

Helicopter surveys keep Wolverhampton and Tamworth stations' big freezes at bay

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Thermal imaging cameras mounted to a Network Rail helicopter are keeping passengers and freight moving after heavy snowfall across the West Midlands.

Although sub-zero temperatures caused heavy snow to fall and ice to form on tracks this weekend, much of the railway has been operating as normal.

This is helped by the Network Rail Air Operations team, which on Monday carried out sky-high inspections of the West Coast main line and key rail routes in the West Midlands.

The impressive aerial photos taken on the flight over Wolverhampton station, and also Tamworth station in Staffordshire, are to check that points – the equipment which allows trains to move tracks – do not become frozen and stop working.

In each set of points the steel rails are heated to stop this from happening. If the heaters are working properly the points should glow bright white in the thermal pictures – if they appear dark the helicopter team raises the alarm to engineers on the ground for them to fix.

Dave Penney, Network Rail's Central route director, said: "With the West Midlands under a blanket of snow the Network Rail Air Operations team has been inspecting the railway from the sky today to help keep passengers and freight moving.

"Key sections of track are fitted with heaters and insulation to help stop them freezing. Thermal imaging cameras attached to a helicopter have been checking the heaters are working.

"Anything reported to us from the skies can then be looked at straight away by the extra teams of people on the ground and fixed as quickly as possible."

With the cold weather continuing, passengers who still need to travel by train during this period of national lockdown are being advised to check www.nationalrail.co.uk for the latest updates.

Photo credit: Network Rail