

Network Rail manager quits £330k job after thousands of passengers stranded on trains for hours

A Network Rail manager has resigned after thousands of passengers were stuck on cold, dark trains for hours in west London.

Michelle Handforth, managing director for the Wales & Western region from Paddington, announced she was stepping down but will continue working on “specific projects” until a permanent successor is appointed.

She joined Network Rail in August 2020 and earned a salary of £330,000 while commuting from Aberdeen.

Around seven Great Western Railway, Heathrow Express and Elizabeth line services were affected after a train hit an obstruction outside London Paddington, damaging high-voltage overhead power lines on 7 December.

Some passengers reported being [stuck for more than three hours](#) without access to toilets and with no information from operators.

Singer James Blunt and TV presenter Rachel Riley were [among those affected](#) by the disruption.

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Blunt posted on X: “Been stuck somewhere outside Paddington for close to 4 hours now. Out of peanuts and wine”, while Riley wrote: “Nearly 4 hours after we got on, we’re getting off the Elizabeth line, woohoo!”

Stranded passengers on social media described people on their trains “getting agitated” and “kicking doors”.

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In a letter to Network Rail staff, Ms Handforth said: “It’s been a real privilege to work with you all through the highs and lows of the past couple of years, and while this decision is a real wrench to me, I believe it is the right one for me, my family and the business.

“It has been such an honour to lead this region since joining the business in August 2020. Over that time we have faced an incredible range of challenges, but your support, friendship and good humour has been consistent throughout.

“I am extremely proud of the achievements we have made together and while times feel tough right now, I know that a bright future for Wales and Western lies ahead.”