

Multi-million pound investment to prevent landslips at Bearsted to be delivered over the summer

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Passengers are advised to plan ahead for major work on the line between Maidstone East and Ashford International stations this summer – from Saturday 7 to Sunday 15 August 2021 inclusive.

Network Rail engineers will be reinforcing Bearsted cutting to prevent landslips as well as improving drainage and signalling in the area. For a nine-day period in August a rail replacement bus service will be in operation along the line.

There will also be closures on Saturday 3 and Sunday 4 July, and Saturday 24 and Sunday 25 July. For all these dates no trains can run between Maidstone East and Ashford International stations, with a rail replacement bus service running instead.

The cutting at Bearsted is over 150 years old and requires ‘soil nailing’, a type of strengthening, to make sure it remains safe and resilient. Over 2,000 of the 6,000+ required soil nails will be installed in the lower reaches of the cutting. At the same time, engineers will be taking opportunity to work on power supply

feeder cabling between Harrietsham and Charing.

Network Rail will also take the opportunity to address a number of other earthwork, drainage, track and signalling maintenance issues, including track realignment, rail grinding / reprofiling and flood mitigation. In addition, several stations will also benefit from various maintenance works which can be implemented whilst they are closed.

In the past decade, there have been several incidences of unplanned disruption for passengers as engineers have scrambled to the Bearsted cutting site for urgent fixes of weather-related movements. New Year's Day 2021 was the most recent landslip due to heavy rain in the area.

Fiona Taylor, Network Rail Route Director for Kent, said: "Line closures are always a last resort for us because of the disruption they cause passengers, but are sometimes unavoidable. Extreme weather, as a result of climate change, is having a significant impact on our Victorian railway embankments. The works at Bearsted will make the cutting secure for a long time. We're scheduling them to cause minimum disruption, when fewer people are using services, so that passengers will benefit from the works as soon as possible."

"Closing the rail line for nine days in a row will mean there is less disruption than completing the work over a higher number of weekends. The closures have been carefully planned for the summer school holidays, when passenger numbers are traditionally lower.

"Network Rail and Southeastern want to give passengers as much advance notice as possible so that they can plan their journeys or make alternative arrangements, such as taking leave or working from home where possible."

Scott Brightwell, Train Services Director at Southeastern, said: "It's vitally important that Network Rail carry out this essential work along this part of our route. Reducing the risk of landslips will really help to improve reliability for our passengers. We are working on the alternative travel arrangements and we will publish more detailed information for our customers in the coming weeks."

- **Saturday 3 and Sunday 4 July** (Maidstone East to Ashford)
 - **Saturday 24 and Sunday 25 July** (Maidstone East to Ashford)
 - **MAIN POSSESSION - Saturday 7 to Sunday 15 August** Information, including detailed travel advice can be found www.networkrail.co.uk/Bearsted which will be regularly updated.

Photo credit: Network Rail