

High-speed services continue, despite the heatwave

July 19, 2022



On a day when the UK rail network bucked under the heat of a record summer, the HS1 high-speed line between London St Pancras and the Channel Tunnel near Folkestone kept running, with Eurostar and Southeastern High-Speed services unaffected.

How did they do it?

Richard Thorp, HS1's engineering director, explained that there were several reasons for this. HS1 is a modern, well-maintained railway that is comparatively short (67 miles - 108km) and is intimately known to its maintainers.

Built to French high-speed standards, as it essentially is an extension to the French network, the rails are prestressed to 28 degrees centigrade - one degree higher than the rest of the UK network. This, combined with Kent being marginally cooler than some other areas of the UK, kept the rail temperature under the critical limit.

"We get concerned when the rail temperature goes over 55 degrees," Richard said. It didn't, although

there were regular checks throughout the day. It was only marginal – Richard said they were “running tight” – but it stayed on the right side of the safety limit. As a result, trains operated with no temporary speed restrictions and HS1 didn’t have to paint any of its rails white to keep the temperatures down.

One small area of success in an otherwise unfortunate day for Britain’s railways.