

# THE GREAT NORTHERN & CITY RE-AWAKENS

With effect from the new National Rail timetable of 13 December 2015, an extended Monday to Friday service on the former GN&C route (Great Northern Rail's province today!) to Moorgate was (re)introduced, giving an all-day service the first time in 28 years. Moreover, a weekend service has also been provided, on Sundays from 13 December and Saturdays from 19 December, with all stations between Moorgate and Drayton Park<sup>1</sup> open throughout the traffic day. The Sunday service on what was then Network SouthEast was withdrawn in May 1986 and Saturday services succumbed a year later in May 1987. The Monday to Friday traffic day was also reduced over the years, finishing at around 21.00 from May 1988, but extended to finish almost an hour later from June 2005 to help mid-evening passenger traffic. The following notes are a summary of services on "the big tube" since reopening by British Rail in August 1976, having been closed by London Transport and handed over to BR on 4 October 1975.

British Rail (Eastern Region) took over the Northern Line (Highbury Branch) after the close of traffic on Saturday 4 October 1975, just eleven years after the severing of the line between Drayton Park and Finsbury Park. From the following day, a bus service was provided between Moorgate and Finsbury Park whilst building work proceeded.

At last, the partly-completed 1935-40 works at Drayton Park were put to use to connect the GN&C tunnel section of the line to the high level station at Finsbury Park. New purpose-built dual-voltage rolling stock was constructed – the class 313 EMUs<sup>2</sup> – to operate between Moorgate, Welwyn Garden City and Hertford North. The changeover from 750V d.c. 3rd rail (from Moorgate) to the 25kV a.c. overhead system (to the northern suburbs) and vice versa was effected in Drayton Park platforms. After some ten months, the line was able to reopen, but initially as a shuttle, as it was in London Transport days.

## 16.08.76

Introduction of BR service between Drayton Park and Old Street, with trains running empty to Moorgate to reverse, as the escalator work at Moorgate station was then incomplete. Trains operated every 10 minutes (8 mins Mon-Fri peaks and 15 mins Sundays). The replacement bus service between Moorgate and Finsbury Park was withdrawn which meant that passengers travelling between Drayton Park and Finsbury Park had to travel via Highbury and change there. Essex Road station remained closed on Saturdays and Sundays. Trains ran empty north of Drayton Park for access to and from Hornsey depot. First and last trains were as follows:

	MF & SO		Sunday	
	First	Last	First	Last
From Drayton Park	06.45	19.55	08.45	20.00
From Old Street	07.01	20.11	09.01	20.16

The periods of operation were, in reality, little different from those which had been operated by London Transport since October 1964, when the line had been cut back to Drayton Park.

## 8.11.76

Extended opening hours thus:

	MF & SO		Sunday	
	First	Last	First	Last
From Finsbury Park	05.35	00.05	07.25	23.25
From Moorgate	05.50	00.20	07.30	23.45

Full inner suburban service commences between Moorgate (reopened from this date), Welwyn Garden City and Hertford North. Common section between Moorgate and Finsbury Park (high level)

has a 10-minute interval service MF & SO, and every 4 minutes MF peaks. Peak service comprises 9 tph Hertford North and 6 tph Welwyn Garden City. Sundays every 15 minutes. Essex Road station open daily.

<sup>1</sup> Because Drayton Park station does not have the capacity to safely handle the large numbers of passengers going to the nearby Emirates Stadium on match days (narrow stairways and island platform), the station will be closed for two hours before and after each Arsenal game at weekends to protect the safety of passengers. During the week the station closes only after a match).

<sup>2</sup> They are still at work on the line today – almost 40 years hence! (but see also NF 29/16, this issue).

**02.05.77**

Monday to Friday peak service increased to 18 tph (9 each from Hertford and Welwyn), but at uneven 2-5 minute intervals.

**14.05.79**

MF peaks reduced to 3-6 minutes (16 tph) and regular service introduced extended from Hertford North to Letchworth. No other major changes. MF off-peak and SO service still remains at 10-minute intervals.

**01.06.81**

Reduction of MF peak service. MF evening and SO reduced to 15 minutes after 20.30.

**05.10.81**

Sunday service reductions, from four to three trains per hour, at irregular intervals. Departures from Moorgate at '20' past each hour (Welwyn Garden City), '30' (Letchworth semi-fast via Hertford North) and '50' (Hertford North).

**24.01.83**

MF peak frequency reduced further to 3-7 minutes (10-11 tph). MF off-peak and SO services restored to regular 10-minute intervals. Summary of intervals on 'common' section as follows:

<b>MF</b>	Before 07.00	15	<b>SO</b>	Before 08.00	15
	Peaks	3-7		08.00 to 20.00	10
	Midday	10		After 20.00	15
	Early evening	10	<b>Sun</b>	All day	30
	After 20.00	15			

Sunday services further reduced, to two trains per hour. Last trains to and from Moorgate operate earlier. Ex-Finsbury Park at 23.29 MF & SO, 23.09 Sun. Ex-Moorgate at 23.45 MF & SO, 23.25 Sun.

**13.05.85**

No major changes. First train from Finsbury Park on Sundays booked to non-stop Drayton Park and Essex Road. Of course, a stop *is* necessary at Drayton Park, in order to lower the train's pantograph.

**12.05.86**

Withdrawal of Sunday services to Moorgate with the diversion of all trains to King's Cross on that day. Essex Road and Drayton Park thus closed on Sundays. No other major changes.

**11.05.87**

Withdrawal of Saturday service to and from Moorgate, with the closure of Drayton Park and Essex Road on that day of the week also. MF midday off-peak reduced to 15 minutes. Introduction of a single journey from Moorgate (depart 23.04) all stations to Royston – a distance of nearly 48 miles.

**16.05.88**

Reduction in operating hours between Moorgate and Finsbury Park on Mondays to Fridays. Little changed after then for some time, with only slight revisions made to services

	<b>First</b>	<b>Last</b>
From Finsbury Park	06.22	20 52
From Moorgate	06.30	21.00

**28.05.95**

During the inventing years, first and last trains have changed, too, with even earlier last services from Moorgate. There is still a 15-minute service MF midday and although a similar number of peak services operate, the service intervals were adjusted to make the intervals between trains more regular.

	<b>First</b>	<b>Last</b>
From Finsbury Park	06.17	20 25
From Moorgate	06.39	20.41

**SUMMARY OF ARRIVALS AT MOORGATE 07.30 TO 09.30 MONDAYS TO FRIDAYS:**

16.08.76 – 07.11.76	14	24.01.83 – 12.05.85	21
08.11.76 – 01.05.77	30	13.05.85 – 11.05.86	20
02.05.77 – 13.05.79	35	12.05.86 – 10.05.87	19
14.05.79 – 31.05.81	32	11.05.87 – 15.05.88	20
01.06.81 – 23.01.83	25	From 28.05.95	20

Subsequently, from the summer timetable of 1999, the midday MF service was improved from 15- to 10-minute intervals as it had been until May 1987.

Of course, the branches (Hertford North and Welwyn Garden City) were correspondingly improved from every 30 minutes to every 20 minutes.

## WINTER 2004-2005

In the winter timetable 2004-05, there were just 17 arrivals (at Old Street) between 07.30 and 09.30. First trains were at 06.35 from Moorgate and 06.17 from Finsbury Park. Last trains were 20.35 from Moorgate and 20.32 from Finsbury Park.

Because of escalator replacement at Moorgate, WA&GN [as it was then] services were scheduled to detrain at Old Street and run empty to and from Moorgate during the morning peak, during the following times:

From Monday 27.09.04	07.30 to 09.30
From Monday 08.11.04	07.45 to 09.30
From Friday 07.01.05	08.00 to 09.00

### 12.6.05

Last train from Moorgate Mondays to Fridays extended to 21.50 instead of 20.35.

### 17.05.15

This was the last timetable before the revamp and increased services. During the morning peak there were 22 arrivals at Moorgate between 07.30 and 09.30, mostly at 4-6 minute intervals, but with two longer gaps. In the evening peak, there were 23 departures from Moorgate between 16.30 and 18.30 at 5-minute intervals, save for one 10-minute gap. No trains were scheduled to terminate or start from Finsbury Park<sup>3</sup>.

The midday service on the 'trunk' section remained every 10 minutes.

First and last trains were as shown opposite:

	First	Last
From Finsbury Park	06.16	21.49
From Moorgate	06.34	22.03

### 13.12.15

The peak, midday and after evening peak services remain similar but with changes to first and last trains on a daily basis:

	Mon – Fri		Saturdays		Sunday	
	First	Last	First	Last	First	Last
From Finsbury Park	05.45	00.27	05.39	00.26	06.56	00.26
From Moorgate	05.48	00.18	05.49	00.19	07.04	00.19

Weekend services on the Northern City are every 15 minutes.

*Editor's Notes: Although not having weekend services for many years, the line was opened very occasionally when engineering work prevented access to King's Cross main line. In those instances Drayton Park and Essex Road stations remained closed. These (very few) events were noted in Underground News at the time.*

*Sadly, Great Northern did not have enough Train Drivers in place in time for the new timetable and on the first day, Sunday 13 December, many trains were cancelled because not enough drivers were willing to work their rest day. The Great Northern website stated that only an hourly service would be possible between Moorgate and Welwyn Garden City with no service on the Hertford North route and with only a partial bus replacement service. Cancellations continued throughout the week until just before the Christmas holiday.*

<sup>3</sup> Several years ago on the peak 'shoulders', trains from Moorgate not required for the midday service ran to Finsbury Park and then empty to depot. In the opposite direction, a number of trains started in service from Finsbury Park during the evening peak build-up.



**Left:** The first day of Great Northern Electrics on 16 August 1976 which initially began with a shuttle service between Drayton Park and Old Street – Moorgate did not become available as a passenger terminus until 8 November 1976, when the full 'inner suburban' service to Welwyn Garden City and Hertford North was inaugurated. Trains reversed north to south via the crossover at the north end of Drayton Park, seen here.

The train is showing a 4-character headcode and the destination blind reads 'Old Street'. Behind the train are the twin tunnels of the former GN&C route to Finsbury Park, which were then still 'open' because the northbound bore had been used, since October 1964, as a shunting neck.

**Photo: Brian Hardy**