

100-year-old swing bridges given a modern makeover

October 31, 2022



Network Rail has swung into action in East Anglia, and completed a package of works on Reedham and Somerleyton swing bridges.

The bridges, designed to carry trains over waterways and swing open to let boats through, are over 100 years old, and their internal parts were starting to become unreliable. A nine-day campaign saw engineers start work on replacing these parts, making the bridges less likely to develop faults and reducing the need for costly maintenance. The upgrade of the swing bridges will help Greater Anglia train passengers and boat users get to their destinations on time for years to come, while enabling the historic structures to keep being operated in the modern day.



Beam installation at Somerleyton swing bridge

Ellie Burrows, Network Rail's route director for Anglia, said: "These bridges on the Wherry and East Suffolk lines are an important part of our railway heritage and also critical pieces of infrastructure that keep both rail and boat traffic moving. Renewing the components will reduce the risk of mechanical problems and help keep services running safely, smoothly and reliably for our passengers, as well as maintaining access to the ports and marinas."

During the autumn, engineers have carried out vital works on Reedham and Somerleyton swing bridges. At both bridges they have:

- Installed a beam in the building that houses the swing bridge machinery. This will make the building strong enough for a temporary opening to be made in the wall. The opening will allow old and heavy machinery to be moved out and replaced with modern, more reliable equipment.
- Upgraded and replaced the manual winch system. This allows the bridge to be swung open manually by the bridge operator if there are problems with the machinery, keeping trains and boat users moving.
- Completed a full renewal and upgrade of the electrical system.

While the swing bridge work took place over the nine day closure, Network Rail took the opportunity to carry out essential drainage, track and vegetation management works along the Norwich-Lowestoft line.

Jamie Burles, Greater Anglia managing director, said: "I'd like to thank customers for their patience while this work was carried out. Our new trains have already improved reliability on our Norwich and Ipswich to Lowestoft lines and this work will make it even better, which I know our customers will welcome."



View of Reedham swing bridge

During the work, there has been disruption for both train passengers and boat users, including a nine day stretch of bus replacement between Norwich and Lowestoft. Dates for future works will be announced in due course and will primarily include a full replacement of the hydraulic and mechanical systems that the bridges use to open and close.

Rob Rogers, Broads Authority director of operations, said: "This much-needed investment by Network Rail into the Broads' swing bridges is very much welcomed by the Broads Authority and our boating communities.

"It has been a challenging few years for our river users regarding the bridges and we are delighted to hear that work is progressing to allow them to reliably open for river traffic."