”.

He said: “I do not accept commercial interests in Lucas Green Road should dictate what happens in Ford Road.”

The road has a “relatively good safety record”, according to a report, with only one personal injury collision in 2021 in the 10 year period between November 2014- October 2024.

As the current speed limit is 30mph, and the existing average speed is over 28mph, council documents state the road would need more than just a sign to reduce the speed successfully.

These measures could consist of road humps, raised road tables, road narrowing, chicanes and priority give way pinch points.

The report read: “The cost of introducing traffic calming measures over such a length of road (approximately 2km) would be substantial, especially since significant improvements to the existing street lighting are likely to be required to comply with the appropriate design standards for the installation of traffic calming measures.”

Council officers also warned the additional features could have negative effects; for instance, traffic tables could cause noise and vibration from the HGVs or that speed cushions could even lead to road damage.

Concerns were also raised that if the speed limit changed to 20mph on Ford Road, residents on Lucas Green Road would also want a reduced speed limit.

The report said, given the roads are interlinking and are similar in character and measures introduced in one road are likely to have impacts on the other road, introducing traffic measurements would likely create “significant concern” for those residents on the other road.

A traffic engineer said: “We’re aware of the issues and hopefully we can in the future change the speed limit.” She added the council will include the road on a list for schemes that need funding in the future.

Redesigning the Surrey skyways?

26 August 2025

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Quicker, Quieter Flights on the Horizon for Heathrow and Gatwick Passengers and Neighbours

Passengers at Heathrow and Gatwick are set to enjoy quicker flights and fewer delays under new government plans to redesign flight paths, aimed at modernising one of the world's busiest airspaces.

Announced on Monday (2 June), the largest overhaul of UK airspace since the 1950s will prioritise London's crowded skies, promising more efficient, direct routes for aircraft. The changes are expected to support expansion at Heathrow and growth at Gatwick, while also cutting delays and noise pollution for communities under the flight paths.

Transport officials say the new UK Airspace Design Service (UKADS) will be fully operational by the end of 2025, run by NATS (En Route) plc (NERL). With 2.7 million flights expected this year alone, the new system will help manage soaring demand more sustainably, with fewer planes circling while waiting to land.

Local residents living near Heathrow and Gatwick could benefit from quieter skies, as modernised 'skyways' will allow aircraft to climb more quickly after take-off and descend more smoothly, reducing noise and emissions.

Heathrow's expansion, including its long-discussed third runway, is expected to generate over 100,000 new jobs, while Gatwick is also poised to gain from increased passenger capacity and investment. Aviation Minister Mike Kane said the changes would "turbocharge growth in the aviation industry", with faster and more reliable journeys for holidaymakers and business travellers alike.

Local airports, airlines and residents' groups are watching closely, with officials promising that community consultation will remain central to the process. The Civil Aviation Authority (CAA) will oversee the implementation, ensuring transparency and evidence-based decisions.

Rob Bishton, Chief Executive of the CAA, said: "Modernising our airspace is key to enabling growth and helping mitigate impacts like noise."

Martin Rolfe, CEO at NATS, added: "We have one of the busiest and most complex airspaces in the world. To maintain our performance as traffic grows towards 3 million flights per year, we have to modernise. UKADS is a crucial step."

Karen Dee, Chief Executive of AirportsUK, called the move "a vital step in making our airspace fit for the 21st century," while Tim Alderslade of Airlines UK said the changes were "long overdue" and would reduce delays, improve resilience, and lower carbon emissions.

The government's plans also pave the way for future air travel technologies such as drones and flying taxis, with London's airspace set to lead the way.

Local residents can expect more information as the CAA and NATS engage with communities to design the new routes, with a full consultation expected by September 2025.

The Department for Transport says it is determined to strike the right balance between economic growth and protecting communities from excessive noise and pollution.

Notes to Readers:

- UKADS will be led by NATS (En Route) plc (NERL).
- Heathrow's expansion plans, including a potential third runway, will benefit from the new airspace design.
- The initial focus is on modernising London's airspace, but future phases could benefit airports nationwide.
- A consultation on the regulatory changes will begin later this year.

Surrey sink-hole major incident

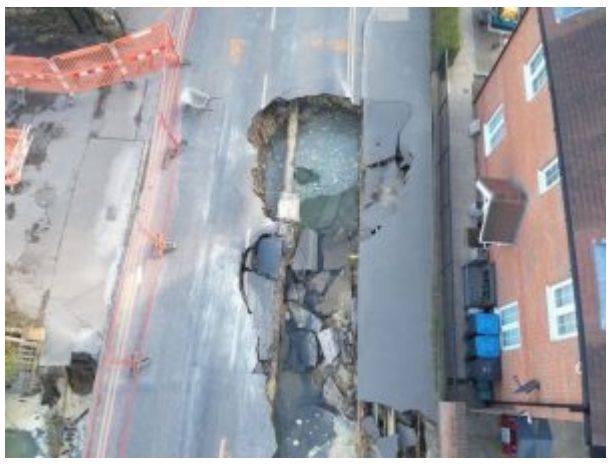
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A significant sinkhole has emerged on Godstone High Street in Surrey, leading to evacuations and widespread disruptions. The incident began on Monday night when a section of the road collapsed, revealing a hole filled with water. By Tuesday morning, the sinkhole had expanded to approximately 20 metres in length and 6 metres in width.

Surrey County Council has declared the situation a major incident, with the Surrey Local Resilience Forum overseeing the response. Assistant Director for Safer Communities, Carl Bussey, stated that efforts are underway in collaboration with emergency services, utility companies, and Tandridge District Council to ensure public safety and restore essential services.

The sinkhole's rapid expansion has led to the evacuation of around 30 properties within a 100-metre cordon. Residents have been advised to avoid the area while investigations and repairs are conducted. The incident has also resulted in the closure of Godstone High Street between Oxted Road and Bletchingley Road, with diversions in place for the foreseeable future.

The cause of the sinkhole is believed to be a burst water main. SES Water has confirmed that engineers are on-site working to repair the damaged pipe and restore water supplies to affected homes. In the interim, bottled water is being distributed to residents.

Local residents have expressed concerns over the incident. Some evacuees have reported hearing cracking sounds and witnessing the sinkhole's growth overnight. One resident described the scene as resembling the aftermath of an earthquake, with buckled roads and pavements.

Authorities are urging the public to follow updates from Surrey County Council, Surrey Highways, and Tandridge District Council on social media for the latest information regarding the situation.

Surrey's new rail link to Heathrow?

26 August 2025



Plans for a new railway connecting Surrey to Heathrow and beyond have resurfaced as the track's backers welcomed government support for a third runway at the airport. The line, called the Heathrow Southern Railway (HSR), is a privately financed proposal to link towns in Surrey to one of the world's busiest airports.

If built, it would operate between Heathrow and London Waterloo via Staines. There would also be direct trains from the airport to Woking and Guildford, before carrying on to the south coast. Heathrow Southern Railway said it also would provide for an extension of the Elizabeth Line to Staines.

Baroness Jo Valentine, the group's chairperson, said: "The UK Government has set a bold agenda for growth with its support for a third runway at Heathrow Airport. Our railway enhances that growth by increasing connectivity and reducing surface emissions. These benefits accrue with a two runway airport but will be enhanced with an additional runway. We look forward to working with all partners to make this a reality."

Mark Livock, chief executive, added: "The new Government has expressed interest in finding ways to harness private sector finance in making the delivery of major infrastructure schemes more affordable. Heathrow Southern Railway has a depth of experience in creating opportunities for private investment that could deliver tangible benefits to the UK, and southern rail access to Heathrow would positively transform public transport connectivity to Europe's busiest airport."

The group estimates that the new route would cut about millions of road journeys – with many of those from the M25. They added: "Our construction plans minimise the impact on neighbouring communities by providing a route mainly in tunnel and using only electric trains. Unlike the previous "Airtrack" proposals, HSR avoids level crossings in the Egham area."

An HSR spokesperson said: "Our proposed route starts at Heathrow's Terminal 5 station and is intended to run mainly in

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tunnel and be electrified to minimise environmental impact. It rises to the surface to connect to the existing railway near Staines and Virginia Water."

Related reports:

Heathrow expansion reaction

"Blocks away" from airport expansions

Hsr Proposed Route (Image Heathrow Southern Rail)

Heathrow expansion reaction

26 August 2025



Heathrow has been given the go ahead to press forward with plans for third runway that will bring in hundreds of thousands of extra flights to the West London airport every year, the Chancellor has announced – but questions remain about how deliverable the project will be.

The airport has long pressed for a third runway. The plans in the past have involved demolishing the mediaeval village of Harmondsworth and its neighbours Sipson and Harlington.

Feasibility studies have also been carried out about re-routing the M25 through a tunnel under the new northern runway and the enormous infrastructure project is supposed to be built while the country meets its environmental targets.

Heathrow has welcomed the Chancellor's announcement today that the Government is backing a third runway – and would be inviting proposals to be brought forward by the summer.

The government has already tightened legal pathways against any plans, cutting the number of appeals allowed from three down to just one.

Opponents, including the London Mayor's office, MPs and campaign groups however, argue a third runway won't bring in hoped-for economic benefits but will raise "serious environmental and health concerns".

The Mayor of London, Sadiq Khan, said: "I remain opposed to a new runway at Heathrow Airport because of the severe impact it will have on noise, air pollution and meeting our climate change targets.

"I will scrutinise carefully any new proposals that now come forward from Heathrow, including the impact it will have on people living in the area and the huge knock-on effects for our transport infrastructure.

"Despite the progress that's been made in the aviation sector to make it more sustainable, I'm simply not convinced that you can have hundreds of thousands of additional flights at Heathrow every year without a hugely damaging impact on our environment."

Stanwell Moor is the Surrey village at the end of Heathrow's southern runway.

Residents there have grown used to jet engines flying overhead. So much so, that some regard the noise made from incoming planes a respite compared with the roar when taking off.

The Stanwell Moor Residents' Association, in a statement published on its website, said: "What is different this time is that easterly alternation planning application will go ahead regardless of the airport expansion and would lead to more flights over our village; and secondly, the Government are likely to reform planning to speed up the approval for expansion.

"We will be ready to represent the village with a list of demands that put residents first."

The Government said it would issue a full assessment of any expansion plans through the Airports National Policy Statement.

It said the project must represent value for money and that it, plus any associated service transport costs, will be financed through private funding to "ensure that a third runway is delivered in line with our legal, environmental and climate objectives."

Paul Beckford, policy director at the HACAN clearskies group said: "The announcement today will disappoint the thousands of residents whose communities will be destroyed by a third runway and the millions who will be exposed to increases in noise and air pollution.

"Labour have set four tests that any airport expansion must pass in order to be approved and we believe that Heathrow's current plans are simply not compatible with those tests.

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“The Government believes that it can achieve both growth and meet its climate targets but this decision puts both of those ambitions at risk.

“Expanding the UK’s largest emitter of carbon in a forlorn hope of increasing GDP at some point in the future without a credible plan to deliver zero emission aviation is a folly of the highest order.”

The Liberal Democrats issued a statement from its MPs saying the third runway would jeopardise the UK’s climate commitments and will have a significant negative impact on local communities and human health.

The hundreds of thousands of extra flights to-and-from Heathrow, they said, will increase the risk of health conditions including heart disease, strokes and mental health issues.

MP for Esher and Walton Monica Harding said: “A third runway at Heathrow would have a profound impact on our climate, health, and communities. With a lack of clarity on the economic benefits and costs to the taxpayer, along with serious environmental and health concerns, the Government must urgently address these questions.”

Others, such as the Chartered Institute of Logistics and Transport UK were quick to praise the announcement but cautioned the importance of prioritising environmental concerns.

Its chairperson, Paul Le Blond, said “Any expansion strategy must prioritise public transport integration, leveraging existing transport hubs and accommodating new rail links.

“The development should include modernised terminals and new gateway facilities for both the northern and southern perimeters. Crucially, all environmental impacts—including noise, local air quality, and greenhouse gas emissions—must remain within statutory limits.

“Whilst the expansion would be privately funded through passenger and shipping revenues, government support through policy frameworks and strategic rail investment will be essential to unlock private sector investment.”

Related reports:

“Blocks away” from airport expansions

Surrey village to suffer a lot more Heathrow flights

Chance for Epsom and Ewell’s say on Heathrow flights

Surrey Uni making self-driving cars safer

26 August 2025



With self-driving cars expected to hit British roads next year (2026), a new motion forecasting framework developed by the University of Surrey and Fudan University, China, promises to make autonomous cars both safer and smarter.

Researchers have combined their expertise to create RealMotion – a novel training system that seamlessly integrates historical and real-time scene data with contextual and time-based information, paving the way for more efficient and reliable autonomous vehicle technology.

Dr Xiatian Zhu, senior lecturer at the Centre for Vision, Speech and Signal Processing and the Insitute for People-Centred AI at the University of Surrey and co-author of the study, said:

“Driverless cars are no longer a futuristic dream. Robotaxis are already operating in parts of the USA and China, and self-driving vehicles are expected to be on UK roads as early as next year. However, the real question on everyone’s mind is: how safe are they?

“While AI operates differently from human drivers, there are still challenges to overcome. That’s why we developed RealMotion – to equip the algorithm with not only real-time data but also the ability to integrate historical context in space and time, enabling more accurate and reliable decision-making for safer autonomous navigation.”

Existing motion forecasting methods typically process each driving scene independently, overlooking the interconnected nature of past and present contexts in continuous driving scenarios. This limitation hinders the ability to accurately predict the behaviours of surrounding vehicles, pedestrians and other agents in ever-changing environments.

In contrast, RealMotion creates a clearer understanding of different driving scenes. Integrating past and present data enhances the prediction of future movements, addressing the inherent complexity of forecasting multiple agents’ movements.

Extensive experiments conducted using the Argoverse dataset, a leading benchmark in autonomous driving research, highlight RealMotion’s accuracy and performance. Compared to other AI models, the framework achieved an 8.60%

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improvement in Final Displacement Error (FDE) – which is the distance between the predicted final destination and the true final destination. It also demonstrated significant reductions in computational latency, making it highly suitable for real-time applications.

Professor Adrian Hilton, Director of the Surrey Institute for People-Centred AI, said:

“With self-driving cars reaching British roads imminently, ensuring people’s safety is paramount. The development of RealMotion by Dr Zhu and his team offers a significant advance on existing methods. By equipping autonomous vehicles to perceive their surroundings in real-time, and also leverage historical context to make informed decisions, RealMotion paves the way for safer and more intelligent navigation of our roads.”

While researchers encountered some limitations, the team plans to continue its research to further improve RealMotion’s capabilities and overcome any challenges. The framework has the potential to play a critical role in shaping the next generation of autonomous vehicles, ensuring safer and more intelligent navigation systems for the future.

About the Surrey Institute for People-Centred AI (PAI)

Taking a different approach to much AI activity in the UK, the Surrey Institute for People-Centred AI puts the needs of individuals and society at the very heart of everything it does: we believe that the starting point for AI should be people rather than technology.

This people-centred approach drives our research and enables us to design AI technologies and systems that are ethical, responsible, and inclusive. The pan-University Institute brings together Surrey’s core AI-related expertise in vision, speech and signal processing, computer science, and mathematics, with its domain expertise across engineering and physical sciences, human and animal health, law and regulation, business, finance and the arts and social sciences. With this distinctive approach, PAI builds on Surrey’s track record of collaboration with industry, the public sector, government and other relevant institutions to develop solutions to shared challenges.

Image: Waymo self-driving vehicle. Credit Grendelkhan CC by SA 4

Check your Epsom and Ewell train journeys January weekends.

26 August 2025



Residents of Epsom and Ewell are advised to prepare for disruptions to South Western Railway (SWR) services due to essential engineering works in the Wimbledon area. Bus replacement services will operate on key routes over two consecutive weekends: January 18-19 and January 25-26.

While services on the London Waterloo line from Epsom will be affected, passengers can still reach Waterloo by using Southern Railway services via the Victoria line and changing at Clapham Junction. However, there will be no SWR services between Epsom and Guildford, and SWR trains to Dorking will also be unavailable.

The works will involve renewing 800 meters of track, ballast, and sleepers between Wimbledon and Earlsfield, alongside replacing points and installing 100 meters of conductor rail. These upgrades aim to improve track reliability and reduce faults, providing smoother journeys for passengers.

Key Impacts for Epsom and Ewell Residents

- **No SWR trains from Epsom to Guildford.**
- **Southern Railway services to Dorking via the Victoria line remain available.**
- **Rail replacement buses will operate between Clapham Junction and Worcester Park, affecting onward connections.**

Additional Service Changes

- SWR services between London Waterloo and Chessington South, Hampton Court, Dorking, and Woking (stopping services) will not run.
- Longer-distance services to Portsmouth Harbour, Exeter St Davids, and Weymouth will be revised, taking up to 30 minutes longer.
- Berrylands station will be closed during the works.

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Plan Ahead

SWR advises passengers to check travel options in advance via the SWR website (southwesternrailway.com/plan-my-journey) or National Rail (nationalrail.co.uk) and to allow extra time for their journeys.

Apologies from Network Rail and SWR

Peter Williams, SWR's Customer and Commercial Director, acknowledged the inconvenience:
"Customers should plan ahead if they intend to travel on these weekends, as engineers carry out vital maintenance at one of the busiest parts of our network. We're grateful for our customers' patience."

Mark Goodall, Network Rail's Wessex Route Director, added:
"We're sorry for the disruption but completing these upgrades back-to-back is the most efficient option. We encourage passengers to check their journeys and plan ahead."

Further closures in the Wimbledon area are also planned for Sunday, February 2, and Sunday, February 9. Updates will be available on the SWR website.

For Epsom and Ewell residents, alternative travel routes and extra planning will help navigate the disruptions while these essential upgrades take place.

Going South from Epsom for Xmas? Check your trains

26 August 2025



Epsom residents are being urged to check before travelling as South Western Railway (SWR) services to Guildford face significant disruption due to emergency engineering works. The works will take place from **Saturday 21 December to Tuesday 24 December**, affecting trains running via Cobham & Stoke D'Abernon and Epsom.

The disruption comes as Network Rail works to stabilise an embankment near Clandon following the detection of ground movement. Trains in the area have been operating at reduced speeds, and urgent repairs are required to ensure passenger safety.

Impact on Services

During the works, limited train services will operate between London Waterloo and Effingham Junction via both Cobham & Stoke D'Abernon and Epsom. To help passengers, replacement buses will run on the following routes:

- **Surbiton to Guildford**, every 30 to 60 minutes depending on the day.
- **Effingham Junction to Guildford**, every 30 minutes, with some extending to Epsom.

Passengers travelling between Epsom and Guildford will be served by either a train or replacement bus. Normal services are expected to resume from **Friday 27 December**, but journey planners will be updated daily, and travellers are advised to check before setting out.

A Safety Priority

Explaining the need for the emergency works, Tom McNamee, Network Rail's Wessex Route Infrastructure Director, said:
"We detected ground movement at an embankment in the Clandon area, which has made it necessary to operate trains at slower speeds. Stabilising the embankment is critical to ensure the safety of passengers and staff. While we recognise this will be disruptive, it's essential to carry out these repairs to prevent further movement and restore full services as quickly as possible."

Passenger Advice

SWR is apologising to passengers for the inconvenience. Steve Tyler, Planning and Performance Director at SWR, added:
"We are sorry for the disruption and are working hard to provide as many train services as possible during the works. Buses will operate to ensure passengers can still reach their destinations, and we encourage everyone to check journey planners before travelling. We appreciate your patience as these essential repairs are completed."

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Key Information

- Trains will not stop at **Horsley, Clandon, or London Road Guildford** stations during the works. These will instead be served by replacement buses.
- No SWR services will operate on **Christmas Day or Boxing Day**, and an amended timetable will be in place from Friday 27 December.

For the latest updates, visit **southwesternrailway.com** or use journey planners to confirm service availability. Passengers are encouraged to allow extra time for their journeys during this period.

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