

Vital rail artery to be better protected as rockfall shelter plans handed £37.4m boost

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Plans to extend a rockfall shelter that will protect the only railway line into the south west for the next 100 years, have received confirmation of government funding.

Confirmation of the £37.4m of funding from the Department for Transport, will help Network Rail realise its plans to build a 209m long extension of the rockfall shelter north of Parsons Tunnel between Dawlish and Holcombe.

The rockfall shelter will play a major role in helping protect trains against falling rocks along this vital stretch of railway that connects 50 towns and cities across the south west with the rest of the country.

Parsons Tunnel was previously extended 100 years ago and Network Rail proposes to extend that further by providing a rockfall shelter in modern materials, but with open sides rather than the previous brick built enclosed tunnel extension.

Construction is expected to start in August with the work expected to take around a year to complete.

Prior to the funding being secured, Network Rail submitted its plans for the rockfall shelter to Teignbridge District Council in February, with more information available on the Council's [website](#).

Environmental protection is a key focus for the project and, following early feedback from Teignbridge District Council, Network Rail has carried out additional studies and submitted reports that set out its approach to ecological protection and management of potential impacts on wildlife habitats.

Ewen Morrison, senior programme manager for Network Rail's South West Rail Resilience Programme, said: "We are delighted to have received the support of the government to build this important rockfall shelter which will help protect the railway in Devon for the next 100 years.

"This coastal stretch of railway is beautiful but also faces a number of vulnerabilities either side of the railway; rough sea conditions on one side can cause flooding whilst steep cliffs on the other side make the railway at risk of rock falls and landslides.

"We're looking forward to getting started and are excited by the engineering challenge of building such a critical structure in such an inaccessible location whilst minimising the impact on train services."

Councillor Andrea Davis, Chair of Peninsula Rail Task Force (PRTF), said: "The Peninsula Rail Task Force welcomes confirmation of the £37.4m of funding from the Department for Transport, in order to help Network Rail build the extension of the rockfall shelter, north of Parsons Tunnel, as the next phase of the South West Resilience Programme at Dawlish.

"The line at Dawlish is a vital link between the Peninsula and the rest of the UK and the rockfall shelter is an important element in ensuring people can continue to travel across the peninsula safely and reliably.

"Network Rail has made fantastic progress on the South West Rail Resilience Programme, in spite of substantial challenges in recent months. Completion of all phases of this programme will ensure the long-term resilience of the line, which is vital to the economic success of the region.

"However, there is still work to be done and the PRTF looks forward to working with government to build upon efforts to level up the region, securing a rail infrastructure across the Peninsula that is resilient, reliable and improves connectivity and capacity for years to come."

Photo and video credit: Network Rail