

Specialist trains help deliver improvements for Network Rail

December 6, 2021



Network Rail has delivered improvements to the 'Heart of Wessex' line, between Dorset and Wiltshire, using two unique trains.

During a 16-day closure, starting 18 November, teams installed new track and carried out maintenance. Between Chetnole and Yetminster, they brought in a New Track Construction train, which is designed to lay new rails and sleepers as it travels.

Overall, there were more than four miles of new sleepers, rail and ballast put in place from Maiden Newton to Yetminster. Some of the track in the area, Network Rail says, dated back to 1958.

At Upwey station, engineers used the country's only Railvac to remove ballast supporting the track. The Railvac uses a high-powered vacuum to suck up large volumes of ballast, which through Upwey had become contaminated due to rainwater that had mixed with clay beneath.

With this operation complete, the track was then lowered slightly to improve its level and ensure that trains can continue travelling at full speed through the area.

Network Rail Wessex route director Mark Killick said: “We’re so grateful to customers and people who living close to the railway for their patience over the last few weeks. Sixteen days is a long time to close the railway but we’ve delivered much better track, improved two stations and performed vital maintenance that will keep trains running on time. The alternative to this closure would have been many months of weekend disruption which would have affected many more journeys.

“The new track we’ve laid will last us many decades into the future and I’m confident that people will notice a difference this week as they enjoy travelling by train again.”

Great Western Railway’s station manager for Westbury, Wiltshire and Dorset, James Wilcox, said: “We are grateful to our customers for their patience while this important work has been completed. We are thankful so much has been achieved by Network Rail during the 16-day period, allowing us to continue to operate services on this key route between Somerset and Dorset for years to come.”

Christian Neill, SWR’s customer experience director, said: “The work Network Rail completed will mean big improvements for our customers. Not just a more reliable and resilient service, but visible changes which usher in further upgrades to the passenger experience at Weymouth, with the new forecourt scheme planned for completion in May 2022. The new tactile paving will also improve journeys for our visually impaired customers at Weymouth and Upwey.

“I know that closing the railway for such a long time was disruptive to our customers and I’m grateful to Network Rail for the huge amount of work they packed into this closure. I’d especially like to thank our customers for their patience and understanding whilst these essential works were carried out.”

Between Monday 22 and Friday 26 November, the line from Weymouth to Dorchester South on the South Western Railway (SWR) network was also closed to allow engineers to complete a total of more than 30 jobs at eight different locations.

Making the most of the quiet time on the railway, Weymouth and Upwey stations also benefitted from improvement work. Both stations had new tactile paving installed on platforms to assist visually-impaired passengers, while Weymouth station was also cleaned and re-painted.

All work was completed on time with trains running as normal from Saturday 4 December.