

REGIONAL REVIEW: NOVEMBER 2023

STOCK NOTES

Liveries: The last Desiros in South West Trains livery are 444004/26/39/45 and 450031/59/85/99, 450116/18.

Class 73: 73138 is reported to have been purchased from Network Rail by GB Railfreight and is expected to be used as a source of spare parts. Harry Needle Railroad Company is reported to have bought 73951 and 73952, to be hired out. As these two are completely non-standard, it will be interesting to see who wants to make use of them.

Class 375: Eversholt Rail, the owner of the class 375 units, has entered into a contract with Siemens for provision of automatic vehicle inspections at Ramsgate depot. A series of cameras and laser detectors will be able to check brake pad thickness, collector shoes, wheel profiles and wheel tread thickness. The system will alert staff to work needing to be done immediately or within the next 48 hours. It is intended that this will allow a shift from carrying out work on a time interval basis to doing it when really necessary. It is planned that the equipment will be installed from mid-2024 and come into use in 2025.

Class 458: Unit 458428 was delivered to Bournemouth from Widnes on 8 November. The transfer of 458524 to Widnes on 9 November was unsuccessful. The train terminated at Brockenhurst with a brake problem and returned to Bournemouth. A further attempted delivery on 20 November was successful.

Classes 465 and 466: 465917+466032 were moved to store at Widnes on 26 October. Further units overhauled at Doncaster, so unlikely to be stored soon, are 465911/24/25.

Class 701: Moves have included:

26 October	701506 Eastleigh to Bicester MoD
30 October	701513 Eastleigh to Bicester MoD
1 November	701520 Derby to Eastleigh
2 November	701021 Eastleigh to Bicester MoD
9 November	701505+701514 Eastleigh to Bicester MoD
10 November	701521 Derby to Eastleigh
15 November	701522 Derby to Eastleigh
16 November	701004 Long Marston to Eastleigh
17 November	701507+701511 Eastleigh to Bicester MoD
21 November	701523 Derby to Eastleigh

Class 707: The transfer of units 707024+030 from SWR to Southeastern, planned for 28 October, was cancelled. The units returned to passenger service with South Western Railway and may not move to Southeastern until next spring.

TIMETABLES and DIAGRAMS

Southeastern: Timetable changes from December comprise additional morning peak trains on the Sidcup and Maidstone East lines and reinstatement of half-hourly trains between St Pancras and Faversham for most of the day.

Freight: The Antwerp to Irvine china clay workings via the Channel Tunnel have ceased. It appears that the traffic has been lost to coastal shipping.

Class 458: Class 458/5 units are diagrammed to work 07:01 Dorking to Waterloo, 09:54, 14:54 & 19:54 Waterloo to Guildford via Epsom, 11:42, 16:28 & 21:42 return via Epsom, 08:06, 13:06, 18:06 & 23:06 to Hampton Court, 08:53, 13:54 & 18:54 return and 23:59 Hampton Court to Wimbledon. Class 458 has not worked regularly on the Guildford New Line, but this diagram is almost certainly a result of delays in getting class 701 into service.

RAIL BUSINESS

Travelcard: A financial deal between Transport for London, the Department for Transport and the Rail Delivery Group means that Day Travelcards are to be retained, but the price will be increased.

Booking Offices: In another about turn, plans to close most station booking offices have been abandoned.

Sussex Route: Lucy McAuliffe has been appointed as Route Director for Network Rail's Sussex Route. She was previously Southern Region's safety and security director and had worked as head of passenger security at Gatwick Airport prior to that.

INDUSTRIAL ACTION

The RMT union is balloting its members at affected companies on a proposed memorandum of understanding with the train operators. If accepted, this will result in a pause in strike action at least until spring 2024 while negotiations on changes to working practices take place. There will be a backdated 2022 pay rise for staff and job security guarantees.

The pay dispute between ASLEF and various passenger operators rumbles on. The union has called further strikes, but on different days at the various companies. Drivers at Thameslink will be striking on 3 December, at Southeastern, Southern, Gatwick Express and South Western Railway on 6 December and at Great Western and CrossCountry on 7 December. There will also be an overtime ban between 1 and 9 December.

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.

	17 September to 14 October	MAA to 14 October
All TOCs	66.2%	67.7%
SWR	64.6% (11 th)	67.5% (11 th)
GTR	68.3% (8 th)	68.7% (10 th)
SE	65.4% (10 th)	65.9% (12 th)

Tuesday 24 October: A signalling failure at Tunbridge Wells about 08:35 required all trains to use the up line for the rest of the morning. Trains schedule to terminate and start there were cut back to Tonbridge. Following the 11:34 Guildford to Waterloo being involved in a fatality at Wimbledon most trains were curtailed or cancelled throughout the afternoon. Shepperton services were diverted via Richmond and a few main line trains ran via Chertsey. Lines through Faversham were closed for two hours after the 12:10 Victoria to Dover was involved in fatality.

Wednesday 25 October: Island Line was closed all day because of flooding and did not reopen until 1 November. A track circuit failure affecting the Brighton side of Victoria station caused cancellations and delays throughout the morning. Some trains were diverted to London Bridge. An empty train from Kentish Town to Orpington continued from City Thameslink with the pantograph raised shortly after 10:00. It came to a stand before Blackfriars. A very limited service operated using bidirectional signalling on the northbound line, but both lines were closed for over an hour during the early afternoon while the damaged pantograph was removed. Both lines re-opened by 14:45, but the service was badly disrupted, with many cancellations, for the rest of the day. Lymington branch services were cancelled for four hours after 450013 failed at Brockenhurst prior to working the 14:42 departure. A signalling fault at Barnes resulted in some evening peak services being cancelled or diverted via Hounslow.

Thursday 26 October: A signalling failure at Portsmouth & Southsea caused delays until late afternoon. Various Southern services terminated and started at Fratton.

Friday 27 October: A track circuit failure at Brighton required trains to be diverted via the carriage road for most of the day. The 17:06 Sevenoaks to Charing Cross terminated at Petts Wood after defective shoe gear caused the traction power supply to trip out. Other trains were subject to delays and cancellation until the failed train could depart for Slade Green depot about 20:30.

Saturday 28 October: An external power failure affecting the signalling resulted in early morning trains between Tunbridge Wells and Hastings being cancelled, with consequent disruption until 10:00. Trains from Cannon Street to Gravesend were diverted via Greenwich during the afternoon, because of a signalling problem at Blackheath.

Sunday 29 October: The line was closed shortly after 10:00, because of a landslip near Moulsecoomb. It was considered safe to run trains after about an hour, but the service was disrupted for the rest of the day.

Monday 30 October: There were no trains to Seaford between the 06:36 and the 09:36 from Brighton, because of a points failure. The line was closed between Ore and Rye following a landslip about 10:00. The 09:50 from Eastbourne terminated at Hastings and 10:25 from Ashford terminated at Rye. There were no trains between Ashford and Hastings until after 16:00, but cancellations and delays continued into the evening.

Tuesday 31 October: The 05:52 Sevenoaks to Welwyn Garden City terminated at Farringdon, having been unable to switch to AC power.

Wednesday 1 November: The morning peak service was disrupted by signalling problems between Basingstoke and Fleet. The Quarry Line was closed for most of the morning to allow repairs to failed track circuits.

Thursday 2 November: High winds and very heavy rain caused major disruption across the region, with many lines subject to a precautionary 40 mph speed restriction. That resulted in modified and reduced services. Lines were flooded between Salisbury and Dean, at Hinton Admiral, Hamble and Ryde, between Liss and Petersfield, at Ash, between Penshurst and Leigh and between Berwick and Polegate. Empty trains hit trees at Chilham and Dumpton Park and a MPV ran into a tree between Gomshall and Dorking West. Trees also fell onto the line at Margate, between Buckland Junction and Kearsney, between Adisham and Aylsham, between Tonbridge and High Brooms, at Edenbridge Town and Rye and between Ascot and Wokingham. A trampoline was blown onto the railway at Hastings. A power failure at Ramsgate about 08:40 caused loss of signalling for two hours. The 12:07 St Pancras to Ramsgate, unit 395002, terminated at Folkestone Central with a mechanical fault. A signalling power failure resulted in there being no trains between Dover and Folkestone from late afternoon, but services were already badly disrupted by the severe weather. The 17:15 from Waterloo, units 444041+450043, terminated at Petersfield with a traction fault.

Friday 3 November: The line between Ryde St Johns Road and Ryde Pier Head remained closed because of storm damage on the pier and did not reopen until 20 November. There were no trains on the Lymington branch until the 08:59 from Brockenhurst, because a tree had fallen onto the line. The 10:18 Dover Priory to Victoria was delayed by over two hours after suffering a brake fault in Lydden Tunnel.

Saturday 4 November: There was a difficult day on the East Coastway line. A broken rail was found on the down line in Bopeep Tunnel during night and had to be replaced, resulting in the railway being closed until the middle of the afternoon. A few early morning services were able to run to Charing Cross, because the units had been stabled at Hastings, but otherwise trains terminated and started at Bexhill and Robertsbridge. There were no trains via Rye. A member noted that St Leonards Carriage Shed was full of class 375 units during the afternoon, when normally it would have been empty. A signalling failure late morning prevented trains running from Brighton to Preston Park, but it was fairly soon found possible to run a reduced service. Gatwick Express did not run south of Gatwick Airport until normal working resumed in the evening. The line between Brighton and Lewes was closed for four hours during the afternoon, following a landslip east of Falmer Tunnel. The line re-opened with a 5 mph speed restriction for trains towards Brighton, which continued until repairs were completed on Sunday night. Trains were unable to call at Cooden Beach during the afternoon, because access to the station was flooded.

Sunday 5 November: Another tree fell onto the line at Chilham late in the evening. The 20:50 Margate to St Pancras was detained for 1½ hours at Canterbury West and terminated at Ashford. The 21:12 Ramsgate to Charing Cross, 21:50 Margate to St Pancras and 22:12 Ramsgate to Tonbridge were diverted via Folkestone.

Monday 6 November: A Freightliner light locomotive running from Hoo Junction to Birmingham Lawley Street was stopped at Sidcup about 07:30 for a safety check, blocking the line until 08:40. The 07:24 from Dartford, following behind, was delayed by 72 minutes, the 07:33 from Crayford terminated at Bexley and other up trains were diverted via Bexleyheath. A track circuit failure resulted in some Greenwich line trains being diverted via Lewisham from the middle of the afternoon.

Tuesday 7 November: The 07:44 Hastings to Charing Cross ran into a herd of deer between Battle and Robertsbridge, causing significant damage to the train. Passengers had to be evacuated to another train and it was not until early afternoon that the 07:44 could be moved clear. A track defect between Selhurst and Gloucester Road Junction resulted in most trains between Selhurst and West Croydon being cancelled or diverted from 16:00. Most trains between Victoria and Sutton or Epsom Downs were diverted via Mitcham Junction.

Wednesday 8 November: Signalling problems at Bosham and a tree on the line at Fareham caused delays during the morning. A signalling failure resulted in there being no trains to Tattenham Corner between the 11:08 and 13:08 from London Bridge.

Thursday 9 November: A points failure prevented trains running between Havant and Cosham during the morning peak, so Southern services to Southampton were cancelled, terminated short or diverted to Portsmouth. This was followed by a signalling failure between Fareham and Cosham for two hours from 17:30. Trains were delayed, cancelled or diverted.

Friday 10 November: The signalling fault between Fareham and Cosham reoccurred, disrupting the service throughout the morning. The 10:06 Brighton to Seaford terminated at Falmer, because of flooding, and services did not resume until after 14:00.

Saturday 11 November: Trains were diverted via Sidcup or Woolwich for about 1½ hours after the 07:57 Dartford to Victoria was involved in a fatality at Kidbrooke.

Monday 13 November: Track defects were found during the night on the up slow line at New Malden and on the down slow line at Wimbledon. In both cases a 20 mph speed restriction was imposed. The fault at Wimbledon required regular inspection throughout the day, with a line blockage while this was done. This resulted in significant delays and cancellations. Repairs were carried out in the early hours of Tuesday. The 07:49 Sutton to St Albans terminated at Tulse Hill, because of a points failure. Following trains were delayed by up to an hour, but Southern services were unaffected. There were consequential delays and cancellations until late afternoon, with a failed train at City Thameslink adding to the disruption. There were no trains from Alton between the 08:44 and 12:44, because of a tree on the line. Locomotive 69008 suffered a failure at Bickley about 22:00 while working the Southampton Western Docks to Tonbridge West Yard gypsum train. The train was assisted forward by another locomotive about 01:30.

Tuesday 14 November: Despite the previous evening's events, 69008 was sent out on its own to take the gypsum to Mountfield on the 05:10 from Tonbridge West Yard. It lost 20 minutes to Robertsbridge and then took a further 2½ hours to get from there to Mountfield Sidings, arriving at 08:35. This resulting in significant disruption to passenger services throughout the morning. A points failure about 11:00 prevented use of the up lines through Woking for two hours, causing extensive delays and numerous cancellations.

Wednesday 15 November: Urgent track repairs at Bearsted resulted in there being no trains between Ashford and Maidstone East until after 09:00. Meantime, trains were cut back to Maidstone or diverted via Bat & Ball. An earth slip near Balcombe resulted the down line between Balcombe Tunnel Junction and New Copyhold Junction being closed for about two hours during the middle of the day. Consequential disruption continued into the evening.

Thursday 16 November: Over-running engineering work resulted in there being no trains between Ebbsfleet and Ashford until after 08:00. There were no Southern trains to Beckenham Junction between the 08:14 and 11:14 because of a track circuit failure at Birkbeck. The 11:33 from Guildford via Cobham, formed of 455869+741, terminated at Surbiton with a brake fault. A signalling problem at Cosham caused delays from the middle of the afternoon. Southern services to and from Southampton were diverted to Bognor or Portsmouth during the evening.

Friday 17 November: The 05:52 Poole to Waterloo, units 444008+005, failed at Hinton Admiral, blocking the line for about two hours. The 06:53 Cambridge to Brighton terminated at London Bridge with a door fault. It was able to continue empty to Three Bridges depot after a delay of about 40 minutes. A points failure at Woking about 12:30 put the up lines out of use for about an hour, but trains had to pass signals at danger for some time thereafter. Trains from Guildford were able to use bidirectional signalling on the down lines through the station, but that is not possible for trains from Brookwood.

Saturday 18 November: Persistent signalling problems at Cosham resulted in some Southern services again being diverted to Portsmouth, terminated at Chichester or cancelled entirely.

Sunday 19 November: A power failure affecting the signalling meant that most morning trains between Redhill and Tonbridge were cancelled.

Monday 20 November: Services to Portsmouth were delayed or revised, because a fractured component in Portcreek Junction required a 5 mph speed restriction. The rail was replaced overnight.

Tuesday 21 November: A DB Cargo freight train from Dollands Moor to Daventry failed near Borough Green about 07:55, blocking the line until 10:15. The 08:55 Ashford to Victoria was diverted via Bat & Ball, but other trains from Maidstone East towards London were delayed or cancelled.

AROUND THE REGION

Margate: A cycle hub, with 38 secure spaces, a repair stand and two charging points for electric bikes, has been provided adjacent to the old water tower at Margate station.

Herne Bay: A footbridge with lifts is being constructed at Herne Bay.

Wandsworth Road: Voltaire Road Junction, the crossovers connecting the Atlantic and Chatham lines east of Wandsworth Road, is to be relaid. The new junction, to a revised design, will allow trains to cross over at 45 mph instead of 35 mph. Most of the work will take place between 23 December and 1 January, but there will also be weekend closures from 16 December until 14 January. Southeastern services to and from Victoria will be diverted to Charing Cross, Cannon Street or Blackfriars and London Overground trains will be replaced by buses.

Govia in the Community: Govia Thameslink Railway has made grants totalling £375,000 from its 'Your Station, Your Community' fund to support 19 community groups in the area it serves. Recipients include organisations working to rehabilitate offenders in South London; develop musical talent in young people in Worthing; and to help those who lack confidence in use of digital technology in Brighton and Hove. Grants relating to stations support gardening groups at Merstham and Earlswood and environmental improvement projects around Streatham, Streatham Hill and Ore stations.

Gatwick Airport: The rebuilt station officially opened on 21 November. The new second concourse is used by people arriving at the airport. The old concourse, which has been refurbished, will be used just by those catching a train. The first passengers to use the new concourse were those off the 05:48 Bedford to Brighton, which calls at Gatwick at 07:35.

Richmond: The station building is being renovated in a scheme jointly funded by Network Rail, South Western Railway and the Railway Heritage Trust. The Portland stone street façade is being cleaned, the timber entrance doors and flagpoles repaired, bronze work polished and toilets refurbished. It is hoped that this will be the first phase of a wider project.

Guildford: South Western Railway and Network Rail are withdrawing permission for the general public to use Guildford station footbridge for a trial period from 4 December 2023 until 1 March 2024. When the station was rebuilt it was a planning condition that there was public access to the footbridge. The withdrawal of permission follows anti-social behaviour towards station staff by fare evaders. Over just 25 days in November 2022, almost 2,000 bridge passes were used by fare evaders to access platforms, board trains and travel without a ticket. Using data from the trial, Network Rail intends to apply to Guildford Council for the planning condition to be withdrawn.

Guildford to Reigate: The railway between Shalford Junction and Reigate was closed from 11 to 17 November, for track renewals and replacement of the timber beams that support the track on the bridge over the River Wey at Shalford.

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