

Network Rail protects line from encroaching trees and vegetation

April 14, 2022



Network Rail has now completed a project which set out to improve safety and performance on the West Highland Line between Craigendoran and Helensburgh.

Trees and encroaching vegetation were removed along more than two kilometres of the line to reduce the impact of dangerous leaf and tree fall.

Left unmanaged, vegetation can pose a risk to rail safety as trees can fall onto the line during bad weather or when overgrown, branches and foliage can obscure signals from a driver's view.

In autumn, leaves on the line can affect train wheel traction to the rail which affects braking distances and acceleration, and interferes with signalling systems.

Following the clearance work, native trees and shrubs were re-planted alongside around 1,200 new berry bearing plants in an effort to protect wildlife, the environment and nearby communities.

It's all part of a trial designed to help Network Rail realise its ambition of seeing no net loss of biodiversity

by 2024, with an overall net gain by 2035.

Kirsty Armstrong, Scheme Project Manager for Network Rail said: “While our priority is the safety and performance of the railway, this project has been planned and delivered to protect wildlife and promote biodiversity.

“We’re making positive efforts towards managing our lineside areas in a more environmentally-friendly way as part of our commitment to a better, greener railway.

“We’ve taken a number of proactive steps to offset the impact of tree removal and created a mixture of habitats which support a range of species alongside the railway.

“It sets the standard for sustainable management of the lineside environment for the future.”

With the introduction of new berry bearing trees and shrubs, the lineside area will become a more diverse corridor with native species that benefits the surrounding wildlife. Hawthorn, holly, blackthorn and elder trees native to the area, have also been planted, and these are better suited to the railway environment due to their slow growth rate, low height and minimal leaf-fall impact.

Bat and bird boxes have been installed to increase the availability of bat roost and bird nest sites within the railway corridor.

In addition, habitat piles – logs stacked on top of each other to simulate fallen trees – have been created along the railway corridor. This is designed to add to the existing natural features and to offer sheltering opportunities for insects, hedgehogs and nesting birds among others.

The new lineside environment will be routinely maintained to manage the regrowth of plants and trees. And Network Rail will monitor the biodiversity and offsetting measures that are in place to make sure wildlife and communities are protected while railway performance is improved.