

Ballot opens for one-off public tours of iconic railway signal box

March 6, 2023



A two-week ballot has opened for members of the public to get the chance to be on a rare tour of a Birmingham city centre railway landmark.

For one day only, Network Rail will open the doors to the Grade II-listed Birmingham New Street power signal box (PSB) after it finished 56 years of duty in December.

A total of 60 places are on offer on five, 45-minute tours starting every hour from midday on Friday 31 March*.

Due to anticipated high demand, tickets will **be allocated by a random ballot which can be entered [here](#)**.

It will close on Friday 17 March and then the lucky people who have been successful will be contacted.

Railway staff – with more than 70 years of combined experience of working in and around the operational signal box – will lead the tour of three of the iconic building's five floors.

Visitors will be given the chance to learn the basics of railway signalling, how the signal box worked and discover more about plans for the building's future.

Denise Wetton, Network Rail's Central route director, said: "We were overwhelmed by the response when we announced that the Birmingham power signal box would be closing, so it felt like the right thing to do to open up the doors and show off this local landmark which played a crucial role for six decades at the heart of Britain's railway network.

"I hope that people will enjoy this rare look behind the scenes and that it inspires people not only to learn about the important part this building and the people who worked in it played in the railway's past – but also discover more about how we're improving the railway for the future, too."

At the building's peak up to 1,200 trains were directed by its team of dedicated signallers every day – that's tens of millions of trains over its operational life.

But last Christmas the 1960s analogue technology made way for digital when responsibility for all train movements through Britain's busiest station outside of London was passed over to the West Midlands Signalling Centre in east Birmingham.

After the interest generated by the Christmas closure, Network Rail has decided to open up the building for railway enthusiasts and architecture fans alike.

It's applauded for being one of Birmingham's best surviving examples of Brutalist architecture – defined by imposing facades built from pre-cast concrete.

Its insides were also unique too, as the only surviving signal box to use the Westpac Mk 1 signalling system until it closed on Christmas Eve 2022.

Built as part of the West Coast main line route modernisation, the Birmingham PSB was one of four power signal boxes in the West Midlands, replacing 64 manually operated signal boxes in the 1960s.

It was given Grade II listed building status in 1995 because of its 'dramatic and exceptional architectural quality' and 'strongly sculptural form'.

After the tours take place work will start on the next phase of the building's life to become a training centre for the next generation of railway signallers.

This latest look behind the scenes follows the hugely successful tours of a forgotten underground tunnel linking New Street station to the Mailbox building which took place as part of Birmingham Heritage Week 2021.

*Built over five floors in the 1960s, unfortunately the building does not meet modern day accessibility standards so the tours will be unavailable to those who are unable to use stairs.

The operational spaces and some rooms in the building included on the tour are also small so each group

is being capped at a maximum of 12 people to give enough space for everyone to enjoy their visit in comfort.

Each tour will start on the hour from 12 midday, with the last tour at 4pm, on Friday 31 March, and will last for approximately 45 minutes.

Full link to the public ballot

is: <https://www.eventbrite.co.uk/e/birmingham-new-street-power-signal-box-guided-tour-tickets-565336545827>

Photo and video credit: Network Rail