

Network Rail takes advantage of quieter period to make improvements to two of London's busiest railways, in partnership with train operators

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Network Rail engineers are getting extra time to make improvements to two of London's busiest railway lines thanks to lower passenger numbers during the second national lockdown.

Working closely with operators Thameslink, Southern and London Overground, the company's Southern region is working overnight to tackle the causes of some recent delays to trains on the core Thameslink central London route between St Pancras and London Blackfriars, and the Sydenham Corridor between New Cross Gate and Norwood Junction.

Both those routes are crucial for the punctual operation of trains across South London and – thanks to Thameslink – even well into the north, on lines to Bedford, Cambridge and Peterborough. However, they are also very busy 24 hours a day.

Network Rail Southern region director John Halsall said: “One of the challenges of running a busy railway is that the routes we most need to do work on are the routes where people need them to be running 24/7 and it’s hard to get the time to do the job. That means the big jobs get done but the smaller work – such as managing vegetation or even wildlife – is hard to fit in and the smaller problems build into big ones.

“Working closely with our colleagues at Thameslink, Southern and London Overground, we’ve been able to take advantage of this unusually quiet time on the railway to plan some ‘quick wins’ working overnight. It will also give the opportunity to properly look at the condition of some of the technology so we really know the state of the railway and what we might need to do in future.

“We’ve had some performance problems on these corridors recently and I know passengers will want to see improvements quickly, which this plan delivers.”

Thameslink Customer Services Director Jenny Saunders said: “These difficult times do at least give us an opportunity to improve the railway, to make it more reliable. This is why, with Southern, we have collaborated with our industry colleagues at Network Rail to make this time available for extra engineering work. Passengers should please check online at thameslinkrailway.com to plan their journeys.”

Rory O’Neill, TfL’s General Manager for London Overground, said: “We are always looking at ways we can reduce unnecessary delays for our customers and welcome this improvement work Network Rail is doing to help tackle these. Some late-night London Overground services may finish early to allow this important work to take place safely and we recommend you check your journey before you travel.”

As a result of the work, there are changes to late-night train times between Loughborough Junction/London Bridge and Finsbury Park/Kentish Town as of Monday, 23 November – Friday 27 November, and between London Bridge/New Cross Gate and East/West Croydon and Crystal Palace from Monday 30 November until Friday, 4 December.

Work planned includes improvements to the quality of the track for a smoother ride, signalling improvements, removing and cutting back some trees and bushes from the trackside, clearing scrap rails and even bird-proofing structures and the former King’s Cross Thameslink station.

Photo credit: Network Rail

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