

Network Rail announces £25m investment to secure future of critical Wales and Borders transport link

September 30, 2021



Network Rail has revealed details of a multi-million-pound plan to rescue a railway line increasingly ravaged by climate change and extreme weather.

The Newport-Gloucester line connects South Wales with the West Country, Midlands and north of England, providing a vital link for passengers.

Running alongside the Severn Estuary – exposed to rain, wind and sea – more frequent extreme weather has seen the line devastated by five major landslips in the last two years alone. This has led to extended closures of the railway and temporary speed restrictions, delaying more than 200,000 trains.

As well as disrupting passengers this also impacts essential freight services, with 43 freight trains passing through every week, moving steel, petrol, and construction materials. The route also serves ‘Tesco trains’, keeping supermarkets stocked with essential supplies.

With the long-term viability of the line at stake, Network Rail engineers have developed a multi-million-

pound plan to protect the railway's future.

Work is due to begin in summer 2022 and will include the removal of more than 30,000 tonnes of material from the cliff face. A state-of-the-art mesh and bolt system will then be installed alongside three miles of track, stabilising the rockface and preventing landslips from affecting the track below.

Network Rail is working closely with train and freight operators, carefully planning the work to minimise disruption for passengers, while delivering the project as safely and quickly as possible.

Bill Kelly, route director, Network Rail Wales and Borders said:

"We've seen a huge increase in extreme weather events across our network in recent years. Climate change is happening here and now, and across Wales and Borders – from the Conwy Valley to the Welsh marches and Severn Estuary – we're responding by building a more resilient railway.

"As well as saving taxpayers' money and reducing delays for passengers and freight – we're protecting this vital Welsh transport link for generations to come."

Sarah Kelley, CrossCountry's West & Wales Regional Director said:

"This welcome investment from Network Rail will deliver a resilient and sustainable railway for our services along this key line linking England and Wales.

"We know disruption to our passengers' journeys is unwelcome and will work closely with Network Rail to ensure this is kept to a minimum while they complete this."

Jess Lippett, senior route freight manager, Network Rail Wales & Western said:

"This is one of the busiest and most important freight routes in Wales and Borders, so it's really important to the economy. As we saw through the pandemic, this route really is a lifeline, and the current shortage in HGV drivers means it's playing an even more vital role.

"People are amazed when I tell them that a single freight train keeps 70 or more lorries off Britain's congested road network. With carbon emissions 76% lower, rail freight is also making a significant contribution to meeting the climate change challenge."

James Price, Chief Executive at Transport for Wales said:

"The storms and flooding we saw in 2020 were a powerful reminder of the growing impact of climate change on our transport network. We work very closely with Network Rail and it underlines the importance of their work to increase the resilience of the railway across Wales and Borders."

Photo credit: Network Rail