The Train at Platform 1

The Friends of Honiton Station Newsletter 80 - November 2026

Welcome to the November newsletter. Another month has gone by, and unfortunately there is still no news on when the timetable will be able to return to normal. With months of low rainfall, it has been next to impossible for Network Rail to carry out sufficient tamping on the track to create the conditions under which speed restrictions can begin to be removed. In this issue of the newsletter, we provide all the information we have, as well as the latest rail news. Thanks also to Dave Tozer for his lovely article and photographs about his recent trip. I hope you enjoy the newsletter.

It's that time of year again when the Rail Head Treatment Train will be a regular seasonal visitor.

November News: Still No Return to Normal Timetable

The temporary timetable operating since early August shows no sign of coming to an end. Continuing dry conditions during September and the beginning of October have meant that SWR's initial plan to return things to normal at the end of October or early November have been scuppered. This is despite some welcome recent rain and some stormy weather.

We have been promised two weeks' notice of the temporary time ending. This will give everyone time to spread the word, but also will allow SWR time to sort out the necessary logistics of returning to the standard timetable including crew and train diagrams. There has been a suggestion that this may now only happen when the winter timetable begins on **December 14th**.

To find out the latest news, and to watch a video message from Lawrence Bowman, SWR's Managing Director, go to: southwesternrailway.com/travelling-with-us/west-of-england-line

Following our request, there is now a warning triangle next to train times of Journey Planner where the original timetable is still shown. We have asked why the old timetable is still shown at all. SWR have explained that they are only able to update details a couple of weeks in advance. A spokesperson said:

"Each week has to be bid separately as part of the short-term planning process via Network Rail and you can only do this so far in advance. This is partly due to the fact that each week can be subtly different, particularly at weekends or when there is something like the GWR diversions in November.

"The team that does this also has to make all the changes for engineering works, football matches and other short-term changes too. When starting out with this timetable we didn't know how long it would need to be in place for so we couldn't set it up for a fixed period."

Shortly after the introduction of the Autumn timetable, SWR announced that until further notice trains from Exeter would no longer stop at Woking. Passengers for this station will need to change at Basingstoke. This will operate initially until the December timetable change, but there has been a report that it could then continue into 2027.

During October, SWR issued a survey about onboard catering. SWR staff were out and about on trains for a week distributing both some food and drink bags and a leaflet asking for customers' help in filling in the survey. We were happy to ask our members to complete it. Catering continues to be one of the top priorities for our colleagues at the Salisbury to Exeter Rail Users Group (SERUG). The intention of the survey was to help gauge what SWR described as *"the extent and nature of the demand to support the development of a business case for the future introduction of a trolley service."*

One issue that did occur last month was the idea of the wider use of skip-stopping in the Autumn timetable. As well as the minor retiming of trains that always takes place at this time of year due to poor track conditions, SWR introduced several skip-stopping patterns on parts of the network.

Although it was **not** introduced due to the temporary timetable that was already in place, it is clear that Crewkerne, Templecombe, Tisbury and, closer to home, Cranbrook would have been affected by this skip-stop plan. I have made clear to SWR my concern about this idea, and the effect it would have had at Cranbrook on promoting long-term passenger growth.

The station car park saw a serious incident last month, when an Exeter College student bus and a car collided, causing damage to the fence at the top of the grass bank. How the crash happened is still under investigation. It is not believed that anyone was hurt.

Separately, we have continued to keep a close eye on traffic congestion in the car park when the 1430 and 1630 trains are due to arrive. Station staff continue to be concerned by the way some people collecting passengers are still parking in a way that causes an obstruction.

With the arrival of Autumn, and slippery rail conditions, we are beginning to see the Rail Head Treatment Train passing through Honiton. It should be noted that this train is continuing more often beyond Honiton to Exeter. In previous years it has usually terminated on the bridge just west of the station, before returning to Totton.

This has always felt like an anomaly, as poor rail conditions in places like Feniton have sometimes caused trains to suffer wheel spin on starting. It is good to see this issue being addressed.

November and December Engineering Report

Saturday 31st October and Sunday 1st November

The lines in the Exeter area and between Yeovil and Exeter will be closed for part of the 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.

Saturday 7th and Sunday 8th November

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

Saturday

London Waterloo to Exeter St Davids services will start from Basingstoke.

Passengers travelling from London Waterloo should travel on services to Guildford to connect with the replacement buses to Basingstoke. Buses will run between Woking, Guildford and Basingstoke.

Sunday

London Waterloo to Exeter St Davids services will be revised and will start from Andover. These services will call additionally at Grateley.

Passengers travelling from London Waterloo should travel on services to Guildford to connect with the replacement buses to Andover.

Buses will run between Woking and Andover via Guildford and Basingstoke.

Saturday 21st and Sunday 22nd November

Due to maintenance work in the Yeovil Junction area, some late night services on Saturday and morning services on Sunday will be cancelled or replaced by buses for all or part of their journey.

Sunday 29th November

The lines in the Tisbury area will be closed all day due to maintenance work.

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

Buses will run between Andover and Gillingham (non-stop). Buses will also run between Salisbury, Tisbury and Gillingham.

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

In addition, the 0946 Yeovil Junction to Salisbury via Westbury service will not run.

Saturday 19th and Sunday 20th December

Due to maintenance work in the Salisbury area, some late evening services on Saturday and some early morning services on Sunday will be cancelled or replaced by buses for all or part of their journey.

Christmas Eve

Services on the SWR network will shut down earlier than normal. Please check SWR's website for details.

Christmas Day and Boxing Day

There will be no services on the SWR network. **See story below about closure of London Paddington over Christmas and New Year.**

Sunday 27th December until New Year's Day (and possibly beyond)

Services will operate to an emended timetable during this period.

On Sunday 27th and Sunday 28th December, some lines in the Queenstown Road area will be closed Sunday 27 and Monday 28 December due to maintenance work. Queenstown Road station will be closed Sunday and Monday and Earlsfield station will be closed on Monday. Please use other nearby stations.

London Waterloo to Exeter St Davids services will be revised. See SWR's website nearer the time for more information, as well as for full details of the Christmas and New Year services.

Rail Industry Launches Crackdown as Trespassing Criminals Cause Delays

Trespassing to obstruct and vandalise the railway caused 9,437 minutes' worth of delays on the South Western network and more than 137 days of delay across Britain's railway network last year. South Western reported the third highest rate of trespass across the industry, with data showing trespass and fatalities account for almost 14% of delays on the route.

Nationally, trespass, cable theft and obstruction caused more than 3,300 hours of delays, making it one of the railway's biggest causes of disruption, with a significant impact on customers, freight, railway colleagues and local communities.

Some trespass incidents can require a substantial industry response and come at a considerable financial cost. Across the industry, vandalism and deliberate obstruction cost over £4 million in delay costs in 2025/26.

South Western Railway had the third highest rate of vandalism and obstruction - which includes deliberately placing items such as debris and even other pieces of track on the railway across Network Rail's 14 routes.

Trespassing on the railway is extremely dangerous. On the South Western network, most trains are powered by an 'always on' electric third rail carrying 750 volts of direct current, which can cause severe, life-changing injuries or death.

Trespassing is also illegal, and the new campaign 'Crime with Consequences', which highlights the serious consequences for offenders, is part of an industry crack down on trespassers committing crime on the railway.

Part of the enhanced collaboration will see improved evidence collection to strengthen prosecutions, as well a greater focus on victim impact statements to help demonstrate the impact of delays caused by railway crime.

Across the network, drones, sensors and smart CCTV are also helping Network Rail and the BTP identify and catch offenders faster and more consistently.

At London Waterloo, South Western is now using an automated drone to tackle trespass, inspect infrastructure faults and reduce disruption.

Operated remotely from Southampton, the drone provides live, high resolution and thermal imagery, allowing incidents to be assessed before teams reach the site. This can reduce the need for colleagues to access the track and help minimise delays.

Tom Desmond, Operations Director for South Western said:

"Trespass is one of the leading causes of disruption on our network, delaying our customers' journeys and costing taxpayers. Every minute of delay has a significant impact on our network.

"This campaign demonstrates the industry's commitment of keeping the railway safe, reliable and running on time. We fully support taking firm action to deter railway crime to keep the railway running safely.

"As part of our plan to deliver more reliable journeys, we're working with partners to reduce these types of incidents and improve our response so that we can keep services running. The launch of the new drones at London Waterloo helps us to respond more quickly, enhance safety and minimise disruption for our customers."

Superintendent Darren Malpas, of British Transport Police, said:

"Cable theft and associated railway crimes like trespass aren't victimless offences. They put lives at risk, cause significant disruption to passengers and freight services, and cost the rail industry millions of pounds every year, which ultimately ends up costing the public more.

"This important campaign highlights both the dangers and consequences of criminal activity on the rail network. Those involved must understand that railway infrastructure is extremely dangerous. Anyone trespassing on the railway or attempting to steal cable risks serious injury or death. Through closer collaboration, improved intelligence, new technology and stronger evidence gathering, we're working tirelessly to identify offenders, bring them to justice and protect the communities and passengers who rely on the railway every day.'

Rail Minister, Lord Hendy, said:

"Trespassing causes delay and frustration for thousands of passengers every year and stops people going about their daily lives. Anyone doing this on the railway is also putting themselves at serious risk of injury or death.

"It is great to see the rail industry come together with British Transport Police to make it absolutely clear that trespassing on the railway is a criminal offence. Make no mistake, offenders will be brought to justice quickly, helping to reduce disruption across the network and keep passengers moving."

My Scottish Weekend - by Dave Tozer

A chance comment by a friend late last year resulted in two interesting trips in September.

The first trip was a day out on the only ocean-going paddle steamer in the world in which we sailed from Torquay to Weymouth and then a short excursion from Weymouth to Lulworth Cove and Durdle Door then back to Weymouth. Coaches were arranged to convey us from Exeter to Torquay and Weymouth to Exeter. It was fairly calm waters until Portland Bill where to convergence of tides made for interesting sailing.

The second trip was courtesy of Locomotive Services Limited HST Pullman 'Lord of the Isles' from Exeter to Inverness on day one. Day two was an out and back trip from Inverness to the Kyle of Lochalsh. We returned home to Exeter on the third day. LSL has built a reputation of quality trips with either First Class or Pullman Class, the difference being that in Pullman class meals are brought to your table, whilst 1st Class you have a box of treats.

Having been discarded by the privatized main operators of HSTs, some of these units have been refurbished. The power cars and the Mark Three coaches being repainted in Nanking Blue. This livery was previously carried by units BR introduced on the Midland and Western Region in the late 1950s/1960s.

For the trip we had a train consisting of two power cars, four coaches and a trailer kitchen first class buffet car, the later marshalled in the middle of the train. The unit had travelled from Crewe the previous day to Goodrington Sidings and stabled until the early hours of the morning of the trip. On the Saturday morning it ran empty to Exeter St David's where it arrived at 0540.

We were greeted by a steward who took us to our seats and placed our cases on the luggage rack. Bang on time we left Exeter at 0605 and by Cowley Bridge Junction we had our first cup of tea. Many more cups of tea were to come over the following hours. We had numerous stops to pick up more passengers until the skirts of Birmingham.

During progress to towards Birmingham we were served with our breakfast and very enjoyable it was. As we went through the Birmingham suburbs we could see the progress on the HS2 project and from this one could see why it is costing so much. A small portion of this money could be used West of Salisbury to make our line more reliable.

We continued along the West Coast mainline to Crewe where a change of driver took place. Quickly we were off again as far as Penrith where we stopped and we were able to get out and stretch our legs. Then it was back on the train to Carlisle where we had another crew change.

During this section of the trip we had a fine lunch served. We continued onwards and then across the border into Scotland. All the while the scenery was changing and it was noticeable how much greener the fields were compared to Devon.

Due to engineering on the Forth Bridge we continued from Carstairs to the outskirts of Glasgow and then headed towards Edinburgh and then North to Perth and here we we another break to stretch our legs. Then it was the last leg of our day to Inverness. At Inverness we arrived on time and we all alighted and headed to our hotel of choice for which we had to make our own arrangements.

On day two we then headed back to Inverness Station for the trip to the Kyle of Lochailsh. The route was not built for high speed and I guess we ambled along at around 50 mph taking in the views of the various Lochs on the way. On reaching Strathcarron early we had an opportunity to disembark and stretch our legs. One could see why we had a shortened HST as the passing points on this single line were not very long.

Following the arrival of an Inverness bound service from the Kyle of Lochailsh it was back on the train to our destination and here we were greeted by a lone piper playing his bagpipes. After a two hour break we headed back to Inverness and a couple of hours to look around.

Day three it was time to head back home with a couple of slight diversions from the route outward.

Praise should be extended to our stewards and one lone stewardess who really looked after all of those travelling. It has to be said it was a very enjoyable experience.

Huge thanks to Dave for this piece. We are always delighted to hear about members' railway adventures.

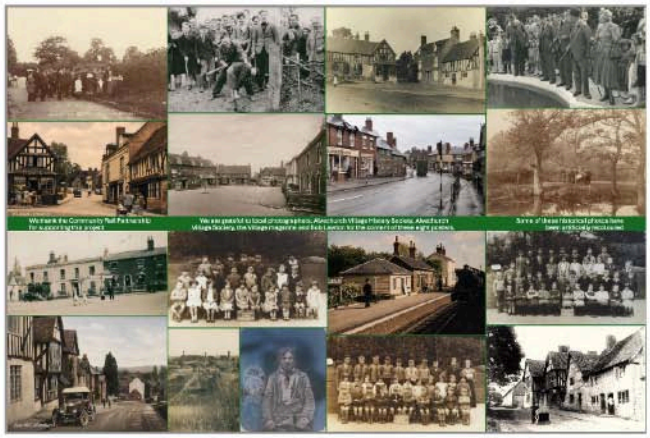
Footbridge Art is a Growing Trend - Thanks to Honiton Friends

We were delighted last month to receive some photographs from the Friends of Alvechurch Station in Worcestershire.

A couple of years ago, they heard about the work we had done with our colleagues and partners, in decorating the footbridge at the station. I offered them some advice and suggestions, and they have now sent us some pictures of the results.

Congratulations to everyone at Alvechurch for the success of their project, which includes the four panels below, which focus on (clockwise):

local landmarks, local community groups, the countryside, and local history.



We have enjoyed spreading the word about Honiton, its station and the work we do to other groups across the SWR network and beyond. One of the great features of Community Rail is how much of a family it is. We all share ideas and experience, and help each other to find ways to turn our ideas into reality. Seeing what Alvechurch has done is just one more example of how groups like ours can work together to make our stations more welcoming spaces to be.

GBR's Opportunity for Positive Change in New Rolling Stock and Infrastructure Strategy

Recently saw the publication a potentially very important document: GBR's Rolling Stock and Infrastructure Strategy.

Therefore, in this month's "Explainer" article below we pick out some of the key sections of this lengthy document, including the Executive Summary and details of its plans for Rolling Stock and for building a coherent plan for investment. It is a long read, so settle in with a cup of tea…

The UK Government's rail reform programme is creating Great British Railways (GBR) as the unified directing mind for track and passenger train operations. The Government's Long Term Rail Strategy (LTRS) will set the long-term direction and expectations for the railway, including meeting customer needs, securing financial sustainability, supporting economic growth, improving connectivity and reducing inequality, and improving environmental sustainability. The Rolling Stock and Infrastructure Strategy ("the RSI Strategy") sets out how GBR will respond to that direction through better long-term decisions about trains, track, traction power, signalling, depots and maintenance.

Trains and the infrastructure that supports them are expensive, interdependent assets with working lives measured in decades. They shape reliability, punctuality, accessibility, capacity, operating cost and environmental performance long after the people who commissioned them have moved on. Yet, under the railway model that has been in place since 1993, decisions have often been taken by different organisations through uncoordinated processes working to varied timescales.

The result is fragmented train fleet procurement decisions often misaligned with required infrastructure, constrained maintenance and depot arrangements and a stop-start work pipeline for suppliers, leading to reduced flexibility and higher costs. For passengers, getting these decisions right means trains that are comfortable and accessible, services that are more reliable, and a railway that provides better value.

The direction set out in the RSI Strategy does not remove the need for individual business cases, funding decisions or engagement with the relevant partners and stakeholders, including passengers, workforce representatives, recognised trade unions, devolved and local government, funders, freight and non-GBR operators and the supply chain. Instead, it provides the common strategic framework within which decisions can be made more consistently.

The RSI Strategy, therefore, establishes both a direction and a different way of acting. It aims to deliver noticeable and enduring improvements for passengers, stronger whole-system value for taxpayers and a more stable basis on which the rail supply chain for the UK can plan and invest in skills, apprenticeships, facilities and innovation, supporting economic growth and opportunity across the country.

The RSI Strategy is GBR's response to these challenges, by unifying train and track to replace fragmented asset decisions with a coherent national approach. It will:

- Put passengers at the centre of train design - including making level boarding a baseline expectation for new fleets, using engagement with passengers and their representatives to shape more accessible, consistent and attractive trains that better meet the needs of passengers, families and communities, encourage greater use of rail and support revenue growth. All decisions will continue to need to be assessed for affordability and value for money.

- Manage train fleets as a national portfolio - structured around a smaller number of fleet families, aligning procurement, refurbishment, life extension, replacement and redeployment with infrastructure and operational needs, while retaining flexibility to reflect different markets and communities.

- Move progressively away from diesel towards electric traction - principally through battery-electric trains with targeted electrification, supporting a more reliable, sustainable and lower carbon railway while considering affordability and value for money and recognising that diesel fleets will remain necessary during the transition.

- Plan trains and infrastructure as a single integrated system - aligning decisions on rolling stock, electrification, traction power, digital signalling, depots and maintenance to improve value, reduce delivery risk, and accelerate benefits for passengers, while making greater use of passenger trains to support infrastructure monitoring and asset management.

- Treat depots, maintenance, materials and logistics as core parts of the system's design - moving towards more condition-based and predictive maintenance to identify issues earlier, helping to improve reliability, reduce disruption, make better use of assets over their full lives and support a safer, more productive railway.

- Act as a stronger and more coordinated national customer - bringing greater consistency to train procurement and securing better whole-life and whole- system value for passengers and taxpayers.

- Take a more strategic approach to train ownership and financing - assessing direct ownership, leasing and other financing arrangements on a case-by-case basis rather than relying on a single financing model, to secure the strongest overall outcomes for passengers and taxpayers .

- Establish a Fleet & Infrastructure Plan (FIP) - creating a more credible, coordinated and deliverable long-term pipeline of rolling stock and enabling infrastructure activity to support planning for funders and delivery partners and provide confidence for suppliers.

A major challenge is posed to GBR by the decision regarding the traction power to replace the diesel engines that have played such a significant role in Britain's railways since the 1950s. Around 4,000 diesel and diesel-hybrid passenger railway vehicles will reach the end of their asset lives over coming decades, creating a significant opportunity to reshape the railway's costs, performance and environmental profile for the subsequent 35 to 40 years.

Many generations of diesel trains have come and gone from Britain's railways since the 1950s. Today, while providing continued flexibility and good service, diesel fleets require more intensive and costly maintenance than electric and battery-electric alternatives. The market for new diesel products has reduced and ageing fleets face increasing obsolescence risks. This is before taking into account the volatile, rising cost of diesel fuel and the risks to supply from international events.

Rail represents a relatively small proportion of transport emissions and already provides a lower-carbon alternative to many forms of transport. However, the binding legal commitment to the UK economy being net zero by 2050 means that any use of diesel traction after that point will require some form of carbon removals with all of the associated costs. GBR will also take seriously its responsibilities on improving local air quality and reducing exposure to diesel emissions, particularly in stations, depots and densely populated areas as well as the totality of emissions in the context of the 2026 Rail Air Quality Policy Statement3 which sets the approach in this field.

For GBR, the challenge is not just in the way diesel replacement is planned and delivered but how to introduce replacement traction at an affordable cost and a deliverable pace which brings the greatest benefits to the most passengers and communities as quickly as possible. That in turn depends on some factors beyond the control of GBR itself, in particular the availability of electric power from the grid.

Existing diesel and diesel-hybrid fleets will therefore continue to play a role on the network for some time. Where the infrastructure, funding or operational conditions needed for replacement traction are not yet in place, GBR will need to make other choices such as to retain, redeploy, refurbish or extend the use of existing fleets to protect service continuity.

This will not alter the long-term traction choice to move away from diesel but recognises that it must be affordable, deliverable and coordinated with the readiness of the wider railway.

Delivering the RSI Strategy requires a step change from legacy arrangements in how GBR makes decisions about major investments and how they are funded and sequenced. As the directing mind for the integrated railway, GBR will take these decisions within the long-term direction established by the LTRS.

Many of the most consequential choices in the railway system, particularly those affecting rolling stock and infrastructure, are long-term, interdependent and difficult to reverse. They determine not only what is delivered but also when benefits are realised, how services perform and how costs are shared between passengers and taxpayers. Too often in the past, these choices have not been sufficiently strategic or holistic.

GBR will establish a more strategic, considered and consistent approach, focused on ensuring that the right choices are made early, that they are arrived at on a whole-system basis and that their assessment makes trade-offs clear and outcomes explicit.

In practice, this will mean GBR making investment decisions, subject to wider governance processes, at the points where they have the greatest influence on long- term outcomes. These are the inflection points at which train fleets approach inevitable replacement, infrastructure requires essential renewal or wider system constraints make significant change necessary. Identifying these clearly and early will allow options to be explored before they become constrained, enabling better alignment between trains, infrastructure and operations, while reducing the need for reactive or short-term remedial interventions.

This strategic approach places a greater emphasis on outcomes. Decisions will be guided by passengers and freight benefits, whole-life and whole-system value, affordability, deliverability, and risk. No single consideration will determine every decision. The purpose of this approach is to make the relevant benefits, costs, constraints and trade-offs explicit so that the best overall outcome can be identified.

Delivering a whole-system programme of train fleet renewal and associated infrastructure will require a combination of public funding using established mechanisms and private capital, where it supports delivery and provides value for money, rather than reliance on a single source. GBR will use the available funding and financing approaches coherently, matching them to the characteristics of different investments and the outcomes they are intended to deliver.

The integrated approach to decision- making and funding that GBR will follow will be closely linked to the development of the FIP. The FIP will provide a forward view of expected activity across rolling stock and infrastructure dependent on those rolling stock choices.

This will allow funding for strategic requirements, dependencies and potential sequencing to be considered as part of Spending Reviews, Funding Period settlements, and from other sources. The FIP will not determine or guarantee investment but will support an iterative process in which the pipeline informs choices and funding settlements. This will help ensure that available funding is directed towards the interventions that deliver the greatest whole-system value and can realistically be delivered.

Photograph credit: SWR

One of the most important decisions facing GBR will be how new trains are owned and financed. Life-expired trains must be replaced or services risk being withdrawn, so GBR must consider the available ownership and financing models early and rigorously rather than allowing established commercial structures to determine the outcome by default. The aim is to identify the best possible commercial outcome for an integrated, publicly owned and system- led GBR. This means considering the possibility of direct GBR ownership.

Direct purchase of trains would represent a significant shift from the approach that has characterised much of the railway since privatisation, whereby the default approach was for trains to be leased from private sector rolling stock companies (ROSCOs) that have invested heavily in expanding and developing fleets.

The ROSCO model has delivered significant benefits including access to private capital, specialist asset management expertise, long-term stewardship of rolling stock assets, and fleet enhancement and modernisation. Public ownership, however, provides greater direct control that could improve flexibility to manage the rolling stock fleet as part of a coordinated national railway system.

In that context, for each new fleet, GBR will assess leasing, direct ownership, and other appropriate financing arrangements on a case-by-case basis. Individual assessments will consider whole-life and whole-system costs and value alongside factors such as deliverability, risk allocation, operational flexibility, and GBR's capability to own and manage the assets effectively. Direct ownership will be pursued where this assessment demonstrates that it offers the strongest overall outcome.

The primary focus of any direct ownership would be on future train fleet procurements rather than existing rolling stock. Existing fleets are expected largely to remain leased and ROSCOs and other financiers will continue to play an important role in supporting them. GBR will, however, manage those arrangements more strategically through a portfolio approach, supporting more coherent decisions on lease extensions, refurbishment, replacement, life extension and redeployment.

Building on the strategic and holistic approach to funding and decision-making described in Chapter 5, GBR will establish the Fleet and Infrastructure Plan(FIP) as the principal internal mechanism for planning and coordinating rolling stock and related infrastructure activity across the integrated railway. The FIP will provide a disciplined, whole-system view of the expected pipeline for trains and the infrastructure needed to support them.

GBR will use the FIP to provide appropriate information to the market on upcoming fleet and related infrastructure requirements. A more credible and coordinated pipeline will not only support better outcomes for passengers and taxpayers, but also provide the rail supply chain for the UK with greater confidence to invest in people, skills, facilities, and innovation here.

The FIP will not imply that every intervention identified has been approved or funded, which will remain subject to consideration of business case, affordability and scheme governance.
Rather, it will translate the direction set out in the RSI Strategy into a coordinated time-phased view of expected rolling stock and related infrastructure activity and will be maintained and refined as evidence, funding and delivery circumstances evolve.

Rolling stock and related infrastructure decisions will be integrated, sequenced and prioritised together to enable the cost-effective delivery of the services that passengers and, where applicable, freight customers need within GBR's available funding and to maximise value across the system. The FIP will align with:

- Passenger train fleet refurbishment, cascade and replacement to support expected levels of demand growth;
- Electrification (discontinuous, partial or full) and power availability, including taking account of the needs of freight operators;
- Depot and stabling capacity;

- Signalling and ETCS deployment;
- Operational and maintenance readiness.

Alignment will work in both directions, with infrastructure planned to enable fleet deployment and rolling stock decisions shaped by infrastructure constraints and opportunities, including aligning replacement and redeployment with electrification, ETCS deployment, traction choices, and delivery timing.

Interventions within the FIP will be assessed through a common whole- system framework to ensure proposals are developed consistently across rolling stock and related infrastructure. Prioritisation will consider value for money, affordability, deliverability, and the expected outcomes for passengers and operations, ensuring that trade-offs are made consciously so that interventions deliver the greatest overall benefit.

A central function of the FIP is to create a smoother and more consistent pipeline of activity, reducing the historic boom and bust in train procurement, refurbishment and infrastructure delivery, thus supporting a more stable flow of work for the supply chain.

This outcome will be achieved through active sequencing across the system, including adjusting the timing of train fleet replacement, using refurbishment and life extension to manage transitions, grouping interventions where this improves value and aligning infrastructure programmes to support continuous delivery.

This approach reflects both delivery considerations and funding constraints. A more even profile of work is required to support supply chain capability and to ensure that expenditure remains manageable within Spending Review cycles and funding periods.

The FIP, therefore, balances the efficiency benefits of a stable pipeline with realistic delivery constraints. It will be refined as delivery performance, market capability, and evidence improve, ensuring that it remains grounded in what can be delivered effectively.

The information GBR provides to the market will support planning, investment and capability-building across the railway industry by providing appropriate visibility of the pipeline while maintaining discipline in decision making. It will also support better option selection and earlier development of interventions before major delivery commitments are made.

The FIP is not intended to be a static, one-off plan but will be maintained and updated as required to reflect new evidence, changes in funding and affordability, delivery capability, emerging system requirements and other relevant developments.

This will allow sequencing to be adjusted, priorities to be refined, and new interventions to be incorporated as circumstances evolve, while maintaining alignment with the overall direction set by the RSI Strategy.

It will reflect how schemes evolve during their development, showing increasing confidence and definition closer to implementation while supporting early feasibility, scheme development and design activity to reduce delivery risk and drive the best possible value for money.

This approach will provide greater flexibility to refine priorities and develop interventions before delivery is committed, reducing the need for reactive tactical solutions, lowering delivery risk and improving the quality of future decisions.

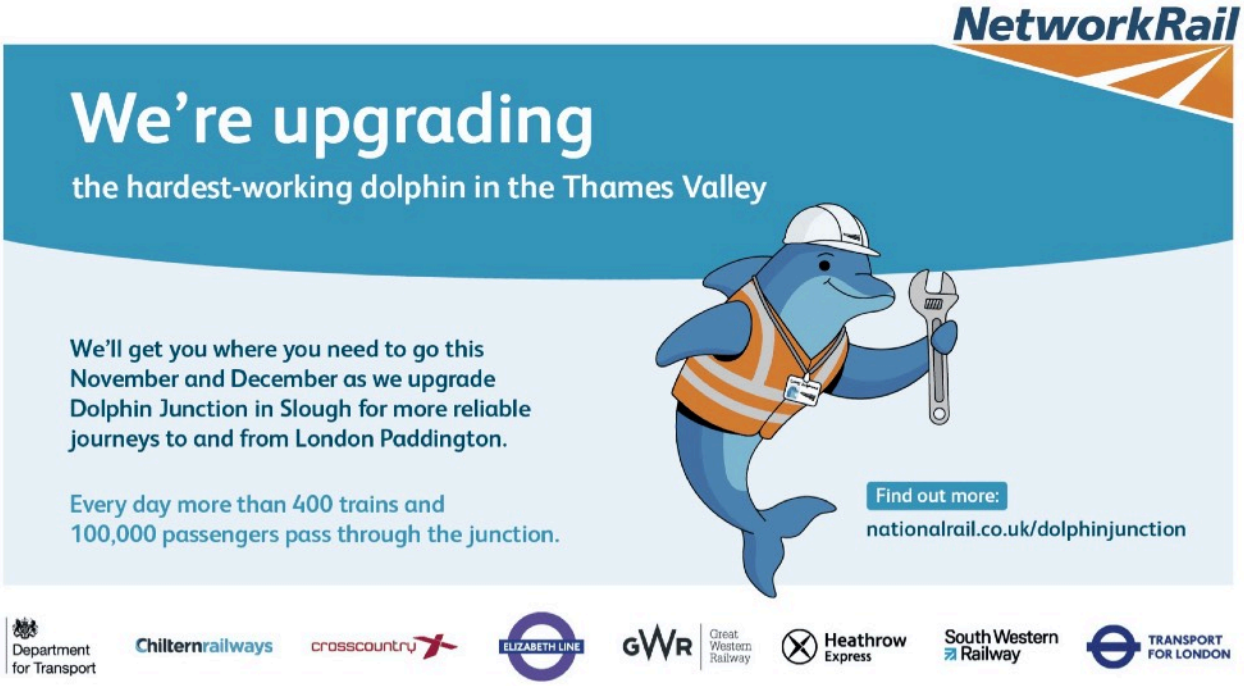
Paddington Line Closed at Christmas

While most of Britain's railway open for the run up to Christmas and the New Year, passengers are advised to plan ahead around engineering work taking place in several locations. Engineers say that they plan the most disruptive work for the period between Christmas Day and the New Year, when passenger numbers can be at their lowest.

This is, say Network Rail, one of the few opportunities each year to complete major, multi-day projects at some of Britain's busiest stations and on key routes, improving reliability for passengers and freight customers.

This year, the Christmas period will work will allow Network Rail to carry out a £152m investment programme to improve journeys, reliability and capacity, including major work at London Paddington, Birmingham New Street, and Huddersfield stations.

As usual, trains will not run on most routes in England on Christmas Day and Boxing Day.



One of the largest projects this year affects services into and out of London Paddington. The station will be closed from Christmas Day, while engineers deliver a package of improvements across the Thames Valley on the main line into the station.

The work will include replacing Dolphin Junction near Slough, replacing ageing points, improving the track layout and upgrading overhead line equipment, alongside a deep clean of Paddington station. These improvements will help deliver more reliable journeys for passengers. Every day, around 400 passenger trains carrying more than 100,000 passengers pass through the junction, making it one of the busiest pieces of railway infrastructure on the Great Western Main Line.

Services will begin returning from New Year's Eve, with the Elizabeth Line and Heathrow Express resuming operations to and from Paddington.

However, due to the scale of work taking place at Dolphin Junction, Great Western Railway services will be unable to access Paddington until Monday, 4th January. Long-distance GWR services will instead start and finish at Reading, while some services to Bristol and out Wales will divert to Euston. Paddington Station will remain open for customers to use toilets and other facilities.

To carry out the work, there will be an initial closure of the lines to and from London Paddington on Saturday 28th and Sunday 29th November, followed by the main phase of work between Christmas and New Year as part of a wider programme of engineering upgrades across the Thames Valley.

As well as GWR services starting and finishing at Reading, or operating via the diversionary route to Euston, connections via Waterloo and Marylebone will also be available. Elizabeth Line and Heathrow Express customers are also advised to check before travelling. SWR services between Exeter and Waterloo may be busier than usual during this work.

GWR Operations Director Richard Rowland said:

"Our priority over Christmas is making sure customers can still get where they need to go. Although trains won't run into London Paddington for a short period, we've worked closely with Network Rail and our industry partners to put alternative routes in place, including GWR services from London Euston, and connections via Waterloo and Marylebone.

"This does however mean some journeys may take longer than usual; so we ask anyone travelling to or from London during this period to plan ahead and check before they travel. Our teams will be on hand to help customers along the way.

"Once complete, the upgrade will enable trains to move through the junction more smoothly, helping to reduce congestion and improve performance across the route."

The Project in Numbers (Courtesy of Network Rail)

- Over 400 passenger trains pass through Dolphin Junction every day.
- 123 million tonnes of freight are carried over the junction each year.
- £27.8m is being invested in renewing and enhancing Dolphin Junction.
- 88 pre-constructed track panels will be fitted together like a huge jigsaw, making up the new track layout on the eastern side of the junction.
- Nine new structures for overhead power lines are being installed, including four gantries.
- One kilometre of new wire for overhead power lines is being installed onto the new gantries and masts alongside the existing wire through the junction.
- State of the art points operating equipment is being installed, and two signals are being relocated, along with lineside location cabinets and other signalling components.

Station Keeps Up Proud Record at Stations in Bloom Presentation

Station Adopters, Community Rail Champions and SWR representatives came together at Sherborne on Thursday October 22nd for a special awards celebration as part of Stations in Bloom.

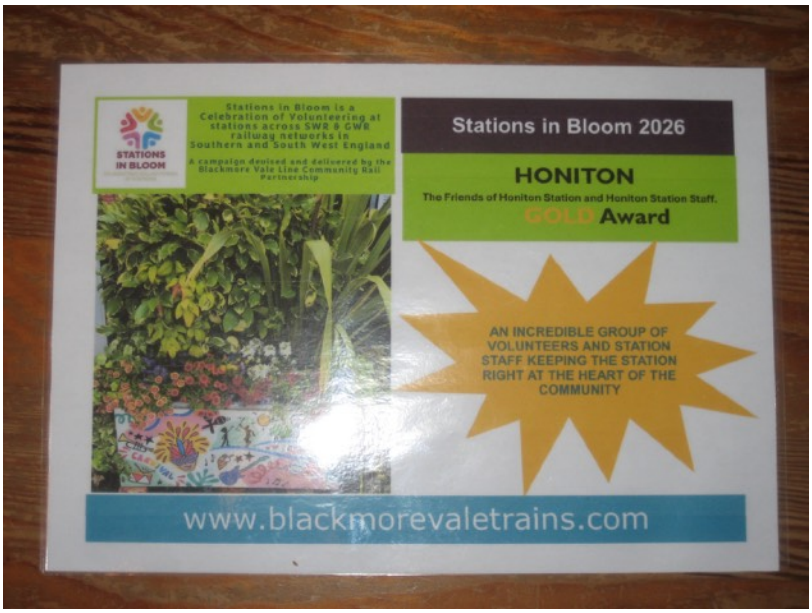
This year's event at Castle Gardens was somewhat different, for several reasons. First, when we were invited to the awards it was a last minute decision that there was in fact a Stations in Bloom in our region at all this year. We had been invited to enter a South East in Bloom event, with the station category sponsored by SWR, but had declined.

Usually we receive an invitation to take part in an event, run by the Blackmore Vale Community Rail Partnership, with a set of judging guidelines sent out in advance, and a day set aside in the summer when a team of judges visit the station to meet the team and look around. This was paused in 2025, due to the Railway 200 celebrations going on across the network.

We are grateful to Derek Beer, who has visited stations during 2026 to see how groups were doing, and carry out the rather more informal judging. His expertise in this field is second to none. Our thanks go to Derek and Caroline Rowland, and to everyone at the Blackmore Vale CRP.

The second reason the 2026 ceremony was rather different was that many of those planning to attend were unable in the end to get there, as Sherborne was cut off from the rail network on the day. This was due to a power outage at Gillingham, causing signal failure. Trains were re-routed between Yeovil Junction and Salisbury via Westbury.

We are grateful to Stacey Retter and Keith Webber from our excellent station team who managed to get there and, eventually, to get back again, thanks to sharing lifts. They were rewarded with the traditional excellent cream tea, as well as the chance to pick up the award.



Keeping up the long-standing record of success in Stations in Bloom, we were delighted to receive a Gold Award, with the citation describing: "An incredible group of volunteers and station staff keeping the station right at the heart of the community."

As well as the station staff who have taken on the development of several of the planters, huge thanks go to Steve Craddock and his team who have begun the long process of updating our larger planters, which has been a real challenge given two years of long-term drought. We also thank Paul Wilson, not only for his efforts in keeping the plants watered during the worst of the summer heat, but also for his work keeping our community noticeboard at the forefront of the minds of so many local groups, enabling them to promote their activities to the wider public. 2026 has been in many ways a year of change and transition for much of our work. This Gold Award is a lovely recognition for our volunteers of the value and importance of all that you do.