

REGIONAL REVIEW: JANUARY 2023

STOCK NOTES

Class 458: Contrary to previous reports, South Western Railway does intend to proceed with refurbishment of class 458.

Class 491 (4TC): The London Underground 4TC unit, comprising vehicles 76297, 71163, 70823 and 76324, is being fitted with controlled emission toilets at St Leonards. It was hauled there from West Ruislip via Kensington, Catford, Tonbridge and Ashford on 9 January by 56081. There are two toilets in the trailer first and one in the trailer brake standard. The driver's cabs in the other two vehicles replaced the toilets.

Class 701: Unit 701010 was delivered from Derby to Eastleigh on 11 January. 701051 followed on 20 January, being routed via Petersfield, because of the landslip at Hook.

Class 707: There was a curious incident involving class 707 units between Waterloo East and Charing Cross on 23 January. Between 09:00 and 10:00 four trains were unable to take power, though there was no problem with the conductor rails and other trains were unaffected. Further trains formed of class 707 units were diverted to Cannon Street. Technical investigations were put in hand.

TIMETABLES and DIAGRAMS

Southeastern: The new timetable on the Charing Cross and Cannon Street suburban lines got off to a difficult start with what Network Rail and Southeastern described as "teething issues made worse by too many infrastructure failures". There have been reports of trains becoming overcrowded.

Sittingbourne: The new timetable has seen the curve onto the Sheerness branch from Western Junction to Middle Junction return to passenger use, but the only train is the 05:05 from Gillingham. The peak hour trains between Sheerness and Victoria, withdrawn on 16 November 2020, have not been reinstated.

Freight: Spoil from HS2 construction started being conveyed from Willesden to Cliffe (on the Grain branch) in December.

INTERESTING WORKINGS

Class 73: On 8 January 73212 was scheduled to work a route proving trip from Tonbridge via Redhill and South Croydon to Uckfield and East Grinstead. Unfortunately, it failed at Hurst Green about 09:30 while running to East Grinstead, with loss of both electric and diesel power. After about an hour it was found possible to drive the locomotive from the north end, so it missed the visit to East Grinstead and returned to Tonbridge via Longhedge Junction.

STRIKES

There were RMT strikes by Network Rail staff, including signallers, on 3, 4, 6 and 7 January, with the same limited service as on previous strike days. An ASLEF driver's strike on 5 January resulted Southeastern and GTR being among the operators running no trains at all; the same is expected on 1 and 3 February.

WEATHER PROBLEMS

There were two serious landslips in January and various other incidents, all caused by heavy rain. In the last three years Network Rail's Southern Region has had to deal with more than 200 earthworks failures. These have become more frequent as the weather gets wetter.

An embankment slip east of Hook on Sunday 15 January left the down slow line entirely unsupported over a length of 44 metres and the down fast undermined. The line was closed for planned engineering work that day. On Monday 16th the only trains scheduled between Pirbright Junction and Basingstoke were hourly Weymouth trains, calling additionally at Farnborough. Down trains ran via the up fast line from Farnborough, but were switched to the up slow from the evening. The other Weymouth trains, also hourly, were diverted via Havant. West of England trains were to be diverted from Basingstoke to Reading, but lack of crews with route knowledge meant that many terminated at Basingstoke. Difficulties in operating on Monday led to a revised approach from Tuesday, which was provision of a shuttle service between Woking and Basingstoke calling at Brookwood and Farnborough. There were no diversions via Havant. West of England and Bournemouth line trains terminated and started at Basingstoke, with passengers making use of Portsmouth and Alton services between Waterloo and Woking.

Passengers were advised to avoid travel through the affected area. There was little information about alternative routes, such as via Reading, possibly because of limited capacity on them. Although buses operated between Basingstoke and Woking to supplement the shuttle service, they were not advertised. Services were very extensively disrupted, with numerous cancellations throughout the week because trains and crews were displaced.

The Mountfield to Southampton Western Docks gypsum empties ran via Kensington and Reading on 17 January and via Havant for the rest of the week, providing the rare sight of freight on the Portsmouth Direct line.

Over the weekend of 21/22 January the down fast line was slued into the up fast at the site of the landslip, giving a fully-signalled double track line, with a 50 mph speed limit for down trains, at Hook. Planned work on the Portsmouth Direct line was cancelled in order to release staff and equipment for this. Down trains use the down fast line from Winchfield to Basingstoke, via the up fast alignment at Hook. All up trains have to use the up slow from Basingstoke to Farnborough.

With only two tracks available, the full timetable could not be operated. From 23 January the stopping service between Waterloo and Basingstoke has operated hourly instead of half-hourly, with no additional morning peak trains. Trains are unable to call at Hook, which is served by a minibus from Winchfield. The local service between Woking and Basingstoke is supplemented by a few buses. Waterloo trains terminating and starting at Salisbury are cancelled, but there is an hourly service between Waterloo and Exeter. Peak trains from Salisbury terminate at Basingstoke. Main line services to Weymouth and to Portsmouth via Winchester operate to the usual timetable.

It is expected that work to repair the embankment will not be completed until the second half of February.

The East Grinstead line was closed from midday on 17 January, because of an embankment slip near Lingfield. It reopened on 24 January, after an interim repair with steel sheet piles was completed. There were other less serious earthworks failures at Addlestone on 16 January and at Warnham on 18 January.

Much work has been carried out in recent years to strengthen slopes, in order to prevent problems. This often involves line closures of a week. The next is between Faversham and Dover from 11 to 18 February.

As the soil becomes wetter it gets softer, so trees are more likely to come down. Lines have been blocked by fallen trees at Leigh on 31 December, at Moreton on 14 January, between Crowhurst and West St Leonards on 16 January, between Dorking and Horsham on 20 January, at Worcester Park on 21 January and at Lancing on 23 January.

Heavy rainfall has also caused an increasing incidence of flooding, with lines closed at Eridge on 1 January, between Hassocks and Preston Park on 6 and 18 January, at Sway and on the Netley line on 14 January and at Sway again on 16 January.

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. The Office of Rail and Road is wanting data that more reflects the experience of passengers.

| | 11 December to 8 January | MAA to 8 January |
|----------|---------------------------|---------------------------|
| All TOCs | 64.2% | 68.7% |
| SWR | 66.2% (8 th) | 69.5% (9 th) |
| GTR | 63.6% (9 th) | 69.4% (10 th) |
| SE | 52.5% (16 th) | 66.7% (12 th) |

Tuesday 27 December: There was severe and widespread disruption on Southeastern suburban routes throughout the day because of damage to a critical signalling cable. Locomotives 73213+73201, working a route proving trip, hit a large boulder between Upper Warlingham and Woldingham about 08:15. They were able to continue under diesel power to Oxted about 09:30. Passenger services were able to operate during the afternoon and evening, but with a 5 mph speed restriction on the down line through the cutting where the boulder had fallen.

Monday 2 January: The first four round trips on the Bromley North branch were cancelled, because the allocated unit failed.

Tuesday 3 January: The 11:00 Victoria to Epsom Downs failed at West Croydon and terminated there.

Friday 6 January: Platforms 7 to 15 at Waterloo were out of use for planned engineering work, but a problem with the work prevented use of platforms 5 and 6, as well. In addition, a power cable fire at Queenstown Road about 09:30 caused a section of conductor rail to melt. Even though only the reduced strike service was operating, the number of trains had to be cut back until early afternoon. Windsor services started and terminated at Clapham Junction and those from Southampton did so at Woking. Intermittent power failures caused the slow lines to be closed between New Cross and St Johns during the morning, so all trains had to run via the fast lines and could not call at these stations.

Sunday 8 January: The 15:34 Bedford to Brighton, diverted because of engineering work, failed north of Herne Hill. It could not be assisted by the following train because the two units did not have the same software. As a result the line was blocked until 21:40, with no alternative route available to divert following trains. The 19:12 to Gillingham became stranded outside Victoria station, because a cable had become entangled with the shoe gear. It was on the move about 22:00 after the cable had been removed and the shoe gear checked by fitters.

Monday 9 January: A displaced conductor rail near Metropolitan Junction caused delays and cancellations to Charing Cross services throughout the morning. Main line trains were diverted to Victoria. The Quarry Line was blocked for over two hours during the afternoon after a lorry became wedged under Brighton Road bridge.

Tuesday 10 January: The 16:12 Orpington to Victoria was cancelled because the units became uncoupled on departure.

Wednesday 11 January: A track maintenance machine working within an overnight possession failed between Tooting and Streatham Junction, blocking the down line. Locomotive 69004 was summoned to haul it back to Hither Green, departing shortly after 07:30. On arrival at Hither Green 69004 derailed in the sidings. The 06:15 Ashford to Eastbourne terminated at Rye, because of problem with the doors. A signalling problem between Clapham Junction and Balham required trains to run at reduced speed during the morning. The service was thinned, including Epsom Downs being served by a shuttle from Sutton, Reigate trains being cancelled and some main line services terminating and starting at East Croydon. A power failure affecting the signalling and level crossings resulted in there being very few trains between

Horsham and Arundel Junction from late afternoon. Services were cancelled or diverted via Hove. A power failure caused cancellation of trains between Bournemouth and Weymouth after 21:00.

Saturday 14 January: A power failure late on Friday evening resulted in there being no trains between Hayes and Elmers End during the morning. The 11:40 Charing Cross to Sevenoaks terminated at London Bridge, because of a cable fire.

Sunday 15 January: A broken rail near Haslemere caused the line to be closed until late afternoon. Unfortunately, Bournemouth line trains were scheduled to run via Cobham and Haslemere, because of engineering work between Weybridge and Basingstoke. CrossCountry was also to be diverted via Haslemere, because of engineering work between Reading and Basingstoke. Furthermore, there were no Southern services to Southampton, because of engineering work between Littlehampton and Chichester. Anyone determined to travel by rail between London and Southampton would have been obliged to go via Westbury, not that tickets were valid that way.

Monday 16 January: An electrical fault on the up line between Rochester Bridge Junction and Sole Street during the night caused severe arcing, resulting in a length of conductor rail melting. Several early morning trains passed through, shedding shoe gear as they did so, and the 06:18 from Ramsgate became stranded. The up line was closed for the rest of the day, with trains cancelled, curtailed or diverted via Dartford. The 12:22 St Albans to Sutton failed between Loughborough Junction and Herne Hill and could not be moved for two hours.

Tuesday 17 January: A traction power failure resulted in there being no trains on the Sheerness branch until the middle of the afternoon. A signal fault at Cannon Street caused delays for much of the day. The station was closed for an hour during the afternoon to allow repairs, but the fault reoccurred and had to be rectified overnight.

Wednesday 18 January: The 05:06 Clapham Junction to Weybridge was detained for over an hour at North Sheen after hitting a bicycle on the track. Services were diverted via Hounslow while the bicycle was extricated from under the train. There were no trains on the Isle of Wight between 09:00 and 13:00, because of ice on the conductor rails. Ice also caused disruption to trains between Weymouth and Poole. An engineer's train from Hoo Junction to Eastleigh was detained at Lee for over two hours during the evening peak, because of a brake problem. Traction current was discharged to allow this to be dealt with, so trains were diverted via Bexleyheath. The 18:00 Brighton to Portsmouth & Southsea terminated at Havant, because of a problem with the brakes.

Thursday 19 January: A fire at Pokesdown substation caused the line to be closed for about three hours during the afternoon. Evening peak services were disrupted by a signalling fault preventing use platforms 5 and 6 at Charing Cross.

Friday 20 January: A points failure at Keymer Junction resulted in severe disruption during the afternoon, with many trains to and from Brighton and Lewes cancelled. Littlehampton trains were diverted via Horsham.

Saturday 21 January: Early morning trains were diverted, delayed or cancelled because the points at Keymer Junction failed again. Evening services between Eastbourne and Hastings were cancelled, because of a broken rail at Pevensey & Westham.

Sunday 22 January: A damaged signal cable at Deal meant that there were no trains between Ramsgate and Dover until late afternoon. Most services were diverted via Canterbury, but some were cancelled. Loss of power caused a failure of all signals controlled from Feltham ASC for about three hours from 12:40. A small fire developed on unit 375713 at Dover Priory while it waited to work the 15:00 to Charing Cross. The fire service attended and promptly extinguished the fire. After safety checks on the train and the track had been completed, all lines were reopened just before 17:00. The 13:48 Bedford to Brighton was detained for three hours on the Quarry Line after hitting a metal object that damaged the brakes. Trains were diverted via Redhill meantime.

Monday 23 January: Evening services were disrupted by a fatality at Wandsworth Common and a points failure at Redhill. Some trains were diverted via the Quarry Line.

AROUND THE REGION

Hollingbourne: A community centre has opened using refurbished space in Hollingbourne station building. The project has been undertaken by Kent Community Rail Partnership, the Railway Heritage Trust and Hollingbourne Parish Council, working with Southeastern.

Chatham: The new footbridge and lifts have come into use.

Victoria Area Resignalling: Work over the Christmas and New Year holiday resulted in Three Bridges ROC taking control of signalling between Victoria and Streatham North Junction, the Chatham lines between Victoria and Battersea Pier

Junction, the Streatham Hill area and the West London Line. New signalling, with axle counters, was commissioned between Battersea Park and Streatham Hill, but elsewhere the existing signalling has been retained. There is now a fully-signalled turn back facility at Streatham Hill, allowing passenger departures towards Balham from the down platform. New work stations, Victoria Eastern, Victoria Central, Clapham Junction (which includes the West London Line) and Balham, came into use at Three Bridges. This means that the only section of the Brighton lines still controlled from Victoria Area Signalling Centre is East Dulwich and Herne Hill (both exclusive) to Beckenham Junction via Tulse Hill and Crystal Palace. Lines from Battersea Pier Junction to Longfield, Kemsing and Bat & Ball may transfer later from Victoria ASC to East Kent Signalling Centre (Gillingham), rather than Three Bridges.

Gatwick Airport: Platform 6 was returned to use on 27 December, in association with revisions to the track layout and signalling.

Crawley: Work to refurbish Crawley station, including a new glazed frontage, has been completed. There are additional ticket gates and improvements to the space in front of the station entrance.

Bognor Regis: Network Rail has applied for listed building consent to replace the semaphore signals at the platform ends at Bognor Regis with colour lights. NR does not consider the signals to be within the curtilage of the listed station building, but has submitted the application at the request of Arun District Council. These are the last semaphores at Bognor.

Feltham Area Resignalling: Lines between Reading, Bracknell and Aldershot South Junction are closed from 13 to 17 February and the Windsor branch is closed from 11 to 19 February. In both cases this is for resignalling work, but commissioning of the new signalling comes later.

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There is a target date of 23 February for re-opening the down lines at Hook. Publication of Regional Review in February may be delayed by a few days, in order to provide a definite report.