

EAST LONDON LINE POST-CLOSURE NOTES – 9

by John Thomason

**With contributions from londonreconnections blogspot,
Google groups and anonymous**

East London Line News continues to have erratic distribution. Two members report that issue 5, December 2008 was first seen at Whitechapel in early February – your reporter is unaware of any distribution south of the river. Issue 6, February 2009 followed on in due course. Each issue contains information, largely predictable, about rolling stock, depot and station work, social and environmental matters, charity donations and project highlights.

Secondary means of escape (steel stairs) were noted in mid-March at Rotherhithe and Surrey Quays. These arrived in pieces, were assembled on site and then craned into position. Rotherhithe's escape route is into Albion Street, Surrey Quays southbound platform gives egress to the adjacent shopping centre boundary wall, the northbound to a nearby residential development's car parking space.

Cope Street bridge reopened during March with no ceremony at all. A number of Sheffield Hoops [for parking cycles] have been provided although your reporter finds this location unexpected to say the least. An extensive programme of hoop installation has been underway in Southwark – at least 40 additional hoops were recently erected adjacent to Canada Water station where about 80 cycles are left on working days.

Track laying at New Cross Gate station area has finally got underway following extensive formation and drainage work in the area.

The *Hackney Post* for 24 March reports that bus users in Dalston were left confused after routes were diverted to make way for major road works. From 00.01 on Saturday 21 March until 20.00 Sunday 24 May, routes 30 38 56 242 277 and N38 will be on diversion westbound only and subject to severe delays. Diverted buses skirt round to the east of the Dalston Junction site and will serve stops in Queensbridge Road and Richmond Road during these works. Southbound buses will rejoin Kingsland Road junction with Richmond Road and Dalston Lane will be closed to westbound traffic for two months. This will allow the construction of the northern exits at the initial northern terminus of the East London line extension at Dalston Junction.

In the meantime work has begun on Kingsland Road with the demolition of shops, whose sites are required for the access road into the new bus bays being built on the western side of the station.

A planning application was submitted to Tower Hamlets in late March for the redesign of the station at Wapping. The application notes that the existing single storey ticket hall was built in 1960, and is of "limited architectural quality" and with no real street presence when compared to the green faience and painted render capping the Brunel shaft.

The main change to the station design is the moving of the current entrance to a more central position, and the removal of a planned central support column that would have split the entrance in half. As part of the upgrade works, the two lifts in the original Brunel shaft are to be replaced, which the planning application notes

offers a unique opportunity to replace the lift apron deck at a lower level and thus create a single floor for the ticket hall and lift area. The shaft itself is Grade 2 listed, so the works have to reflect that. The main effort is to remove an atmosphere described as “intimidating” when entering the dimly lit shaft. The brickwork is to be cleaned and new edgings for the steps installed. The final short flight of stairs leading down to the platforms feature listed timber and cast iron balustrades. It is being proposed that these are refurbished, and new tubular rails are then used to replace the single timber handrail on the outer brick shaft wall to bring the stairwell up to modern building codes.

By mid-April at Dalston Junction, the track bed for the extension to Highbury and Islington was occupied by builders spoil. The incline down from Boleyn Road has become permanent with a new retaining wall. Presumably, an engineer’s service access point has been created. Two gaps have now appeared on Kingsland Road north of Dalston Lane, as the shops built over the rail link have been demolished. Moving down Kingsland Road, progress in demolishing the former Oxfam Shop to create the entrance into the new bus station seems to have slowed. Round the corner on Forest Road, however, there was an absolute hive of activity. Looking north, the track bed slab where the two through platform roads split round the two centre reversing roads is visible. Looking south, the reversing scissors crossover, for Dalston Junction terminators has been put in place.

Further south at Holywell Lane the chord from the former Bishopsgate Goods Depot to the former NLL formation has been completed and track laying is in progress. The Shoreditch High Street entrances appear to be all that needs to be done to complete the exterior works. Most of the trackwork in the New Cross area appears have been laid to the south of the new depot entrance but certain elements appear to be still underway on the north west end. The flyover has been connected to the main line but as with the platform road, electrification, final alignment and tamping appear incomplete.

East London Line Information, the Balfour Beatty Carillion house magazine for April 2009, has much useful information concerning progress. Covered way 126 between Shoreditch and Whitechapel has been refurbished with 59 beams grit blasted and painted. The covered way is to be topped with reinforced slab work and then landscaped. Drainage work at Allen Gardens is nearing completion, preceding conversion to a recreation area. Several visuals of proposed refurbishment of stations are shown with detailed listing of the works envisaged. An account of the complex construction work undertaken at Dalston station and Bishopsgate rounds off the issue.

The London Marathon on 26 April 2009 caused the usual curtailment and diversions of replacement buses ELC (New Cross to Surrey Quays) and ELW (Shoreditch to Shadwell).

Travelwatch have released communications between themselves and both TfL and the DfT relating to an apparent agreement reached between the government bodies to abandon plans for the service between Victoria and Bellingham in return for ELLX2 funding contributions. The service, with ELLX Phase 2, originally formed part of the Rail Utilisation Strategy for replacement services for the South London Line after its 2012 closure. The plan was to replace the current half-hourly London Victoria to London Bridge service (which calls at Battersea Park, Wandsworth Road, Clapham High Street, Denmark Hill, Peckham Rye, Queens Road Peckham and

South Bermondsey) with a service that ran through from Victoria to Bellingham. Additionally, the RUS proposed that the new replacement service stop at Nunhead, Crofton Park and Catford.

It appears, however, that as part of the ELLX Phase 2 funding negotiations TfL approached the DfT and requested that the service be dropped in return for a £24m contribution from the DfT to ELLX2 funding. The DfT, after proposing several conditions, agreed.

The reasons for the proposal are clear. As TfL themselves indicated in their response to Travelwatch's request for information about the decision, in terms of passenger numbers, the cost-to-benefit ratio for an extended ELL service (about 1,000 passengers per hour eastbound, 900 west) is far higher than that of the proposed Bellingham service (about 650 per hour). In that light, ELLX2 is the far better option mathematically speaking. It will, however, mean that no direct services will run between Victoria and Clapham High Street/Wandsworth Road, and will also likely mean only 2tph between Denmark Hill and Victoria instead of the publically claimed 4tph.

Some of the conditions attached by the DfT to the decision also have major implications. Firstly, TfL have agreed that neither they, nor any concessionary, will run East London Line services into Victoria for at least 10 years (excepting unusual circumstances such as engineering work). This ensures that the DfT do not face the risk of ELL services abstracting from other operators (such as South Eastern).

Secondly, TfL have agreed that Shoreditch High Street will be a Zone 1 station. On the surface, this may not seem too bad, but a quick glance at the Tube map will highlight just how much this single little salient of Zone 1 will potentially affect the cost of journeys on the line.

Interestingly, it appears that the DfT also offered to provide an additional £7m of funding if TfL agreed to take the station at Surrey Canal Road forward – something that TfL declined on the basis that they anticipated the overall cost of the station to far exceed that.

Beyond the service implications, of course, it is the lack of public consultation or (post-decision) information which Travelwatch feel is the major issue here. Whilst the RUS was in no way binding, no information on the change to this service plan featured in the much-hyped ELLX2 announcements at the beginning of this year – a big contrast with the genuinely good levels of communication so far on Surrey Canal Road.

Ultimately, whether the decision taken was the right one or not, Travelwatch do appear to have a fair point about communication and consultation. The DfT indicate that publicising the decision was not their responsibility, whilst TfL seem to suggest that they would have done so nearer the time. Whatever the case, it seems a shame that, according to Travelwatch, it is only thanks to communications made available to them by Val Shawcross AM that this information has come out now, rather than due to the proactive efforts of TfL, the DfT or the Mayor's Office, all of whom were involved in the decision itself.