

Brighton Main Line to shut for 9 days for £15 million upgrade

February 3, 2022



The Brighton Main Line will shut for nine consecutive days later this month for £15 million worth of improvements.

Engineers hope to tackle delays for Southern and Thameslink passengers.

The railway between Three Bridges, Brighton and Lewes will close from Saturday 19 to Sunday 27 February 2022. During this time, teams will work round the clock to rebuild a crucial junction, lay new track and shore up embankments to reduce the danger of landslips.

The upgrade also means the lines between Three Bridges and Brighton/Lewes will be closed on the weekends of 12/13 February, 5/6 March and 3 April for preparation and follow up works.

Katie Frost, Network Rail's Sussex route director, said: "The Brighton Main Line is one of the UK's busiest routes and the rail infrastructure is among the oldest and most intensively used. These works are absolutely vital to improving performance so we can give passengers a more reliable train service."

“Doing the work in a longer 9-day closure means we can get more work done, more quickly, avoiding 20 separate weekend, evening and bank holiday closures which would be even more disruptive to passengers, the people who live by the railway and the wider economy.

“We are working hand-in-hand with our colleagues at Govia Thameslink Railway to make sure people who do need to travel when the line is closed can still go where they need to.”

In a snapshot passenger survey late last year, more than three quarters were aware of the closure, and 48% will change their travel plans.

Southern and Thameslink will operate alternative train and bus services, but Network Rail warns many journeys will take considerably longer than normal.

No trains will run between Three Bridges and Brighton or Lewes. Main line services will start and terminate at Three Bridges, where there'll be a major temporary bus hub, served by up to 54 replacement buses per hour at peak times, running on routes across the closed sections of the line. Two trains per hour will run between London Victoria and Brighton via Gatwick Airport, Horsham and Littlehampton, offering an easier and more comfortable journey than using a replacement bus. However, journeys will take significantly longer.

The operation requires more than 200 buses, and 100 additional customer service staff will be on hand to provide assistance. The custom-built bus hub at Three Bridges creates a temporary bus station with toilets and a refreshment stand.

Chris Fowler, Southern's customer services director, said: “We've been working closely with Network Rail to make sure our customers can get where they need to be while these vital infrastructure improvements are carried out. The train and bus services we'll be running are now in the online National Rail Enquiries journey planner, so please plan your journey now, and re-check closer to the time, as we might need to make further changes because of Covid.

“People can take a train confidently, knowing that Southern and Thameslink trains and stations are treated every day with a viricide that kills coronavirus for weeks at a time.”

Engineers will use 8,000 tonnes of ballast – the stones beneath the track – as they rebuild Copyhold Junction near Haywards Heath, a crucial intersection for Ardingly Stone yard where aggregate for the construction industry is carried by train, removing hundreds of lorries from local roads.

During the closure, engineers will replace more than 1,500 metres of track in renewals at Copyhold Junction, Burgess Hill, Preston Park and in the 1841-built Clayton Tunnel.

They will also renew eight sets of points – the mechanical kit that moves switches and crossings for trains to change tracks.

The closure will also see the construction of a new underpass at Hassocks, to replace Woodside level crossing – closed recently after a spate of safety incidents including near misses and children playing

chicken with trains.

Building the underpass in a 9-day block – instead of 40 nights of noisy work – will cause less disruption to residents who live by the railway and deliver the benefits to the community much sooner.

The work is part of the wider Sussex Upgrade programme, which is investing more than £750 million from 2019 to 2024 to improve the railway for passengers.