

Railway reopens thanks to the help of Ivy and Holly the robots

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The railway between Taunton and Exeter St David's has reopened after a three-week closure thanks to Ivy and Holly the robots who helped carry out vital maintenance work in Somerset.

The line reopened on Saturday (9 March) after Network Rail, with the help of their trusty robots, completed maintenance work through Whiteball tunnel in Somerset whilst engineers of the human kind made the most of the closure by also completing track renewals further down the line in Marley tunnel in Devon.

It means passengers will benefit from increased resilience on the railway in this area for generations to come, as Ivy and Holly relined the walls of Whiteball tunnel with a specialist concrete mix designed to safeguard against loose masonry and bricks falling on the railway, which would cause it to close for safety.

It is one of the first times this cutting-edge robotic technology has been used and meant the work could be done more safely and quickly than if it was done by hand, which in turn meant that trains were able to

start running again sooner.

Ivy and Holly sprayed the tunnel walls with the concrete mix and were able to apply 830 cubic metres of concrete in 21 days, as specialist machines constantly stirred the concrete mix to stop it from setting before the robots could get on with the job in robotic hand.

Scott Pillinger, programme manager for Network Rail, said: “We would like to thank passengers for their patience while we carried out this essential maintenance work which affected services in Somerset and Devon. The project is part of our Railway Upgrade Plan, improving the railway in the south west so passengers have more reliable rail services.

“Whiteball Tunnel is over a hundred years old and this work will make sure that it stays safe for use for another century, ensuring passenger journeys won’t be affected by falling masonry inside the tunnel.

“During the three-week closure, the team worked both night and day. Ivy and Holly really helped speed up the time the work took, allowing us to get passenger services up and running again. Everything we can do to get the trains back on track is great news for us.”