

Multi-million-pound investment to prevent landslips on Chiltern main line

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Major work to secure a railway embankment in Warwickshire will mean more reliable journeys for passengers on the Chiltern main line.

Since December 2019, a £9m investment by Network Rail has seen engineers working to stabilise the slope on the south side of Harbury tunnel between Leamington Spa and Banbury.

Historically the area has been beset by earth movement, most recently in early 2015 when a 300,000-tonne landslip on the other side of the tunnel closed the Chiltern main line for six weeks.

Joel Farrell, scheme project manager at Network Rail, said: “This significant investment to secure this part of the Chiltern main line will ensure reliable journeys for passengers between Birmingham and London for many decades to come.

“The ground here, made up of layers of limestone and shale, can be unstable and could potentially cause issues for the railway running through it. This preventative work will stop any future slips and make it much more secure.

“We know Harbury very well after the huge landslide in 2015 and I want to thank the local community for their patience while we complete this vital work.”

The geological makeup of the earth at Harbury means landslips and subsidence have caused issues for the railway since its completion in 1852.

The first attempt to make the slopes of the cutting at Harbury shallower to prevent landslips was undertaken by Victorian engineers of Great Western Railway in 1884.

Now, 136 years later, this work continues as the Victorian’s modern-day counterparts continue to stabilise the embankment making it less steep and pinning it with large nails and piles to make it more stable. A new retaining wall will also be built at the bottom of the slope to prevent soil movement.

The embankment strengthening began in December 2019 and is expected to finish in 2021.

The project has been carried out during the daytime while passenger and freight trains continued to run below, meaning no disruption to services and no noisy overnight work.

Passengers should continue following government guidelines and avoid train travel unless absolutely essential.

People making essential journeys should visit www.nationalrail.co.uk for the latest information.

Photo credit: Network Rail