

Leatherhead railway station gets access upgrade

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A major upgrade to Leatherhead railway station has officially opened, marking what local MP Helen Maguire has called a “crucial step” in the campaign to make rail travel more accessible across Surrey.

The improvements, delivered through the Department for Transport’s Access for All programme, include the installation of two 16-person lifts and a new footbridge linking both platforms. The £6.2 million project also included platform widening, upgraded lighting and CCTV, and enhanced ramp access. The enhancements are designed to make life easier for elderly and disabled passengers, as well as those travelling with pushchairs, bikes or heavy luggage.

The scheme was developed and delivered by Network Rail in partnership with Southern, with much of the work taking place over the past year. Prior to the upgrade, Leatherhead was nominally step-free, but passengers needing to avoid stairs had to take a lengthy, steep detour under a railway bridge outside the station to move between platforms. The new bridge and lifts provide a direct and safe route for all users, replacing what many had described as an awkward and at times treacherous alternative.

Opening the new facilities, Helen Maguire MP praised the scheme as a long-overdue improvement for passengers in the area. “I’m delighted that Leatherhead has become the latest station in my constituency with step-free access,” she said. “These improvements are absolutely vital for our town, and a crucial step in making rail travel more accessible to my constituents regardless of their need.”

However, the Liberal Democrat MP for Epsom and Ewell also used the occasion to highlight wider concerns about the state of the rail network in her constituency. In particular, she pointed to the reduction in the number of South Western Railway (SWR) services running to and from Waterloo since the Covid pandemic. “South Western Railways should also increase the frequency of the Waterloo service back to pre-Covid levels to ensure that passengers are not overcrowded,” she said, noting that passenger numbers have increased while service levels have not kept pace.

Maguire also raised the ongoing lack of sufficient blue badge parking spaces at local stations, and the need for ticketing systems that are more accessible for people with visual impairments. With SWR now operating under national ownership, she said, passengers would be expecting higher standards of service. “Delays to the Arterio train rollout and extortionate ticket price rises are a worrying start,” she added. “I will keep campaigning to ensure that rail passengers in Epsom, Ewell, Ashted and Leatherhead get a fair deal.”

Southern, which manages Leatherhead station, has also introduced cycling improvements alongside the accessibility works. A secure cycle hub with 26 spaces and a maintenance area has been installed on Platform 1, while Platform 2 now features a double-deck cycle rack with space for 32 bikes, as well as new motorbike parking. Lighting and CCTV coverage in these areas has also been upgraded.

Jenny Saunders, Customer Services Director at Southern’s parent company Govia Thameslink Railway, welcomed the improvements, saying: “Lifts benefit everyone who finds stairs a barrier, and for some disabled passengers this project has the potential to be life-changing.”

Leatherhead joins a growing list of stations to receive Access for All funding, with similar projects completed in recent months at Barnes, Herne Bay and Motspur Park. The scheme forms part of a wider national programme to modernise railway infrastructure and open up travel to all users, regardless of mobility needs.

Network Rail’s Sussex Route Director Lucy McAuliffe said: “These upgrades have removed a significant barrier to travel at Leatherhead. We’re proud to be making a difference for passengers who, for too long, have had to navigate difficult routes to use our railway.”

While the transformation at Leatherhead station represents a clear step forward, campaigners and passengers alike will be watching closely to see whether service levels and surrounding facilities are brought up to the same standard.

Image: MP Helen Maguire opens Leatherhead upgraded railway station