

Good afternoon,

Welcome to November's stakeholder newsletter for the Wessex Route.

November is almost over and with Christmas and the new year rapidly approaching, we are giving you a lookahead to our Christmas works and what we have planned for the start of 2025. There is plenty happening here and now though, with SWR unveiling a new train, successful engineering work on the West of England line and network rail engineers getting creative on a bridge.

As ever, if there is anything that we can assist with do feel free to get in contact with the stakeholder team at any time.

Harry Riley
Public Affairs Manager - Wessex

West of England line improvements

Recent Work



Early in the morning of Saturday 23 November, teams successfully reopened the West of England line after two weeks of round the clock engineering work.

During the two-week closure, engineers laid a mile of new track through the Honiton Tunnel, which has replaced the existing 50-year-old rails. This work required the installation of 2,300 concrete sleepers and 4,000 tonnes of new ballast stone. In order to complete this work, 15 engineering trains, one tamper, eight road rail vehicles and two road rail bulldozers were deployed to the site over the past fortnight.

The tunnel, which was originally opened in 1860 and consists of 11 million bricks, is prone to leaks from the natural springs in the area and over 150 metres of new drainage has been installed at the Honiton end of the tunnel to help preserve the line.

Teams also replaced half a mile of track between Pinhoe and Feniton, while also stabilising the embankment at Cleave, where there was a landslip in May. The Honiton end of the tunnel also fell victim to a landslip in August and Network Rail have worked to stabilise the surrounding area to reduce the risks to the railway.

This work is part of a wider scheme to renew the West of England Line, which connects Exeter with London Waterloo via Honiton, Axminster, Yeovil, Salisbury, Basingstoke and Woking. Further work to renew the line is scheduled to take place in 2025.

Christmas Blockades

Upcoming Works

Our preparation for our improvement works over Xmas are picking up, with blockades between Brockenhurst and Lymington, Farnborough and Woking, and Salisbury to Trowbridge all taking place in the Wessex region.

Returning to **Lymington** over Christmas, we will be continuing the work we started on Lymington Viaduct during the October half-term closure, this time strengthening the viaduct, laying new wheel timbers over it, as well as providing a new wooden decking underneath where the electrified rail sits.



Between Farnborough and Woking, we will be renewing the switches and crossings at the important junction at Brookwood which directs trains towards Ash and Aldershot. These improvements will see a reduction track faults, and more reliable journeys for passengers.

Out further West, our structural engineers will be working between **Salisbury and Trowbridge** strengthening the Sherrington Viaduct which carries trains over the

River Wylde. We will be strengthening the viaduct so trains can continue to run safely in and out of Salisbury towards Bristol.

Christmas works (outside of blockades)

Upcoming Works



Aside from our longer line closures over the Holiday period, our engineers will be working all over the network whilst trains aren't running on Christmas and Boxing Day.

Just outside of Waterloo station, our crews will be replacing old worn out wooden bearers, which hold the track together, with new bearers to reduce the chance of track failures into the London hub.

In Southampton, we are continuing our Southampton Area Life Extension project, which will ultimately see around 12,000m of new cabling installed as well as new signals. Over Christmas we will be putting up new signal gantries outside of Southampton Tunnel, by Northam Road Bridge, and renewing components at Mount Pleasant crossing.

Between Farncombe and Petersfield we will be continuing with our Portsmouth Direct Upgrade works. Along the line we will be installing piles and cabling cabinets in preparation for further upgrades. We'll be working in Sheet, Witley, Liphook, Liss,

Farncombe, and Princes Bridge as part of the work to upgrade the level crossings and signalling along the mainline.

New Year lookahead

Upcoming Works

Following a quiet start to the year in January, we are back in February with three line closures across the network.

At the start of the month we will be working on the North Downs Line, between Guildford and Gatwick airport, upgrading the signalling and level crossings in the area making it safer for both road and rail users.



In mid February, our engineers will be back by the coast in Portsmouth, strengthening the famous viaduct at Portsmouth & Southsea station and renewing track components.

And from 22 February to 1 March we will be working on the West of England line but this time between Salisbury and Yeovil Junction, stabilising a cutting by the side of the railway to reduce the risk of landslips affecting trains and passengers in the area.

SWR Stakeholder Conference

General

Mark Goodall, route director for Wessex, was delighted to attend the annual South Western Railway stakeholder conference earlier this month. Alongside speakers such as Stuart Meek, managing director of SWR, Mark spoke about our plans for Control Period 7, the challenges facing the railway at the moment and the future of the railway with nationalisation.



Happy Christmas Bridge

General

An usual request from a local community saw Network Rail engineers ignore their instincts to remove graffiti and instead channel their inner Banksy.

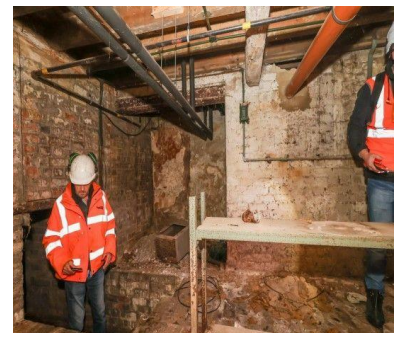
Sandhurst's 'Happy Christmas' bridge has been a beloved local landmark between Yorktown Road and High Street since 1967, when college students painted the bridge after a Christmas drink. Over the years the paint had faded leading to hundreds of residents calling for the graffiti to be repainted.



Working with Sandhurst Town council, engineers repainted the bridge during some planned routine engineering work, just in time for the festive season to begin.

Secret Tunnel in Salisbury

General



Wessex's own Salisbury station has been the centre of railway and local sleuths as a hidden tunnel was uncovered during a forecourt enhancement project.

The entrance to the tunnel was discovered to the right of the station's main entrance and has been subject to a thorough investigation to uncover its origins and purpose.

Specialist confined space engineers, a photographer from the Salisbury journal and a local historian led the exploration team, funding fascinating historical tidbits such as old signal equipment and sections of rail track repurposed as structural supports for the ceiling.

Investigations complete, we can reveal the tunnel once played a role in the station's logistical operations, transporting goods to be sold and served at the station.

The Stockton & Darlington Railway opened to passengers on September 27 1825, and from this humble beginning the railway spread, connecting communities across the nation. In honour of this historic day, 2025 will be Railway 200, a year-long nationwide campaign to celebrate 200 years of the modern railway and inspire a new generation to look to its future.



From January we're looking to celebrate the rich history of the railway in our route, whether that be historic stations, key figures from the past or interesting tidbits, so please have a think about the railway in your local area and get in touch if you'd like Network Rail to help you celebrate.

Further information about Railway 200 can be found on the dedicated [website](#).

Digital Lineside Notifications

General



As mentioned in the introduction to this month's newsletter, we are continuing our drive to promote this new and innovative way of informing residents who live near the railway about our work and projects.

As part of our 'Digital Notification' programme, neighbour notification letters will where possible be replaced by emails.

Thousands have already signed up in the Southern region, and we would really appreciate your support in helping us stay in touch with our neighbours and communities.

If you haven't already done so, we'd be grateful if you could share [this link](#) or the QR code on the right through your communications channels. This will help our ambitions to keep everyone informed of our work in their local area.

