

# One of Britain's shortest branch lines gets superfast upgrade

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Journeys on Stourbridge's unique 'people mover' will soon be much smoother for passengers after a week-long upgrade of its railway line.

Network Rail engineers will replace track along just under a mile of track on the Stourbridge Town branch line in just seven days between Saturday 6 and Saturday 13 March.

From planning to completion, the whole project will take eight weeks – normally it would take 18 months.

The superfast approach has been possible as Network Rail has worked closely with train operator West Midlands Railway to complete major upgrades while passenger numbers are low during the latest lockdown to stop the spread of COVID-19.

Martin Colmey, operations director for Network Rail's Central route, said: "This speedy upgrade of the Stourbridge town branch line shows how the rail industry is coming together to get Midlands routes in the best possible shape for passengers when they can return once coronavirus travel restrictions are eased.

“This is all part of our commitment to build back better as the region emerges from the pandemic. However, as the line will need to close for the major upgrade, I’d urge anyone still making essential journeys to check National Rail Enquiries so they know what to expect when they travel.”

From Saturday 6 until Friday 12 March, a rail replacement service will be in operation between Stourbridge Junction and Stourbridge Town stations while work takes place.

It’s been planned during the period of national lockdown as fewer passengers will be disrupted by the work.

Jonny Wiseman, customer experience director for West Midlands Railway, said: “This important work will ensure a smoother journey for our customers on this popular route and follows hot on the heels of recent upgrades we have made to the trains on the line.

“With the railway currently reserved for essential journeys only and fewer people travelling, it is a good time to complete this project. Replacement buses will be running for passengers who do need to travel while the work is in progress.”

The Stourbridge Town branch line is just 0.8 miles or 1,287 metres long.

It was originally built in 1879 to move goods and people between Stourbridge’s canal basin and the mainline rail network at Stourbridge junction, providing a vital link to Worcester, Kidderminster and Birmingham.

Because of the steep gradient of the railway, unique trains run on the track – two Class 139 Parry People Movers shuttle up and down the line.

The small trains are much-loved by train enthusiasts and the line is one of the only places in the world where they are in operation.

Those using the rail network for essential journeys should leave more time to complete their journeys and check before travelling at [www.nationalrail.co.uk](http://www.nationalrail.co.uk) or with their train operator.

*Photo credit: Network Rail*