

MUCH ADO AT WOODFORD

The Hainault – Woodford section of the Central Line opened to passengers on 21 November 1948 and most of us assume it has mostly been a shuttle service, and that's that. However, some interesting correspondence in a letter file has come to light about whether the service could be made a 'thorough' service rather than a shuttle.

Some nine months before opening, the Chigwell Labour party wrote to London Transport querying the fact that the proposed service would be a shuttle. London Transport's view, contained in internal correspondence between the Operating Manager and Public Relations Officer on 18 February 1948, was that the whole of the service on the Woodford side would eventually, if not at first, be required for Loughton and beyond, and it would be undesirable to introduce a through service it might not be able to maintain. It was agreed to reply that the stations on the loop would be better served by a frequent shuttle service with good connections at Woodford rather than by occasional through trains. Moreover it would be pointed out that some through trains would be run at the commencement and finish of the peaks for trains entering and leaving service at Hainault depot but they would not operate at the height of the peaks.

Further correspondence dated 2 April 1948 notes that the decision to operate a shuttle service between Woodford and Hainault is being maintained but will create certain 'fouling' movements at Woodford, which may have an effect on the running of through trains. Of course, there would be no third platform to reverse the shuttle trains and as the peak frequency would not permit shuttle trains reversing in the westbound platform, such trains would have to reverse in the siding west of the station and would foul the eastbound road when returning to the eastbound platform. It is noted that the signalling between Woodford Junction and Woodford should be able to operate on 90-second headways and the signalling at Woodford should permit the quickest possible clearances. A proposed working at Woodford in the peaks is appended to the correspondence, based on 3½-4 minute Loughton service and 7½ minute shuttle, viz:

Woodford WB	02	03½	06	09½	11	13½	17	18½	21	24	26	28½	32
		↓			↓			↓			↓		
Woodford EB	07½	09½	11½	15	17	19	22½	24½	26½	30	32	34	37½

Further considerations of the proposed signalling at Woodford show that the clearances would be very tight, particularly in the case of the shuttle train from the west siding to the eastbound main. What is described as a 'temporary measure' is the provision of a facing trap point with sand drag in the westbound road, immediately ahead of the starting signal (LJ17). This was provided to allow an Eastern Region steam train to run into the westbound platform while an electric train was crossing from the eastbound to the westbound through No.14 points (i.e. reversing east to west in the eastbound platform). It was therefore suggested that this trap point and sand drag be retained in the final layout to allow an electric train to run into westbound platform 2 while the shuttle train is proceeding from the west siding (No.21 road) to the eastbound main. Moreover, that shunt signals LJ34 and LJ54 in the line of route from the siding to the eastbound main be arranged so as to permit the shuttle train to depart the siding while the platform track is occupied. To that end, on 10 May 1948, the Superintendent (Indoor) Railways wrote to the Chief Signal Engineer with these proposals.

The Signal Engineer sent a favourable reply four days later.

On 2 June 1948 the work involved was noted to be progressing satisfactorily but modifications would have to be made to the cable run at the site, and that a 'tube' type buffer stop would be required in the sand drag and the steam type buffer stop be removed and returned to store.

Even with these modifications it was acknowledged that there was little margin to recover from late running in the area and on 7 October 1948 the Operating Department requested (1) an additional intermediate home signal on the eastbound road in advance of signal LJ1, up to which a train could approach whilst No.14 crossover is in use by a shuttle train exiting the siding, or (2) the provision of a delta track approach to LJ1 to allow a train to draw past that signal up to LJ2 whilst No.14 crossover is in use. The Signal Engineer approved the latter option on 15 October.

In the meanwhile, the necessity to speedily detrain and despatch shuttle trains to the siding would be instructed to staff and the staff numbers increased as necessary.

In a meeting of 29 September 1948, it was agreed that consideration be given to the possibility of constructing a new single line from Woodford station to Woodford Junction parallel to the existing tracks for use by the shuttle service without interfering with main line working, should traffic develop in the future, which was passed to the New Works Engineers.

On 16 November 1948, five days before the opening of the Woodford – Hainault section, the Operating Manager wrote to the Chief Engineer about the track layout at Woodford, expressing continued concern of through and shuttle trains. It is noted that the layout was not designed for that sort of service but this was laid down by the late Chairman just before the Second World War, after the track work had been approved. Not only would the shuttle trains foul the main line at Woodford (leaving the siding) but also at Woodford Junction to cross the westbound towards Roding Valley. The Operating Manager goes on to say that the department would do their best to work the service with the layout given and would not suggest any track alterations just before opening day (!) but that a scheme ought to be prepared for adoption as soon as possible thereafter in case the double fouling movement could not be accepted. He goes on to suggest an altered track layout to be designed so as to convert the present shunting neck into the westbound main by a junction with the westbound main in the neighbourhood of the Marlborough Road footbridge and to replace in its original position the former trailing crossover from the present westbound main to the eastbound main, so as to give a clear 8-car length of reversing siding 'north' of the new junction proposed. A sand drag would be required at the end of the reversing siding and would presumably entail knocking down the switch house at the end of the present shunting neck and replacing it at the west end of the westbound platform rather in its present rather inaccessible position.

And so the Hainault – Woodford section opened on 21 November 1948 – as a shuttle service.

The Chief Engineer wrote to the operating Manager on 15 December 1948, which included a rudimentary diagram of the proposed track alterations. It notes, however, that the plan avoids knocking down the switch house at the end of the (present) shunting neck. Because the switch house is fed from South Woodford substation, if it was to be relocated at the west end of the station, it would involve much additional cable and therefore incur additional project costs. Moreover, if the work was to proceed, the existing shunting neck track would need to be lowered and during this work (shuttle) trains reversing and those proceeding to the sidings would have to reverse on the westbound road. A provision of £50,000 was to be included in the Investment Programme for the work, for it to be undertaken in 1949.

On 4 January 1949 the Chief Mechanical Engineer wrote regarding the fact that with the proposed new track layout there would be no direct access between the eastbound line and the sidings. A defective train would therefore have to be reversed back into the shunting neck and then reversed again into the sidings. He therefore recommends that, if it possible, a crossover be installed between the eastbound line and the 'north' end of the shunting neck to permit trains to run directly into the sidings.

A report dated 5 January 1949 lists the various alterations that would need to be made, if the project was given the go-ahead, *along with some notes and observations thus:*

1. Conversion of the electrified shunting neck to a through road by a junction with the westbound line west of Broadmead Road bridge. *The radius of the curve at the new junction to be sufficient to obviate the need for a speed restriction on westbound trains.*
2. Disconnection of the present westbound road and provision of a sand drag west of Broadmead Road bridge to form a siding.
3. Connection (No.50 crossover) from the goods yard to the westbound road (which is used by westbound goods trains from the yard), to be cut short to form a connection with the eastbound only.
4. Provision of a new crossover from eastbound to westbound west of new reversing siding. *A goods train travelling from the yard to the westbound would have to travel for about 100 yards along the eastbound road in the wrong direction. Additional controlled eastbound signals would be required at Woodford for the eastbound approach, and also possibly to control the South Woodford eastbound advance starter, LH30.*
5. Removal of No.12 facing crossover from eastbound to westbound. *This would remove direct access from the eastbound to the sidings.*

6. Removal of No.36 facing crossover from the westbound road to the existing shunting neck.
7. Relocate No.55 crossover (from the goods yard to the eastbound) to a new position to the east.
8. Relocate No.14 trailing crossover (from eastbound to westbound road) to a new position to the west. *No longer possible to reverse a train east to west in the eastbound platform.*
9. Install a connection from westbound platform to the new through westbound road, at the position of the present No.11 trap points at the west end of the westbound platform. *Departure of westbound trains to the new westbound road could be slower than at present over the curve and current rail gaps, compared with the present relatively straight run out.*

The report goes on to say that while the centre reversing siding would obviate interruption to the westbound through service while the shuttle train is leaving the siding to go eastbound, it will only slightly reduce the effect the working of eastbound trains. The actual signal engineer's alterations need to be ascertained, as it would be desirable to reduce the distance the shuttle train has to travel between the station and the siding to obtain a quick clearance between through trains, which cannot be done with the present arrangements.

It is stated that there is much to commend a through service to Hainault and abandon shuttle working and suggests abandoning the bay platform, which is rarely used for reversing trains. The removal of the connection from the eastbound to the bay platform would permit the outlet from the siding being much closer to the station thereby giving a better run out for westbound trains, over plain track. It would also obviate the need for altering the connections from the goods yard to the westbound or eastbound road signalling west of Broadmead Road and would save maintenance on rarely used crossings. The only difficulty then envisaged may have been the provision of a trailing crossover from the eastbound to the westbound for reversing trains east to west in an emergency.

The file then includes a summary of correspondence about the Woodford track layout in the pre-war period:

26 June 1937 – A drawing shows the track arrangements, assuming a through service to Hainault, which had been agreed as satisfactory from an 'operating' point of view.

30 December 1937 – The Chairman required a shuttle service and via the Operating Manager asked the Chief Engineer to consider reversing sidings at each end of Woodford station, joining the bay road to the Up (westbound) line to form a loop, and continuation of the bay road "to connect with the Fairlop line".

24 January 1938 – The layout on the drawing (noted above) did not permit a through service on the main line plus the reversal of a shuttle service and suggested the rearrangement of the existing shunting neck 'south' of the station to lie between the Up and Down tracks to enable the shuttle service from Hainault to be handled so as to give platform exchange to passengers in both directions.

31 January 1938 – The Vice Chairman stated that it was likely that there would be considerable development at Chigwell and Grange Hill and that (his view) it was desirable to provide for this development a through service from London. It was thus decided that the original scheme for the running of trains on the eastern extension be adhered to in that 8 trains per hour would proceed via Woodford to Hainault.

7 February 1938 – J.P. Thomas suggested that a decision on the method of working the services on the "Grange Hill Loop" be deferred for 12 months, a decision then being taken in the light of the development of the area at that time. A decision was therefore made to suspend the method of operation pending an inspection of the area.

21 April 1938 – The Operating Manager reported that "the proposal for a shuttle service will probably be brought into force in the initial stages" and asked for the provision of a centre reversing siding between the tracks at the 'country' end of the station.

24 February 1939 – A drawing showing the passenger lines was signed off as satisfactory which was approved three days later.

The Operating Manager then raised the following points in a memorandum dated 26 January 1949, referring to the pre-war correspondence:

- The Chairman, on a recent visit to Woodford, enquired why the project for installing a reversing siding between the Up and Down tracks at the London end of Woodford station had been allowed

to be neglected so long after electrification had been installed, or at least had not been queried at the time it was decided to proceed with the full service to Loughton and a shuttle to Hainault.

- The present layout at Woodford was materially identical with the pre-electrification LNER layout. It was noted that in June 1937 (q.v.) this was approved for operating purposes (with minor track alterations to improve goods yard access and engine run round facilities) on the basis of two through services, splitting at Woodford Junction to Hainault and Loughton.
- On 30 December 1937 the late-Chairman had decided on a full service to Loughton and a shuttle service to Hainault and the Chief Engineer was asked for estimates for a reversing siding between the main lines at each end of Woodford station and for the continuation of the bay road to form a loop 'north' of the station.
- The events of 31 January 1938 and 7 February 1938 were reviewed.
- The Operating Manager then stated that this remained the position when electrification began to be proceeded with after the war. It did not seem reasonable to demand a radical revision to the whole of the track layout in the austerity conditions prevailing but it was certain, from an operating viewpoint, double fouling movements could not be tolerated. Furthermore it was reasonable to proceed at least with drawings and estimates for a revised layout, even if only for a centre reversing siding was concerned in the event it became essential later.
- The memorandum concludes with the fact that train working is still being examined and concrete recommendations should not be made until this has been brought to a conclusion. Because of the austerity and economic situation it was acknowledged that any service difficulties would have to be tolerated until times are easier. However it was the opinion that any further increase of Central Line services would make the alterations imperative.

On 23 February 1949 the Divisional Superintendent for the Central Line notes –

- The proposed arrangements provided no direct route between the eastbound line and the sidings.
- Direct access between the siding and east- and westbound roads is desirable and if possible making the siding double-ended.
- By removing the connections from the eastbound to the bay road, to reposition the outlet from the siding closer to the station and to improve the run out for westbound trains by the provision of plain track has the attraction of reducing the gaps in the route from siding to eastbound which would slow up such movements and become a potential cause of more serious delays through trains becoming stalled on current rail gaps.
- The heavy cost of the proposed alterations would not be commensurate with the small advantage likely to be obtained.
- The only delays experienced are the occasional half-minute to the main line service when crossing a shuttle train and the result of the expensive proposals would merely be to eliminate those few occasions when, with the present layout, it is not possible to avoid a small delay by giving preference to main line working.
- The money could be spent to much greater advantage by providing a better layout at the 'north' end of Woodford station with a view to providing for the shuttle service to operate over an independent track which would not foul the main line between the station and Woodford Junction.

The correspondence ends with a Minute of a meeting held on 9 March 1949 where it is stated that it had been decided to operate a shuttle (to Hainault) instead of a through service and that the decision to retain the existing layout at Woodford had been reached with a full knowledge of its limitations.

The file then lists some meeting Minutes, unreadable because of the handwriting, but all proposals seem to have petered out in August 1949.

Of course the Hainault loop never got its through service until April 1991, but not in the form of a 'frequent' service (8tph peaks) as originally proposed. The rush hours (only) all-round service comprised a train every 31-46 minutes and it lasted only November 1992. With such an infrequent service during rush hours, it is perhaps not surprising it didn't last long.

A sort of compromise was then made to provide a better service on the loop (every 18-24 minutes) by extending some trains from Hainault, but terminating at Woodford, not only in the peaks but on a daily basis – the shuttle was thus history (apart from severe service disruptions, when a shuttle might be reinstated on a temporary basis, while the main service gets back to timetable). This remains the case today with no further plans, as far as it is known, for an 'all round' service.

Below: Looking west from the westbound platform at Woodford with an eastbound train of 1962 Tube Stock approaching. The closeness of the crossover between the westbound and eastbound line, seen where the leading bogie of the train is, made it necessary to have trap points and sand drag, seen going off to the left, in case of an overrun of the westbound starting signal.



Previous Page: (Lower) A three-car unit of 1960 Tube Stock has departed the siding west of Woodford and is proceeding across the crossover onto the eastbound line. This train was the one that was used for the Fully Automatic Control of Trains (FACT – seen in the destination box) which, although successful in its own way, was abandoned because of financial reasons.

Below: With the resignalling of the Central Line in the 1990s, the opportunity was taken to make track layout alterations at certain locations. This is at the west end of the westbound platform at Woodford on 31 October 2013 showing that the former overrun track and sand drag has been removed.

All photos: Brian Hardy.

