

Makeover announced for popular West Midlands Railway branch line

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One of the best-loved train services in the West Midlands – the Stourbridge Town branch line – is getting a makeover.

The popular line, which connects Stourbridge Town and Stourbridge Junction stations, will close to passengers for a fortnight from Monday 8 February while improvement works are carried out. Passengers will be able to use their tickets on replacement bus services throughout this period.

During the work, the pair of small Class 139 trains used on the route will be internally repainted, deep-cleaned and have new passenger grab rails installed. Some seating will also be temporarily removed to aid social distancing on board.

Network Rail will use the temporary closure to inspect the track, remove graffiti and clear vegetation along the line, including overhanging trees which could pose a risk to the safety of trains.

The line – which is less than a mile long – is believed to be the shortest branch line in Europe and first opened in 1879. The journey between Stourbridge Town and Stourbridge Junction takes just three minutes.

Jonny Wiseman, customer experience director for West Midlands Railway, said: “The Stourbridge Town branch line is one of our best-known services and its uniqueness makes it popular with our customers and rail enthusiasts alike.

“With passenger numbers currently very low due to the national lockdown it is the perfect time for us to pause the service to give the trains and tracks some TLC.

“Our customers who need to travel will be able to use their tickets on local bus services for the duration of the work and we look forward to welcoming passengers back on board later this month.”

Geoff Lusher, chairman of Pre Metro, which runs the service on behalf of West Midlands Railway, said: “This is excellent news and yet another example of our ongoing successful partnership working with West Midlands Railway. Replacement bus services will be available to minimise the inconvenience to our passengers, who will soon see revitalised railcars on the branch.

“Our thanks also go to West Midlands Rail Executive, which has been instrumental in promoting improvements to the branch line, including upcoming track improvements.”

Dave Penney, director of Network Rail’s Central route, said: “We know this line is much-loved by people in Stourbridge and beyond. While passenger numbers are lower than usual we want to take the opportunity to make sure the route is in the best condition it can be.

“This essential work to both the trains and tracks will ensure safe and comfortable journeys for passengers on the Stourbridge Town branch line for many years to come.”

The branch line is due to reopen to passengers on Monday 22 February.

West Midlands Railway is reminding passengers to follow the Government’s “Stay At Home” advice and to only make essential journeys. Passengers must also wear a face covering when on board the train, unless exempt for medical reasons.

Photo credit: West Midlands Railway