

DOCKLANDS LIGHT RAILWAY – COMPLETE (OR NOT?)

Exactly 24 years since the initial section of the Docklands Light Railway opened on 31 August 1987, the final section of railway under construction – the Stratford International branch – opened for business at around 11.00 on Wednesday 31 August 2011, after months and months of waiting and anticipation. Whether that was a deliberate coincidence or not remains unanswered, but your writer was aware that the extension should have opened some 15 months previously in June 2010. That date came and went, as did many others, latterly with a ‘month’ being superseded by a ‘season’, e.g. ‘spring’, ‘summer’ and so on. But open it is now and the DLR today is a large network with 48 trains and 126 vehicles required for (morning) peak service, compared with just 9x1 vehicles of 24 years ago.

Back then, even before it opened in August 1987, plans were already advanced to expand the system. Then it was never anticipated for it being a direct link from the City to East London, but a City and Stratford link to the Docklands area and the Isle of Dogs.

The Metro newspaper the day following the opening carried a “welcome” article on the new route. Sadly, however, the accompanying photograph was at Stratford Regional DLR which was, of course, inappropriate – it showed platform 4A on the long established route into Stratford from Canary Wharf and Crossharbour. What a shame they couldn’t get it right!

The current fleet of trains comprises 149 vehicles built over 20 years, as follows:

Type	Number built	Vehicle numbers	Type	Number built	Vehicle numbers
B.90	23	22-44	B.07	24	101-124
B.92	47	45-91	B.09	31	125-155
B2K	24	92-99 and 01-16	Total:	149	

Currently, 126 out of the 149 fleet are required for service (plus 8 spares ‘ready to run’ if need be), but if all 48 trains were three vehicles on the current schedule, this would require 144 – technically possible but far short of the 10% spares normally calculated for. It has been written that there are insufficient vehicles to provide a full 3-vehicle service for the Olympics. However, when moving huge crowds, it is sometimes considered better to provide longer trains at very slightly wider intervals, to allow time to clear crowds, using the “less is more” principle. To see how it all eventually pans out, we will revisit it in a year’s time to see how it was actually handled.

Until the new shopping centre “Westfield Stratford City” opened on 13 September, late-night trains to Stratford International (after 00.15 Monday to Saturday and after 23.45 Sunday) actually terminated passengers at Stratford (Regional) and then ran empty to Stratford International to reverse. This was because then the only access at the terminus was to the main line station, whose services had finished by that time, and the area surrounding it was still a building site with no public access. Once the Javelin services ceased, there was no need for passengers to be at Stratford International because they couldn’t get anywhere.

But of course the Stratford International branch is only part of a much bigger picture, all of which owes its transformation to next year’s Olympic Games. All DLR routes have been upgraded to operate 3-vehicle trains, although a small number of stations¹ haven’t been lengthened and trains invoke ‘selective door opening’ procedures.

The Canning Town area has been completely transformed, which was previously two-platform (high-level) station with a flat junction east of it where the Beckton and City Airport routes diverge. Now there are four DLR platforms (two high level and two low level that were formerly the North London Line) and a complex series of flyovers, which have had to be fitted around the Jubilee Line, Silvertown Way and electricity pylons. A refuge siding has also been provided at the back of Royal Victoria station and a new scissors crossover provided between Custom House and Prince Regent. This has been provided to improve traffic flows to and from the Excel exhibition centre. At the latter,

¹ “Selective Door Opening” operates at Cutty Sark, Elverson Road, Royal Albert, Gallions Reach and Pudding Mill Lane (eastbound).

the access stairs have been widened to take into account the extra traffic visiting the exhibition area, especially as the building has been extended at that end.

Back to the new extension, a number of new lifts and escalators have been provided, as follows:

Canning Town	Island platform	1 lift	Platform – interchange concourse below
Star Lane	Island platform	2 lifts	Platform – overbridge Overbridge – corner of Star Lane/Manor Road
West Ham	Island platform	1 lift	Platform – interchange overbridge
Abbey Road	Side platforms	2 lifts	Platform – entrance (one per platform)
Stratford	Side platforms		LU station assets
Stratford International	Island platform	3 lifts	One at west (departure) end Two at east (arrival) end
		2 escalators	Two at east (arrival) end

It was interesting to note that at Stratford International, the escalators operate on ‘slow speed’ until someone boards them. It is reported that all DLR escalators have now been fitted with ‘powersave’. London Transport was doing that many years ago, but abandoned it!

Abbey Road, uniquely, has a ‘panel’ pole-mounted exterior roundel instead of the ‘silhouette’ type used at Stratford High Street and Star Lane. Those at Stratford International are all wall-mounted, but still silhouette, whilst obviously Canning Town, West Ham and Stratford (Regional) are represented on the joint LU/TFL signage. One wonders if the roundel-shaped cycle racks at those wayside halts will ever be used!

It is strange that the DLR did not sign Stratford platforms 16 & 17, plus resign 4A & 4B, as “Stratford Regional”, since their DVA now makes reference to this title. The platform name signs at Stratford International say change for ‘National Rail’, yet far more National Rail trains call at the Regional station, but this exhortation is not made on those installed there!

On Friday 9 September, two new escalators were brought into service at the east end of Custom House, work having begun on their installation last February. The two new escalators are at the standard 30° incline and have a height rise of 17.99ft.

Once Westfield Stratford City opened on 13 September, an enhanced DLR service was provided for it for the first week. Monday to Friday services operated as follows:

10.00 to 16.00	5 mins	Woolwich Arsenal – Stratford International.
	10 mins	Bank – Beckton (replacing the usual Bank – Woolwich Arsenal service).
19.30 to 21.00	10 mins	Additional Woolwich Arsenal – Stratford International service, complementing Beckton – Stratford International service

On Saturday and Sunday 17/18 September, services changes were –

All Day	6 mins	Stratford – Lewisham (service extended from Canary Wharf).
12.00 to 19.00	10 mins	Additional Woolwich Arsenal – Stratford International service, complementing Beckton – Stratford International service.

In addition, some trains were formed of three vehicles.

A further package of improvements is planned for stations along the eastern route, from Poplar to Beckton and Poplar to Woolwich, later on this year. They will deliver better lighting, new seating and enhanced information displays for passengers.

Although as appearing to be as good as ‘complete’, there are further extensions to the Docklands Light Railway in the planning stage – see *Underground News* No.595, July 2011, pages 387-388.

DLR CURRENT TIMETABLE

Date From	MORNING PEAK			MIDDAY OFF-PEAK		
	Interval (mins)	06.30 – 10.00 Section	Units	Interval (mins)	10.00 – 16.00 Section	Units
MON – FRI 31.08.11	4 *	BAN – LEW	16x3	5 *	BAN – LEW	13x3
	12	STR – LEW	6x3	7	STR – CAW	(3x3
	12	STR – CAW	3x2		(2x2
	8	TOG – BEC	8x3	10	TOG – BEC	7x3
	8	BAN – WOA	8x2	10	STI – BEC	6x2
	8	STI – WOA	7x2	10	BAN – WOA	7x2
For Service:		48 TRAINS	(18x2 (30x3		38 TRAINS	(15x2 (23x3
Totals:		126 vehicles	36+90		99 vehicles	30+69

* East-southbound trains run via West India Quay avoiding line until 19.00.

	EVENING PEAK			AFTER 21.00		
	Interval (mins)	16.00 – 19.00 Section	Units	Interval (mins)	Section	Units
	4½ *	BAN – LEW	14x3	10	BAN – LEW	6x3
	7	STR – CAW	(3x3 (2x2	10	STR – CAW	(2x3 (2x2
	9	TOG – BEC	8x3	10	TOG – BEC	6x3
	9	BAN – WOA	7x2	10	BAN – WOA	7x2
	9	STI – WOA	6x2	10	STI - BEC	6x2
For Service:		40 TRAINS	(15x2 (25x3		29 TRAINS	(15x2 (14x3
Totals:		105 vehicles	30+75		72 vehicles	30+42

* East-southbound trains run via West India Quay avoiding line until 19.00.

Date From	BEFORE 08.30 (SAT) AND 10.30 (SUN) & AFTER 19.30 (SAT & SUN)			08.30 (SAT) AND 10.30 (SUN) to 19.30 (SAT & SUN)		
	Interval (mins)	Section	Units	Interval (mins)	Section	Units
SATURDAY & SUNDAY 03.09.11	10	BAN – LEW	6x3	5	BAN – LEW	12x3
	10	STR – CAW	4x2	10	STR – CAW	4x2
	10	TOG – BEC	6x2	10	TOG – BEC	6x2
	10	BAN – WOA	7x2	10	BAN – WOA	7x2
	10	STI - BEC	6x2	10	STI - BEC	6x2
For Service:		29 TRAINS	(23x2 (6x3		35 TRAINS	(23x2 (12x3
Totals:		64 vehicles	46+18		82 vehicles	46+36