

Sleeper service impacted by overnight working

January 17, 2022



The GWR sleeper service between London Paddington and Penzance will not be able to operate from Monday to Thursday evenings because of essential work, Network Rail says.

The sleeper will continue to operate as advertised on Friday and Sundays.

Engineers will work overnight from Monday to Thursday from 24 January to 17 March, improving the railway line between Dawlish and Holcombe as part of its £37.4m resilience project to construct a 209m rockfall shelter extension north of Parsons Tunnel in Devon – a key element of the South West Rail Resilience Programme.

The rockfall shelter is an extension of Parson's Tunnel designed to protect the railway line from rocks falling from the cliff face above, which Network Rail has identified as a growing risk to the railway. Although some temporary measures have been put in place, this work provides additional and permanent protection.

Work on this project has recently started, and engineers have identified that the condition of the ground is

not sufficient to be able to safely begin the piling work from the side of the railway, and that all piling must therefore be done by a specialist piling rig from the track itself.

The closure of the railway also means the GWR 22.02 service from Paddington to Newton Abbot via Bath and Bristol, will terminate at Exeter St Davids for the period.

All other weekday and weekend train services are unaffected and will continue to operate as advertised.

Mike Gallop, Network Rail Western route and strategic operations director, said: "The worksite at Parsons Tunnel is in a difficult location, surrounded by sheer cliffs, the sea and a tunnel.

"While it is disappointing to need to close the railway overnight for this period, the safety of those working on the project and our passengers is paramount and we have concluded the piling for this project is most safely achieved by using a rail-mounted piling machine.

"We have seen a shift in more passengers travelling on the weekends and for leisure, so we are undertaking this work now ahead of the Easter break whilst ensuring weekend travel isn't affected.

"I would like to thank passengers for their patience and understanding while we complete this important work that once complete, will help protect trains against falling rocks along this vital stretch of railway."

Mark Hopwood, GWR managing director, said: "Our Night Riviera Sleeper service is extremely popular and provides an important link between London and Devon and Cornwall and we are sorry for the disruption that this vital engineering work will cause.

"The rockfall shelter extension is a key piece of work that in the long run will greatly improve the reliability of train services in the future. We always work with Network Rail to minimise the impact of their work on our customers. Traditionally, this might mean looking at reducing services at weekends to accommodate the extra work, however with a reduced number of customers using this service at present due to Covid, this weekday overnight work will cause the least disruption.

"We look forward to this phase of the work being completed and restoring the world-famous Night Riviera Sleeper service back to full operation."

Anne Marie Morris, MP for Newton Abbot, said: "I very much welcome the vital work being undertaken at Parsons Tunnel to ensure we have a resilient railway; absolutely key for local and regional connectivity and the economy.

"While it is disappointing that we will be seeing line closures to get this vital work done, I have been assured by Network Rail that every effort has been made to minimise disruption while ensuring the work can be done safely. I would ask everyone to bear with Network Rail through this disruption. In the end we will be the winners with our iconic railway line properly futureproofed."