

Unique road-to-rail vehicle to help emergency services reach emergencies faster

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Emergency services will have a better chance of saving lives when responding to incidents in the Severn Tunnel thanks to a new innovative road-to-rail vehicle which has been provided by Network Rail.

The 7.25 tonne Mitsubishi Canter can travel by road before switching to rail in as little as three minutes and can then travel on the railway at speeds of up to 20 mph, enabling firefighter and ambulance crews to reach emergencies faster.

The vehicle will be stationed at Avon Fire & Rescue's Technical Centre in Avonmouth while its Welsh 'twin' will be kept at Maindee fire station in Newport, allowing faster response times from both sides of the Severn Tunnel.

Network Rail has been working on the design with Avon and Somerset Fire and Rescue Service, South Wales Fire and Rescue Service, G.O.S Tool & Engineering, Welsh Ambulance Service Trust and South Western Ambulance Service NHS Foundation Trust (SWASFT), to ensure the vehicle provides the quickest response times possible while carrying their life-saving equipment.

Robyn MacNamara, Network Rail's Project Manager, said: "The safety of our passengers is our priority and these vehicles will allow for a faster and more effective multi-agency emergency response.

"The Severn Tunnel is over four miles long so should an emergency incident occur, quick access for emergency services is vital. That is why we have developed this bespoke vehicle which has dedicated provisions for both firefighters and ambulance crews onboard.

"We would like to thank our emergency services partners and our supplier G.O.S Tool & Engineering for their help in bringing this replacement incident response vehicle to life."

Station Manager for Avon Fire and Rescue Service, Neil Stradling, commented: "Since the late 1990's, Avon Fire and Rescue Service have continued to work in collaboration with Network Rail and South Wales Fire and Rescue Service to provide a rescue capability within the Severn Tunnel.

"The fire service exercises emergency procedures, within the tunnel in the early hours of the morning, on a quarterly basis and are joined by multi-agency partners such as South Western Ambulance Service.

"The past few years has seen the collaborative development of a new road rail vehicle to provide a future proofed capability which is designed to work in conjunction with modern infrastructure such as electrification of the rail system.

"Avon Fire and Rescue Service are delighted to take receipt of the new vehicle to maintain and enhance our ability to access the length of the tunnel in an emergency.

"Training has already commenced for both operators and technicians, which will culminate in the operational readiness of the vehicle in the coming months."

Ben Murley, SWASFT Emergency Preparedness, Resilience and Response (EPRR) Officer for BNSSG and Somerset, added: "We are most grateful to receive this new vehicle. It replaces a similar vehicle that is no longer fit for purpose, and has been specifically designed for use by our Trust and Avon Fire and Rescue Service.

"Network Rail allowed our Hazardous area response team (HART) involvement in the design stage of the project, which means we will be able to use it effectively for the benefit of our service to patients. For example, the vehicle has dedicated space for breathing apparatus and other equipment.

"Our people are already trained to use the vehicle, so we are prepared and drilled to deal with an incident in the tunnel if and when one happens."

Photo credit: Network Rail