

EAST LONDON LINE POST-CLOSURE NOTES – 4

by John Thomason

Tower Hamlets council have produced an updated leaflet for their Wapping to Surrey Quays bus service. It has a picture of the new vehicle and details of the improved service now provided. The “Your questions answered” section has had a modification to suggest that if usage drops then the service could be withdrawn or reduced, however use remains buoyant at the moment. The leaflet was first seen in May but is flashed from 5 April 2008. It has been reported that the Tower Hamlets’ shopping bus is funded by Transport for London despite being restricted to Tower Hamlets’ residents.

LOROL held a recruitment open day for train drivers in May at the Barnes Wallis Community Centre in New Cross. They are offering a salary of £35,000 after a qualifying period. It is understood that training is well under way at the LOROL offices at Swiss Cottage but more staff are needed to operate the trains when services are improved/extended.

Janet Cook, Chief Executive of London Travelwatch wrote on 19 May to the Office of the Rail Regulator concerning the South London Route Utilisation Strategy:

“ORR should make a statement which clearly signals to Network Rail, the Department for Transport and other industry parties that particular consideration must be given to the following points.

- a) The need for station capacity improvements at Waterloo (East) and Charing Cross. This matter is alluded to in the RUS, but unlike (for example) London Bridge, there are currently no worked-up schemes for these two stations.
- b) That before South London Line trains are withdrawn from London Bridge, it is essential that East London Line Extension phase two (the section from Surrey Quays to Clapham Junction) is completed and in operation.
- c) That before a final decision is taken to withdraw South London Line trains from the section of line between Wandsworth Road and Battersea Park, the appropriate statutory closure procedures are applied so that any passenger hardship issues can be properly considered. It would not be acceptable for the statutory procedures to be avoided by operation of a single daily or weekly train as has occurred elsewhere”.

Two LOROL briefings to user groups in May revealed that ELR test running was anticipated in late 2009 with the trunk service (Dalston to New Cross/Gate) starting in April 2010 and the extension beyond New Cross Gate following in June. Southern station refurbishment would precede this, starting in June 2009.

At the end of the evening peak on 28 May an incident occurred outside Liverpool Street station at the site of new bridge GE19. To quote an eyewitness:

“As usual I had a late meeting at work which meant I rushed to get the 19.08 Clacton service from Liverpool Street. Reaching Platform 18 at about 19.06 I walked along the 4-coach train and to my irritation it was full and standing in all four coaches. I could have crushed in, but feeling tired I decided to skip it and settle for a seat on the 19.18 Harwich to travel more relaxed to my stop at Witham.

“The 19.18 was on platform 13 opposite the 19.15 to Southend Victoria on 12. The Southend (4 coaches) left on time and so did my 4 coaches, which by this time were

also full and standing. Settling down to read the free evening comics we pulled smoothly away out and up for a minute or so before halting. I didn't pay any attention, after all it's a common occurrence just outside the Street, but when we didn't move for a couple of minutes I started to look out the window. We were on the Down Electric and just across on the Down Main was the Southend. What was curious were that people seems to be walking along the train from the front to the back between the carriages. I couldn't work it out at first, all I could do was guess there was a jumper under the train and the driver had sent people away to stop them seeing anything. Then people started walking back (or rather trying to squeeze through) in our train. When the power went off, I thought I was right but once again I was wrong.

"I then started to look out of the window. I was in the 3rd carriage, level with the 3rd carriage of the Southend, which was just under the western Girder of Bridge GE19, newly installed over the tracks. I then looked up and saw various 'holes' in the decking of the bridge. It appeared that a number of steel reinforced concrete 'deck' panels or planks had fallen onto the track. The Southend had obviously hit one or nearly hit one, because his emergency brake application meant he had come to rest exactly halfway under the bridge.

"The panels or planks were about two metres long and about 10cm by 10cm or so. I could see at least four or bits of four on ether side of the down main. It took approx 30 minutes after the 'incident' that we started to be detrained. The Southend was obviously done first then my Harwich and a West Anglia 317 that was also stopped under the bridge. We all walked down (or rather up the slope) to Bethnal Green and then guided out onto the street to make our own way to Bethnal Green Tube".

Sometime sensational reporting appeared in the daily and evening press with much speculation and some doubtful "facts". *Construction News* had a measured, if brief account of the incident: "The bridge was pushed into position earlier this month and was sitting on two temporary fixtures. Last night work was being carried out to move it into its final position. A jack holding the bridge eight inches above its permanent position gave way during the works causing the bridge to drop into place. As a result some concrete planks from the final fixture fell onto the track. Last night at around 19.25 a driver of a service to Southend reported hitting debris. Under the supervision of emergency services the electrical current was turned off and passengers were evacuated. Network Rail is hoping that services will resume this afternoon. [They did]. TfL has confirmed that a full investigation into the incident will be carried out and that the £400 million East London Line project won't be delayed". Similar less sensational reports appeared in *Building* and *Construction Journal*; the *East London Advertiser* had some local colour: Senior fire officer John Scott, one of the first rescuers at the scene, told the Advertiser: "The bridge appears to have distorted and thrown out a 3ft concrete plinth, which fell onto the main line below and one of the trains hit the concrete. We got all the passengers off and led some towards the old Shoreditch station then on to Bethnal Green along the tracks, and others back to Liverpool Street. One passenger had just had a hip replacement operation, so we had to carry him on a special stretcher because he couldn't risk walking along the track". Rescue crews were on the scene within minutes from Whitechapel, Bethnal Green and Shoreditch fire stations, with other crews joining them from East Ham, Walthamstow, Euston and as far as Battersea. There were 60 fire fighters involved along with police and railway officials. The incident also led to a security alert when police spotted what they thought was a hand-grenade on the

track. The area was cordoned off for an hour from 21.30 while sniffer dogs were brought in to search but the object turned out to be a discarded child's toy.

On 29 May at 16.45 Network Rail issued the following Press Release:

"Network Rail's Chief Executive today wrote to Transport for London's Commissioner Peter Hendy to seek urgent answers about the severe disruption caused to tens of thousands of passengers as a result of the failure of TfL infrastructure outside Liverpool Street station on the evening of Wednesday 28th May.

"At about 19.15 last night a concrete slab fell from a TfL bridge that had been erected over the May Day bank holiday as part of TfL's ongoing project to extend the East London Line. Services were stopped as a result of the incident and it wasn't until 09.30 this morning that TfL gave the 'all clear' and services were allowed to re-start.

"Because of concerns over TfL's handling and management of both the project and its contractors, Network Rail has banned work on the bridge, effective immediately. This will remain in place until TfL has completed an investigation and reported back on the causes of the incident and what measures it will be putting in place to prevent a repetition.

"Commenting on the incident, Network Rail's Director of Operations and Customer Service, Robin Gisby, said: 'Passengers rightly want an explanation, as do I. Passengers deserve an apology for the disruption they suffered last night and this morning and I want assurances that such an incident can't and won't happen again.'"

The *East London Advertiser* reported that the police are looking for a man after he was caught on camera taking cable from the railway. Power supplies to the overhead cables had been switched off after a bridge support collapsed onto the tracks last Wednesday [28 May] that brought chaos to the network. The man was photographed by an *East London Advertiser* reader who watched him brazenly collect lengths of copper cable in broad daylight a few hundred yards from Bethnal Green station, bundle them into a bag and pass them to someone waiting below the viaduct in Three Colts Lane.

On 3 June a gas main rupture closed Canada Water station and the bus station above for most of the day. Buses were diverted to miss out the nearby area and Surrey Quays station became the terminating point for relevant bus services including the ELC.

Docklands 24 for 4 June reports that the Surdoc social club in Cope Street [adjacent to Surrey Quays station] is losing £1,000 to £1,500 a week [profit or turnover is not stated] as a result of being "marooned" because of the bridge closure adjacent to their premises. [The two alternative routes available from the west end of Cope Street add at most 4-minutes walk]. The publication reports that discussions regarding compensation and providing a Wednesday mini-bus service are continuing. The Surdoc club is one of the last workingmen's clubs still trading in the Greater London area. It was noted that additional outside lighting had been installed by mid-June.

During the June Society meeting it was announced that the ELS service would cease on Friday 18 July and be replaced by an extension of the ELW from Sunday 20 July. It has been reported that six 'DMS' type buses will take over from Saturday 19 July with revised routing to take advantage of the smaller vehicles. The operation will also change from Dagenham depot to the new First garage at Lea Park. All going

well the buses should be suitably branded. Shoreditch will continue to be served at similar hours to now – outwith these times the service will terminate at Whitechapel. Passenger use of the ELW has reduced significantly recently. Loadings on the ELC are little better and numbers are slowly declining as users find better routes. Peak hour reliability has been severely affected by water main and road works in the New Cross area and bridge works in the Surrey Quays one-way system. Unsurprisingly the peak-hour frequency of the ELC is to be reduced to every 10-minutes from 21 July. It is clear that the cost of providing these replacement bus services is high for the number of users.

Barratt Homes has a development, Dalston Square, adjacent to Dalston Junction station. Phase one has started to the east of the railway but phase two is to be built above the station and will also have extensive bus interchange facilities. In order to regenerate this brown-field site, TfL will have to build a giant reinforced ‘slab’ over the new East London Railway station. This major piece of engineering work is not required for the rail link and will add some £39 million in additional cost. TfL have already committed to covering £10million of the cost directly themselves and have secured a £10million Community Investment Fund grant, however the remaining costs will have to be met by the scheme itself. The Barratt Homes’ marketing suite has an excellent architectural model of the development and surrounding area. It is possible to work out the location of the safeguarded eastern curve but to utilise this would require relocation of the Matalan service road that has been built over part of the alignment. One wonders what effect the current economic downturn will have on phase two of this scheme.

A great deal of work to the formation on the former ELL south of Surrey Quays can be seen. The track bed has been excavated in many areas and extensive work to the embankments, drainage and structures is in hand. New rail and concrete sleepers stocks are placed ready for total renewal of the track. An extraordinary variety of specialised road-rail vehicles can be seen from time-to-time.

New Civil Engineer for 13 June has a write-up of the latest information regarding the GE19 bridge collapse: “Packing supporting the bridge failed at one support point, causing a second temporary support to fail. The bridge slipped to its final resting position at both points. As the steel warren truss structure fell, one of the pre-cast concrete slabs forming the bridge’s deck came loose and dropped onto railway lines below”. The slab in question was part of a thin lightweight deck, probably designed to *protect* the line from workers above until the final deck was poured on top. The article mentions that until the bridge is finished they can’t bring materials from the Silwood Triangle worksite to the northern extension by rail, which means this incident could have delayed the whole East London Railway project but this is unlikely since the slab track is being laid from Whitechapel southwards and will take some time to reach Silwood.

The following appeared in mid-June on an enthusiast discussion group: “I heard that some of the Knights Rail shunters have been sent away for repair and that a ex-BR Class 73 loco has recently arrived at New Cross to assist with the works”. This prompted an especial visit to Silwood to investigate – my first reaction was that a 73 might be out-of-gauge and possibly too heavy. 73.204 is reported to be replacing a defective Ruston diesel and was delivered overnight on 9/10 June. The locomotive was previously at the Nene Valley Railway and is in somewhat scruffy GB Railfreight livery. It was noted passing (by road!) through east London during 9 June and is reported as having crossed the Thames using Vauxhall Bridge. Your reporter did not

see the locomotive until 23 June despite several visits – two of the three Rustons were also seen, as were the four battery units.

Since coming to power, Boris Johnson has taken part in Mayor's Question time. One interesting reply is that, "The East London Line phase 2 extension does not have funding. If it does get it, the target opening date is December 2011". Unless funding is forthcoming soon it may not prove possible to install the grade-separated junction at Deptford Road (south of Surrey Quays) without a further closure!

New Cross Road was part closed after 21.00 on Monday 23 June resulting in short working of the ELC to New Cross Pagnall Street. New Cross Gate was not served for the rest of the night.





Canal Junction signal cabin was reported to have been demolished in the short space of an hour on during the last week of June. The signal box was located in the 'V' of the junction. The pictures show the cabin before demolition (*above*) and during demolition (*left*).

**Both photos:
John
Greenaway**

A TfL press release on 26 June advised us that crucial work to a bridge would allow the East London Line to connect with Highbury & Islington station via Canonbury in 2011. To enable the bridge replacement, traffic restrictions on Dalston Lane between the junctions of Queensbridge Road and Kingsland Road are set to begin on 19 July and will last for approximately 10 months. Phase one of the restrictions will close the southern footpath across the bridge and retain two-lane, two-way traffic with a northern pedestrian footpath in place. This restriction will last for approximately four months. Phase two will start in mid-November and traffic will be reduced to one lane eastbound with the northern footpath retained. Westbound traffic, including buses, will be diverted from Dalston Lane along Queensbridge Road, Richmond Road and Kingsland High Street. This will last for two months. Phase three will see two-way traffic restored with the southern footpath reinstated. This is scheduled for completion in May 2009.