

Southeastern Networker overhaul completed ahead of schedule

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A **Southeastern** engineering team slashed the time taken to maintain its key Class 465 *Networker* fleet by bringing the job in-house.

Instead of losing a train for up to three weeks while it was shunted to a depot hundreds of miles away, then brought back, Southeastern kept the heavy-duty C6 maintenance programme at its Slade Green depot in south east London.

For over two years between 2021 and 2023 a bespoke team of engineers spent a week on each unit carrying out procedures involving couplings, brake control units, suspension, components, seals and hoses.

The in-house approach for the 97-strong fleet saved Southeastern money, ensured that trains spent less time out of service and the team kept a tighter grip on quality control while forging strong links with parts' suppliers.

Nick Hancock, Depot Manager for Southeastern at Slade Green, said: "These trains are around 30 years

old, and a lot of the technology, including electrical circuitry, isn't around anymore, which means that there is some obsolescence. It's a bit like running a vintage car for 400 miles every day and expecting its reliability to be what it was when it was new.

"Year-on-year, they've improved reliability or maintained the status quo when compared with similar fleets across the UK. It's testament to everyone who works in the Metro team. It's one of the older fleets in the UK, but out-performs units 10-15 years younger.

"Though we were streamlined anyway, this was innovative. We had to change our working practices from the way it had been done since 2013. The majority of those working on the project were ex-contractors who had taken on full-time positions, with many years' experience using traditional methods of overhaul. The shunting team supported. We've maintained quality in-house.

"This new approach has proved quicker, more reliable, and ultimately a better product for the customer – maintaining safe and reliable operation of these trains for years to come".

The team of 10 are proud of the work they have undertaken on the Eversholt Rail owned trains.

In January 2021 when it was decided to prolong the life of the *Networkers*, the Slade Green shed had already been set up for mileage-based C4 maintenance. This meant C6 work being undertaken on traditional maintenance roads. With no pit to work from, colleagues had to adopt new procedures to split and join coaches, while undergoing fresh risk assessment.

C6 Programme Lead, Production Manager Steve Lloyd added: "We were fortunate in that we had recently completed the C4 overhaul programme at Slade Green, along with a significant modification package on our Metro Fleets. We were able to use what we learned and apply these to C6. This helped us to develop new ways of working and improved communications, as well as formation of a cross functional management team with individual areas of responsibility."

Photo credit: Southeastern