

# Super-fast Northampton railway upgrades complete for passengers

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A year's worth of work to upgrade the railway in Northampton has been completed in just five days by Network Rail.

On Saturday 20 March a more reliable railway reopened for passengers after the super-fast improvements to the West Coast main line.

The upgrades included improving drainage in the Victorian-built Crick tunnel on the Northampton loop.

Problem flooding inside the 140-year-old tunnel caused passengers and freight travelling between London Euston and the Midlands to be delayed for a total of 15,000 minutes (10 days) between 2012 and 2020.

Network Rail and train operators agreed to close the railway and fix the problem once and for all while passenger numbers are low during the coronavirus lockdown.

It's estimated that doing the work in this way has saved the taxpayer £7.5m\*.

James Dean, Network Rail's West Coast Mainline South route director, said: "I'd like to thank passengers making essential journeys for their patience while we carried out this accelerated upgrade work on the vital route between London Euston and the Midlands.

"This speedy upgrade of Crick tunnel shows how the rail industry is coming together to get the railway in the best possible shape for passengers when they can return once coronavirus travel restrictions are eased. This is all part of our commitment to build back better as the country emerges from the pandemic."

Rail minister Chris Heaton-Harris MP, said: "Delivering vital maintenance work while our railways are quieter has seen a crucial stretch of the Northampton loop upgraded, set to reduce the number of delays experienced by passengers.

"I thank passengers for their patience during this short closure, which has ensured that we can deliver an efficient and value for money upgrade, focused on improving services and putting passengers first."

The full line closure on this part of the railway is very rare as it's a key spur of the West Coast main line, one of Europe's busiest mixed-use lines for passengers and freight.

It's thought to be the longest full closure of Crick tunnel since it opened in 1881.

Because no trains at all were running – a 13 mile stretch of the 25,000 volt electric power lines could be turned off between Northampton and Rugby to allow for other essential repairs to be made.

This included renewing track, removing scrap rail and upgrading drainage.

Now the work which can only occur during a full railway closure is complete, engineers will finish off any remaining work during night shifts over the next month, but this will not be disruptive for passengers or freight.

Gus Dunster, executive director of operations and safety at Avanti West Coast, said: "We are proud to have played our part to facilitate this unique opportunity for Network Rail to access and upgrade Crick Tunnel, while protecting vital services for key workers and those making essential journeys.

"This scale of work would usually take months of careful planning and take a year to complete but as a result of collaborating successfully with industry colleagues, we were able to do this in a matter of days. It's a great achievement and we would like to thank all of those involved for making this happen, and for the patience of everyone who travelled with us over the five days as the work was completed.

"The work will help to make journeys more reliable for our customers when we look forward to welcoming them back in the near future."

Lawrence Bowman, customer experience director for London Northwestern Railway, said: "I would like to thank our passengers who have made essential journeys over the past week for their patience while these crucial improvements were carried out.

“We know unexpected delays following bad weather are frustrating for our customers which is why Network Rail’s work to tackle this flooding hotspot will prove so valuable as more people begin travelling again.”

Meanwhile, anyone making essential journeys during this period of national lockdown is being asked to follow government guidelines and check [www.nationalrail.co.uk](http://www.nationalrail.co.uk) for the latest information.

\*Doing the tunnel drainage work conventionally over consecutive weekend shifts would take a year and cost approximately £11m. Doing the work all at once between Monday 15 and Friday 19 March is estimated to have cost £3.5m.

*Photo credit: Network Rail*