

More reliable journeys through Norfolk as Network Rail upgrade 100-year-old swing bridges

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Network Rail is renewing and refurbishing the existing electrical and mechanical parts of three swing bridges in Norfolk to keep services running reliably and prevent disruption at the ports and marinas.

The internal components on the Somerleyton, Reedham and Oulton Broad swing bridges haven't been replaced in over 100 years but are frequently repaired, each bridge costing over £100,000 a year to maintain.

Starting early next year (2022) internal upgrades will be made as part of a £5.5million programme of work. Network Rail will replace the winch system, hydraulic jacks and pipework, lighting across the bridges, and install a new power system. This will make the structures easier to maintain for the coming 25 years, saving up to a combined £7.5million in future costs.

Reducing future maintenance

Once the work is complete the bridges will be able to operate more reliably throughout the year, giving river traffic consistent access to the ports and marinas, benefitting the local economy, especially throughout summer as tourists are welcomed to the area. The bridges will break-down less often, and save taxpayer funded Network Rail more than £100,000 a year, per bridge, in maintenance costs.

The three bridges are an important part of Network Rail's railway heritage and work to the internal elements of the bridges will be carried out whilst also maintaining the current look-and-feel and heritage of each bridge.

Drones reduce survey time and cost

In order to prepare for this work, surveys works have been completed. Usually, this would require several engineers to close the railway and visit each site on foot, multiple times, over a number of days. Network Rail has sped up this process by using drones, so engineers were able to complete the surveys in a matter of hours, whilst also keeping the railway running.

Ellie Burrows, Network Rail's route director for Anglia, said: "These bridges are an important part of our railway heritage and also an important part of keeping both rail and boat traffic moving. Renewing the components will reduce the risk of mechanical problems and help keep services running safely, smoothly and reliably for our passengers, as well as maintaining access to the ports and marinas.

"The use of drones to complete survey work is a great example of how we're innovating to keep the railway running with minimised risk to our staff, minimised disruption for passengers and at reduced cost for taxpayers."

Jamie Burles, Greater Anglia managing director said: "This work will make our Norwich and Ipswich to Lowestoft lines even more reliable, which I know our customers will welcome. While the work is going on we will make sure customers can still complete their journeys with a rail replacement bus service."

More information about the project and cost efficiencies can be found at:

www.NetworkRail.co.uk/DoingMoreForLess

Photo credit: Network Rail