

Upgrading Britain's Shortest Branch Line

May 4, 2021



At just over $\frac{3}{4}$ of a mile long, the Stourbridge Branch Line is the shortest in the UK.

It's home to the Stourbridge Shuttle – a charming little operation that runs frequent passenger services between the local Town and the Junction railway station.

Operated by Pre Metro on behalf of West Midlands Railway, the service uses two Class 139 railcars that are currently found nowhere else in the world.

Pre-COVID, the service was carrying 650,000 passengers every year!

As the UK's only currently operating Very Light Rail (VLR) system, the Shuttle presents itself as a low-cost, eco-friendly alternative to standard rail operations.

Over the past two months, this small but mighty service has seen some big changes...

The whole Branch Line has had major modernisation works, overseen by Network Rail. With new railway, new sleepers, and new ballast, the entire track was significantly upgraded to ensure service can run effectively, frequently, and smoothly.

This the first total renewal of the track since 1902, with some of the removed sleepers over 120 years old! The whole process was captured and recorded by the Inside Out Group who worked in partnership with Pre Metro to produce a time lapse video of this historic development.

Geoff Lusher, Chairman of Pre Metro, said: “We are thrilled about the fantastic upgrades that have taken place recently. These improvements mean our valued customers can feel safe and comfortable on their essential journeys and beyond. A big thank you to West Midlands Railway Executive and Network Rail for their ongoing work and support.”

Neil Elkes, from West Midlands Railway Executive, said: “The improvements to the Stourbridge Branch show what the rail industry can achieve when it works together. In the space of just a few weeks, the tracks and trains have been given a new lease of life, and the disruption to customers kept to a minimum. If the industry can make this way of working the norm, it will be fantastic news for customers.”

Photo and video credit: Pre Metro