

Completion of major Southend Victoria branch line improvements brought forward in response to passenger feedback

February 6, 2019



The £46m project work to replace the entire overhead wiring system and structures on the railway between Southend Victoria and Shenfield is expected to finish sooner than originally planned, as Greater Anglia and Network Rail respond to customer feedback.

The new plan sees a reduction of 11 weeks of midweek night works and six weekend works compared to previous plans. This will enable the majority of the work in the project to finish two months early in March 2020, instead of May 2020.

This has been made possible by deploying additional resources and agreeing a nine-day closure of the branch line between Wickford and Southend Victoria at the end of May 2019 that will help get more upgrade work done in less time.

The overhead wires and supporting structures which power Greater Anglia's trains are over 60 years old. The wires can sag in hot weather leading to speed restrictions being imposed. By installing a new auto tension system, this will help keep the wires at the correct tension in the hot weather and avoid the need to impose speed restrictions.

Rail passengers, who have seen their trains replaced with buses during late night, mid-weeks and at weekends, have complained about the length of time the project is taking and the inconvenience it has caused.

Over the last few months, Greater Anglia and Network Rail have looked at what can be done to speed up the works and for them to be carried out at times which are less inconvenient for customers.

Working together, Greater Anglia and Network Rail have confirmed a revised plan which includes:

- The continuation of the current weekend closures until 29 and 30 June 2019
- Midweek closures in March and April will take place on Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday evenings. These will start later with the last train from London Liverpool Street to Southend Victoria running at 10:45pm. To accommodate this, the first train the following morning will run at 5am from Southend Victoria rather than the usual time of 4am.
- The line between Wickford and Southend Victoria will close for nine days over the May 2019 half term holiday (25 May until 2 June). A rail replacement bus service will run between all intermediate stations, but customers are advised to use alternative transport where possible.
- The line will remain open for most of the summer months. There will be no weekend closures during July and most of August, with the exception of the first trains starting later on Sunday mornings and a full closure over the August bank holiday weekend.

From September, the weekend works will resume and the plan is currently being agreed by all parties. While this is subject to change, these are the works that are likely to take place:

- A programme of weekend closures with the line shut most weekends over September, October and November. Providing the work progresses as planned, we will look at the feasibility of running trains between London and Wickford on most weekends during this period.
- Train services to be suspended on the branch line between Christmas and New Year 2019, with work planned to focus on the complex junction at Wickford.
- A final phase of weekend closures, when buses replace trains, to begin from the first weekend of January 2020 and continue every weekend until the end of March, with one final weekend closure required on 18 and 19 April 2020 (Easter weekend).
- In addition to the above overhead line work, we will need to undertake midweek track work in early 2020, but this should be possible to complete while keeping most trains running. The Southminster line should remain open as normal while the works on the Southend Victoria line are completed.

Jamie Burles, Greater Anglia managing director said: “We are pleased that we have been able to work with Network Rail to speed up completion of this project, as we know how unhappy our customers are about the disruption it has caused.

“We know customers would rather stay on the train for the whole of their journey, but I’d like to reassure passengers that we will have plenty of rail replacement buses and extra staff to make sure that they can complete their journeys at weekends and during the remaining mid-week works.

“However, we are advising customers to make alternative arrangements during the May half term works, especially on the four working days. We are sorry for this inconvenience, but listening to customer feedback, we believe this is the right decision as the project will be finished sooner with fewer mid-week works.

“We and Network Rail are investing heavily in the railway in the Southend area so that it will be more reliable and served by modern state of the art trains.”

Meliha Duymaz, Network Rail’s route managing director for Anglia, said: “I know that passengers on the Southend line have been disrupted a lot over the past few years and having listened to their concerns, we’ve worked to revise our plans to reduce the impact on their journeys while we carry out the upgrade.

“This work is vital to supporting the growing number of passengers using this line, making journeys more reliable and allowing for new trains to run, as part of our Railway Upgrade Plan.

“I’d like to once again thank passengers for their continued patience.”