

Track-engineering father and son keep railway running safely

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Railway upgrades by a father-and-son duo are helping keep critical supplies and key workers moving across Britain.

Over the past three weekends, Howerd Kernahan, 50, a senior programme manager for Network Rail, and his track worker son Rafael, 18, have been part of an engineering team improving the Wigan-Kirkby line.

Taking extra safety precautions to halt the spread of coronavirus, the team laid 1km of new track through the 172-year-old Upholland tunnel, in West Lancashire, to make it more reliable for passenger and freight trains moving between Merseyside and Greater Manchester.

The job, which finished at the weekend, involved laying 3,000 sleepers and 3,000 tonnes of ballast (railway foundation stone), and improving trackside drainage.

Howerd, a former British Army captain from Southport, Merseyside, said: “I strongly believe it is important I’m out there on track leading my team at this difficult time. I feel honoured that my son and I can be part of the wider railway family doing our bit to keep critical supplies and key workers moving in Britain’s hour of need.

“The work we’ve done through Upholland tunnel will help make the Wigan-Kirkby line more reliable both now and long into the future.”

“Throughout this job we have all worn protective equipment, including masks, and wherever possible have kept two metres between us in line with government social-distancing guidance.”

Network Rail is working collaboratively with trade union colleagues to help keep track-working staff safe, in line with government health guidelines designed to halt the spread of coronavirus.

West Lancashire MP Rosie Cooper said: “Superb. What a magnificent effort from everyone involved. It just shows that in these difficult times we can still do essential work safely. This will help the railway stay open for key worker journeys as well as for freight traffic, moving essential fuel, food and medical supplies around the country.

“This magnificent effort helps all our communities. I want to thank everyone involved.”

Upholland tunnel was built in 1848 and takes in 887 metres of the Kirkby branch line underneath the village of Upholland.

The track renewal was carried out overnight over three consecutive Saturdays – 14, 21 and 28 March – by the Central Rail Systems Alliance, made up of staff from Network Rail, Balfour Beatty and Atkins.

Photo credit: Network Rail