

# The South Western Report

Issue 7

Summer 2020




## Waterloo station but not as we know it How we handled Covid-19

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# Responding to COVID-19 and moving forward

## Managing Director Mark Hopwood

I have been at the helm of South Western Railway (SWR) for a little over 6 months, and whilst I knew when I joined the company that I'd face many challenges, no one could have predicted that the biggest challenge would be responding to a deadly virus.

Coronavirus has had a significant impact on SWR, as well as the wider industry, with passenger numbers falling overnight. At the height of lockdown we saw around 4-5,000 key workers passing through Waterloo station each morning as opposed to our usual 125,000 passengers.

For someone who has been in the industry for over 30 years, it has been a peculiar time. I have always been the one encouraging more passengers onto the railway, but instead I have recently found myself doing the opposite and asking passengers to only travel if necessary.

Like all businesses during the pandemic, we have seen an increase in the number of colleagues off work, ill or self-isolating, and as result we have been running a reduced service on our network. Despite this, our focus has been on running a reliable service for those that need it, including the key workers who have been keeping our country safe through these difficult times.

As time has gone on, lockdown restrictions have eased, and with more colleagues returning to work, we have gradually increased the number of services we are running. At the beginning

of July, we increased our level of service to around 85% of our normal timetable, and we are planning further increases for September.

Prior to COVID-19, we had begun to see the early signs of improvement in performance, and over the last few months with fewer people travelling, and fewer services running, our train performance has been significantly better. The challenge as we add in further services and see more passengers returning to the railway is how to maintain that improvement while meeting demand. At the time of writing, we are still achieving over 90% daily.

As an industry, we have also seen a temporary change in how franchises operate, with Emergency Measures Agreements resulting in the Government taking on the cost and revenue risk of running franchises across the UK. This has allowed us to maintain all colleagues, without the need to furlough and has highlighted how lucky we are to receive such support, and how vital the railway will be in helping our communities and the economy as a whole to recover.

I believe in connecting more people and



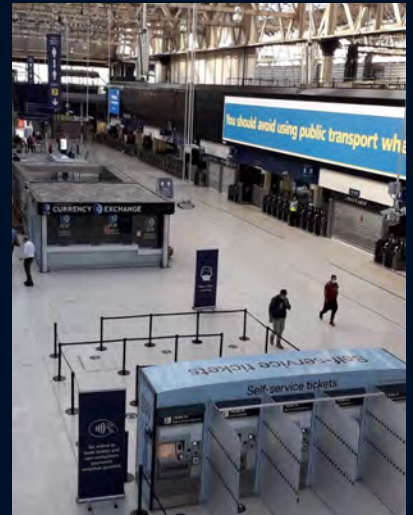
communities to the railway. Recently, we ran a special 'fact-finding' train down the former Fawley branch line after Hampshire County Council was awarded funding for a feasibility study into its reopening. Joining me were the Rail Minister, Chris Heaton-Harris, Network Rail's Chair, Sir Peter Hendy and Wessex Route Director Mark Killick, along with some council colleagues, to take a look at the opportunities the line might offer.

As the country moves out of lockdown and we welcome customers back on to the railway, people's travel patterns may well have changed. We will need to be agile - in terms of managing these demands and providing flexible ticketing options - in order to meet our customers' needs.



## Refunding customers

With many of our customers following government guidance and working from home, we saw a significant increase in requests for refunds – 47 per cent more than we would normally receive in a whole year.



Although our Customer Services Centre closed during lockdown, we were soon able to reopen with social distancing in place to begin refunding our customers as quickly as possible.

Through the hard work of the customer services team, by the end of June we had processed all outstanding refund requests – a total of 36,269 within 12 weeks.

**Despite a nationwide lockdown, our railway has continued to provide a critical service for those key workers who rely on us, so we can rely on them.**

We have needed to keep our customers and colleagues safe while continuing to run services. To do this, we have taken measures to enhance our cleaning regimes, while also helping to facilitate social distancing on our trains and at stations.

Cleaning teams have been paying particular attention to commonly touched areas, where the risk of cross-contamination is greater. For example, ticket machines, grab rails and handles, staircase handrails, touchscreens and door opening buttons have all been cleaned more regularly.

We have also rolled out a powerful sanitising 'virucide', Zoono Z71, which kills

99.9% of viruses and bacteria for up to 28 days.

We've also introduced hand sanitising machines at over 100 of our stations, allowing customers to clean their hands before and after they travel.

Social distancing has also been key to keeping our customers and colleagues safe. The station and engineering teams have been working round the clock to put in place over 50,000 vinyls, stickers and posters on board trains and at stations. Our aim has been to engage, educate and encourage our customers, for example, on the importance of wearing a face covering on public transport.

## Supporting key workers

**Our colleagues have been grateful for the nation's support of key workers during the pandemic.**

Wherever they have been, whether at depots, stations or working from home, our colleagues have also been eager to recognise the hard work of others despite being key workers themselves.

They've participated in the 'clap for the NHS / carers' campaign, with depot teams and drivers even sounding train horns in support.



We also donated PPE to the emergency services, NHS, and care providers, to assist in their efforts in the fight against coronavirus. This included a donation of spare equipment to Woking Homes, a care home that provides residential care for retired railway workers.



# Performance still our priority

James Royal, Performance Strategy Manager

**We've remained committed to driving up performance, with improvement schemes continuing throughout the pandemic in readiness for the return of more services and customers later this year.**

Since the introduction of our amended timetable, service punctuality on our network has remained strong with over 95% PPM compared to 80.5% at the end of last year.

This is due in part to fewer services operating in the peak periods and allowing us to recover more quickly from the type of incidents which have a negative impact on our performance.

## Speed restrictions

We've continued to work with our colleagues in Network Rail to remove speed restrictions which have a significant impact on the punctuality of our services.

Since the beginning of the pandemic in

April the number of speed restrictions has reduced by over 50% – from 43 to 20 (July 2020).

## Assisting ill customers

We're still working hard to minimise the consequential impact of customers falling ill on our services, even as delays from these incidents continue to decline.

To help with this, our train guards are now receiving further training in how to assist customers when they fall ill. For example, through using a 3-way call with network control and paramedics, the guards can coordinate a response which could help customers receive the most appropriate treatment whilst reducing delays to other services on the line.



## New performance working groups

Despite the pandemic, the work of the JPIC continues to address the many challenges on the network so performance can improve for the benefit of our customers.

For example, we have set up a number of working groups with Network Rail to improve performance at a 'local level' on the Wessex route.

The first of these has already met to look at the Portsmouth region, whilst the Mainline group (Southampton to Weymouth) will meet shortly. I'll update readers in the next edition on the outcomes of these groups.

# Our role in recovery

**As we look to the future, we're also planning for what will become the 'new normal'. Changes in working patterns, with potentially more customers opting to work from home, and the majority of offices currently remaining closed, could change what the usual rush hour peak looks like.**

However, behind the scenes work is continuing to deliver key projects, that will help improve performance and the customer experience on our services. Two of our new Class 701 trains have arrived on our network for testing and driver training, with the first due to begin passenger service later this year. Our Class 442 re-tractioning programme has also continued to help improve the reliability of these units once reintroduced on the Portsmouth Line.

We also recognise that whilst we have been able to operate and continue to work on some key projects throughout this pandemic, for many businesses in our region this has not been possible. Local businesses have been some of the hardest hit by COVID-19 and the subsequent lockdown, and we recognise

that as restrictions begin to ease it is important now more than ever that we support them.

In July, we ran a competition to encourage our customers to nominate their favourite local business – their village's butcher, their local artisan baker or their town's best café.

Our competition offered prizes to local businesses, including tailored packages up to the value of £12,000 for equipment and

marketing as well as advertising on Smooth or Heart Radio to help them to promote their business across the region.

As the nation looks to rebuild and kickstart the economy, the railway will be a key tool.

We are playing our part through working closely with key stakeholders, such as local businesses and authorities, to help rebuild local economies.



# £1.5m re-painting programme to spruce up stations



Earlier this month, we were delighted to announce that we're spending over £1.5 million on re-painting stations across the network.

The first phase of the programme is already underway, with repainting currently taking place at 10 stations, including the flagship stations of Wimbledon, Portsmouth and Southsea and Basingstoke as well as smaller stations such as Bitterne, Netley and Moreton.

**Alan Penlington, South Western Railway's Customer Experience Director, said:**

"When SWR took over the South Western franchise, we agreed that we would improve and maintain our stations."

"This significant investment in our stations is just one example of how we are honouring this commitment."

"Our stations sit at the heart of the communities we serve and play a key role in providing the quality service our customers rightly expect and deserve. This re-painting programme will smarten up a whole host of our stations and enhance the overall experience of using our network."

The second phase is set to begin at the start of the autumn, which will see another tranche of stations receive a complete re-paint, with both interior and exterior walls receiving a welcome facelift.

## Helping passengers stay connected: boosting train and station Wi-Fi

We all like to stay connected, and we are investing heavily to make sure our customers can rely on a fast and reliable Wi-Fi connection whenever they travel with us by boosting the Wi-Fi and 5G connections onboard our trains and at our stations.

BT have recently completed the upgrade of 104 4G EE cell masts and over the next 18 months will be building an additional 31 – all on sites identified as being crucial to improving passenger Wi-Fi onboard SWR trains. This programme is set to significantly improve connectivity and download speeds for customers using our services.

Our work with BT has also seen improvements at stations too with Wi-Fi now installed and available to customers at all SWR managed

mainline and Island Line stations

On the Isle of Wight, we are also participating in an exciting FirstGroup trial of cutting-edge Rail-5G technology. It is somewhat ironic that the technology of the future is being trialled on some of our oldest trains. FirstGroup fitted the 80-year-old Island Line trains with antennas to trial the technology which is destined to be rolled out on part of the SWR network, creating the world's first ever gigabit railway.

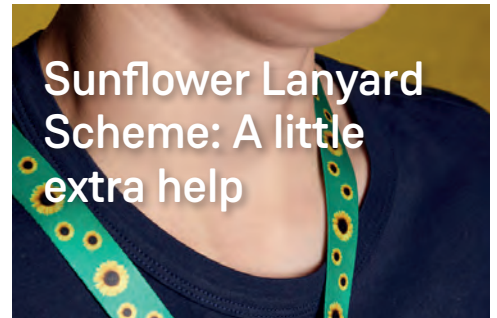


## Sunflower Lanyard Scheme: A little extra help

**In June, we began taking part in a scheme designed to support adults and children with non-visible disabilities.**

The initiative – the Sunflower Lanyard Scheme – helps those who have a non-visible disability to discreetly indicate that they need extra support or a little more time. Lanyards or cards with a simple sunflower design are now available for collection for free at our flagship stations. Customers will not have to disclose their disability in order to obtain a lanyard.

Our station and train staff will be on hand to offer those customers additional support and assistance if they require it.





# Significant milestones reached as programme gathers pace

Our close working relationship with the train's manufacturer, Bombardier, as well as their hard work introducing coronavirus-safe measures at their Derby plant, has been invaluable in ensuring the programme continues during the crisis.

The arrival of the first two Class 701 trains has allowed us to begin the process of certifying the train for passenger usage, as well as kickstart crew training programmes. These developments are crucial to ensuring our new fleet is reliable (including the new onboard features) as well as helping prepare our colleagues ahead of the first train being introduced later this year.

Eventually, the full fleet of 90 new (60 x 10-car and 30 x 5-car) Class 701 trains will arrive on the network to transform the customer experience and improve performance for the benefit of our suburban passengers.



Neil Drury, South Western Railway's Engineering Director

Whilst we have reached important milestones, introducing a fleet of this size is a complicated process, even more so during a pandemic. Over the coming months, the Class 701 programme will continue to gather pace and we'll be working hard behind the scenes so our passengers can benefit from a step-change in the customer experience and performance.

More information can be found here: <https://bit.ly/Class701Trains>



## New trains kick-off crucial testing and training programmes

Two trains from our new Class 701 fleet arrived on the network earlier this summer, marking an important milestone in improving our railway.

The first train arrived at Eastleigh in June which meant that the train's manufacturer, Bombardier, could complete vital signal testing as part of a submission to the Office for Rail and Road to certify the train for passenger usage.

Wimbledon depot will eventually become the new maintenance home for the entire Class 701 fleet, so the arrival of the second train at the depot in July was an opportunity to begin reskilling colleagues in preparation for the next generation of trains, as well as start our driver training programme.

As Neil says:

**"The arrival of the train at Wimbledon allows us to prepare our drivers, maintenance staff and other colleagues for a step-change in service performance, and ensure important components which define the experience of travelling on these new trains are ready before the fleet's eventual introduction."**

Every aspect of the Class 701 needs to be put through its paces before passengers step aboard, and we begin real-world testing of the Class 701s on the Reading line in August - the route where they will first enter service.



# Birth of a new depot - Feltham takes shape



Transforming services for passengers means significant investment not only in new trains, but in infrastructure too. The £60m investment in a new depot on the old marshalling yard at Feltham in South West London is part of our commitment to improving passenger experience.

Feltham reached a significant milestone in May as preparatory works, which included vital new cabling and 220m of track connections, commenced to connect the depot to the mainline. While this work is set to continue over the summer period in readiness for the new

trains later this year, other aspects of the project are also due to make big strides over the coming months.

August is set to see the arrival and construction of modular office accommodation to provide drivers and guards, as well as the train presentation teams who will clean and maintain the trains, with modern facilities. Specialist servicing and train washing equipment will also be installed on site over the coming months to help keep the trains looking good.

The end of the summer will also see the installation of the third rail, an important step in helping prepare the depot ahead of the arrival of the first train.

Once fully operational in 2021, ten 10-car Class 701 trains will be stabled at Feltham Depot.

Keep up to date with the latest developments from the depot by downloading the VolkerFitzpatrick's community app from the Google and Apple app stores.



## New Class 701s - comfortable, connected and better performance

**Our massive investment in the new Class 701 fleet will see passengers travel more comfortably and stay connected.**

Passengers will benefit from 2 by 2 seating, dedicated accessible space for wheelchair users, multi-use space for bicycles, prams and luggage, as well as onboard Wi-Fi. Once the entire fleet is rolled out, every train on the suburban network will have fully accessible toilets for the first time.

Transforming the suburban network also means delivering better performance, a key driver for passenger satisfaction. New improvements, such as wider doors, live passenger loading information, as well as new methods of dispatch, will mean



more people getting where they need to be on time as station dwell times are reduced and trains loaded more efficiently.

## Welcoming in the new, saying goodbye to the old

**As passengers welcome the arrival of the first Class 701s into service later this year, we'll have to start saying goodbye to the current fleet operating on the suburban network.**

All our Class 455, 456, 458 and 707 trains will eventually be replaced by the new trains following a phased introduction over the next 18 months/ two years.

These trains currently offer a 'mixed-bag' of services for our passengers. One simple benefit from operating a single fleet is a consistently higher standard of quality, onboard features and reliability across the entire suburban network – something we believe passengers should expect in this modern era of train travel.





In partnership with Porterbrook, and emissions specialist, Eminox, we've completed a revolutionary trial of new technology which successfully reduces harmful emissions from mid-life diesel trains.

Fitted to the exhaust of a Class 159 train in full passenger service, Eminox's EMxS5 emissions reduction system delivered immediate, real-world reductions in harmful pollution of nitrous oxides (NOx) by over 80% and hydrocarbons by more than 90%.

Rail Minister Chris Heaton-Harris said:

**"The success of this trial in reducing harmful emissions underlines the importance of the First of a Kind competition, which funds pioneering projects to support better, more environmentally friendly rail journeys."**

Our Engineering Director, Neil Drury, said:

**"We're rising to the challenge of tackling climate change by developing innovative technology that minimises the impact of air pollution from diesels trains on passengers and the communities we serve."**

Significantly reducing these harmful pollutants, which cause long-term damage to the environment and people's health, could enable mid-life diesel trains to closely match strict modern emissions standards for non-road machinery. Moreover, retro-fitting existing diesel fleets could offer more immediate air quality benefits in the short-term compared to building bi-mode trains or electrification.

The technology is the first successful transfer of proven emissions reduction technology in to a rail environment and was supported by InnovateUK's first-of-a-kind funding ('Foak2').

## Compensating customers affected by industrial action

Earlier this year we launched our compensation scheme for customers affected by last December's industrial action.

Despite the initial delay from the impact of Covid-19, we are pleased to say phase one of the scheme has already paid out £2.8m in compensation to nearly 35,000 customers we proactively contacted.

Phase two has now opened up for customers who travelled with us during this disruption but who have not already been contacted to check their eligibility for compensation.

Of those customers who have received refunds, more than 90% were able to have their claims processed automatically by simply clicking an online link we sent them.

The scheme is over and above any Delay Repay compensation claimed at the time. Claims can be lodged until 13 September 2020.

Further details of the scheme can be found here: <https://bit.ly/D>

## Transforming Island Line

**There have been many challenges this year due to COVID-19, but preparations are well underway to deliver the £26 million investment programme on the Island Line.**

Announced by the Department for Transport in September 2019, and supported by £1m investment from Solent Local Enterprise Partnership and the Isle of Wight Council, the programme will transform rail services for customers on the Island.

Over a period of two weekends in August, works will take place at key locations along the route to accommodate the testing of the new Class 484s trains and allow for crew training.

We are also preparing a schedule of works so a new passing loop at Brading can be constructed, and we're installing Wi-Fi at every station as well as number of new ticket vending machines.

We're currently in talks with Network Rail about upgrading the line's sub stations, which help provide power to the trains, and carrying out strengthening and stabilisation works on Ryde Pierhead.

The new trains are currently being constructed by Vivarail.





## SWR shortlisted in five categories for industry 'Oscars'

**We are immensely proud that SWR staff have been shortlisted for the 'rail industry's Oscars'.**

We submitted a number of entries to the National Rail Awards 2020, and five have made it through to the shortlisting stage.



*Susan Fishwick, centre, with colleagues and students from the Prince's Trust*

These are:

**Susan Fishwick:** Helping vulnerable young people achieve their potential (Outstanding Personal Contribution category). This submission highlighted the brilliant work of Susan Fishwick, who helps to run the Prince's Trust and SWR's 'Get Into' programme. This programme helps young people from disadvantaged backgrounds to enter the rail industry.

**Ryde St John's Depot:** Overcoming the odds on the Island Line (Fleet Excellence category). The team maintaining the 80-year-old trains currently running on the Island Line are widely respected throughout SWR. This small team have learnt brand new skills and embraced innovation and technology to keep the trains – which are nearing well-earned retirement – running for islanders and visitors on the Isle of Wight.

**Assisted Boarding Points:** Transforming accessible travel (Customer Service Excellence category). Our new Assisted Boarding Points scheme also impressed the judges. This pilot allows those customers who require assistance to 'turn up and go', rather than going through the process of pre-booking assistance.

**Trespass and Welfare Officers:** Helping the vulnerable for a safer railway (Safety Achievement category). This joint submission with Network Rail promoted the trailblazing work carried out by our Trespass and Welfare Officers. These officers identify and check the welfare of vulnerable rail users and intervene where necessary to prevent trespass and tragic incidents such as fatalities from occurring.

**Helping passengers to breathe more easily:** Cleaning up diesel trains (Sustainable Business Award category). We recently completed our trial of a new emissions system in partnership with Porterbrook and emissions specialist Eminox (see page 8).

## National Rail Passenger Survey results

Results from Transport Focus' Spring 2020 wave of the NRPS were released in early July, revealing a satisfaction score of 75%.

Punctuality and reliability are the biggest drivers of satisfaction and this research was carried out during a particularly challenging time for our customers: a month-long strike by the RMT in December, two months dominated by severe weather and a major freight train derailment which affected the network for several days.

Whilst we are disappointed with the results, hard work continues behind the scenes to improve services for our passengers. Headway

is being made to improve performance as we work closely with Network Rail, and despite the global impact of coronavirus, we've welcomed the first of our new £1 billion suburban trains for testing which offer a significant opportunity to improve performance on our busiest routes.

We're also investing in our stations with a £1.5 million repainting programme and new cycle facilities, benches and waiting shelters; as well as investing in Wi-Fi for our trains across all our stations.

## Our online Stakeholder Survey 2020

In September we will be once again inviting you to take part in our annual stakeholder survey.

Your views are invaluable, and the survey helps us develop our plans for the following year, so please take a few minutes to complete it and help us improve how we interact with you.

**South Western**  
**Railway**

## Get in touch

If you have any questions or queries about SWR, please contact our stakeholder team:

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