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Leaves off the line: leaf-busting locos help keep passengers on the move this autumn

Four specialist trains are working 24 hours a day to blast leaves off the line and keep passengers and freight moving.

Up and down the West Coast and Chiltern main lines and across the West Midlands the four leaf-buster trains will cover 25,000 thousand miles this autumn as they tackle the widely-mocked problem of leaves on the line.

The reality of leaves on the line is no joke: they get flattened onto the rails by trains creating a Teflon-like, slippery coating which limits trains' ability to

accelerate or brake rather like cars driving on black ice.

The outcome is a disrupted timetable as trains, which can weigh several hundred tonnes, need more time to start and stop and must travel more slowly through affected areas.

That's why Network Rail, working with train operators, has developed an ever-improving autumnal plan to regularly treat the rails to help keep passenger and freight trains moving.

The four trains use powerful jets of water to blast squashed leaves off the rails. The water jets are so powerful that if they sprayed one spot on the track continuously, they would cut straight through the steel rail.

Across the West Midlands and on the West Coast main line and Chiltern main line, more than 10 million litres of leaf-busting water will be used over the next 10 weeks.

Martin Colmey, current operations manager for Network Rail's London North Western route, said: "Leaves on the line is no joke. If we didn't work to remove them, their impact on train passengers wouldn't be funny either.

"They have the same impact on the railway as black ice does on roads, making it impossible to drive a train normally.

"Our leaf-busting trains will cover more than 25,000 thousand miles this autumn - vital to help keep customers and freight safely and swiftly on the move."

The treatment trains will cover the West Midlands area and the West Coast main line to London Euston and Chiltern main line to London Marylebone, running until the beginning of December.

Jonny Wiseman from London Northwestern Railway, said: "Autumn time poses a number of significant operational challenges for rail operators around the country. Our priority is to keep our customers moving. Every year the whole rail industry comes together to focus on the best solutions for this perennial problem. Network Rail's leaf-busting trains are going to be extremely helpful in ensuring services run on time during this period."

Nick Chadwick, head of drivers for Virgin Trains said: “Quite simply we wouldn’t be able to run our normal timetable without the vital work carried out by Network Rail during the challenging leaf fall season. That, and adjustments to driving techniques are essential to ensure our customers arrive at their destination safely and on time.”

Alan Riley, customer services director, Chiltern Railways, said: “Leaf fall can cause problems for our infrastructure so we work very closely with Network Rail to minimise disruption for our customers. We also have very minor changes to our timetable, as this means drivers have a much better chance of keeping to time because of potentially slippery conditions. Please remember to check our website for any changes: www.chilternrailways.co.uk.”

The treatment trains can also apply a special gel which improves trains' grip on the tracks. Sand is also carried on many passenger trains and released in front of the wheels to further boost grip on the rails.

For all travel information visit www.nationalrail.co.uk.

Contact information

Passengers / community members
Network Rail national helpline
03457 11 41 41

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About West Midlands Trains

For further information on this release, call our press office on 03300 955150 or email press.office@wmtrains.co.uk

West Midlands Trains operates both West Midlands Railway and London Northwestern Railway services.

- **London Northwestern Railway** services operate between Liverpool and Birmingham, and on the West Coast mainline to and from London Euston.
- **West Midlands Railway** services operate to destinations across the West Midlands via Birmingham New Street.

For more information on these services visit westmidlandsrailway.co.uk or londonnorthwesternrailway.co.uk

The West Midlands Trains franchise started on 10 December 2017 and will run until 2025/26.

West Midlands Trains operates 1,300 services a day, manages 150 stations and provides over 70 million passenger journeys a year. Over the course of the franchise, West Midlands Trains will be investing £1 billion into the rail network to deliver new trains, improved routes and station upgrades. This will include 400 new train carriages across the network and space for an extra 85,000 passengers into Birmingham and London at peak times.

The franchise is a joint venture between Abellio (70.1% share) and East Japan Railway Company / Mitsui & Co., Ltd (29.9% share in a 50:50 split). Abellio is the international passenger transport subsidiary of the Dutch national railway company, Nederlandse Spoorwegen. In the UK, Abellio operates ScotRail and Greater Anglia train services, Merseyrail services in a joint venture with Serco and buses through Abellio London. For more information visit www.abellio.com

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