

# Major works shut down services between Tunbridge Wells and Hastings this half term – but promise big improvements in reliability

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Despite a bit of an upheaval over half term, the end is in sight for passengers on the Tunbridge Wells to Hastings line, with a major engineering project promising big improvements in reliability.

Between Saturday 22 October and Sunday 30 October, major engineering work will close the line to trains, allowing teams to undertake ongoing improvements to the notoriously unreliable stretch of track.

The line was built in the early 1850's, and since its infancy has suffered with tricky earthworks – major landslips closed the line in 2020 and 2014 – and **Network Rail** has installed earth movement sensors along the route at vulnerable locations.

Along with improvements to the earthworks on the line, there will also be new track installed inside Wadhurst Tunnel and work will also be taking place in Mountfield Tunnel, near Robertsbridge. The track here is currently set into concrete, called slab track, which needs repairing, and investigations will also be taking place to plan for additional work at a later date.

The first phase of the earthwork improvements on the route was completed in October 2021 and the final phase will take place for a week around Easter, from Friday 09 to Sunday 16 April 2023.

Fiona Taylor, Network Rail's route director for Kent said: "The closure of the railway for nine days is good news for passengers on the route. We're finally able to deliver sustained investment in this railway's civil engineering, really for the first time since it was built. When the engineers of the 1850s cut the tracks through the hills, they cut deeply and cheaply, leaving a legacy of unstable earthworks that have a history of collapse.

"We took a week last year to shore them up around Wadhurst and other locations, and we're going to be back doing more of the same work this time round, and again in April 2023.

"I'm really grateful for the understanding passengers have shown while we've been working on this route and I would ask them to check before they travel during the October half-term week, as rail replacement buses will be in use on the whole length of the route."

Scott Brightwell, **Southeastern's** operations and safety director, said: "We know that closing the railway for a short period isn't ideal, but we'll make sure that all of our customers know exactly how to complete their journey between Hastings and Tunbridge Wells while Network Rail carries out this vital work. Our message to our customers is to check their journey on the Southeastern website or app, and after the work's finished they'll return to a more reliable railway. "

*Image credit: Network Rail*