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125mph test heralds Midland Main Line upgrade

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Trains on the Midland Main Line will be able to run at 125mph from December 2013.

On Sunday (1 July) East Midlands Trains successfully completed two 125mph runs on the route, 15mph faster than the current top line speed of 110mph and the first time a diesel train has operated at 125mph on the MML. British Rail's gas turbine Advanced Passenger Train has previously travelled at 125mph along the line.

Network Rail granted special permission for a Bombardier-built Class 222 Meridian to operate at its maximum speed along an eight and a half mile stretch of the Midland Main line between Bedford and the site of the former Ampthill station.

The high speed test was set up to research the effects of travelling at 125mph on the line's infrastructure as Network Rail continues with a line improvement programme designed to cut journey times between London St Pancras and cities in the East Midlands. 125mph passenger services are expected to begin with the timetable change in December 2013.

Network Rail says the line speed will be raised to 125mph along multiple sections of the route including between Bedford and the Ampthill Tunnel where it will drop to 115mph. The first 125mph stretch out of St Pancras will be just after Elstree and the last just after Loughborough before East Midlands Parkway.

To achieve the higher line speed, which will match the top speed on the West Coast and Great Western main lines, Network Rail will close footbridges, replace track and undertake a major tamping programme. The aim is to reduce the journey time between Sheffield and London to under two hours by spring 2014 - the fastest timetabled peak evening MML service from London is currently two hours six minutes.

Scientists from University of Birmingham were invited to take part in the test to examine the aerodynamic effects and pressure waves created by running trains at 125mph through Ampthill Tunnel. This research is expected to feed into work on other rail projects, including High Speed 2.

Network Rail route managing director Martin Frobisher said: "This test run shows how much research has to go into preparing for an increase in speed. Work carried out on tests like these won't just be used on this stretch of railway but will be used in many future rail projects. With the upcoming redevelopment of Nottingham station, it's an exciting time in the region."

The focus of the test for East Midlands Trains was to research the driver's views of the line and its signals at high speed as well as the 'coffee-cup test' inside carriages. One foot crossing, at Ampthill, was closed and monitored by Network Rail staff when the train passed by.

David Horne, managing director for East Midlands Trains, added: "This trial is a small but important test which will eventually lead to faster journeys between Sheffield and London. Taking the train is already faster than driving from South Yorkshire to London."

East Midlands Trains: Class 222 completed inaugural 125mph run on Midland Main Line



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