

## AROUND THE REGION

**Footbridges:** The old footbridge towards the London end of Sittingbourne station was demolished in January. Network Rail said that it was no longer safe to use. A footbridge with lifts was built at the Faversham end of the station in 2011. The new footbridge to Millbrook station has been installed, but extends only from the north side of the line to the platform. The footbridge at Goring-by-Sea has been renovated. The foot crossing at Shere Heath, between Chilworth and Gomshall, is being replaced by a footbridge. A footbridge with lifts is to be provided at Liphook station.

**Sandwich:** Improvements to Sandwich station have been completed in advance of the Open golf championship in July. A sizeable new footbridge has been constructed, as part of a more direct route from the station to the Royal St George's course, but it will only be used when there is a major event. Platform extensions allow longer trains to call, without selective door opening being required or the level crossing being blocked. Whether the championship will be able to go ahead with public attendance has yet to be decided.

**Dover:** Network Rail has completed refurbishment work at Dover Priory station, which was largely rebuilt by the Southern Railway between 1930 and 1932. Repairs have been carried out to steelwork and concrete, the roof to the footbridge has been replaced and the platform canopies overhauled.

**Whitstable:** Glebe Way foot crossing, between Whitstable and Seasalter has been closed and dismantled.

**Maidstone:** An extension on the front of Maidstone East station building has been completed and a paved forecourt created. These are on the site of the Victoria Hotel.

**Penshurst:** An art gallery has opened in a previously disused room at Penshurst station. This has been established by an art community in Chiddingstone Causeway, with funding from GTR's Passenger Benefit Fund.

**Dartford:** Hythe Street underbridge, immediately west of Dartford station, was replaced over the Easter weekend.

**Abbey Wood:** Crossrail trains have been running on test to Abbey Wood since January 2019, but the line from Westbourne Park was formally commissioned on 27 March. The connection to the North Kent line at Alsike Road Junction, between Abbey Wood and Belvedere, is to be commissioned later. This comprises an extension of the westbound Crossrail line and is not electrified, apart from a train length east of the station. The connection to Crossrail from Plumstead Yard, which was used during construction, has been out of use for some time and has been removed.

**Brixton:** The bronze statues of passengers on the platforms at Brixton station are being cleaned and conserved.

**Victoria Resignalling:** Work started in February on resignalling lines between Victoria, Balham and the West London Line. This will continue for two years, with the area being recontrolled to Three Bridges ROC at the beginning of 2023. Work will include installation of 93 new signals and renewal of 50 sets of points. Much of the work will be undertaken at weekends, with trains diverted to London Bridge, but with longer closures at Christmas 2021 and 2022.

**Brighton Line:** Network Rail has awarded a contract to Cellnex UK to provide mobile phone and internet access along the full length of lines from Victoria and London Bridge to Brighton. This includes through the numerous cuttings and tunnels.

**Purley:** Three large paintings have been installed on platform 6, used by trains to Caterham and Tattenham Corner. Each shows an individual associated with the area. They are Amey Johnson, who flew solo from Croydon to Australia in 1930, composer Samuel Coleridge-Taylor and William Jessop, the engineer of the Surrey Iron Railway. The artwork has been provided by Purley Business Improvement District.

**Eridge:** Southern has departed from its usual colour scheme at Eridge and painted the platform buildings and canopy on platform 1 in traditional Southern Railway green and cream, matching the platforms used by

**Spa Valley trains.** In addition, replica 'bullseye' name signs have been installed. A vacant building on platform 1 has been refurbished as a waiting room.

**Gatwick Airport:** Work to rebuild Gatwick Airport station is ahead of programme. The dramatic reduction in passenger traffic, as a result of Covid-19 travel restrictions, has enabled work to be speeded up, mainly because a larger area can be closed off.

**Burgess Hill:** The original station building, on the up platform, has been converted into a waiting room. In 1877 it was replaced by the building that spans the line at the London end and in recent years had been used as a salt store.

**Bishopstone:** During work to renovate the station contractors opened up the former parcels office and found a remarkable collection of objects that had been there for over thirty years. Items included a pair of water skis, fishing rods, car parts, rowing oars, a skateboard, British Rail advertising posters and a sack of fertiliser. Amazingly, media reports resulted in a teddy bear and some other items being reunited with their original owner, a man whose father used to run the station shop. Southern is to sell most of the other objects and donate the proceeds to the Friends of Bishopstone Station, the station adoption group. They intend to develop the parcels office as a community space.

**Feltham Resignalling:** New signalling was commissioned between North Sheen, Whitton and Norbiton with effect from 7 April and control of this area and the Shepperton branch transferred to Basingstoke ROC. Bi-directional signalling was introduced on Twickenham up loop and on the up line between St Margarets and Stoop Junction (between Twickenham and Whitton). Train detection is by axle counters. In connection with this work, the Kingston loop was closed from 1 to 6 April, also requiring the Shepperton branch to be shut. Barnes to Feltham Junction via Twickenham was closed from 2 to 6 April. The Windsor branch was closed from 6 to 13 March for various works, including installation of new foundations for signalling equipment. Network Rail has announced an amended programme for resignalling the rest of the area controlled from Feltham:

- Egham to Chertsey, Camberley and Bracknell: Easter 2022 (to be confirmed)
- Kew Bridge to Windsor: August 2023
- Earley to Farnborough North: March 2024

Changes from the previous programme are the timescale for resignalling the Virginia Water and Ascot area is to be confirmed and the Staines and Windsor area is put back from October 2022.

**Reading:** The bridge that carried the line from Wokingham over the siding serving Huntley & Palmers biscuit factory was renewed over the weekend of 20/21 March. Biscuit-making in Reading ceased in 1976 and the bridge has been used since 2015 to take a pedestrian and cycle route under the railway.

**Guildford:** Further renewal of points at Guildford at Easter resulted in no trains running at all.

**Portsmouth:** Ten of the seventeen spans of Landport Viaduct were strengthened while the line was closed between Blackfriars Junction and Portsmouth Harbour from 17 to 24 January. Repainting was mostly carried out after that. Work to the other seven spans will be undertaken later. The opportunity was taken to do other work during the closure, including replacing some rails and point heaters, together with timber beams supporting the track at Portsmouth Harbour station. New rail lubricators were installed as well. Timber beams have also been replaced on the bridge carrying the railway over Portsbridge Creek onto Portsea Island, allowing a temporary speed restriction to be removed.

**Southampton:** Track and signalling alterations, to allow operation of longer freight trains, were completed in February. A key improvement is a revised layout at the west end of the Freightliner terminal, allowing direct access from the lengthened reception sidings at Redbridge. That avoids involving the signallers at Eastleigh in local moves between the sidings and the terminal. The mechanical ground frame at Redbridge has been replaced by a power-operated ground switch panel. The access to Western Docks at Millbrook East Junction has been remodelled to allow parallel moves to and from the Down Fast and Down Loop lines. The Arrival and Departure Line has been renamed the Redbridge Goods Line and the Departure Line at Millbrook is now the Maritime Back Road. In order to finish the work all lines were closed between Southampton Central, Brockenhurst and Romsey from 13 to 19 February. Much work had been undertaken

prior to this and the closure was required for signalling work affecting the passenger lines. Most trains terminated short while work was under way, but those between Portsmouth and Cardiff were diverted via Botley and Chandlers Ford. As a result of that the stopping service from Salisbury ran only to Romsey, with the Cardiff trains calling at Chandlers Ford.

**Wilton:** A proposal to open a new station at Wilton Junction is under consideration again as part of the Government's plans for reinstating railways. The station would be located where the Westbury and Exeter lines diverge, and have four platforms. It would function as a park+ride for Salisbury, as well as serving the local area. The estimated cost of the station is £20 million.

**Station lighting:** South Western Railway has announced a 21% saving in energy use following the installation of 16,180 LED light fittings at 165 of its stations.

## **OLDEST TRAINS**

Live Rail 298 claimed that class 313 units are now the oldest passenger trains used by a franchised train operator. It has been questioned whether some HST vehicles are older. Manufacture of production HST sets commenced in 1975 and they first entered passenger service on the Western Region on 4 October 1976. That was seven weeks after class 313 started running between Drayton Park and Old Street, though the full service to Hertford North and Welwyn Garden City did not commence until 8 November 1976. It is possible that the first production HST vehicle was manufactured before the first 313, but the 313s have been in passenger service longer.

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