

Underpasses burrowed beneath Bicester railway this Easter

March 26, 2021



Railway engineers will dig two new routes this Easter for pedestrians and vehicles to pass under the Chiltern main line.

A £12.3m investment will see two underpasses built in north west Bicester to help traffic and people move more easily around the town in the future.

Network Rail will rip up old track before more than 21,000 tonnes of earth are burrowed from the railway embankment.

Two prefabricated underpass structures, with a combined weight of 2,100 tonnes*, will then be slowly moved by a transporter vehicle into the new gaps dug through the Chiltern main line.

In recent weeks, rehearsals lifting the heavy structures have taken place so things go to plan once the railway line is excavated.

When the new pedestrian and vehicle underpasses are safely in position, 400 metres of railway track will

be installed above.

The upgraded track will improve future journeys for passengers and freight on the Chiltern main line.

Dave Penney, Network Rail's Central route director, said: "This £12.3m investment in Bicester to create two new routes under the railway will not only benefit the flow of people and traffic, but also help the both local councils' regeneration vision. It's a great example of how the rail industry can work in partnership with local authorities to unlock opportunities and growth for communities.

"I'd urge anyone making essential rail journeys over Easter to check National Rail Enquiries or with Chiltern Railways so they know what to expect while this major work takes place."

Building the underpasses can only be done when trains aren't running above.

This means the railway will be closed between Bicester North and Banbury over the Easter Bank holiday weekend (Friday 2 until Monday 5 April).

Passengers making essential journeys on the Chiltern main line this Easter are being advised to check before they travel at www.nationalrail.co.uk or with Chiltern Railways.

From Friday 2 April until Monday 5 April, trains to London Marylebone will be diverted via Oxford and a replacement bus will run between north Bicester and Banbury, calling at Kings Sutton.

Those travelling by train over the Easter weekend are advised to leave more time to travel and to plan their journey in advance.

Eleni Jordan, commercial and customer strategy director at Chiltern Railways, said: "The improvements being made in Bicester will have a positive impact on the local area and we are sure our customers will benefit from the new underpasses. While we have added extra capacity on all services, I would recommend that customers who need to travel during these dates check their journey via the Chiltern website or app before setting off and allow extra time for their journey."

The £12.3m investment is being delivered by Network Rail and Story Contracting on behalf of Homes England, Oxfordshire County Council and Cherwell District Council.

Cllr Yvonne Constance, Oxfordshire County Council's cabinet member for environment, said: "This scheme will help deliver positive impacts on the lives of local people of a growing community.

"It will allow people in this area of Bicester to adopt environmentally responsible forms of travel with options and infrastructure to enable cycling and walking.

"Our goal is to offer infrastructure which combines benefits of active travel with reducing congestion."

Cllr Lynn Pratt, Cherwell District Council's lead member for economy, regeneration and property, said: "This project is vital for the future of Bicester Garden Town by unlocking land to the north west of the

town.

“The provision of two underpasses will help to create sociable, healthy neighbourhoods by offering safe, easy access for pedestrians and cyclists, connecting new communities to the rest of Bicester.”

Once complete, the new underpasses will improve future connectivity for vehicles, cyclists and pedestrians when the surrounding areas are redeveloped.

*The pedestrian underpass is prefabricated from concrete and weighs approximately 600 tonnes. The vehicle underpass is made from both concrete and steel and weighs 1,600 tonnes.

Other key statistics from the project

- The railway will be closed for a total of 100 hours to drive the underpasses underneath the railway line.
- Trial lifts of the structures took place 2 weeks in advance
- 21,000 tonnes of earth will be moved during railway closure to make way for the new underpasses
- 6,500 tonnes of back fill material will be used once they are in position
- A Mammoet self-propelled modular transporter (SPMT) will safely drive the two underpasses into place
- Temporary propping will support both structures while they are installed
- 400m railway track will be removed and upgraded once the underpasses are in position
- Extensive temporary work to divert cables above and below the ground along the railway lines has taken place

Photo credit: Network Rail