

Network Rail's stations play part in ending period poverty

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Passengers travelling through Bristol Temple Meads, Reading and London Paddington can now get free sanitary products as part of a drive to end period poverty.

Network Rail has teamed up with facilities management company Mitie, to install vending machines in the public toilets at all three stations, providing access to free sanitary products such as pads and tampons for all those who need them.

Calum Mackay, Network Rail's stations transformation programme manager, said: "We're pleased to be working with Mitie to tackle the issue of period poverty by providing free access to sanitary products at our managed stations alongside safe, hygienic spaces in which to use them.

"We want everyone to feel welcome at our stations, which is why we're proud to be doing our bit to help passengers access these vital products – as well as anyone else who needs them."

Period poverty – a lack of access to sanitary products due to financial constraints – is an issue that affects women, girls and people who menstruate across the globe. Studies have shown that around 10% of girls

aged 14 to 21 in the UK are unable to afford sanitary items*, with the average annual cost of purchasing tampons and pads totalling approximately £128, or £10 a month. One in seven female students have had to rely upon their friends to provide them with the products they need owing to affordability issues.**

It is hoped that by providing easy access to free sanitary products, Network Rail and Mitie will help passengers to travel with dignity and confidence.

Kelly Parish, Mitie strategic account director, said: “We’re so pleased to be able to partner with Network Rail in playing our part in working to end period poverty, which is such an important initiative.

“Providing access to free sanitary products for those who need them safeguards their dignity whilst being able to ensure their health and hygiene.

“Mitie and Network Rail are committed to delivering social value to maximise our positive reach and impact on the communities we serve.”

Free sanitary products can be obtained from vending machines in the female toilets in the subway and accessible toilets on platform 3 at Bristol Temple Meads, the female toilets and changing room on platform 12 at Paddington and in the Brunel Arcade toilets at Reading. Since being installed, the vending machines at Bristol Temple Meads and London Paddington are dispensing an average of 875 products every four weeks, with around 300 products being distributed each month at Reading station.

* A 2017 survey by Plan International UK found that 10% of girls have been unable to afford sanitary products.

** One in seven girls (14%) have had to ask to borrow sanitary wear from a friend due to affordability issues (Plan International).

Photo credit: Network Rail