

# New bridge for Biscuit Tunnel in Reading is a nod to rich history of the area

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Network Rail will replace a historic railway bridge in Reading this weekend (20 March) to allow trains to run at full speed again.

The Huntley and Palmers bridge, which runs on top of a former railway tunnel used by steam trains to transport biscuits from the famous Reading company, will be renewed on Saturday 20 and Sunday 21 March in a weekend closure to South Western Railway (SWR), Great Western Railway (GWR) and CrossCountry services.

The bridge dates back to the late 1800s and today crosses what is affectionately known as 'Biscuit Tunnel'. Long after the closure of both the biscuit branch line and just under 40 years since the Huntley and Palmers factory closed its doors, the tunnel was re-opened as a pedestrian and cycle path in 2015.

Now past its sell by date, in recent years trains on the Reading to Wokingham line have been forced to run at lower speeds over the bridge in order to keep pedestrians and cyclists safe. Breathing new life into the famous bridge and improving both train performance and safety, engineers will replace its metallic superstructure and wooden rail supports with a ballasted, concrete deck.

Network Rail's Wessex route director Mark Killick said: "Replacing the Huntley and Palmers bridge will improve journeys for our passengers and protect pedestrians and cyclists.

"By rebuilding the bridge, we will provide a more reliable railway for many years to come, keeping passengers moving between Reading and Earley. We know the history of the bridge is important and we've worked closely with Reading Borough Council to develop a design that retains the heritage of the structure.

"We're very grateful to our passengers for their patience and to the local community while we carry out this work."

While the bridge and tunnel structure lifted into place on the weekend will initially look modern, Network Rail will add a brick façade to the tunnel entrance at a later date, retaining the look and feel of the original bridge.

*Photo credit: Network Rail*