



KiwiRail's Wellington Metro Programme

Issue 01 | March 2022 Edition

Welcome to the first in a series of newsletters designed to provide an overview of what is happening on the Wellington Region rail network. These newsletters will be issued on a quarterly basis.

In this issue, you'll find out about the significant works we carried out between 26 December and 10 January, other activities we've recently undertaken, and what's coming up over the next months. You'll also get to meet some of our people.

Making strides on Wellington's rail network

The period between Christmas and early January is generally our busiest for working in the rail corridor. With most people on holiday, and passenger trains not running, we can get a lot done.

While we typically work on several or all the network lines during this time, this past Christmas our efforts centred on the Kāpiti Line. We carried out extensive work at and around Plimmerton Station and in the tunnels on the line.

Plimmerton Station – more than 150 KiwiRail staff and contractors worked to upgrade and re-surface a portion of the station platform, upgrade the underpass at the north end of the station as well as the Steyne Avenue level crossing, and run new wiring for the traction overhead equipment.

Tunnels – rail, sleepers and ballast were replaced in 60% of Tunnel 2, which is the tunnel that runs between Glenside and Ngauranga.

KiwiRail and contractors will be taking advantage of Easter and Anzac weekend to finish the work in Tunnel 2 and make progress in Plimmerton and on the Wairarapa Line.



Upgrade works at the Steyne Avenue level crossing in Plimmerton

Steep learning curve for rail protection officer

Kim Dittmer, 25, is a rail protection officer (RPO) and based in Wellington. She shared her experience of working as an RPO at Plimmerton Station between 26 December 2021 and 10 January 2022. More than 150 people worked at several sites in and around Plimmerton Station during the two-week period, including KiwiRail staff and contractors Downer and John Holland.

The works included level crossing and underpass upgrade work, traction overhead renewals, and a resurfacing of the station platform.

‘It was challenging and also really rewarding. What was great was how well we got along. We all checked in on each other a lot. We all had a laugh.’

‘In my day-to-day role, I don’t normally mix with the traction or signals teams. All of a sudden, we were side by side all the time.’

‘At the end of the block of line I was relieved but also a bit sad. It was like my friends had gone.’

Kim grew up in Featherston and started her working life in hospitality. Nine months ago, when an RPO role came up, Kim’s uncle, who works at Hutt Workshops, encouraged her to apply. She did, and she got the job.

‘I came over with nothing beyond basic life skills and a full license. They teach you everything you need to know,’ she says.



Kim with Robert Gibbes, KiwiRail's Chief Operating Officer, Construction Delivery.

What she learned during her first months in the role prepared her to some extent for the block of line, but she learned a great deal more during those two weeks.

‘The important thing is to manage your fatigue. When you get home, you need to find something to do that doesn’t involve any screens. Pick up a pen and draw a picture.’

The job involved crew briefings, making sure they were signing in and locking on, and walking the sites to check on people.

‘During the block of line, temperatures climbed to the high 20s and one of the key things was to make sure people had enough water and weren’t getting dehydrated’, she says.

Works on the Wairarapa Line are underway

KiwiRail and Metlink are working together to improve rail infrastructure and services in the Wellington region. The Wairarapa Line upgrade is one of several projects in a significant programme of works designed to build resilience and capacity in the network.

A key driver for the Wairarapa Line works is to make the line safer and more reliable. Most of this line is now due or overdue major maintenance.

As the population grows and commuter traffic increases, upgrading the track also means it will be able to support more passenger trains. This upgrade also means increased capacity to carry freight.



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Sustainability is another key objective. By upgrading our infrastructure, we can support new regional trains. Increasing our capacity to carry commuters and freight means fewer cars and trucks on the road, and lower carbon emissions.

The current work includes:

- vegetation and drainage clearing and improvements from Upper Hutt to Masterton
- track renewals from Upper Hutt to Masterton
- level crossing refurbishments
- track renewal in the Remutaka and Maoribank tunnels
- renewals at three bridges.

In 2021, we:

- completed the vegetation removal and drainage improvement works from the north end of the Remutaka Tunnel through to Masterton
- re-sleepered the track from the north end of the Remutaka Tunnel to Woodside. About 80% of this section of work is now completed.

The plan for 2022 is to:

- complete the re-sleepering from Woodside to Masterton and begin re-sleepering from the south end of the Remutaka Tunnel to Upper Hutt
- perform ballast cleaning and continue with re-railing work from the north end of the Remutaka Tunnel to Woodside.

Alongside the current works, planning, design and procurement is underway for additional upgrades designed to improve safety and ready the line for more passenger and freight services.

The additional upgrades include:

- increasing safety measures at all level crossings between the Remutaka Tunnel and Masterton
- this is anticipated to include installing half arm barriers, warning lights and bells to all the public road level crossings as well as automatic pedestrian gates on footpaths at urban level crossings
- passing loops at Maymorn and between Featherston and Masterton, to enable trains to pass each other and improve operational resilience
- a second platform at Featherston to allow two passenger trains to operate at the same time, allowing more frequent train services in the future
- further upgrades to the signalling system between Upper Hutt and Featherston
- a new signalling system between Featherston and Masterton
- improved storage sidings at Masterton for Greater Wellington's proposed new passenger trains.

Meet Alan Gilbert, head of Wellington's signals and traction team



With four decades' experience in rail, Alan Gilbert has tackled plenty of challenges. As manager of KiwiRail's Wellington region traction and signals team, currently the primary challenge is finding, training and retaining people who can support a growing workload. The team is tasked with day-to-day maintenance

and compliance-related activities as well as supporting extensive project work being carried out across the region's rail network.

The team currently has 42 people, with half a dozen more positions expected to be filled. The most recent recruit is an isolation planner whose role it is to provide planning and coordination support for the team as they go about their work.

'Hiring is a challenge as it takes time to train people up,' says Alan. 'It takes two years to train a traction lineman. It takes a minimum of three years to train up a signals technician – four or five years if they're not electricians to begin with.'

'It can be hard attracting people to these roles too. The work we do needs to happen when trains aren't running, and the overtime and shift work can put people off.'

'At the same time, the things you're involved in are really interesting. It's the sort of work that's good to get your teeth into.'

Originally from Northampton in the UK, Alan worked with his father in a bearings factory and spent four years in the merchant navy as an electrician. He first visited New Zealand in 1979, when his ship berthed in Auckland. He moved here permanently in 1981.

It was in Auckland that an opportunity came his way.

'I was out of work and would spend time in the library. I got talking to the librarian and it turned out her husband worked in rail. He was from the same town as me. He called me in for an interview. We spent six hours talking and by the end of it I'd landed a job as a trainee signals technician.'

The bulk of the work his team does relates to compliance. 'We're focused on regulatory code work and making sure everything is safe to use.'

The team also supports the projects that are being carried out in the region as part of the Wellington Metro Upgrade Programme (WMUP), aimed at building reliability and capacity across the rail network.

He turned 66 last month, but Alan says he's still learning.

'It's one of those jobs where you can never say you know it all.'

Corridor clean-up initiative

Several times a year, KiwiRail works with volunteer organisations like Keep Lower Hutt Beautiful to clear the rail corridor of rubbish left on and around the tracks.

This year, John Holland, one of our contractors, decided to carry out their own clean-up effort. On 24 January, 10 John Holland supervisors, managers and engineers from Auckland and Wellington came together to clear the Johnsonville Line of litter. They swept the line from Johnsonville Station to Ngaio Station and collected 40 bags of rubbish.

Thank you for your efforts, team.



Meet one of KiwiRail's new recruits



David Sauvageon, 34, joined KiwiRail in November 2021 as a project coordinator for the Wellington Metro Upgrade Programme (WMUP).

He grew up in the small commune of Saint Romain d'Ay in southeast France and spent several years in Canada and Australia working

in hospitality before landing in New Zealand in 2014.

'I loved working in hospitality,' he says. 'I've done everything from being a waiter and bartender to being a restaurant and events manager.'

After the second COVID-19-related lockdown happened in August 2021, David decided it was time to do something different.

'I applied for a project coordinator role at KiwiRail. I went in for an interview and very soon after I got a phone call, and that was that. I joined the company.'

His first task was to help the project team prepare for significant tunnel works on the Kapiti Line between 26 December 2021 and 10 January 2022, while commuter services on the line were suspended.

'I found that everything I did in hospitality was transferable to this new role. Delivering a site for rail works is not so

different from delivering a wedding. Everything needs to be on point. I took the same thinking I had in my previous jobs and applied it here.'

His job was to make sure the four work sites for the tunnel works (Glenside, Glover St, Ngauranga and Porirua) were properly set up with everything they required, from meal deliveries, lunch break rooms and port-a-loos to proper COVID management processes.

'My job was to make sure the set up was good and to deal with logistical issues when they cropped up, so the crews could focus on the work.'

He says one of the biggest challenges in his new role has been coming up to speed with all things rail-related.

'I didn't know anything about rail. There is so much involved. There's so much to learn.'

When he isn't working, David is spending time with his partner and seven-year-old son, and playing sport. He plays squash several times a week and recently took up surfing.

In 2021, he became a NZ resident.

So what happens when the All Blacks play France?

'If the All Blacks are playing France, I'll support France. But I'll support the All Blacks against any other team,' he says.

For questions or feedback about this publication, email us at wgtnupgrade@kiwirail.co.nz.