

£6.5 million project to begin in Penzance

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GWR and Network Rail have invested £6.5 million in the railway in Penzance to build three new sidings.

The new, longer sidings enable GWR to more easily service and run nine-carriage trains between London Paddington and Penzance.

The Ponsandane sidings will be constructed to the west of Long Rock Depot, about one mile from Penzance station. There, trains will be stored, cleaned and prepared before re-entering service.

The work will start later this month and is expected to be completed within a year.

In addition to the sidings, Cornwall Council has submitted plans for a new car park at Ponsandane with a view of creating around an additional 60 parking spaces in Penzance including five accessible spaces, six electric vehicle charging spaces and space for up to 15 motorbikes. Plans also include a new bicycle hub and bicycle hire facilities while providing easy access to the recently upgraded South West Coast path.

This latest funding announcement is, Network Rail says, evidence of its ongoing investment into the railway in Cornwall, improving rail travel for school children, commuters, and tourists. Most recently, a [£1.14m upgrade of the St Ives branch line](#) has enabled platform extensions at St Erth and Lelant

stations, which will in the future allow GWR to run longer trains in high summer, providing 2,000 more seats everyday and a total of 10,000 seats to and from St Ives.

Network Rail is also continuing to support plans for the proposed future Mid-Cornwall Metro.

The Ponsandane sidings are being funded by £4.8m from Network Rail and £1.75m from GWR. Cornwall Council is seeking to secure funding from the Government's Town Deal Fund to start the construction of the new car park and cycle hub in 2023.

Christian Irwin, Network Rail's industry programme director (South West), said: "We are delighted to be continuing our investment into the railway in Cornwall. Over the last 18 months, we've made a number of significant improvements to rail travel in the county including completing the biggest track investment on the St Ives Bay line in 60 years, upgrading to the Newquay branch line and renewing parts of the River Fowey viaduct and track at Lostwithiel station.

"As the country looks to recover from the Covid pandemic and passengers are increasingly returning to the railway, it has never been a more important time to invest in rail and ensure the railway is an efficient, affordable and reliable green transport option for residents, commuters and tourists alike."

Matt Barnes, GWR head of strategic service development, said: "This wider investment across the South West has helped GWR to be able to deliver more and better train services, offering passengers more seats on a more resilient and reliable railway.

"As we seek to build back better, we are always looking at ways to make travelling with GWR a simpler, more accessible experience, allowing passengers to make sustainable transport choices."

Councillor Philip Desmonde, portfolio holder for transport at Cornwall Council, said: "The work at Ponsandane is the latest example of the partnership working between Cornwall Council, Network Rail and GWR to improve connectivity for residents and give people choice about how they travel. Whilst enhancing the look of the current site, the extension of the sidings will also complement the wider regeneration plans for town."

Jonathan How, mayor of Penzance, said: "Anything that can be done to help people arrive in the centre of Penzance by some means other than a private car is going to help. This project at Ponsandane ticks all the boxes. It'll initially make much needed additional train seats available and once Towns Fund investment has been confirmed it will provide a new place to leave a car so that people can walk or cycle into town."

Councillor Tim Dwelly, Penzance East, said: "This project is exactly what we need to show that Penzance also has a beach. The land is called Cressa which might be a good name for the future 'park and bike ride' project we are hoping to develop at Ponsandane. The refurbishment of the site will help with our ambition to encourage more people to access town shops and facilities without having to drive into the centre. And it will be ideal for local people wanting easy access to the beach without using a car."