

Britain's royal train nears retirement after nearly two centuries

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Dhaka: After more than 180 years of royal rail travel, Britain's iconic royal train is set to be retired by March 2027. The move, announced in the Royal Household's latest financial report, aims to reduce costs and modernize royal transport.

The train, which dates back to Queen Victoria's era in the 1840s, has become a symbol of tradition. However, its use has steadily declined, and officials say future royal journeys will rely more on helicopters, scheduled trains, and other transportation options.

James Chalmers, Keeper of the Privy Purse, said the decision reflects a need to prioritize value for public money while acknowledging the train's historical importance.

Built in the 1970s, the current royal train is functional but outdated,

with an interior more suited to a 1970s office than royal luxury. Modernizing it would cost tens of millions of dollars, while new bespoke trains would be even pricier—especially with taxpayer funds already allocated for the costly renovation of Buckingham Palace.

The royal train once played a visible role in major events, including Queen Elizabeth II's jubilees and a 2020 pandemic thank-you tour by Prince William and Princess Kate. However, it was not used for the Queen's funeral journey in 2022 due to security concerns.

The announcement has drawn mixed reactions. While some lament the loss of tradition, others question the environmental logic, as helicopters—less sustainable than trains—will now see increased use. Critics also note the decision comes just ahead of the 200th anniversary of Britain's public railways.

Recent travel records show the royal train was used only twice in 2024–25, at a cost of over USD 105,000. In contrast, there were 55 private flights, 141 helicopter trips, and numerous scheduled flights—totaling more than USD 6 million in royal travel expenses.

Britain joins other monarchies, like Japan and Sweden, that have phased out royal trains. Only Denmark and Norway still maintain theirs, though rarely use them.

Wolverton, the town in Buckinghamshire where the royal train has long been maintained, will especially feel the loss. Locals take pride in the town's deep ties to royal rail history, dating back to Queen Adelaide's first carriage in 1842. Rail historian Philip Marsh emphasized the cultural and technological importance of royal trains, which introduced innovations later adopted in public rail travel.

While the train will likely be retired from service, many hope it will find a home in a museum rather than be dismantled. A farewell tour across Britain is expected before it is officially withdrawn, giving the public one last chance to witness a piece of royal history on the tracks.

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