

NEWS

A war of words on a month of rail strikes

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PASSENGERS in the South West face a month of strikes after talks between a rail company and a union broke down, ending in claim and counter-claim.

South Western Railway (SWR) says it has done "all it can" to meet demands from Rail, Maritime and Transport (RMT) leaders, accusing the union of moving the goalposts over the issue of guards on new trains.

The RMT says the company will receive a "taxpayer bailout" to cover lost revenue during the 27 days of strikes and that SWR has no incentive to settle.

The deadlock leaves passengers on the Exeter-London Waterloo route facing an unprecedented month of disruption from Monday and through Christmas and New Year's Day. Services will operate as normal only on election day, December 12.

An SWR spokesperson said: "We have done everything we can and more to meet the RMT's outdated demands with our promise of a guard on every train, and a safety critical role for that guard. What we are not prepared to compromise on is the much needed modernisation of the service with improved performance, safety and customer service that our new fleet of modern subur-

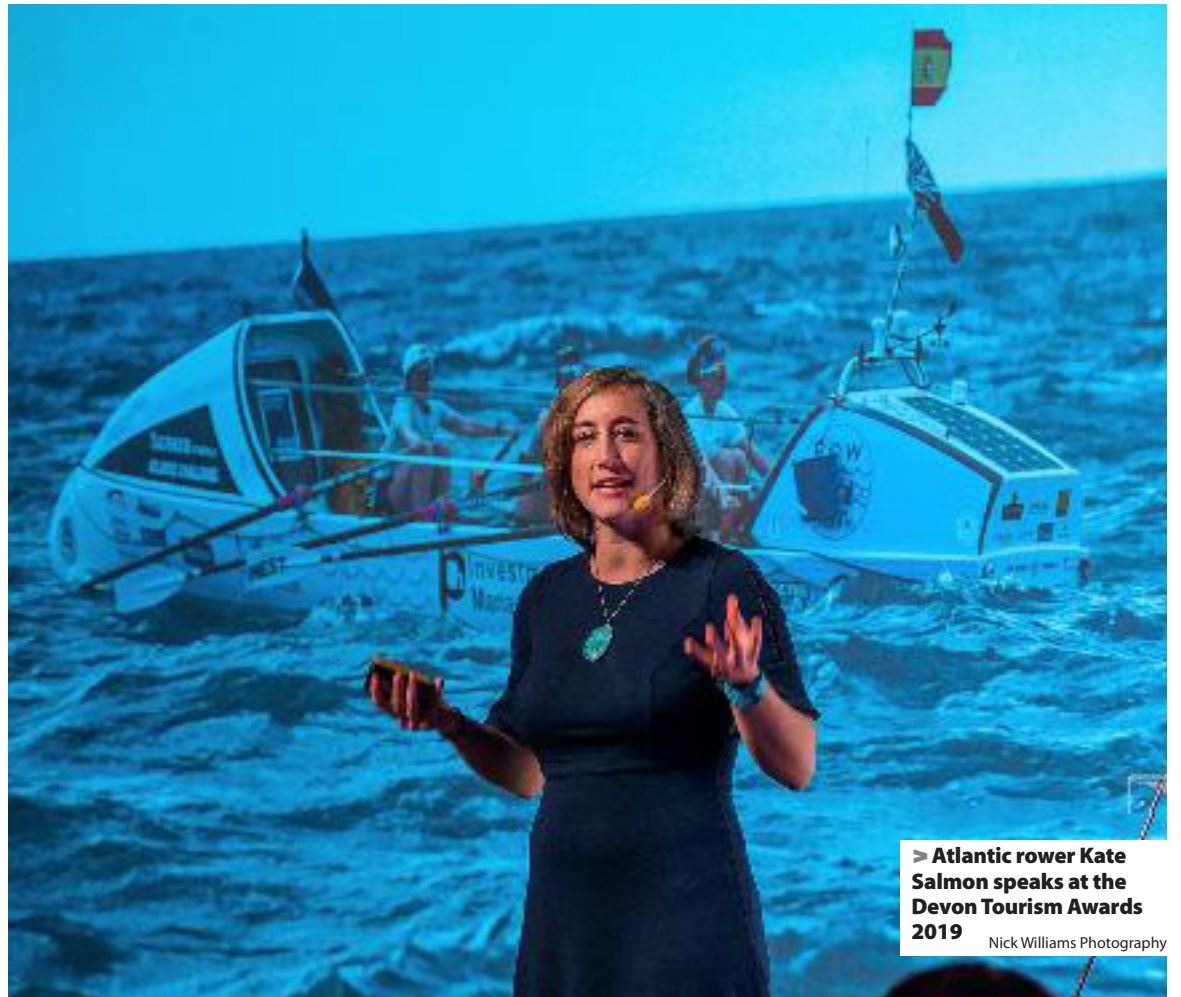
ban trains will vitally deliver for customers."

They added: "Every time we find a way forward on one point the union has moved the goalposts by changing its position. Unfortunately it is clear to us that the RMT is unclear on what this dispute is about and intent on striking no matter what. We know the impact these RMT strikes will have on our passengers and we want to be clear that we have done everything we can to try and avert the strikes and meet RMT's antiquated and changing demands."

The union said that parliamentary answers and reports to investors showed SWR would get a "taxpayer bailout" of £86 million for previous strikes and in December to cover lost passenger revenue. Mick Cash, the RMT's general secretary, said: "This £86 million taxpayer-funded government bailout means South Western Railway will be paid by the Government even when they don't run trains on strike days. Fat cat rail bosses won't lose a penny and have no incentive to settle."

In turn, SWR said: "To suggest we're making money from these strikes is frankly absurd."

The company says it expects to run more than half of its Monday-Friday services, prioritising peak periods. Buses will replace some trains and off-peak frequencies may be reduced, the company says.



> Atlantic rower Kate Salmon speaks at the Devon Tourism Awards 2019
Nick Williams Photography

Oceans of talent among tourism businesses

A TOTAL of 89 Devon tourism businesses have been rewarded for their efforts at the 2019 Devon Tourism Awards, held at the Riviera Centre in Torquay.

Michael Smith, co-founder of the Venus Company, and Kate Salmon, part of the 'Row for the Ocean' rowing team that became the fastest all-female team in the 2018 Talisker Whisky Atlantic Challenge were guest speakers.

North Hayne Farm Cottages took the prestigious Winner of Winners award alongside Gold awards for Access and Inclusivity and Self Catering. Guest speaker Michael Smith was awarded an Outstanding Contribution to Tourism award.

A special award for Energy Efficiency was presented by headline sponsors Beco Energy to

River Dart Country Park, who also took Gold awards for Ethical, Responsible and Sustainable Tourism, Camping and Caravanning Park and a joint Gold with Salcombe Distilling for Small Attraction. Food and Drink Golds went to Valley View Café, The Waterfront Pub & Dining, and Harry's Restaurant. The top Hotel awards went to Paschoe House and Salcombe Harbour Hotel and Spa, with the 25 Boutique B&B taking Gold in the B&B and Guesthouse category. Other Accommodation Golds went to Devon Yurt and Ladram Bay Holiday Park.

Lisa Bradford from the Cary Arms took the special Customer Service Superstar award. Golds were also awarded to Pennywell Farm in the Large Attraction

category, Reach Outdoors in both Active & Sporting and Learning Experience, Ilington Country House Hotel and Spa in the Spa and Wellbeing category and Kents Cavern for International Visitor Experience. Event Exeter was the top winner in the Business Events Venue category, with Kitley House Hotel taking the top Wedding Venue award. There were Dog-Friendly Golds for Woodland Cottages and the Cadeleigh Arms.

Glas-Denbury Music and Arts Festival took the Gold for Event and Festival of the Year, with Lorrens Ladies Spa taking the top award for Tourism Innovation and Hayley's Hut in the New Tourism Business category. The English Riviera took Gold in the Visitor Information Service category.

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