

Multi-million track protection is real “Rock and Rail”

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As part of a project to protect the network running between Hereford and Abergavenny, engineers have installed 8,000 tonnes of ‘rock armour’ to fend off the elements.

Network Rail says it is in response to extreme weather brought about by climate change which, over the last two years, has caused several washouts on the Marches Line, resulting in sudden closures of up to seven days.

The impact, the rail infrastructure owner says, is severe when this happens. The effect can be felt by many passengers using the line to get to Manchester, Birmingham and North Wales

Consequently, Network Rail has put in place half a mile of rock and refurbished culverts along this route – following good results on a flood prone stretch in the Conwy Valley.

In all, ten trains were used to move the 8,000 tonnes of rock which was sourced locally from Machen Quarry, South Wales. Network Rail says using these trains helped the environment, keeping 400 lorries off the road.

The work, which cost £4 million, began in May 2021. November marks the first phase being finished, and more work will be carried out in Spring next year.

Network Rail says all efforts were made to reduce impact on local wildlife and the environment.

Programme manager at Network Rail, Alex Hinshelwood, said: “We know that rock armour works, as we’ve seen it in action on the Conwy Valley Line – where recent flooding there left the line closed for hours, instead of days.

“This is a huge benefit for passengers with less disruption to their journeys.

“We are dedicated to improving resilience across the Wales and Borders route and what we’ve installed here will protect the future of this stretch of railway for many years to come.”

This project is the latest of Network Rail initiatives dedicated to facing climate change and improving resilience across the whole Wales and Borders route. Others include raising Black Bridge out of a flood zone, landslip defences on the Severn Estuary, and the rock armour installation on the Conwy Valley Line.