

West London Orbital moves to design stage

FUNDING TO accelerate design and modelling of the West London Orbital route has been agreed that will enable a public consultation this Summer, leading to a decision late next year on whether to seek statutory powers through a Transport and Works Act Order.

Transport for London, four west London boroughs and the Old Oak & Park Royal Development

Corporation will collectively contribute up to £6.65 million to take the next stage forward.

The West London Orbital route, which would be added to the London Overground network, would use freight lines with up to six trains per hour connecting Brent Cross, Neasden, Harlesden, Old Oak Common Lane, Acton, Brentford and Hounslow. Public consultation

later this year will include details of four planned new stations at Old Oak Common Lane, Neasden, Harlesden and Lionel Road.

TfL says the link would support more than 25,000 new homes and 11,500 new jobs while encouraging 650,000 fewer car trips.

Funds will enable TfL, boroughs, OPDC and Network

Rail to prepare this consultation: finalising preferred options for stations, junctions, signalling and power; modelling how the new service will run alongside existing rail operations; assessing environmental impacts and refining demand forecasts; building evidence of the housing, jobs and economic potential unlocked by the scheme.

Reeves reacts to Tarka Line closure IET diesel problem under control

CHANCELLOR OF the Exchequer Rachel Reeves told Ian Roome, the Liberal Democrat MP for North Devon, that she was happy to ask either Secretary of State for Transport Heidi Alexander or one of her ministers to meet him to discuss investment to support young people following closures of the Exeter to Barnstaple line during and after recent flooding.

In a House of Commons debate about the Spring Forecast

on 3 March, Mr Roome said: "Hundreds of college students in my constituency have spent weeks unable to travel to college due to flooding and rail closures. Will the Government confirm that they will invest in their life chances by doing more to upgrade our transport infrastructure, especially our rural railway lines, such as the Tarka line in North Devon, because that infrastructure is not working?"

GREAT WESTERN Railway and Hitachi have managed to contain the problems encountered over the past winter with diesel generator units on the Intercity Express Train fleet (*Modern Railways*, January 2026) by suspending other work on the trains and concentrating on engine changes at North Pole depot in London and Stoke Gifford in Bristol. From a low point

in the winter when 108 generator units were out of service, the operator had got the number down to 19 in early March.

The aim was to ensure all trains leaving the depots had at most one generator unit out. GWR points out that with distributed power, the multiple-unit formation of IETs ensures adequate adhesion down the train.

North Fife electrification continues

NETWORK RAIL engineers conducted electrification works between Haymarket and Dalmeny on 17-25 January, with a blockade in place and no trains running.

The blockade allowed the installation of overhead line equipment, part of the Scottish Government's decarbonisation £342 million programme for rail. To give extra vertical clearance, some bridges have been rebuilt and where this was not feasible, the track is being lowered to suit. The overall aim is to improve sustainability, augment capacity, and ensure service reliability. However, this is dependent on the purchase of 69 battery electric multiple units. The Borders Railway is also part of the initiative and when Fife's zones are complete, there should be a total of 140km of electrified lines for ScotRail and freight use.

InterCity routes fare best with existing and approved electrification (including the Fife scheme when complete) amounting to 87% of the works, according to the Scottish Association of Public Transport - but only 19% is allotted for Glasgow to Inverness to give a boost and allow Drumochter and Slochd summits to be surmounted more easily. Nothing is earmarked between Aberdeen and Inverness.

The partial electrification in Fife raised questions about the Forth Bridge, but battery power between Dalmeny and Kinghorn will negate masts and wires on that famous structure. It is estimated that BEMU trains could cover 20 to 25 miles on battery power between electrified sections of similar length. This is the guiding principle for the Fife project, although the Levenmouth line will be fully electric. Ladybank to Dundee and Ladybank to Perth are not being electrified at present.

On the Haymarket to Dalmeny route, South Gyle station shows bridge works in progress with

'active travel routes' receiving investment. Near Dalmeny, a major bridge is under construction at Dolphinton, while in Fife - in addition to parapet raising - bridge works can be seen on the line to Cupar.

Another tranche of works will follow this year but a new methodology for delivery in the longer term is on its way. For the many electrification projects envisaged in the ScotRail realm, Network Rail has launched an 'early marketing engagement initiative' for a £450 million single supplier electrification framework, covering

all projects across Scotland aimed at net zero outcomes.

This will support the development, delivery and entry into service and hand back of OLE and traction power systems as part of the Scottish railway decarbonisation programme. It will be a major procurement exercise backing the decarbonisation strategy of the Scottish Government and should allow NR to concentrate on maintenance of the system.

The contract is valued at £300 million over five years from 1 March 2027 to 29 February 2032. Scotland's Railway has also earmarked £450 million to allow for emerging or unforeseen works taking place in the effective period. A tender notice was published on 6 March. *Ann Glen*



South Gyle station with electrification in evidence on 18 February 2026. Ann Glen