

REGIONAL REVIEW: FEBRUARY 2023

STOCK NOTES

Class 69: All locomotives were out of service at Tonbridge (except 69005 at Doncaster) from 27 January, pending modifications.

Classes 158 and 159: Two vehicles badly damaged in the Salisbury collision on 31 October 2021, 57763 from unit 158763 and 57803 from 159102, have been scrapped.

Class 201: The operational vehicles owned by Hastings Diesels Limited have been fitted with controlled emission toilets. Work has started on renovation of trailer coach 60502, which has been out of use since 1986.

Class 313: Unit 313219 has been stripped for spares at Lovers Walk.

Class 465: Unit 465921 spent several months stored in the Wall Siding, adjacent to Grosvenor Carriage Shed, Victoria, awaiting repair. It was moved to Slade Green early in February and then to Doncaster on 11 February. Its place in the Wall Siding has been taken by 465908. Unit 466028, which caught fire at West Malling on 2 February, was moved from Ashford to Gillingham Depot for damage assessment on 11 February.

Class 458: Unit 458505 was hauled from Wimbledon to Alstom Widnes on 14 February. The move was topped and tailed by 50007 and 50049. A driving vehicle from unit 458506 is reported as having been moved by road to Brodie Engineering at Kilmarnock, possibly for bodywork repairs.

Class 701: At the request of SWR, who were running out of siding space, some class 701 units that have not been accepted from Alstom are being stored at Marchwood military port. Those at Marchwood include 701016/19/22/32/38/45/49. The units are fitted with equipment to ensure they stop in the right position in station platforms and the doors are released on the correct side. As a unit approaches a station it receives a signal from a balise between the rails, which activates the braking and door opening systems. Network Rail is installing the balises, starting between Putney and Richmond. The system is intended to reduce station dwell time, because the doors will open sooner than is the case with manual release after the guard has checked the train is correctly positioned in the platform.

TIMETABLES and DIAGRAMS

Coastway: Nearly all trains between Brighton and Ore are now worked by class 387/2 units, as are some Seaford services. Presumably, units not needed for Gatwick Express are used on Coastway routes to avoid passenger confusion on the Brighton line as to which trains really are Gatwick Express services.

Isle of Wight: There will be two trains per hour between Ryde and Shanklin from 2 April 2023.

INTERESTING WORKINGS

Class 201: Unit 1001 worked an excursion from Hastings to Faversham via Tonbridge, Maidstone West and Strood on 18 February.

Class 491 (4TC): The London Underground 4TC unit was moved from St Leonards to Eastleigh Works via Brighton by 73109 and 73213 on 16 February.

Class 717: Great Northern unit 717004 was at Three Bridges Depot for attention from 17:00 until just before 22:00 on 22 February. It ran from and to Hornsey Depot via City Thameslink.

Class 769: Despite Great Western giving up on class 769 units, 769930 made a trip to Redhill on 26 January at 09:15 from Reading Depot. It was scheduled to return almost immediately at 11:15, but actually departed at 12:29. This was for further evaluation of equipment that might be used on other types of train.

Class 800: 800205, the first LNER train to have problems with cracks rectified at Eastleigh, returned north to Doncaster on 21 February, having been at the Works for almost four months.

Rugby at Twickenham: In connection with the England v Scotland match at Twickenham on 4 February, Shepperton trains were diverted via Twickenham. Additional trains ran from Waterloo to Hounslow via Twickenham before the match and from Twickenham direct to Waterloo afterwards. Associated empty trains to and from Waterloo or Clapham Yard ran via Brentford. Continuing the outward trains in passenger service to Hounslow meant staff there were responsible for seeing they were empty on departure, rather than the very busy staff at Twickenham having to do so. A few additional trains ran between Reading and Waterloo. Trains were a mixture of eight- and ten-coach formations. On 12 February, when England were playing Italy, the Shepperton service ran via Kingston, as usual. Extra trains were mostly Waterloo to Hounslow and Twickenham to Waterloo, with empty stock via Brentford. Similar arrangements apply for other major games.

Railtour: A tour from Derby on 11 February, topped and tailed by 37403 and 50008, visited Twickenham, Shepperton, Guildford, Hampton Court, Waterloo and Chessington South.

Engineering Work between East Croydon and Redhill on 5 February resulted in there being just two trains per hour between London and Gatwick Airport, via Epsom and Horsham. Trains from Bognor and Havant terminated at Horsham and there were hourly trains from Three Bridges to Littlehampton via Hove and to Ore. Thameslink operated hourly between Redhill and Brighton. Road replacement services included half-hourly between Three Bridges and East Grinstead.

RAILWAY BUSINESS

South Western Railway: The National Rail Contract held by South Western Railway has been extended by two years to run until 25 May 2025, subject to the same terms and conditions.

Govia Thameslink Railway has announced a number of staff appointments, one of which is of particular interest. Chris Fowler, who was previously Customer Services Director at Southern and Gatwick Express, is now Network Operations Director. He is responsible for train performance, real-time information for passengers and recovering the service quickly and efficiently in times of disruption. His job is described as a joint position between GTR and Network Rail. This is not exactly a “deep alliance”, as existed between South Western Trains and Network Rail, but a step in the right direction in integrating operation of the railway.

Advance Peak Tickets: In response to commuter traffic being lower on Mondays and Fridays, Southern is offering, as an experiment, advance peak tickets for use on those days. These give a saving up to 15% on the anytime fare and can be purchased up to the day before travel, though there is a limit on the number issued. Tickets are available for use in either direction between Victoria, Clapham Junction or East Croydon and stations in the area bounded by Three Bridges, Eastbourne and Chichester. Passengers to and from Brighton may use a Thameslink train to connect with a Victoria service operated by Southern. Southern has also launched a loyalty scheme which allows passengers buying a ticket to earn points that can be used to purchase refreshments, self-education courses, cinema tickets and other goods.

Waterside Wanderer: The Waterside Wanderer ticket, which gave a day’s travel on public transport in the Southampton area, has been withdrawn.

Mobile Assistance: Southern has established, as a trial, a mobile assistance team at Sutton. They will travel by road to local unstaffed stations to support disabled passengers and others requiring help, such as older people with luggage.

They should be able to attend within 20 minutes of being called by phone or through the station help point. Advance booking of assistance is possible. Stations that the team covers are Belmont, Carshalton Beeches, Epsom Downs, Ewell East, Hackbridge, Kingswood, Tadworth, Tattenham Corner and Waddon.

Works Alliance: Network Rail, Southern Region has announced the firms who will be working with it to deliver its infrastructure renewals programme between 2024 and 2034. They are VolkerFitzpatrick for Buildings and Civil Engineering, Octavius for Electrification and Plant, VolkerRail for Track and Atkins for Signalling. The arrangement is known as Southern Integrated Delivery.

STRIKES

ASLEF strikes on Wednesday and Friday 1 and 3 February resulted in Southeastern and Govia Thameslink Railway running no trains at all. South Western Railway advertised a full service, except for there being no trains on the Isle of Wight. Most train ran, but there were some suburban cancellations due to lack of crew, particularly on Wednesday.

RMT members from most train operators, who include guards, will be striking on 16, 18 and 30 March and 1 April. The RMT has called a further strike by Network Rail staff, including signallers, on 16 March. During various periods in March and April there will be a ban on overtime, rest day working and non-rostered Sunday working by RMT members working for Network Rail.

HOOK LAND SLIP

The down slow line at Hook re-opened on 13 February. It was then necessary to reinstate the fast lines, where the down fast had been temporarily slewed into the up fast. From 13 February all lines were closed from 22:00 each evening, in order to speed up work. All four lines were available for use from 24 February, when the normal timetable resumed.

PERFORMANCE and INCIDENTS

Figures show the percentage of trains arriving within 59 seconds of scheduled time, at all monitored stations. The ranking of the companies within the 24 passenger train operators is shown. Eurostar is not included, but open access operators are. MAA = moving annual average. Performance is measured against the timetable that each train operator advertised the previous day. Therefore, although very few trains run on strike days there is still a “good performance”, because only a limited timetable was intended.

	8 January to 4 February	MAA to 4 February
All TOCs	65.3%	68.1%
SWR	59.5% (13 th)	68.4% (10 th)
GTR	64.2% (10 th)	68.7% (9 th)
SE	60.9% (12 th)	65.9% (12 th)

Fatality at Lady Howard crossing, Ashted: The Rail Accident Investigation Board has published its report into a fatality at Lady Howard footpath and bridleway crossing on 21 April 2022. The crossing is located between Epsom and Ashted and is a means of access to Ashted Common. A pedestrian waited while an up train passed and then started to cross the line, unaware that the up train was hiding her view of a down train approaching the crossing. Similarly the driver of the down train could not see the pedestrian until the train was a few seconds away from the crossing. The driver sounded the horn, but could not avoid hitting the pedestrian who sustained fatal injuries.

Network Rail had identified the crossing as high risk, but decided not to close it. That would have diverted users to another high risk crossing nearby. A footbridge, with ramps to allow use by horses, would have been very obtrusive and

extend onto land not owned by Network Rail, so was not considered to be a viable option. It was decided that provision of miniature stop lights (MSLs) at the crossing was the best solution, but there were problems associated with that. It is sometimes possible to install MSLs independently of signalling, but there are complications where there are signals near to the crossing, as at Lady Howard. Funding had been allocated for MSLs at the crossing every year since 2017, if not earlier, but a suitable technical specification was not available until 2021. A large number of crossings have been recommended for MSLs, resulting in high demand for the equipment and staff able to install them. Wessex Route had concentrated on installing MSLs at crossings where integration with signalling was not necessary, while waiting for the more advanced equipment, suitable for Lady Howard crossing, to become available.

In an effort to reduce the risk at the crossing Network Rail provided additional warning signs, but it was only after the fatality that a further sign was installed saying *A passing train can obstruct the view of a train coming on the other line. Look both ways and make sure trains are not blocking your view before crossing.* Subsequent to the fatality, Network Rail staff were present at the crossing for a week advising users on how to cross safely. There has also been a presentation on level crossing safety to Ashted Residents' Association. Suitable MSLs are to be installed at the crossing by February 2024.

RAIB recommends Network Rail to

- Identify crossings that present the highest risk of a second train being hidden by another train and implement appropriate measures to control the risk to users.
- Review existing processes for level crossing risk management, including explicit provision for considering a wider range of short- and medium-term mitigations than is currently the case, pending implementation of preferred long-term solutions.

Fatality at West Worthing: RAIB has issued its report into the death of a train driver at West Worthing on 1 February 2022. He had driven the 19:51 Brighton to West Worthing, which turns back in the reversing siding there. While the train was in the siding the driver got out onto the track, without first notifying the signaller, and was struck by another train. RAIB exhaustively considered reasons why the driver might have alighted from of the train and concludes he probably did so to urinate. His train was a class 313 unit, with no toilet.

RAIB considers that Southern did not adequately consider driver welfare when putting trains with no toilets into use, in place of class 377. The company knew there was a problem, because of repeated complaints from Network Rail about bottles of urine being discarded on the track at West Worthing. Although driver shifts make provision for personal needs breaks, the standard turn round time at Brighton station is eight minutes, which is insufficient for use of the staff or public toilets there. Many drivers were found to be unaware that there is a toilet at West Worthing station.

In May 2022 the Office of Rail and Road served an Improvement Notice on GTR under the Health & Safety at Work etc Act, because of inadequate provision of welfare facilities for train crew operating class 313 trains. The timetable has been reviewed to ensure that turn round times are adequate for use of a toilet, and staff have been briefed as to where toilets are available. RAIB has recommended that GTR conducts a review of toilet and washing facilities on all routes that it operates and says that this may apply to other train operators, including freight companies.

Wednesday 25 January: A signalling failure at Herne Hill required trains towards Victoria to be diverted via the up loop platform (used by Thameslink) or via Catford during the morning.

Saturday 28 January: A problem at Selhurst Depot prevented trains leaving, so many early morning services were cancelled.

Monday 30 January: Over-running engineering work at Havant caused early morning trains to be delayed or cancelled. A problem with the axle counters in the Bedhampton area caused delays for the rest of the day. The complexity of the repair meant that work had to be carried out overnight. That was unsuccessful, so disruption continued on Tuesday. Some Southern services were cut back to Barnham or Chichester and a few Waterloo trains were diverted via Winchester.

Tuesday 31 January: A points failure caused London Overground services to West Croydon to be cancelled or diverted to Crystal Palace during the evening.

Thursday 2 February: A crane working at the site of the Hook land slip failed, with the arm being unable to retract, resulting in all lines being blocked until after 08:00. Some trains were diverted via Havant. A telecommunications failure affecting the signalling between Ore and Ashford about 10:45 caused services to be suspended for about four hours. A points failure at Keymer Junction caused cancellations and serious delays during the afternoon. A few Littlehampton trains were diverted via Horsham and some from Eastbourne were diverted to Brighton. The 15:25 Victoria to Ashford terminated at West Malling, because of a fire on a bogie of unit 466028. Some damage was caused to the track. The train was able to depart empty for Ashford at 19:56, but was detained at Maidstone East for attention to the brakes and did not reach Ashford until 23:36. The up line was closed for over three hours and down line did not re-open until after 21:00, following repairs to the track. Trains were cancelled or diverted via Tonbridge meantime.

Saturday 4 February: A power failure on the down slow line between Clapham Junction and Wimbledon required trains to be diverted to the down fast line, omitting stops at Earlsfield, from 10:30. The down slow re-opened about 13:00, but there was consequent late running, caused by congestion, for most of the afternoon.

Monday 6 February: There was a further points failure at Keymer Junction late morning, leading to numerous delays and cancellations for the rest of the day. A Southampton Western Docks to Wakefield Europort freight train failed between Wallers Ash and Micheldever about 17:00. An assisting locomotive had to be summoned from Didcot, so it was over 2½ hours before the train was on the move again. Meantime, bidirectional signalling allowed some up passenger trains to run via the down line, but there were significant delays and some cancellations. A few SWR trains were diverted via Havant and CrossCountry via Laverstock.

Tuesday 7 February: In a near repeat of the previous day's failure, 70011 lost power at Micheldever about 09:50 while hauling a Southampton Maritime to Birmingham Lawley Street train. The train was able to proceed about three hours later after another locomotive had been summoned from Southampton. The following 07:25 from Weymouth turned back at Winchester and ran via Havant, reaching Waterloo 87 minutes late. Following SWR services ran direct via Havant and CrossCountry via Laverstock. The down line between Headcorn and Ashford was blocked from early afternoon because arcing had damaged a running rail. Bidirectional signalling allowed an hourly service in each direction on the up line. Trains between Charing Cross and Ramsgate continued to run via Headcorn, but Dover trains were diverted via Maidstone East for the rest of the day.

Wednesday 8 February: An axle counter failure overnight prevented use of the up slow line at Clapham Junction requiring all trains towards Victoria to run via the up fast line. Gatwick Express services were suspended and other trains were subject to delay or cancellation. A Crawley New Yard to Willesden freight train, due through Clapham Junction at 05:12, was stranded on the up slow between Wandsworth Common and Clapham Junction until about 08:40. Normal passenger working was not possible until 09:30. There were no trains on the Lymington branch until the 11:42 from Brockenhurst, because a damaged cable caused engineering work to over-run. An electricity supply problem prevented trains running on the Isle of Wight.

Thursday 9 February: Trains were diverted via Canterbury West after the 09:07 St Pancras to Ramsgate was involved in a fatality between Deal and Sandwich. A failed train between Rowlands Castle and Petersfield resulted in afternoon trains from Portsmouth to Waterloo being diverted via Winchester or cancelled. Loss of power to signalling between Chiswick and Windsor for over an hour from 21:15 brought all trains in the area to a stand.

Friday 10 February: The 06:15 Brockenhurst to Weymouth, worked by 444022, terminated at New Milton with a traction fault, blocking the line until 08:30.

Saturday 11 February: There were no trains to or from Hayes for two hours during the afternoon while a track defect was repaired. Trains alternately terminated at Elmers End or were diverted to Orpington. The up slow line points failed at New Cross Gate North Junction shortly after 17:00. Pending overnight repairs they were clamped to allow access to the East London line, requiring all Southern services to use the up fast line. The 17:51 Victoria to London Bridge was diverted via the Leigham Spur and Tulse Hill.

Monday 13 February: A major signalling failure at Orpington about 07:00 caused severe disruption. Trains were cancelled, badly delayed or diverted via Bat & Ball. The fault was put right after about two hours, but the service was disrupted into the afternoon. A power failure at East Kent IECC shortly before 15:00 brought trains to a halt. Normal signalling resumed in an hour, but services were disrupted for longer.

Tuesday 14 February: A broken rail at Longhedge Junction caused early morning trains between Dalston Junction and Clapham Junction to be diverted to Battersea Park. Various freight trains were diverted via Redhill. The 08:37 from Victoria arrived at Dartford with shoegear missing from unit 465165 and a small fire under the train. Traction current was isolated in platforms 1, 2 and 3, so that the fire could be tackled. Operation of hook switches enabled the isolation to be confined to platform 1 from about 11:00. There was extensive disruption, with some trains delayed over an hour.

It was possible to move the failure to Slade Green Depot shortly after 13:00 and a near normal service was operating by 15:00. The 13:04 Gravesend to Cannon Street suffered a brake fault outside London Bridge, but after about half an hour could move into the station, where it terminated. A broken rail at Minster East Junction resulted in there being no trains between Ramsgate and Sandwich or Minster during the afternoon.

Wednesday 15 February: A cable fire at Gravesend caused the line to be closed for about an hour during the middle of the day.

Saturday 18 February: There were no trains through Aldershot after 14:40, because of a signalling failure. There was an hourly service to Alton all day on Sunday, but there were no trains from Aldershot to Ascot or Guildford until Sunday evening. The up line was closed between Rochester Bridge Junction and Swanley for three hours shortly after 18:00 to allow emergency repairs to a conductor rail. Trains were cancelled or diverted via Dartford.

Sunday 19 February: A signal failure resulted in lines through Rochester and Strood being blocked until after 07:00, but there were numerous cancellations later in the morning. All lines were blocked at Herne Hill after the 16:40 Victoria to Ramsgate was involved in a fatality there. Thameslink services were suspended and Southeastern trains were diverted via Catford. The up and down loops reopened about 18:30, but with trains not stopping. The station and main lines were open about 20:00.

Tuesday 21 February: A points failure at Selhurst Depot resulted in six trains being unable to leave to take up service, causing passenger services to be cancelled. A points failure at Lewisham during the evening peak caused delays and cancellations as well as diversions via Greenwich or Parks Bridge Junction. The 17:09 from Reading was involved in a fatality at Ashford, resulting in the line being closed between Feltham and Staines for about 2½ hours. The 17:29 Victoria to Brighton terminated at Clapham Junction, because of a brake fault on unit 387219. The train was able to depart empty about 18:45 following fitters' attention. All trains from Victoria had to use the down slow line meantime, resulting in delays and cancellation of some suburban services.

Wednesday 22 February: The points at Lewisham failed again during the afternoon, causing disruption that extended into the evening peak. The 21:09 Reading to Waterloo, units 458526+503, failed following departure from Winnersh. The train was able to continue to Wokingham, where it terminated, 1½ hours later.

AROUND THE REGION

Thanet Parkway: The new station between Minster and Ramsgate is almost complete and due to open on 21 May.

Canterbury East: The line between Faversham and Dover was closed from 11 to 18 February principally for work to cuttings and drains, to reduce the risk of slips. Rock netting has been installed in chalk cuttings and slopes have been regraded elsewhere. A retaining wall was built in the cutting by Selling Tunnel. Other work included brickwork repairs in Lydden Tunnel, together with the removal of soot that had been there since the age of steam. The road bridge at Shepherds Well was repaired and stations have been deep cleaned and repainted.

Footbridges: Mount Street footbridge, between Charlton and Woolwich Dockyard has been demolished, but a replacement is planned. Whitehall Lane footbridge, at Slade Green, has been dismantled for renovation. The new footbridge and lifts at Crowborough were formally inaugurated on 10 February. Work has started on building a new footbridge with lifts at Bexley station.

Belmont: Sutton Council has obtained £14.1M from the Government's levelling up fund to double the frequency of trains to Belmont from two to four at hour. This will improve transport to the London Cancer Hub, which includes the Royal Marsden Hospital and the Institute of Cancer Research. The station also serves High Down and Downview prisons, as well as an extensive residential area. The money will be spent on provision of a reversing siding south of the station. The railway was previously double track, so the siding will fit within the existing formation. Currently there are no Southern services terminating at Sutton off-peak, so presumably the West Croydon via Crystal Palace service will be extended to Belmont.

Whyteleafe: A local food bank has relocated to a vacant storeroom at Whyteleafe station, having had to move out of their previous premises.

Gatwick Airport: All platforms have been in use since 14 January.

Waterloo: Display screens have been installed at Waterloo showing station announcements in British Sign Language.

Reading: Work started on 13 February to repaint the bridge carrying the railway from Wokingham over London Road, Reading. This does not inconvenience rail passengers at all, but requires single carriageway working with temporary traffic lights on one of the busiest roads in the town. Work continues until May.

Portsmouth Direct Line: The railway was closed between Shalford Junction and Petersfield from 11 to 19 February, and also between Guildford and Shalford Junction on 19th. This was to allow further work in connection with resignalling. At the same time pointwork at Haslemere was renewed and Silo Road footbridge, north of Farncombe station, was replaced. Network Rail describes the old footbridge as concrete and dating from the 1930s, so a prefabricated structure from the Exmouth Junction concrete works, provided when the line was being electrified.

Shawford: A café and community centre have opened in the previously disused station building at Shawford. The project to renovate and reuse the building was promoted by Three Rivers Community Rail Partnership, with funding from South Western Railway, CrossCountry, Railway Heritage Trust, Winchester City Council and South Downs National Park

Southampton Central: The downside forecourt is being improved at Southampton Central, with changes to the taxi rank and car parking. A waiting room, said to be for cruise passengers, is to be provided.

Isle of Wight: Winter storms have delayed renovation of Ryde Pier. Network Rail is confident that the line to Ryde Pier Head will open in "late spring". The work results in the line between Ryde St Johns Road and Ryde Esplanade being closed from 13 March, but it will reopen by 1 April.

CREDITS: William Davies, Colin Duff, John Goodrich, Stuart Hicks