

THE FUTURE'S BRIGHT

THE EAST LONDON LINE RE-OPENS

Observations by Kim Rennie

An orange surge swept through London in late-April 2010, but it had nothing to do with the Nick Clegg or the General Election. Rather, on 27 April, after several postponements, the first part of London Overground's (LO) East London Line Extension programme Phase 1 opened between Dalston Junction and New Cross/New Cross Gate, fusing together the former BR line to Broad Street (closed 1986) and LU's East London Line (closed 2007). This was a so-called 'preview service' running only on Mondays to Fridays between 07.00 and 20.00.

Services on the launch day commenced from 12.00, with the initial passenger trains being the 12.05 Dalston Junction to New Cross, and 12.10 New Cross Gate to Dalston Junction. Prior to this, Mayor of London Boris Johnson had performed an opening ceremony for the media using Class 378/1 unit 378.154. The train had special white vinyls on the centre cab emergency doors carrying an LO roundel and lettered "First train April 2010". The first passenger-carrying train was formed of unit 378.152 and had similar signs reading "First passenger train April 2010". Both continued to run in this form for the rest of the day and were observed in that state in New Cross depot several days later.

The Class 378/1 units are formed of 4 cars, as opposed to the earlier Class 378/0's used on the North London and West London lines, which currently have 3 carriages. The 378/1's operate on 3rd rail DC only, though like much modern UK rolling stock provision is made for later conversion to dual or AC-only mode, as evidenced by the 'well' for any future pantograph provided on one of the carriage roofs. Train livery is the now familiar combination of white body, blue skirt and orange doors derived from the LU scheme, plus with the addition of yellow warning ends. Each carriage carries a LO roundel and all external lettering, even down to small technical notices, is in New Johnston. Early promotional material showed the trains with an additional roundel on the cab front but these were not applied in practice. Interiors are mainly off-white with orange handrails, and the longitudinal seating is covered in an orange and brown moquette similar in pattern to the original D Stock design. The moquette for priority seating although of similar design has a different colour scheme.

A respectable number of people assembled outside Dalston Junction station ready for the first train, mainly a mix of enthusiasts, curious locals and a few political activists. The Bostwick gates were swung open at around 11.40 to allow entry. Inside were copious amounts of LO staff, BTP police and community support officers, plus LO's own 'Travel Safe' version. There were no restrictions on photography here or indeed at any of the new or re-opened LO stations. Prior to departure TfL London Rail MD Ian Brown posed with Hackney Elected Mayor Jules Pipe in front of unit 378.152. Mr. Brown also used the station's PA to announce the first train's imminent departure. The train left well-loaded, which perhaps showed up the 378s' poor seating capacity, not so much an issue on the NLL but likely to prove less welcome on the long distance services to and from south London. Although the trains are air-conditioned, the internal temperature conditions seemed to differ between units. The carriages offer poor visibility from inside too, due to the comparatively low side windows and small windows in the door pockets, which is a pity given some of the spectacular views available on the elevated section.

DALSTON JUNCTION

The surface building consists of a square metal-clad box with one entrance on Dalston Lane and another unopened (at time of writing) entrance onto a forthcoming bus station accessed from Kingsland Road, and is designed to allow future commercial development above. Exterior signage is in upper case orange New Johnston spelling out the station name above the Dalston Lane entrance, but strangely with no LO roundel. The second entrance was not easily viewed but appeared to have a roundel applied on a white vinyl square stuck directly to the exterior.

Inside, the ticket hall is located on the east side and is very similar to the current LU pattern as seen on the JLE, and at Wood Lane, Shepherd's Bush, plus in King's Cross North Ticket Hall. Indeed, most of the new build on the ELLX Phase 1 mirrors this LU 'New Opportunities' style, whereby much use is made of polished steel, glass, exposed concrete and tiling, but using LO orange as a contrasting colour as opposed to LU blue. The 'safety' signage and general notices dotted about are all pure-TfL and could be found on any LU site. The station has a staffed ticket office as well as Ticket Vending Machines (TVMs). Standard UTS ticket gates and a Wide Access Gate are provided at all stations between here and Surrey Quays. Stairs and a MIP lift lead down to four platforms, the centre pair being south-facing terminal bays, and the outer two destined to serve southbound and northbound services once through trains to and from Highbury & Islington commence.

Also discernable is the route of a possible future reinstated eastern curve towards Hackney Central. The roof is quite low and supported by large silver-clad pillars bearing two horizontal orange bands and full-size LU-style panel roundel name signs, though with an orange LO circle opposed to LU red. Train describers follow National Rail practice in showing the destination, scheduled and expected times of the next three departures. There is a huge 'Health & Safety' provision on the new and re-opened line with various additional fire exits, evacuation routes and passenger refuges being installed at stations or trackside.



Above: Two views from the north end of Dalston Junction on 27 April 2010, showing the future northbound link towards Highbury (*Left*), which was noted as being completely blocked off on Friday 28 May 2010 to enable work to continue (and without preying cameras, maybe?), and the southbound link from Highbury (*Right*). In the centre of this photo can be seen space for the north-east curve, which it is assumed could be reinstated in the future should it be necessary. The Highbury extension is currently expected to open in May 2011.

Both photos: Brian Hardy

HAGGERSTON

Heading south the line climbs to reach the viaduct and alignment of the old NLR route to Broad Street. Haggerston station is another modernist construct but with its exterior clad in cream precast concrete cast glass planks, and the main building is situated to the east of the line. The station was designed by Acanthus LW Architects and features towers that serve to increase the station's presence and also recall the stations of the 1930s designed by Charles Holden. As at Dalston, the station name is applied in orange upper case, though this time onto a metal entrance canopy, and there are several silhouette LO roundels displayed at high level. Inside there are only TVMs and an 'information' office replaces staffed ticketing facilities. Much of the ground floor interior is finished in attractive small salmon pink mosaic tiles, combined with New Opportunities fittings, whilst on the northern wall there is a huge abstract mural which gives off an almost 3D effect. The eastern wall is glazed with opaque glass. MIP lifts serve each platform as would be expected in a new facility. Above at platform level there is a sort of combination of LU and DLR styles with full canopies at the southern end, whilst at the other, the open area is protected by high glass walls, again with the inevitable orange banding. Full-size platform roundels are also fitted and appear at all stations as far as Surrey Quays. The original station was south of the present one and closed in 1940.

HOXTON



There are projecting roundels on both sides of the viaduct but the station name is not too visible, with the orange lettering being placed on silver plate affixed directly onto the wall. Most of the ground floor interior is in yellow brick too, though the 'information' office is designed in New Opportunities style. At platform level the appearance is similar to Haggerston. To the south the line curves away to the right and affords a stunning view of the city with the 'Gherkin', Tower 42 (former NatWest building) and other tall buildings prominent.

South of Haggerston a new bow-string bridge spans the Regent's Canal to allow the line to reach Hoxton. This station is a more modest development where the original viaduct's yellow brick arches have been adapted to provide the entrance and route to the platforms.

SHOREDITCH HIGH STREET

Leaving Hoxton the line swings to the right, crossing Kingsland Road on a refurbished steel-truss bridge and then over Old Street, past the former LMS Shoreditch station building of 1928 which closed in 1940, before curving left on a new alignment. The stub of the former route to Broad Street can be seen on the right complete with the four old 1983 Tube Stock cars used as artists' spaces. The new route passes over Shoreditch High Street on another bow-string bridge before entering Shoreditch High Street station, which is built on the site of the ECR's Bishopsgate terminus. The lower level of this has been built below the new viaduct and is actually on Bethnal Green Road. The exterior is basically a large concrete box relieved by incised horizontal random stripes and designed to allow further development in the area without disrupting the railway. A solitary silhouette roundel is affixed to the north side over Wheler Street, whilst the station name is displayed above the single entrance in the same style as at Dalston. A staffed ticket office is provided, again using New Opportunities standards, and the ground floor follows the same pattern, though relieved by small aquamarine mosaic tiling. Also noted was an April 2010 poster Underground map showing the ELLX open between Dalston Junction and New Cross/New Cross Gate and which would have had only a short life until the 23 May timetable changes extended LO services south to Crystal Palace and West Croydon. MIP lifts and a series of staircases lead up to the platforms which sit enclosed within the concrete box. The platform walls are clad in a silver metal finish with bench seating recessed into them at places. The benches follow a standard LO pattern, which is the LU modern-type though with orange highlighting.

WHITECHAPEL

After leaving Shoreditch High Street, the remains of Bishopsgate goods depot appear on the right before the main line into Liverpool Street is traversed on the infamous bridge GE19. This is the structure which dropped a short distance whilst being installed causing commuter chaos. The surviving parts of the old Shoreditch ELR station are also visible to the right, and work progressing on a public park should allow good views of passing LO trains once finished. The route now drops into a cutting to reach the sub-surface level it will remain at until reaching Surrey Quays. Whitechapel is where old meets new, as practically no work has been done here on the LU side of things, partly no doubt as future changes depend on the arrival of Crossrail (or not). There is of course no step-free access. The LO platforms 5 and 6 retain their panel-clad walls bearing murals of local scenes, though with new sections inserted to carry LO roundels. The platform length name frieze retains its lighter ELL stripe instead of the darker LO shade, however. One depiction of a route 106 double-decker lettered "Leaside Buses" reminds us that even the recent past is now history. A secondary footbridge with emergency exit now spans the northern end and a huge, surely over-engineered, signal gantry carrying just a fibre-optic banner repeater dominates the southbound road (all the signals on the ELLX Phase 1 appear to be fibre optic). To those that remember the LU days the absence of the 4th rail is perhaps more noticeable on the historic 'core'

ELL section. The stairs to the ticket hall are retiled in white with black edging, but the New Works' era biscuit-tiled subways to platforms 1 & 2 and 3 & 4 are untouched. By a quirk of fate, these have contrasting tiled bands in green and orange. Outside, a new projecting combined LU/LO panel roundel sign has been fitted to reflect the two TfL modes. The station remains wholly under LU control with the latter providing both ticketing and also platform attendance using Special Requirements Team (SRT) staff.

SHADWELL

At surface level Shadwell station dates from its relocation by LT in circa-1983. As built it was a modest brown brick building facing onto Cable Street, whose most striking feature was a sloping roof of smoked glass. Inside, the walls were exposed brick relieved by a light green cable management system (CMS) at door lintel height, whilst the doors themselves were finished in varnished wood. The roof has now been removed and a second rear entrance provided onto Cornwall Street to allow for easier interchange with the DLR. Several silhouette LO roundels are fitted, being either wall-mounted or projecting, and have the same frame also used for LU and DLR signs. The station name is portrayed in free-standing individual orange letters set at canopy level. Much of the ticket hall and intermediate level is now clad in small grey mosaic tiles of the type seen elsewhere. As might be expected, being a smaller station, only an 'information' window is available, with tickets being obtained from TVMs. Although there are two new lifts, provided by "Accord Lift Services", these do not reach platform level and stairs are required for the last few feet. The platforms themselves retain their LU-era wall cladding and murals, but with LO roundels. The old replica pendant lights have been replaced by fluorescent tubes in a continuous strip hung from the tunnel roof and are much brighter. This is a standard fitting used at other stations on ELLX Phase 1. Although there were rumours that the old ELR building around the corner in Watney Street might be brought back into use in some way, this has not occurred but serves as an 'emergency exit'.

WAPPING

Always one of the Underground's most characterful stations, Wapping station has led an eventful life in a number of guises. The first station building of 1869 was similar to that at Shoreditch. This was replaced in 1915 by a weather-boarded timber structure, and which itself was destroyed in 1940. Tickets were then sold in what was effectively a wooden shed until a new building was provided by LT in 1960. This was single storey part brick and part concrete, with a central entrance and tenant's premises on the left. Further modernisation took place in 1981-1982 by LT, in conjunction with lift replacement and the general refurbishment of the East London Line. This removed the small shop and provided two entrances, one off-centre and the other to the right in a larger building. Exterior finish was now in grey, and the top of the circular lift shaft above was given some light green vertical decorative features. Inside, the ticket hall was clad in large light grey tiles and doors, again, were varnished wood. This building has now been completely modernised once more, with the outside a mixture of a light cream tiled finish together with recessed light green tiled panels which match the features on the lift shaft. There is now a single entrance just off-centre. The station name is in free-standing orange letters as per Shadwell and there is a single projecting silhouette roundel. The ticket hall is New Opportunities plus grey mosaic tiling, with an 'information' office on the right and tickets bought from TVMs. Under LU ownership the ticket office was situated facing the entrance, and this is the only ex-LU station where the 'information' office does not occupy the site of the old staffed sales facility. In 1959, LT installed a plaque in the old ticket hall to commemorate the centenary of the death of the younger Brunel. The original plaque was in poor condition and replaced with a replica during the Thames Tunnel refurbishment. A replica has now been installed which carries the same wording, including stating that it was "Erected by London Transport". However this is clearly not the case as the sign is lettered in Johnston, whereas the booklet "*The East London Line and The Thames Tunnel*" (LT, 1976) shows the plaque bearing a serified font. A glazed exhibition case promotes the Brunel Museum across the river. Once more the primary access is by two new lifts, provided by "Accord Lift Services", which lead to a lower landing, but again step-free access is not possible as the last part of the route involves narrow curving staircases. Wapping was always notorious for its very narrow platforms and it has not been possible to do anything about this. Again, the 'retro' pendant

lights put in by LU have gone, to be replaced by the standard lighting strip. The 1990s murals are retained, with LO roundels added obviously. These murals were of a more realistic design than those used elsewhere, the most familiar one of which to most LURS members being the depiction of a BR freight train and LT F Stock passing at the station and adapted from a black & white photograph. At the north end of the station, emergency exits have been provided.

ROTHERHITHE

The line then passes through the famous Thames Tunnel of 1843, though little can be seen from the train. As built in 1869, Rotherhithe station also followed the standard ELR pattern, but gained an extended yellow brick frontage around 1905 and this is what we see today. There were three arched windows either side of the central entrance, but the entrance has now cut into the inner two of these in order to widen the space. As part of the work, two decorative metal columns have been installed here and give the effect of being original, or at least reinstated, features. Exterior individual orange lettering is fixed directly onto a horizontal panel at roof level, replacing the LU roundel and blue LU name frieze lower down. When refurbished by LT in the early 1980s, most of the ticket hall and escalator shaft was given a cladding of mustard-coloured melamine panels, with doors finished in red. The overall affect was reminiscent of the 1983 Tube Stock and contemporary LT buses. The ticket hall now has an 'information' office, but no staffed sales point, and another exhibition case promotes the nearby Brunel Museum. The familiar grey mosaic tiles are used on the walls here and at intermediate level. The latter is linked to the surface by a fixed staircase, plus two adjacent Otis HD.B escalators dating from the 1983 modernisation. Prior to closure in 2007, the escalator shaft was spanned by a faded curved Perspex-glazed soffit which dated from the 1980s and had not worn well. This has been removed and replaced by stepped 'green' roof including windows and a turfed area. A staircase leads to a footbridge with further stairs down leading to each platform, these areas being finished in light grey with the contrasting orange handrails used extensively on the ELLX Phase 1, plus all over the rest of LO. There was another plaque commemorating the Thames Tunnel at this point, but has now gone. This station had modern continuous platform lighting under LU so, what with the platform wall murals and cladding still in place, the overall look is little different from before closure. One reminder of the former regime is a standard LU 'Train Operator's Information' enamel whiteboard on the wall at the south end of the southbound platform.



CANADA WATER

Dating from 1999, Canada Water is one of the least-changed stations. The most noticeable alteration is the amending of the platform roundels to replace the red LU ring with LO orange which was done in late-April. These are the only 3-dimensional platform roundels on the whole of the LO system. Less obvious are the new train describers, and unchanged are the 'JLE' bench seats and LU blue contrast bands of the pillars on platforms 3 & 4. As at Whitechapel, LU is responsible for all station services. Step-free access by MIP lifts, both to the Jubilee Line and street level, has existed since the station was built. Outside, a new combined upright TfL 'totem' has been installed, presumably bearing the LU, LO and London Buses roundels. However, several days after the line reopened it was still 'bagged' with a cover depicting Underground, National Rail and Buses logos (*left*).

SURREY QUAYS

Opened as Deptford Road in 1869 and renamed Surrey Docks in 1911, Surrey Quays is where the line re-emerges into the open and gained its present name in 1989. The surface buildings were completely reconstructed between 1979 and 1982, using an unusual curved orange/red brick design, as part of LT's general modernisation of the East London Line.

The ticket hall interior was faced with bare brick, colour relief being given by a red CMS and doors. The main change to the exterior has been the removal of the faded and scratched curved

Perspex-glazed plastic canopy over the ticket hall on the Lower Road side, and its replacement by a larger square glass-glazed grey structure. There are no fewer than four illuminated silhouette LO roundels being either projecting, wall-mounted or pole-mounted, and including one with a finial pole in classic LT-fashion. Exterior lettering again consists of separate letters set above the canopies, with a miniature version used on the small Rotherhithe Old Road subsidiary entrance.

Ticket hall interior finishes utilise small grey mosaic tiling and New Opportunities design again, helping to establish a common London Overground identity within the TfL family. Tickets are only sold from TVMs. The long walkway to the southbound platform has been completely refurbished, but no step-free access has been provided even though it would surely have been easier to do here than at the tunnel stations. Platform buildings themselves are little changed from LU days, apart from the northbound canopy, which appears to have been cut back at the south end. The distinctive support pillars in the “6 foot” between the two running lines remain but are now painted in more subdued colours than in the late-LU era.

NEW CROSS

Beyond Surrey Quays the line gradually rises, passing the old LU Surrey Docks substation on the right, then under the new Trundley’s Terrace footbridge (which offers an excellent vantage point for photography). At this point future services towards Clapham Junction via the South London Line will diverge and the earthworks, diveunder and flyover necessary for a ‘grade-separated junction’ are already in place. The existing line divides at Canal Junction and there are good views of the new LO depot and operating/maintenance centre here. On the left-hand route, the old LU New Cross depot has all but vanished, with buildings demolished and just the staff platform and short sections of 4-rail track left as a reminder. New Cross station is still managed by Southeastern and has little to indicate that a new service is operating. The modern, though now dated-looking, 1970s brown brick and glazed BR station building remains, but the plain LT roundel which once sat next to the BR double arrow on the exterior until 2007 has not been replaced. Nor were the barriers accepting certain types of valid TfL ticket. There are no describers for LO trains leaving from bay platform D and the platform name signs are standard banner-style white-on-blue Southeastern pattern. Step-free access to the LO bay is possible due to the station’s existing design, as opposed to being from any special new provision.

NEW CROSS GATE

Despite being transferred to LO on 20 September 2009 in preparation for through services later, little has changed at New Cross Gate either. Trains were still reversing in platform 1 as the A Stock and their various predecessors did, but come 23 May this will be the route south to Crystal Palace and West Croydon. Northbound trains will use platform 5 on the Up Slow line before crossing all the main lines on a new girder bridge to regain the old ELL alignment just before Canal Junction. Station signage is to the current white-on-green New Southern Railway pattern, and there is no ‘first train’ indicator for LO passengers or step-free access either. Redundant LU Correct Side Door Enable (CSDE) cut-out equipment is still fixed to a wall of the platform building, and as at New Cross, certain TfL tickets did not open the UTS gates. New Cross Gate station signs all bear the Overground roundel but as at 13 May 2010 were ‘temporary’ signs (black-on-orange) stuck over what appear to be permanent signs – i.e. with narrow orange top band.

CONCLUSION

The ELLX Phase 1 was still very much a ‘work in progress’ during its early days of public services. Various people in hi-vi clothing could be seen going around stations with clipboards making notes of this and that. The automated ‘next train’ PA announcements did not always seem to accord with reality either, with trains allegedly say 8 minutes’ away actually arriving in 2. At other locations it appeared they were not working at all and staff had to be positioned on platforms with loudhailers to remind passengers to “stand behind the yellow line”. Indeed, there seemed to be a minor obsession with the latter, even when a train was nowhere in sight!

Staffing seemed excessive for today. Wapping, for example, had two staff in the ticket hall plus another on each platform, and all of the LU-controlled platforms had SRT staff in attendance throughout the traffic day. Whether this will continue remains to be seen, and it could be that

some LO personnel have been redeployed from the NLL during its Gospel Oak – Stratford closure.

There were the inevitable teething problems: on 29 April services were disrupted due to an earlier defective train and bunching and then long gaps were common. The long-line PA was warning of “major delays”, which is not I think an authorised term in the TfL lexicon! (It should be “severe delays” as per LU terminology). It is also odd that the ‘service status’ is displayed using magnetic strips on whiteboards, given that LU is fast moving to replacing all of these with centrally-controlled ESUBs (Electronic Status Update Boards). The same day another train had difficulty opening its doors at Whitechapel on the north, though this was eventually overcome.

Finally, no marks to TfL for placing Shoreditch High Street in Zone 1 instead of Zone 2 where the old station was, thus meaning even orbital journeys involve paying the full fare. But overall, the good far outweighs the bad and the ELLX is a welcome and worthy addition to the London railway network. One can only hope that one day, if enough money can be found, the rest of London Overground can be brought up to this standard. The future’s bright