



## **GREAT CENTRAL RAILWAY**

LOUGHBOROUGH, LEICESTERSHIRE

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### **NETWORK RAIL DONATES REDUNDANT STEEL BRIDGES TO LAUNCH £15m GREAT CENTRAL RAILWAY REUNIFICATION PROJECT**

Two 70ft steel bridges made redundant in the Great Western main line upgrade at Reading have been donated by Network Rail to help reunify the currently-separated Great Central Railways, in the East Midlands.

Their proposed installation at Loughborough will mark the formal start of the GCR's £15m project – and 30 year dream - to reconnect the two currently separated sections of operational heritage railway main line, north and south of the Midland Main Line at Loughborough. Reunification will create an independent Nottingham-Leicester main line, and will use an existing connection to the national network at Loughborough.

The bridges are earmarked by the East Midlands Railway Trust for use side by side to span the A60 road at Loughborough, where the original double track steel deck is almost life-expired. The eight-mile GCR(N) Loughborough - Ruddington line is connected to the Midland Main Line and carries regular inbound gypsum over this bridge to the British Gypsum plant at East Leake, five miles from Loughborough, where it is used to make plasterboard.

The two 70 tonne steel bridge decks were installed over Caversham Road, at the west end of Reading station, in the 1970s and so have many decades of life left in them – but track remodelling as part of the current main line modernisation enforced their early removal at Christmas 2010. With no other suitable role, the decks escaped scrapping with just days to go, after a chance conversation with GCR staff by NR Operations & Customer Services Director Robin Gisby, during a visit to Loughborough, in January.

**“We believe it is far better to recycle these bridges for re-use for their original purpose, rather than slice them up for scrap,”** said Mr Gisby.  
**“Network Rail strongly supports the GCR project to connect up their two railways to link Nottingham and Leicester. This project has clear benefits for Network Rail, so we were delighted to donate these two bridges to the East Midlands Railway Trust, which owns the Loughborough-Ruddington railway infrastructure.”**



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The bridges left Reading by road on Thursday April 7, aboard two Allelys

low-loaders, and were delivered to a storage site adjacent to the Great Central Railway plc's Loughborough Central Station on **Friday April 8.**

EMRT chairman Mike Mountford said: **“We are very grateful to Network Rail for its magnificent gesture in donating these two bridges, which will provide a welcome and cost-effective upgrade for the A60 bridge, which is essential for the security of our gypsum traffic.**

**“There are much wider benefits too – it is currently less than today’s standard height and has been struck several times by lorries. These bridges will enable us to raise the highway headroom which will assist commercial roadtraffic in the region very considerably, as well as helping the GCR.”**

The A60 roadbridge is immediately north of the new junction needed to connect both sections of the GCR, once the 500m of infrastructure missing between them is reinstated.

Reconnection of two sections of the privately-owned Great Central Railway in Loughborough will create an 18-mile, double track, sustainable, independent main line railway which is capable of delivering substantial long term economic, community and environmental benefits – not just for the East Midlands but for the UK as a whole.

The A60 bridge replacement project has been managed by the Great Central Railway Development Company, a special company set up last year by GCR plc and GCR(N) with the sole purpose of reconnecting the two currently separated railways.

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### NOTES FOR EDITORS:

The Great Central plc currently operates steam and diesel heritage services every weekend over the eight-miles isolated section from Loughborough Central to Leicester North, south of the Midland Main Line at Loughborough. Although heritage passenger services are restricted to 25mph, the double track five-mile section between Loughborough and Rothley has sections designated for industry testing and trials at 60mph and 75mph.



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North of the MML, Great Central Railway (Nottingham) operates the nine-mile Loughborough Junction-Ruddington single line railway which serves British Gypsum (five miles from Loughborough) with regular gypsum trains. Heritage passenger services also use this railway, which is owned by the East Midlands Railway Trust.

The two railways, once part of the Sheffield-Marylebone Great Central Railway main line opened in 1899, are separated today by a 500m gap at Loughborough, including a missing bridge over the four track NR Midland Main Line.

Reunification has the committed and enthusiastic support of the railway's local authorities and Loughborough MP Nicky Morgan who says the reinstated Nottingham-Leicester railway will bring significant economic benefits to the East Midlands.

A £235,000 feasibility study carried out for Loughborough's Charnwood Borough Council and the GCR proved that the reinstatement is viable in engineering and economic terms.

The A60 bridge replacement will require planning consent and detailed bridge designs need to be drawn up for the rebuild. Work is not expected to start on site until late 2011/early 2012.

The heritage railway team will work closely with Charnwood Borough Council (the planning authority) and Leicester County Council (the highways authority) in carrying out this bridge replacement and highways upgrade.

The £15m GCR reunification project has a Benefit to Cost Ratio of 2.8. To set context, the Government's controversial High Speed 2 project has a BCR of 2.6 and the Treasury demands a BCR of at least 2.0 before sanctioning national infrastructure projects. The BCR of 2.8 means that there's an economic benefit of £2.80 to the region for each £1 invested.

The National Railway Museum has said that following reunification it wants to establish an 'operating arm' for operational locomotives from the national collection, at the GCR. This would be a 'Duxford for the nation's historic trains' in the East Midlands and could have similar impact to the Eden Project, in Cornwall.

The Nottingham-Leicester GCR will, in addition to its steam heritage services, continue to provide freight services to British Gypsum at East Leake, with a projected new service to the Lafarge quarries at Mountsorrel, using the newly-connected southern section.