RailBusinessDaily

New railway technology – used for the first time in the UK – will give Network Rail more time to carry out vital maintenance work on the South Western Railway route

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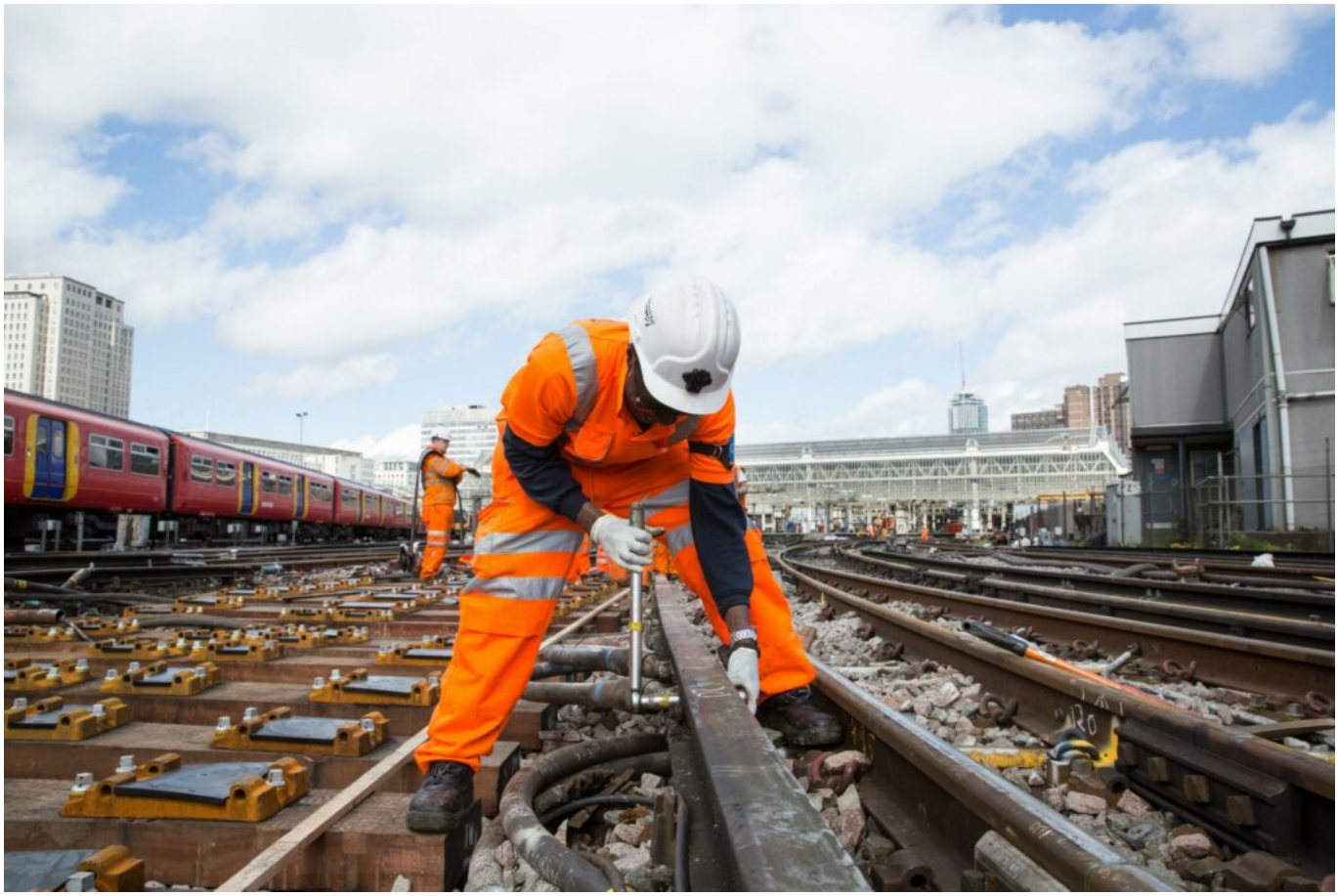

New technology being rolled out across the South Western Railway route is set to give track workers an extra 1,600 hours a year to carry out vital overnight maintenance and renewal work.

The extra hours – equal to 66 days a year – will mean infrastructure on one of the busiest and most congested parts of the railway is more reliable, with fewer delays for passengers.

Known as ‘faster safer isolations’, the technology allows for a more efficient, safer way to turn off the power on the railway line. It brings an end to the outdated and laborious practice of ‘manual strapping’ which typically requires two people having to walk out onto the live railway line, carrying more than 30kg of kit.

The new approach requires one person to drive out to a local control panel, away from the live railway, and

operate a series of switches.

Currently, around 2,500 work hours a year are spent doing manual strapping on this part of the railway.

Becky Lumlock, route managing director for Network Rail's Wessex route, said:

"The window of time where our track staff are able to work on the railway overnight is one of the shortest in Britain, with the last and first train times on a weekday night of typically 1:00am and 4:30am.

"This incredible time saving technology will allow us to be more productive in this short window so we can carry out more vital maintenance work on our railway, giving our passengers more reliable journeys.

"It is also much safer for our workforce, keeping them off the live railway more of the time."

Across the country, more than 20 members of Network Rail staff are injured each year when using the traditional manual strapping method to turn off the power. The new approach reduces the time staff come into contact with the live railway, so is much safer for our workforce.

The technology has been successfully trialled in the Guildford area and is now being rolled out across the network.

More than 450 of the devices required for this technology will be installed by March next year, with a further 400 to be installed over the coming three years.