

# Tories attacked over shortage of train services on Boxing Day

Only a handful of lines will be providing services the day after Christmas

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Labour have accused a Conservative transport minister of "hypocrisy" over the shortage of train services on Boxing Day.

Only a handful of lines will be providing services the day after Christmas, and many of those which are running are serving airports and the Channel Tunnel, leaving much of the country without trains.

Labour said that rail minister Stephen Hammond regularly attacked their ministers when they were in power before 2010 over the absence of Boxing Day services, but had done little to improve matters since joining the Department for Transport in 2012.

As shadow transport secretary in 2008, Mr Hammond called for an increase in rail services on December 26, arguing that "Boxing Day can hardly be seen as a quiet period" for travel because of the many sporting fixtures taking place.

In 2009, he repeated the attack, saying: "By allowing the railway to close so completely on Boxing Day Labour are condemning sports fans, and families trying to celebrate the Christmas period together, to misery on our clogged-up motorways."

But Labour said that on the fourth Boxing Day since the coalition Government took office, most train operators were running no service at all, with others providing only a reduced service.

Among those running were Chiltern Railways between London Marylebone and Bicester North, Southeastern trains between London St Pancras International and Ashford International, a Southern service on the Brighton mainline, shuttle services to Heathrow and Stansted airports, special services on some ScotRail routes and a late-starting midweek service on Eurostar, said the party.

Labour transport spokeswoman Lilian Greenwood said: "In opposition Stephen Hammond attacked the Boxing Day rail shutdown, but now that he's a transport minister it seems he doesn't care about it after all. He's in a position to do something about it, but he's decided not to bother."

Mr Hammond said: "This is an issue that still concerns me. The Government has already taken steps to ensure Boxing Day services run between London St Pancras and Ashford International this year. I want to work with the industry to see what further steps can be taken to meet demand for the benefit of passengers."

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