The Train at Platform 1

The Friends of Honiton Station Newsletter 78 - September 2026

Welcome to the September newsletter. We are all having to get used to the temporary timetable, and the impact it is having on how we organise journeys, whether locally into Exeter or further afield. As ever, our wonderful station staff have done a great job helping passengers get used to the change, and to dealing with those who arrived in the first few days for non-existent trains, largely because they had purchased tickets in advance from ticketing websites or from other train operators. We will now watch with interest what happens as Exeter College students return.

Photograph Credit: SWR

Temporary Timetable Takes Effect on West of England Line

August 10th saw the introduction of a replacement timetable for trains serving Honiton. While Salisbury to Waterloo services continued to operate every half hour, and there was an hourly service between Yeovil Junction and the capital, the western arm of the line, between Yeovil Junction and Exeter was once again cut to only one train every two hours.

As we reported last month, at least journey times from Honiton to Waterloo were only around thirty minutes longer than normal, rather than over an hour as we experienced last year. Partly this was because the speed limit on some sections of line affected by Soil Moisture Deficit was set at 50 miles per hour, rather than the 40 mph suffered last year. Hopefully, as we all learn more about the impact of SMD on track beds, safe line speeds in these kinds of conditions may be further re-considered (However, this may be impacted by the fallout from recent derailments. See below).

At this stage, it is uncertain how long the replacement timetable will need to be in force. It would be safe to imagine that it may continue until the middle of November, as we experienced last year, provided that the Autumn rains come on time.

From September 1st, the original temporary timetable has been adjusted slightly, with the breakfast-time trains in both directions now leaving Honiton at 0812.

Extensive discussions had taken place between SWR and Exeter College about getting students to and from College. As last year, there will be also be special buses to supplement the trains. The schedule is below. Students from Axminster and Honiton will be expected to use the 0812 train rather than a bus in order to arrive for 9 o'clock classes.

Service	**Calling points**
0742 Feniton to Exeter St Davids	Whimple (0802), Cranbrook (0812), Pinhoe (0820), Exeter Central (0834), and Exeter St David's (0839)
0836 Axminster to Exeter St Davids	Honiton (0856), Exeter Central (0940), and Exeter St David's (0945)
1645 Exeter St Davids to Axminster	Exeter Central (1658), Honiton (1748), and Axminster (1808)
1649 Exeter St Davids to Feniton	Exeter Central (1702), Pinhoe (1722), Cranbrook (1732), Whimple (1742), and Feniton (1757)

Our colleagues at the Salisbury to Exeter Rail Users Group (SERUG) have continued to talk with SWR, both about the impact both of the temporary timetable, and the ongoing issue of short-formed trains. They have continually pressed for a temporary Axminster/Honiton to Exeter shuttle. SERUG members received an excellent briefing letter from SWR's Olly Rogers about these issues.

Thankfully, in the first few days of the replacement timetable, SWR were able to operate most services with six-carriage trains. However, there was one very full five-carriage train on Friday August 14th, and on the Saturday following that passengers were turned away at Axminster from a heavily-overloaded 3-carriage train.

Engineering Report for September and October (updated)

Saturday 12th and Sunday 13th September

The lines between Templecombe and Crewkerne will be closed all weekend due to maintenance work.

London Waterloo to Exeter St Davids services will terminate at Templecombe.

Buses will run between Templecombe and Crewkerne (non-stop).

Buses will also run between Templecombe, Sherborne, Yeovil Junction and Crewkerne.

A revised service will run between Crewkerne and Exeter St Davids.

Saturday 19th and Sunday 20th September

The lines in the New Malden area will be closed all weekend due to maintenance work.

London Waterloo to Exeter St Davids services will be revised, with some services starting from Basingstoke on Sunday. For further details of these changes, see SWR's website.

Saturday 10th and Sunday 11th October

The lines in the Salisbury area will be closed all weekend due to maintenance work.

Great Western Railway services will also be affected by this work. Please see their publicity for more information.

Saturday

London Waterloo to Exeter services will start from Gillingham.

Buses will run between Andover and Gillingham via Salisbury.

Sunday

London Waterloo to Exeter services will start from Gillingham.

Additional services will run between London Waterloo and Basingstoke.

A revised service will run between Basingstoke and Andover.

Buses will run between Basingstoke and Gillingham (non-stop).

Buses will run between Andover and Gillingham via Salisbury.

Sunday 18th October

The lines between Salisbury and Yeovil Junction will be closed all day due to maintenance work.

Great Western Railway services will also be affected by this work. Please see their publicity for more details.

London Waterloo to Exeter St Davids services will terminate at Salisbury.

Buses will run between Salisbury and Yeovil Junction (non-stop).

Buses will run between Salisbury and Yeovil Junction via Gillingham.

A revised service will run between Yeovil Junction and Exeter St Davids.

Sunday 25th October

The lines between Yeovil Junction and Honiton will be closed all day due to maintenance work.

London Waterloo to Exeter St Davids services will terminate at Yeovil Junction.

Buses will run between Yeovil Junction and Honiton.

A revised service will run between Honiton and Exeter St Davids.

Monday October 26th until Sunday November 1st

Planned engineering work was due to be taking place around Honiton Tunnel.

This work appears to have been postponed. There is now no reference to it on SWR's website.

Saturday 31st October and Sunday 1st November

The lines in the Exeter area will be closed all weekend due to maintenance work.

Saturday

London Waterloo to Exeter St Davids services will terminate at Exeter Central.

Buses will run between Exeter Central and Exeter St Davids.

Sunday

London Waterloo to Exeter St Davids services will terminate at Yeovil Junction.

Buses will run between Yeovil Junction and Exeter St Davids.

South Western Railway Launches Crackdown on ‘Short-Faring’

While SWR claim that total fare evasion on their network has been cut by more than two-thirds since 2017, they recently updated stakeholders on the efforts they are making to tackle what is known as ‘short-faring’, where people deliberately only buy a ticket for a short part of the journey rather than the correct fare for the full distance travelled.

This work sits alongside SWR’s continued participation in the Channel 5 series ‘At War with the Law’, the third season of which premiered in August.

SWR estimates that up to 95% of barcode tickets between Vauxhall and London Waterloo station are used fraudulently, creating a risk of around £1 million in lost revenue. Results from a new data-led trial launched in June 2026 has already recovered £45,000 in the first four weeks and has identified over 150 short-faring offences compared with seven during the same period last year.

This data-led approach targets one of the biggest challenges facing the railway and forms part of SWR’s wider revenue protection strategy, helping to recover millions that can be reinvested into the railway.

Using operational, retail and customer data to target fraud more effectively, SWR has identified fare evasion patterns, launched targeted enforcement activity and responded quickly to emerging hotspots, with fare evasion down a further 11% over the past year.

Across the SWR and Network Rail Wessex network, around 172 million journeys are made each year. While the great majority of customers pay the correct fare, **around 6.5 million journeys are made without a valid ticket, costing SWR close to £40 million a year,** money that could be reinvested to deliver the best possible service and value for money. According to the Rail Delivery Group, **this figure rises to close to £400 million a year** for the whole of the rail industry.

SWR launched a targeted trial in June 2026 at London Waterloo, a hotspot with high numbers of persistent ticket misuse. The early results have been significant. Since the launch, revenue protection teams have identified 153 short-faring offences.

Early data also indicates that around one-third of those previously identified as short-faring on this route are now purchasing the correct ticket for their journey.

The trial has also shown how quickly some fare dodgers adapt their tactics, with some attempting to purchase barcode tickets from alternative SWR London stations instead. Following the trial, one location saw an 89% increase in barcode tickets compared with the same period last year, highlighting how data-led monitoring is helping identify and respond to emerging patterns of fare evasion.

Recent short-fare case studies include:

- A customer who owed more than £11,000 after repeatedly travelling from Hampshire to London without purchasing the correct ticket over four years;

- A short-faring customer who evaded £20,000 over three years travelling between Surrey and London in addition to fraudulently using a 16-17 railcard.

Matthew Winnie, South Western Railway & Network Rail Wessex Chief Customer and Commercial Officer, said:

"The overwhelming majority of our customers pay the correct fare. However, there's growing evidence of some people deliberately exploiting the system - a criminal offence that deprives the railway of hundreds of millions of pounds each year.

"We know our customers don't like seeing blatant fare evasion, whether that's tailgating through ticket gates or simply travelling without a ticket. But we're also tackling the less visible forms of fare fraud, including short-faring and misuse of e-tickets.

"Every fare avoided is money that can't be reinvested into improving the railway and delivering the best possible service. We have a responsibility to protect revenue and our specially trained teams work around the clock to check tickets on stations and trains to improve fairness for the millions of customers who do the right thing."

Landmark Day for West Devon as Okehampton Interchange Opens

Okehampton Interchange station opened ahead of passenger services starting on Saturday 1st August. The new fully accessible station offers rail, bus, cycling and park-and-ride connections for West Devon. Improved connectivity is expected to support economic growth across the region.

A major milestone for the region was marked with the official opening ceremony of the station, ahead of full passenger services starting. See photograph below from GWR.

Okehampton Interchange is the newest addition to the Dartmoor Line, providing improved access to rail services connecting communities in West Devon, Torridge and North Cornwall with Exeter and destinations across the wider rail network.

The station complements the existing Okehampton Station and builds on strong community backing for the reopening of the Dartmoor Line, which saw the return of daily passenger services in 2021, more than 50 years after regular services were withdrawn. Passenger demand far exceeded projections, achieving over half a million journeys within the first two years of operation.

Designed to support integrated and sustainable journeys, the new station features a 200-space car park, sheltered cycle storage and a covered bus interchange, with electric vehicle charging points coming soon. Step-free access is provided throughout via ramps, lifts and a footbridge.

Photographs: GWR

Okehampton Interchange is an £18 million investment made possible through £13.5m of UK Government funding following a successful bid by West Devon Borough Council with support from Devon County Council on the business case. Both authorities have provided match funding.

The project has brought together a number of partners, with Network Rail overseeing delivery of the station through their contractor Octavius. Devon County Council has led the delivery of walking, cycling and bus facilities on Hameldown Road, constructed by Kennford Tarmacadam, and the environmental work through its consultants WSP.

The station is also expected to deliver significant economic benefits. Research shows railway stations across the South West could support up to 238,000 jobs and contribute £14.25 billion to the economy by 2035.

Rail Minister, Lord Peter Hendy, said:

“The opening of Okehampton Interchange marks a major step forward for transport in the South West. Backed by £13.5 million of Government investment, this fully accessible new station will make it easier for people to get to work, education and leisure, while supporting jobs, homes and economic growth across west Devon.

“It's a great example of the joined-up, locally focused railway we want to see under Great British Railways, bringing together rail, bus, cycling and park-and-ride connections so passengers get better journeys and communities can thrive.”

Network Rail and GWR Route Strategy Director, Joanna Grew, said:

“It's fantastic to see Okehampton Interchange open and ready to welcome its first passengers. The Dartmoor Line has already made a real difference since services returned in 2021, and this new station is another important step in making rail travel easier and more accessible for all across the region.”

“We're incredibly proud of what has been achieved through close partnership working and excited to see the difference this station will make for local people, businesses and visitors alike.”

Commenting on the opening, Devon County Council Cabinet Member for Climate Change and Biodiversity, Councillor Jacqui Hodgson, said:

“The opening of Okehampton Interchange is a proud moment for everyone who has worked so hard to deliver this new station, and to do so so soon after the successful reopening of the Dartmoor Line.

"With convenient access from the A30 and strong bus connections, the station will make rail travel more accessible for communities across a wider catchment area, while helping to ease traffic pressures in Okehampton.

“Local residents will also benefit from attractive walking and cycling links, making it easier to choose sustainable ways to travel.”

Blackmore Vale CRP Goes Coaster to Coaster This Summer

Celebrating 10 years of people and railways working together achieving greater community involvement in stations and locations, the Blackmore Vale Community Rail Partnership ran another successful summer activity. This follows last year’s ‘Postcards from First Class Destinations’

Passengers were encouraged to get out and about across the region and win prizes too. Travellers could have fun collecting celebratory coasters. There were 91 different ones to collect from Salisbury to Crewkerne and Henstridge, Stalbridge to Spetisbury.

'Coaster to Coaster' was described as: *"A fun activity following treasure trails round some of our great destinations. Travel by train to Salisbury, Tisbury, Gillingham, Templecombe, Sherborne, Yeovil Junction, Yeovil Pen Mill, and Crewkerne."*

Passengers could also cycle, walk or take the bus to destinations on the old Somerset and Dorset Railway line of to Henstridge, Stalbridge, Sturminster Newton, Shillingstone, Stourpaine, Blandford and Spetisbury.

Some locations had more than one coaster to collect. Blackmore Vale teamed have teamed up with Stations, Station Cafes, Pubs, Libraries, Art Galleries, Museums, Garden Centres, Social and Leisure Centres and Community Shops across the region, and not forgetting Salisbury Cathedral.

As for prizes: passengers could collect 8 coasters for a water bottle, 15 for a Meteor power bank charger, and 20 coasters for a rucksack. The prizes were offered on a first come, first served basis.

Passengers just needed to take images of their collected coasters and email the photos with their name and address to the CRP.

West of England Line: A Briefing

This month's "Explainer" comes from South Western Railway. It can now be found of SWR's website, and provides quite a comprehensive picture of where things stand on our line, as seen from the company's perspective. It is well worth making a cup of tea and reading the four-page document right the way through.

The West of England line is an important part of our network that links London with Hampshire, Wiltshire, North Dorset, Somerset and Devon. It serves a total of 21 stations over 120 miles and provides vital connectivity for regional centres such as Salisbury, Yeovil and Exeter, and many local communities in between.

We recognise that the line is different to the other routes on our network in terms of its length, geography and rolling stock, which bring a range of challenges.

West of Salisbury, the predominantly single-track line has only six passing points, which constrains services and makes it harder to recover when we experience disruption.

As we have seen in recent years, the West of England line is also vulnerable to extreme weather and most critically, the trains serving the route are ageing diesel units that are coming to the end of their operational lives.

It can be challenging to operate train services on this line because of the long sections of single track from Salisbury to Exeter, the trains that we use, and the impact that climate change is having. This page provides information on those challenges and what we are doing to tackle each of them, as well as information on some of the other issues we are currently facing.

Unlike most of our network, the 124 miles from Basingstoke to Exeter St Davids is not electrified and we can only use diesel trains. Around 60 miles is single track, which severely constrains the way we operate train services and makes it harder to respond to disruption.

To run an hourly service between London Waterloo and Exeter St Davids, there are only six places for trains to pass each other, and they must reach those places at the right time. Even a minor delay by one train can quickly become a major delay to many others.

One of the biggest challenges we face is climate change. As we have seen in recent years, the West of England line is particularly vulnerable to the very hot temperatures that we are seeing much more frequently.

The clay embankments that the line is built upon dry out when we face extreme temperatures and a lack of rain, leading to Soil Moisture Deficit, which forces our trains to travel at slower speeds. In late July, following several heatwaves and the declaration of a drought, we announced a temporary timetable to limit disruption and delays while providing you with a safe and reliable service.

Since we experienced Soil Moisture Deficit in 2025, we have carried out extensive work to correct track levels, installed 5,000 tonnes of new ballast and removed over 200 dead and diseased trees that can further destabilise embankments. This has allowed us to reduce journey times in our amended timetable by around 30 minutes compared to last year.

We are also working with the University of Southampton's National Infrastructure Laboratory to develop longer-term measures that will improve the West of England line's resilience to the effects of climate change and extreme weather.

The Class 158 and 159 trains that serve the West of England line were designed in the late 1980s and have served our network for nearly 40 years.

We are developing longer-term plans to replace the fleet but this will take time, and our plans will need to align with the national rolling stock strategy being developed for Great British Railways, which is due to be published soon.

In the meantime, we are carrying out a major overhaul to improve the fleet's reliability and deliver real upgrades to your on-board experience.

Our Class 158 and Class 159 refresh programme will deliver key improvements for our customers, including:

- At-seat power throughout Standard Class for the first time (above-table 3-pin and USB sockets);
- Improved on-board information systems;
- A refreshed interior including a full repaint, new panels, standardised tables and updated seat covers;
- An improved First Class experience with new curtains and renewed tables;
- Work on mechanical systems such as doors, toilets and air conditioning units;
- Roofs painted in lighter colours to protect against high temperatures from direct sunlight
- The photographs (right) show the first train being prepared for its updated livery along with the newly refurbished seats in Standard Class and First Class.

While refurbishment work has started it will take several years for the full fleet of trains to go through the programme.

Because we must balance this work with having enough trains in service, some trains will not be fully refurbished immediately and will have further improvements made at a later date.

Our Class 158 and Class 159 trains have required additional maintenance in recent months, which has affected their availability.

We, and other UK operators of similar trains, have experienced problems with engine parts and wheelsets. Defects and failures that would typically be expected later in their service life are happening much sooner.

We are having to remove trains from service until they are fixed to keep our services running safely and reliably.

We are working with external suppliers to resolve problems with our engines, but there are some challenges to sourcing replacement wheelsets, as our suppliers deal with the impact of global supply chain delays. There are also only a limited number of suppliers for some of the key parts that we need due to the age of the fleet.

When fewer trains than normal are available we make every effort to prevent services from being cancelled, however this can mean that trains run with fewer carriages than normal. We know this can make our services much busier than normal.

We are working with the industry to identify additional rolling stock units that could operate on the route and relieve pressure on our constrained fleet.

We know that when trains run with fewer carriages than usual it can make our services much busier than normal, and we are sorry if you have experienced any discomfort as a result.

The air conditioning systems on our Class 158 and Class 159 trains were designed around 40 years ago, before the extreme weather that we are seeing now. As a result, very high temperatures like we have seen in the recent heatwaves can reduce their effectiveness or prevent them from working altogether.

While we will make improvements as part of our refurbishment programme, we cannot change the systems' fundamental design capability. Instead, we are making every effort to ensure these systems work to the best of their abilities through a range of measures, such as consistent maintenance, ensuring our colleagues know how to deal with any problems that might occur, and by keeping doors and blinds closed.

When the air conditioning systems are not working, we also aim to provide bottled water and open windows. We are sorry for any uncomfortable conditions you may have experienced when travelling on these trains in hot weather.

We are developing a long-term plan to modernise the West of England line, planning train services, the trains we use, and infrastructure modernisation, together in a 'whole system' approach that could include additional sections of double track to improve performance and resilience, and some additional services.

We are working closely with local stakeholders to refine the options, review potential third-party funding opportunities and enhance the various elements' business cases.

We have developed a wide range of options and are carefully analysing each. The options with the strongest case - considering affordability, growth, decarbonisation, economic value and reliability - will be taken forward for further development in conjunction with the Department for Transport.

Because the line serves a diverse range of communities and needs, there will need to be consensus amongst stakeholders about the options for further development.

Alongside this we are continuing to invest in the maintenance of the line which includes provisional plans to replace signalling in the Salisbury area within the next 10 years.

We have a rolling programme of station improvements, from re-painting stations to installing new facilities and customer information systems, and are working with local stakeholders to improve onward connections and accessibility.

In 2025, alongside Wiltshire Council, we unveiled the newly remodelled forecourt at Salisbury, our flagship station on the West of England line and a key interchange with services to Bristol, Bath, Southampton and Portsmouth.

As part of a £5.5 million investment from the Future High Streets fund, the front of the station was transformed through extensive landscaping with new trees and shrubs, stylish street furniture and intuitive wayfinding, to create a more welcoming, accessible, and vibrant gateway to the historic cathedral city for visitors and residents.

One of the major benefits has been the improved access for buses to the station alongside customer facilities including waiting shelters and real time information screens. This has led to new bus services at the station, and more are planned.

Also at Salisbury, we have recently refurbished the customer toilets on platform 4, while in the booking hall we have opened a new Gourmet Coffee shop. We understand our customers and stakeholders' views on catering, which is why we are working closely with local businesses to improve options at our stations.

The operator of the successful Railway Kitchen at Axminster has recently opened a branch at Honiton, with extended opening hours and an attractive range of food and drink. In the longer term, we are also looking carefully at the feasibility of on-board catering.

Further down the line we have repainted Gillingham, Honiton and Feniton stations, repainted the platform canopy at Axminster, and refurbished the waiting rooms at Gillingham and Feniton.

We know how important it is to provide clear, easy to understand and easy to access information at our stations, which is why we have installed new customer information systems at four of our stations recently. New customer information systems can be found in the booking hall and on platforms 2 and 3 at Salisbury, while at Honiton, Axminster and Yeovil Junction, we have installed new, interactive information totems.

In September 2025 we worked with Wiltshire Council and GWR to introduce a new on-demand bus service that connects Gillingham, Tisbury and Warminster stations to locations in South West Wiltshire including major attractions such as Stourhead (National Trust), Old Wardour Castle (English Heritage) and Longleat.

Axminster and Honiton are two of the key interchange points of a bus and rail integration programme we are developing on the Jurassic Coast. The comprehensive programme will include improved ticketing, new bus services and improved information, alongside wide-ranging promotional activity such as social media and an upgraded website.

As part of the Department for Transport's Access for All programme, we are working with Somerset Council and other local partners on a detailed design for an accessible footbridge at Yeovil Junction.The design is expected to be complete by the end of Autumn 2027 and, if our proposal to the Department of Transport is successful, the scheme will progress to deliver step-free access at the station.

An accessible gate has also been installed at Feniton.

Investigation Launched into Lewes Derailment as Heatwaves Continue

A major investigation was launched into the cause of a train derailment near Lewes in East Sussex on Thursday August 13th, which left two passengers seriously injured and a total of 20 people in hospital.

The Southern train was travelling from London Victoria to Eastbourne when it came off the tracks just north of Lewes station tunnel on Thursday afternoon. Three carriages derailed and overturned, leaving dozens of passengers trapped. Around 150 people had been on board at the time.

Network Rail said the 14:24 BST Southern service from London Victoria to Eastbourne came off the tracks close to Lewes railway station, shortly before 16:00 BST. Photographs from the scene showed people standing on top of overturned carriages, with passengers describing pandemonium on board and the sound of screaming.

Photograph: Network Rail

British Transport Police Chief Superintendent Dominique Ioannou said in a press briefing on Thursday night that a number of passengers were initially trapped but were all safely evacuated from the train. She added that, while two people sustained serious injuries, a further 18 suffered less serious injuries.

"The train started rocking violently and then I remember clocking eyes with this guy and then there was a lot of screaming," passenger Rachel Heath was reported as saying. *"It felt like we flew in the air and the carriage landed on its side and it slid. I felt like it was going to completely flip over. There was a mum who was bleeding from her mouth and a dad and his son who had cuts. It was like a movie."*

Lucy McAuliffe, Network Rail's Sussex Route Director said:

"Firstly I am shocked and saddened by what's happened today. My immediate thoughts and that of our teams are with the injured, their family and friends and with all those who have been caught up and affected by this incident.

"I understand that people will have lots of questions about what has happened today. I'd like to reassure everyone that we are working closely with the Rail Accident Investigation Branch, who are on site to establish exactly what's happened. At the moment, it would be inappropriate to comment as to the cause of this incident, but more information will be provided as soon as we can.

"I'd like to thank the emergency services and the wider railway family for their professionalism and swift response today.

John Whitehurst, CEO of GTR which operates Southern Rail, added:

"I am deeply saddened by what has happened today and my thoughts are with everyone who has been affected, especially those who have been injured, along with their families, friends and loved ones.

Rail commentator Christian Wolmar said such incidents are *"extremely rare".*

"There are special conditions today," he said, *"which may well have contributed to this accident, given that the temperatures of the rails get very hot in these conditions. There have been warnings before about rails possibly beginning to buckle, and that may well be the cause of this incident."*

Sadly, such incidents proved less rare than normal, when only twenty-four hours later, railway services were plunged into more chaos when a Greater Anglia train derailed in Essex. The service from Southend Victoria to London Liverpool Street came off the tracks in Wickford on Friday afternoon.

More than 60 passengers were on board the commuter-line train but nobody was injured and it remained upright, according to investigators and the East of England Ambulance Service.

Martin Frobisher, of Network Rail, said the summer's hot weather had *"presented exceptional challenges to the railway."*

Martin, who is Group Safety And Engineering Director, later issued a statement on behalf of Network Rail regarding both incidents. He said:

"We are currently responding to a derailment incident near Wickford station in Essex, and we are working quickly to understand the situation and to provide assistance where needed. Two carriages have derailed but remained fully upright, and there are no significant injuries reported.

"I appreciate the public will be concerned at the news of two derailments of passenger trains over a short period of time, but I want to reassure them that Britain's railways still rank among the safest in the world, and that safety is always our first consideration on the railway.

"Our thoughts remain with everyone affected by yesterday's significant incident at Lewes. I want to thank the teams from across the rail industry and emergency services who have been working around the clock to provide assistance and support to those who need it, as well as the response from the local community.

"The Rail Accident Investigation Branch is conducting an investigation into the derailment at Lewes, and has investigators on scene at the Wickford incident. We would ask people to avoid speculating on the cause of any incidents until further information is available. We will also conduct our own internal investigations, in which we will look at all possible causes and factors.

"The unprecedented hot and dry weather that we have experienced this summer has presented exceptional challenges to the railway. In response, we have taken several additional proactive steps to manage and mitigate the impact on the railway, including closely monitoring the temperature of tracks, implementing speed restrictions where it is appropriate to do so, and planning track renewals around high temperatures.

The Rail Accident Investigation Branch published its interim report on the derailment at Lewes August 19th. They report that the accident took place on Network Rail's East Coastway line, between Cooksbridge station and Lewes Tunnel.

Rear-facing CCTV image from a train which passed the location of the accident at about 14:04 on the afternoon of 13th August. The irregularity is visible adjacent to the white ballast bags. (Photograph above provided to RAIB by Greater Thameslink Railway).

The report states:

Train 1F34 was formed of two class 387 electric multiple units (EMUs) coupled together, each consisting of four vehicles. Preliminary analysis of OTDR data obtained from the front vehicle shows that the train was travelling at around 65 mph (105 km/h) as it approached the point of derailment.

Preliminary OTDR data analysis also shows that the driver applied the train's brakes as it passed the point of derailment, and that the train started to decelerate.

Marks observed on the rails near the point of derailment are consistent with the wheels of the derailed rear vehicles having climbed over the rails.

Forward-facing CCTV images from train 1F34 and forward and rearward-facing CCTV images obtained from preceding services using these lines on 13th August show that a track geometry irregularity existed on the immediate approach to the point of derailment, prior to the accident occurring.

There was also evidence of previous track maintenance activity in this area. Following the accident, RAIB has received several reports of rough riding at the location of the derailment from passengers on other trains. RAIB continues to analyse evidence relating to the derailment sequence and the status of the track.

The weather on the day of the accident was hot and sunny, with little wind. The ambient air temperature at the time of the derailment was recorded as being around 27 degrees Celsius by the nearest weather station to the accident (which was at Brighton City Airport).

"The accident took place during a sustained period of hot and dry weather.

"The embankment on which the railway runs at this location is constructed of clay and sits on alluvial/alluvium deposits (consisting of loose clay, silt, sand and gravel). Both are sensitive to variations in water content and may undergo movement as moisture levels change.

"Although, at this stage, there is no evidence to indicate that a significant embankment slip occurred before the accident, there is evidence that some movement had previously taken place.

In a joint statement Lucy McAuliffe, Route Director Sussex, Network Rail, and John Whitehurst, Chief Executive Officer at GTR, which operates Southern, said:

"Following the publication of the Rail Accident Investigation Branch's (RAIB) investigation update, we remain fully committed to supporting the continuing investigation and acting on any lessons that emerge from its findings.

"We are very sorry that this happened on our railway. Our thoughts remain with everyone affected, especially those who were injured and the family and friends of those on board the train.

"We also recognise the ongoing impact the incident has had on customers, local communities and railway colleagues.

"Safety is and will always remain our highest priority. While Britain's railway is one of the safest in the world, when incidents like this occur it is essential that we understand exactly what happened and identify any lessons that can be learned.

"We will carefully consider any recommendations arising from the investigation and work across the industry to implement them, with the shared goal of making an already safe railway even safer for our customers, colleagues and the communities we serve.

"Given the complexity of the issues being examined, it is important that the independent investigation is allowed to reach its conclusions. We will continue to cooperate fully with the RAIB throughout this process."

Castle Cary Station Returned to its Former Glory

Castle Cary station has been transformed by an £835,000 restoration celebrating the history of the Great Western Railway and its early 20th-century heritage.

The station building was officially opened on Monday 17 August by Department for Transport Operator Limited (DFTO) Chair, Sir Andrew Haines. Funded by £560,000 from the Department for Transport and £275,000 from the Railway Heritage Trust, the project has restored many of the station's original features, while making it more accessible and welcoming for customers.

The transformation has seen the station's original entrance reopened, alongside a new accessible ramp providing step-free access. The ticket office has been relocated to improve customer flow and provide a more welcoming space. Historic features including fireplaces, skirting, dado rails and cornices have been uncovered, while new timber furniture and joinery complement the station's early 20th-century character. **(Photograph above from GWR)**

The station also benefits from additional seating with views of the platform, a new digital departure board and upgraded toilet facilities, including an enlarged accessible toilet with baby-changing facilities.

Department for Transport Operator Limited (DFTO) Chair, Sir Andrew Haines, said:

"I'm delighted to have been given the opportunity to open the new and improved Castle Cary station today. It's a great example of how we can provide meaningful benefits to the public – such as through improving accessibility and providing a new digital departure board – while remaining true to the station's iconic heritage. I hope Castle Cary's passengers are pleased with the improvements and enjoy their journeys to and from this unique station."

Great Western Railway Managing Director, Mark Hopwood CBE, added: *"Castle Cary is a wonderful example of how we can celebrate our railway heritage while making our stations work better for today's customers.*

GWR Installs Short-Story Vending Machine at St Davids Station

Great Western Railway has introduced Short-Story Dispensers at key stations across its network, encouraging children to continue reading throughout the summer holidays. At the click of a button, the dispensers print a variety of folklores for free. They share stories from 'Line to Legend Land', a collection of much-loved myths and legends featuring dragons, mermaids, giants and fairies from the South West and Wales. Each story is linked to a statue from the region.

The Short-Story Dispensers can be found at Bristol Temple Meads, Exeter St Davids, Cardiff, London Paddington and Oxford. The tales available from the Customer Lounge on Platform 1 at Exeter are:

- The Mermaid of Zennor, in which a fisherman watches his son fall for a mysterious stranger, eventually finding them living happily beneath the Cornish waves.

- King Arthur's Camelot in which King Arthur, following his destiny, receives the mighty sword Excalibur from the Lady of the Lake to unify Britain from his seat at Cadbury Castle.

- The Miracle Dolphin of Mevagissey, in which a young boy rescues a stranded dolphin named Smiler, sparking a magical friendship that ultimately brings a miraculous return of fish to a struggling Cornish village.

The initiative comes in response to new research commissioned by GWR, which shines a light on the impact the long summer break can have on children's reading habits and development. One in five parents report that their children's reading levels and confidence drop during the summer holidays, without the structure and routine of the school term.

Photograph Credit: GWR

The specially commissioned research suggests that:

- Only half of children read for more than three hours a week, compared to 70% who watch TV, with children spending an average of 4.3 hours per week watching television;

- Half of parents report that, without the daily routine of the classroom, independent reading struggles to compete with the lure of other holiday activities, including TV and mobile phone use;

- Parents report that it takes an average of 3–4 weeks of the autumn term for their child's reading confidence to return to pre-summer levels.

The dispensers follow the launch of Little Libraries across 10 key GWR stations, all aimed at improving children's summer reading habits and making books more accessible to families on the move. The Little Libraries were launched with a special live reading on board a train travelling to Reading, hosted by acclaimed children's author Michael Rosen, bringing the joy of storytelling directly into the journey itself.

Through the new Short-Story Dispensers and Little Libraries, GWR hopes to make reading an easy and enjoyable part of family travel this summer – helping children keep their reading going between the end of term and the return to the classroom in September.

GWR Head of External Communications, Dan Panes, said:

"There's nothing like adventuring by train to a new place, while also discovering new adventures within the words on a page. These Short-Story Dispensers will make the journey as much of an adventure as the destination, giving children the opportunity to explore new landscapes before they've even left the carriage."

Children's author, Michael Rosen, added:

"Whether they are sitting at home or travelling on a train, stories have the power to spark the imagination and transport children to completely new worlds. Stories are children's tickets to new adventures and it's vital that they keep exploring during the summer months.

GWR's Short-Story Dispensers and Little Libraries are a wonderful, practical way to put stories directly into the hands of young travellers on their journeys this summer."

The story dispensers are moving on to other GWR stations after the school holidays end. And don't forget that Honiton Station has a book swap shelf in the waiting room. Help yourself to a book to read on the train. The shelf includes a small selection of children's books. Please keep donating books for the bookshelf.

And Finally… Hoop Waste Bins: Sorting Your Waste

As we reported last month, there has been much discussion, and some complaint, about the initial roll-out of new hoop waste bins at stations (including at Axminster). In particular, comment focused on the flimsy nature of the plastic bags hanging from the hoops, and the lack of any guard or surround, leaving the bags swinging in the wind and even becoming detached.

We are pleased to say that the concerns of our excellent Station Manager, local station staff and station adopters have been listened to. When the bins were installed on both platforms at Honiton at the end of August, all bins had strong plastic surrounds in place, and the tops look more sturdy. It remains to be seen how easy the bags are for station staff to lift in and out.

The move to separate bins is the result of legislation that was not, it is believed, intended to affect railways. But (let us assume) due to the way it was drafted, and how it is being interpreted, it does!

A spokesperson for SWR said:

"South Western Railway (SWR) is required by 'Simpler Recycling' legislation to segregate waste before it is collected by our waste provider. To meet this obligation, and to maintain our position as an industry leader in recycling, we are rolling out new bin hoops across our network.

"These will include three waste streams:
- *General Waste*
- *Mixed Recycling (dry only)*
- *Food Waste*

"As one of the UK's busiest train operators, SWR serves millions of passengers each year, generating significant amounts of waste at stations, offices, depots, and on trains. By increasing recycling rates, the company can reduce the amount of waste sent to landfill, conserve natural resources, and lower greenhouse gas emissions associated with waste disposal.

"SWR must follow Simpler Recycling because the legislation requires workplaces in England to separate recyclable materials, food waste and residual waste before collection. This improves recycling rates, reduces contamination, supports the circular economy, and helps businesses comply with legal waste management requirements while contributing to national environmental targets.

"Improving recycling also helps SWR meet environmental targets and align with national sustainability goals. Passengers are increasingly concerned about environmental issues and expect transport providers to demonstrate responsible waste management practices. Providing clear recycling facilities encourages customers and staff to dispose of waste correctly, helping to create cleaner stations and a better travel experience.

"By improving recycling, South Western Railway can reduce waste, protect the environment, meet stakeholder expectations, and contribute to a greener future for the communities it serves. This supports the long-term sustainability of rail travel as one of the most environmentally friendly forms of public transport.