

South Western Railway marks the successful installation of lifesaving defibrillators at all its staffed stations

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South Western Railway (SWR) has marked the installation of publicly accessible, automated, external defibrillators at over 150 staffed stations on its vast network, available for local communities at any time of the day.

The defibrillators are placed in protective cabinets, as close as possible to the front entrance of the stations. They can be used day or night in the event of cardiac incidents, and they are remotely monitored to ensure they are always in working order.

The locations of the defibrillators have been added to 'The Circuit' — the British Heart Foundation's (BHF) database, visible to NHS ambulance services who can direct 999 callers to its position, so the device can be used to help save lives.

The BHF estimates that there are around 30,000 out-of-hospital cardiac arrests every year in the UK, and

tragically just 1 in 10 people survive. The immediate use of CPR and defibrillators can double the chances of survival.

Local ambulance services are provided with the codes so users can unlock the cabinets and access the devices. Particularly in the more remote areas SWR serves, where ambulance response times are slower, a publicly accessible community defibrillator can be the difference between life and death.

A special event to mark the successful rollout took place today, on Restart a Heart Day, at Basingstoke station. A ribbon was cut by the Mayor of Basingstoke, Cllr David Leeks, at that station's defibrillator. The Hampshire town is home to the Basingstoke Rail Operating Centre, the operational 'heart' of the SWR network.

Following this, volunteers from Heart Start, a community-based organisation that provides training in CPR and the use of a defibrillators, led a demonstration for attendees.

The event was also attended by SWR's Head of Stations and Revenue Protection, Jerome Pacatte, and SWR Operations Trainer, Steve Wardle. Steve's son Alex passed away from sudden arrhythmic death syndrome (SADS) in 2016.

Steve and his family set up the Alex Wardle Foundation in his memory, campaigning for greater public access to defibrillators, which helped inspire SWR to undertake its rollout. The foundation is one of SWR's official charity partners.

In March, SWR announced the start of the rollout when the operator named a train after the Alex Wardle Foundation. The train pulled into Basingstoke station at the time of the event today.

Since the train naming, there have been 92 alerts from The Circuit, when the location of one of the defibrillators has been used by an emergency call handler, indicating the difference they are already making.

Yesterday on Sunday 15 October, SWR colleagues also took part in the Great South Run in Portsmouth in aid of the Alex Wardle Foundation and raised £3,283 and more than double the target, as of Monday morning.

Lyndsey Robson-Malone, Service Delivery Director of South Western Railway, commented: "Heart conditions can affect us all, so it is fantastic to mark the successful rollout of defibrillators to our staffed stations on Restart a Heart Day. I would like to thank all the colleagues and others who have delivered this important project.

"We are dedicated to going above and beyond to contribute to the communities we serve across our network. We hope that, should the need arise, this significant investment can make a real difference in potentially life-or-death situations."

David Hamer, Operations Manager for Paramedic Community Engagement & Training at the South Central Ambulance Service, commented: "Defibrillators are quite literally lifesaving pieces of equipment, whilst I

do hope there is never a need for these devices to be used, having them available to passengers using the staffed SWR network stations is an excellent step forward in public safety.”

The Rt Hon Dame Maria Miller DBE MP, Member of Parliament for Basingstoke, commented: “It’s brilliant that South Western Railway has installed defibrillators at Basingstoke station. These machines can mean the difference between life and death, which is why it is essential that they are publicly available in busy places, such as our train station.”

Bradley Scott, Projects Manager for Integral UK Ltd, commented: “We at Integral, are proud to have partnered with the Alex Wardle Foundation in making access to life saving defibrillators that much more accessible. For us, keeping in mind the mission of the foundation and the quality of the service provided was our top priority.

“As such, Integral have worked closely alongside SWR to install these essential devices across its network with minimal disruption. We are honoured to have been a part of advancing the charity’s work towards the wider community as well as continuing to provide a level of service excellence across all our projects.”

The SWR network is one of the largest in the country with stations across Berkshire, Devon, Dorset, London, Hampshire, Somerset, Surrey, Wiltshire, and on the Isle of Wight. The train operator has invested over half a million pounds in the rollout as part of its commitment to safety and serving local communities.

The devices have been installed at 152 staffed stations on the SWR network, with devices at Queenstown Road, Dorchester South, and Branksome installed and available to use, but require some follow-up works which is due to be done soon.

The defibrillator at the final staffed station, Motspur Park, will be installed alongside ongoing ‘Access for All’ work to upgrade the station’s accessibility. Devices at all other staffed stations are installed and fully operational.

In June, as a result of the rollout, the installation of a new defibrillator at Hedge End station in Hampshire allowed SWR to donate an existing one at the station to the Berrywood Primary School nearby free of charge, spreading the benefits of the project even further among the local community. Another existing defibrillator is due to be donated from Haslemere station in Surrey.

Photo credit: South Western Railway