

Merseyrail's Southport line celebrates historic landmark

March 28, 2024



Merseyrail Southport is celebrating the 120th anniversary of its electric train services.

When it opened for passenger services at the end of March 1904, the 18-mile route was the world's first inter-urban electric railway.

The then Lancashire & Yorkshire Railway company carried out the electrification work, with the project starting in 1902. Along the busy route that generated commuter and leisure travel, the new electric trains replaced Victorian steam trains between Liverpool Exchange and Southport via Waterloo and Ainsdale.

The line voltage was originally 625V DC, and power to the live rails was supplied from a specially built electricity generating station at Formby. The electrical equipment for the line and the trains was supplied by the Dick Kerr & Company at Preston and the electric multiple unit trains were built by the Lancashire & Yorkshire Railway.

Those original trains were replaced by the London Midland & Scottish Railway (LMS) Class 502's from 1939 onwards, which in turn were replaced by the British Rail built Class 507's between 1978 & 1980.

The new state-of-the-art Class 777's are the fourth generation of electric trains to have operated along the historic route, which is now part of the well-patronised Merseyrail Northern line.

Two of the original brick built large transformer buildings dating from 1904, that now house modern equipment at Southport and at Hillside are still in-situ and have been silent witness to 120 years of progress.

Neil Grabham, Managing Director of Merseyrail, said: "This is another historic milestone that we are celebrating on the Merseyrail network this year. It illustrates the incredible railway heritage that we have in this part of the UK.

"We are incredibly proud of the history of our network and the public service that has been provided in three centuries - from the 1800s, through the 1900s and now into the 2000s.

"Today, thousands of customers are travelling on the Southport to Hunts Cross line every day. It is one of the busiest lines on the Merseyrail network with a 15-minute service, seven days a week during the summer months.

"And we are sure that the new fleet of Class 777 trains will serve the people on this line for many years to come."