

# Major project to transform the railway from Woking to Portsmouth Harbour set to start next month

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A more reliable railway with faster journeys and the potential for more train services is coming for passengers between Woking and Portsmouth Harbour, with the launch of the Portsmouth Direct Upgrade.

Between 2022 and 2024 engineers will carry out a large programme of signalling, track and level crossing improvements between Farncombe and Petersfield, on the line built as the Portsmouth Direct route more than 150 years ago.

The first major part of the work will see a nine-day closure between Guildford and Petersfield from Saturday 12 to Sunday 20 February.

Mark Killick, Network Rail's Wessex route director, said: "When we're finished in 2024, this upgrade programme will provide a much-improved railway for customers travelling between London Waterloo and Portsmouth. Large parts of the line are still run in the same way as they were in the 1970s and it's time to bring the railway up to date.

“There’s never a good time to undertake disruptive engineering work and we will be working closely with with our industry partners to minimise the impact on everyone. That said, we have a great deal of work to do between now and 2024, involving weekend and some weekday line closures, so I’d encourage our passengers to plan ahead and look out for more information in the coming months.”

Christian Neill, SWR’s Customer Experience Director, said: “The work taking place on the Portsmouth line marks the start of a huge investment in railway infrastructure which will improve customer journeys for years to come.

“I realise these works will mean disruption for our customers; however, replacement buses will be in operation wherever lines need to be closed and I’d encourage anyone traveling with us to check to see if their journey will be affected. I’d also like to thank our customers for their patience whilst these essential works are carried out.”

A key part of the Portsmouth Direct Upgrade will be the Farncombe to Petersfield resignalling scheme, in which engineers will install a new, digital signalling system controlled from Network Rail’s state-of-the-art Rail Operating Centre in Basingstoke (see Notes). In addition, 12 level crossings on the route will be upgraded to make them safer for drivers and pedestrians.

The resignalling scheme, combined with new and improved switches and crossings – which allow trains to move from one track to another – at Petersfield and Haslemere, will increase the speed at which trains can travel on the line.

All combined it will provide a more reliable railway, faster train services and more capacity, providing the opportunity to run more trains when work is complete in 2024.

Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic around 40,000 passengers used the line between Woking and Portsmouth Harbour every day, making it one of the busiest commuter routes in the country.

*Photo credit: Network Rail*