

Emergency 25,000v overhead line repairs keep critical supplies moving on West Coast main line

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Engineers raced to make emergency repairs on the West Coast main line to avoid major disruption to 1m tonnes of freight being moved on the railway line each week.

It's after the overhead 25,000v electric cables which provide power to trains came down north of Carlisle at 1.30pm on Tuesday 7 April.

A bird landed on the high voltage cables underneath a bridge at Kingmoor which caused the section involved to earth.

When this happens the extremely high current passes into the bridge, causing the wires to melt, lose tension, and break away from their supports.

More than a dozen staff completed the repairs in just six hours so overnight freight trains on the important Anglo-Scottish route were not disrupted.

Darren Miller, Network Rail infrastructure and maintenance delivery manager for Lancashire and Cumbria, said: "With the movement of essential goods on the railway like medical supplies, food and energy, it was

vital we fixed this problem as fast as we possibly could.

“We’re sorry to any passengers or freight customers effected by the delay while we worked hard to repair the damaged power lines.

“However, our specialist engineers safely completed the repair in time for the night time freight traffic that transports essential food, fuel and medical supplies across the country.

“I’m proud of our key worker railway staff who are continuing with their critical maintenance activities to keep our railways open for freight during this Coronavirus crisis.”

Network Rail engineers fitted secondary isolation on the wires under the bridge, so they do not earth in the same way again and to help protect birds in the future.

Every 24 hours throughout the coronavirus crisis, 188,000 tonnes of critical supplies – including food, fuel and medicine – are being moved by rail between London, Birmingham, Manchester, Liverpool and Glasgow.

That’s 1.13 million tonnes every week – most of it transported along the West Coast main line (WCML), the busiest mixed-use (passenger and freight) railway in Europe, and its key spurs.

The following day, products including bananas, pasta, loo roll and other essentials can be found in supermarkets and high street shops.

To prioritise freight and journeys for people who cannot work from home, a reduced timetable is currently running on the railway network.

Government guidelines are advising the public to only travel if absolutely essential.

People making such journeys should visit www.nationalrail.co.uk to check the revised train times.

Photo credit: Network Rail