

Greater Anglia and Network Rail work together to tackle leaves on the line

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Greater Anglia and Network Rail are making joint preparations to tackle slippery autumn rail conditions – following a huge improvement in punctuality last autumn.

The two organisations work together every year to minimise the effects of autumn on train performance.

Leaves on the line can pose problems for the railway as they stick to damp rails and passing trains compress them into a thin, slippery black layer on the rail which – much like black ice on the roads – can affect braking distance and reduce traction and acceleration.

This means train drivers must slow down earlier for stations and signals to avoid overshooting them. They must also accelerate more gently to avoid wheel spin. All this can increase journey time and lead to delays for passengers.

However, figures show that delay minutes due to slippery rails were down by 82% last year compared to the previous year and there were 95% fewer cancellations. While there were fewer trains running because of the pandemic, the actions taken by Network Rail and Greater Anglia also contributed to this positive

result.

Greater Anglia's Engineering Director, Martin Beable, explains, "Most trains are fitted with a system called 'Wheel Slip Protection – or WSP. This is the equivalent of the ABS system you have in your car and prevents trains from skidding which can damage their wheels.

"Our brand new intercity, regional and electric commuter trains are fitted with the very latest Wheel Slide Protection systems which have been thoroughly tested and developed to be optimal.

"This means that any sliding on greasy rails – with lots of leaves compressed on the top of the rail – is limited, and causes less damage to the wheels and track."

When it is necessary, the trains also deposit a small quantity of sand onto the rail which helps the train wheels to grip, particularly where there is leaf contamination. Train drivers can also deploy the sand manually as a preventative measure when they are approaching leafy areas, to keep services running smoothly.

Greater Anglia is also making a slight change to some intercity train times from 10 October as part of the railway's preparations for autumn.

The changes, which are made every year, are brought in to ensure that passengers still arrive in London on time in the autumn, by allowing train drivers more time to brake and accelerate if slippery conditions occur caused by autumnal weather and compacted leaves.

Passengers are advised to check before they travel as Greater Anglia intercity trains leaving Norwich, Diss, Stowmarket, Ipswich, and Manningtree before 7.30am will depart up to five minutes earlier, Mondays to Fridays.

In addition, Network Rail will deploy its team six 'leaf busting' Rail Head Treatment Trains (RHTTs) which will operate 24/7 blasting leaves off the lines with high pressure water jets.

Together they will clock up over 80,000 kilometres from 27 September until 17 December to keep rails clear across Norfolk, Suffolk, Cambridgeshire, East London and Essex.

Network Rail's route director for Anglia, Ellie Burrows, said: "Autumn is always a challenge for the railway but our leaf-busting teams will be working around-the-clock to keep passengers moving this autumn. We're deploying special treatment trains to clean rails and have engineers ready to respond to issues as they occur and we'll be taking preventative action wherever possible to keep services running on time."

Photo credit: Network Rail