



Watford Junction aerial view

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New timetable starts next week on Abbey Line due to speed limits

Rail passengers using the Abbey Line between Watford Junction and St Albans are being advised of changes to timetables from next Monday (28 June) because of safety speed restrictions. Network Rail has slowed trains down on the line because of track conditions. Work was due to take place last winter to make the line's steel rails better able to withstand periods of hot weather.

However, the maintenance had to be cancelled when the country went into a

further national Covid-19 lockdown in January.

Now temperatures are reaching their summer peaks, some sections of the steel rails could misalign or in extreme cases buckle in the heat.

Slowing trains down puts less strain on those rails, preventing such incidents.

The condition of some areas of track foundation stone – or ballast – also means trains need to slow down on the Abbey Line.

Normally the weight of frequent trains acts to tightly compact the ballast underneath the tracks.

As so few services have been running on the Abbey Line during the pandemic, some stones have become loose and could dislodge if trains now travel too quickly over them.

Both factors mean a revised timetable will be in place from Monday 28 June so London Northwestern Railway passengers can rely on accurate train times.

James Dean, Network Rail's West Coast South route director, said: "We're sorry to passengers facing longer journey times on the Abbey line between Watford Junction and St Albans because of necessary speed restrictions.

"A combination of the hot weather and condition of the track foundation stone means trains must run more slowly for safety reasons. I'd urge Abbey line passengers to check National Rail Enquiries for revised train times while we work as fast as we can to get the line back up to speed."

Lawrence Bowman, customer experience director for London Northwestern Railway, said: "We are sorry that we are having to make changes to journey times between Watford Junction and St Albans Abbey. As trains have to go slower, there will be fewer services. Some bus replacement services will run during parts of the day when we can't run trains. Bus replacements will be kept to a minimum. So the advice is to check before you travel."

Passengers using the Abbey Line are urged to plan their journey in advance at www.nationalrail.co.uk.

Network Rail is working to increase line speeds on the Abbey Line, but restrictions are likely to be in place throughout the summer.

For more information on how hot weather conditions affect the railway visit: <https://www.networkrail.co.uk/stories/how-we-prevent-tracks-from-getting-too-hot/>

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- **West Midlands Railway** services operate to destinations across the West Midlands via Birmingham New Street and Birmingham Snow Hill.

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