

## More than 400 trains cancelled due to driver shortages

A train company has cancelled more than 400 trains in three weeks because of driver shortages.



More than 400 trains cancelled due to driver shortages Photo: ALAMY

By Julie Henry

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London Midland has blamed a "shortfall of qualified drivers" for a series of cancellations that have affected routes from the capital to major cities in the West Midlands and services around the Midlands.

On Saturday the company announced it would have to cancel 58 services and terminate a further 37 train journey's early due to the shortages.

The firm has had to cancel 410 services since October 7.

Lines affected include Birmingham-London, Birmingham-Liverpool, Birmingham-Coventry-Northampton, Lichfield-Birmingham-Redditch and Wolverhampton-Birmingham-Walsall-Rugeley.

A passenger group called the firm's competency into question and said the level of service as "unacceptable".

Phil Davis, spokesman for the passenger group Travel Watch West Midlands, said: "The situation seems to be getting worse and it calls into question the competence of London Midland.

"It's clear that the company does not appear to be meeting its obligations."

The firm, which runs 1,300 services a day, said the shortages of train drivers would be addressed by mid-December.

"Due to a temporary shortfall of qualified train drivers, we have had to cancel a number of trains over recent weeks. We're sorry if you have been affected," a statement said.

"Whilst the shortfall should be addressed by mid-December, we are working hard to ensure the impact on our passengers in the meantime is kept to an absolute minimum. On most days we hope to run a full service."

The firm said some drivers were working overtime to reduce the impact and "a number of changes to the way we resource our train services" would also help.

Passengers have been advised that daily cancellation updates will be posted on the website at 17:00 the day before services are due to be affected.

Rail Minister Norman Baker has warned the firm its performance is being monitored.

The Birmingham Chamber of Commerce has said it is "critical" the issue is resolved for businesses in the area, especially shops during the half-term holiday.

Mr Davis, who is also a Labour councillor on Birmingham City Council, said he would be writing in that capacity to the rail regulator about the situation.

"It is not acceptable," he said. "People are really having trouble getting into work. We need a service we can rely on."

Mr Davis said he had experienced the train cancellations himself and had other residents complain to him about them.

Passenger Georgia Sutton-Hitch, from Worcester, said: "I've been affected by quite a few trains that have been delayed.

"I've been put on replacement bus services before, which are really annoying, and it's been happening more and more."

