

# ALL CHANGE ON THE NORTHERN CITY

Although the Northern City Line has been part of the main line railway for almost 50 years, it was part of the Underground from its opening in 1904 up to 1975. The various operators and line names have been as follows:

UNDERGROUND	MAIN LINE
Great Northern & City Railway 1904-1913	British Rail
Great Northern & City (Metropolitan Railway) 1913 to 1934	Network SouthEast
Northern City Line (London Transport) 1934-1970	West Anglia & Great Northern
Northern Line (Highbury Branch) 1970-1975	First Capital Connect
	Great Northern (as part of Govia Thameslink)

From 19 May 2025, the Northern City Line became fully operational with the European Train Control System (ETCS) in-cab signalling provided by Siemens Mobility. ETCS was first introduced on the Northern City Line in November 2023 and initially, the lineside signals were retained. It is now the first line on Network Rail which has been converted to “signals away”, meaning there are no lineside signals at all, those remaining being removed over the weekend of 18/19 May. Drivers are now told how far and how fast to run their trains through an in-cab computer screen inside the train, which receives information from the ETCS digital signalling system. We are told that the digital signalling system will give passengers greater reliability and better punctuality. The system is also even safer and more environmentally sustainable as there is much less physical equipment to produce and maintain.

The following photos were taken between 11 and 22 May 2025.



**Above:** (Left) The Down Moorgate platform at Old Street on 11 May 2025 before the removal of lineside signal YA4106, with block marker for YA4106 just visible in distance.



**Above:** (Right) On 15 May 2025, an Up train for Moorgate arrives at Drayton Park. Signal YA4189 is a Down direction lineside signal and will remain to enable an Up train with defective ETCS to reverse at Drayton Park

**Below:** (Left) A train arriving in the Down Moorgate platform at Drayton Park. Signal YA3186 is an Up direction signal, enabling trains to reverse north to south (Down to Up).

**Below:** (Right) Signal YA3186 at Drayton Park on 22 May 2025 after lineside signals had been removed. The 10 mph permissible speed sign is now required, as with ETCS ‘signals away’, any permissible speed lower than the ceiling speed (20 mph on the Northern City) needs lineside signage. This is because if a train needs to operate in the degraded ‘Staff Responsible’ mode, using the driver’s own authority to move from block marker to block marker, the move is made at the ceiling speed. However, any lower speeds need to be visible to the driver.

**All photos: Paul McLauchlan**





## BACK WITH LONDON TRANSPORT

Three events on the Northern City Line took place within the months of October – in 1964, 1966 and 1975. The first was over the weekend of 4/5 October 1964, when the section between Drayton Park and Finsbury Park was closed to passengers, so that the Northern City platforms at Finsbury Park could be adapted for the forthcoming Victoria Line. The northbound platform at Finsbury Park was to become the westbound Piccadilly Line (which took place from 3 October 1965) and the southbound terminal platform was to be the southbound Victoria Line (when opened on 1 September 1968). The Northern City Line signalling at Finsbury Park was decommissioned and sand drags and buffer stops were provided 1,125ft north of Drayton Park. On the northbound side, this was more than long enough to accommodate two full-length trains in the event of one (defective) having to be pushed out to depot. The southbound tunnel would not be used, other than for the storage of stock, which it indeed was.

Over that weekend, 61 cars of 1923-29 Pre-1938 Tube Stock were transferred out, initially to Highgate and subsequently onwards to Ruislip Depot, where they were kept for consideration for service on the Isle of Wight. Transferred in were 32 cars (8x4-cars) of 1931/34 Pre-1938 Tube Stock, of which one four-car had been at Morden since 4 June 1964 for crew training<sup>1</sup>. With the service cut back to terminate at Drayton Park and with the loss of the through service to Finsbury Park and its replacement by a coach service, a reduction to four-car trains was considered adequate. On a 'just in case' (of passenger traffic requirement) basis, a further 16 trailers of 1931 Stock were transferred in during December 1964 and January 1965 which, if needed, would have made 8x6-car trains. They were stored in the disused southbound tunnel north of Drayton Park. In the event, they were not required and four-car trains were more than sufficient.



**Above:** Trains on the Northern City Line were maintained at Drayton Park Depot and only left the line for heavy overhaul or repairs that the depot couldn't handle. Seen on the main line (Left) above the Northern City Line (which was in a cutting), a 1925 MCCW control trailer is seen being returned to the line in pristine condition after overhaul at Acton Works. The car, between match wagons, is being

<sup>1</sup> The four-car from Morden arrived at Highgate on 2 October 1964.



shunted into Highbury Vale sidings and will be collected from there by a pair of LT motor cars. Stabling accommodation on the Northern City was restricted, and as well as the depot, trains were outstabled at Moorgate and Finsbury Park. At the latter (Right) trains had to stable into the (northbound) overrun tunnel, part of a 1923 Cammell Laird trailer being nearest.

**Photos: Brian Hardy Collection (Left) and LURS Collection (Right)**

**Below:** The 'new' order on the changeover weekend 4/5 October 1964 with 1931/34 Stock passing through the closed Crouch End station (Left) on its way to Drayton Park. An outgoing train of 1923-29 Stock (Right) is seen after leaving Highgate Wood Sidings for Ruislip Depot, with trains of 1938 Tube Stock stabled in Highgate Depot. The closed (in 1962) Wellington goods yard is to the left.

**Photos: Fred Ivey / Online Transport Archive (Left) and Brian Hardy Collection (Right)**



The next 'October' event was in 1966 with the imminent withdrawal of the four-car trains of Pre-1938 Tube Stock, which had come about because of recent service reductions, providing sufficient 1938 Tube Stock to replace them. To that end, the first four-car train and two stored trailers left the line on 1 September 1966. The 14 other stored trailers were transferred away during September and October. With one 1938 Tube Stock unit transferred in before the changeover, the actual changeover took place over seven days, on 25-28 October and 1-3 November 1966. Trains were replaced on a one-for-one basis and the 'new' order then comprised eight units, four four-car and four three-car. The last run of the Pre-1938 Tube Stock in passenger service on LT metals was during the morning peak on 3 November 1966. It was celebrated 'locally' but with no interest from London Transport, despite a career history of some 43-plus years<sup>2</sup> with these trains (from the first 1922 'Sample' cars in service on 12 February 1923 to the last on 3 November 1966<sup>3</sup>).



**Above:** The last run of a Pre-1938 Tube Stock on the Underground on 3 November 1966 at Drayton Park (Left) and having stabled in the depot (Right) prior to transfer away to Highgate and Ruislip, with the replacement stock on the right.

**Both photos: Printz Holman**

<sup>2</sup> At least the residents of the Isle of Wight were able to enjoy them for a further 23 years!

<sup>3</sup> The car in longest service was 1923 Cammell Laird trailer 7275 (ex-825) from 28 January 1924 until withdrawal on 4 October 1964. This car was one of 43 that went to the Isle of Wight for further service and its 'age' was celebrated there on 28 January 1984.

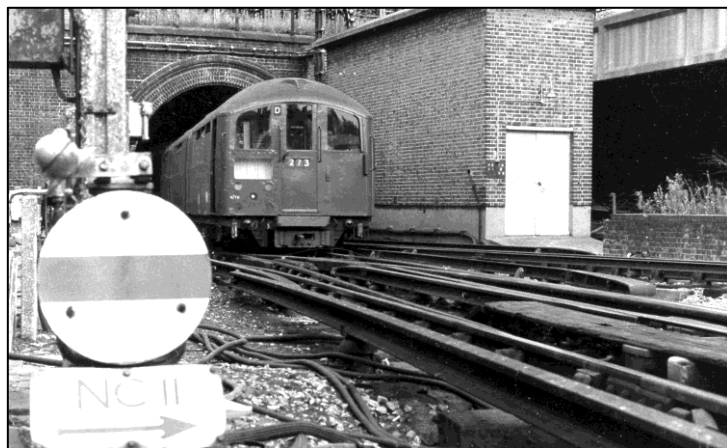


**Below:** One of the 16 trailers that were stored in the southbound disused tunnel north of Drayton Park, in Ruislip Depot awaiting disposal. Two years of storage in a disused tunnel is very evident ... None of the 1931 trailers made it to the Isle of Wight.

**Photo: Brian Hardy**



Initially, the 1938 Tube Stock operated in single three- or four-car units on the Northern City Line, again this being sufficient for the traffic offering at the time, with any unit from the Northern Line fleet, apart from three-car units with Uncoupling Non-Driving Motor cars. The three-car M-T-M formations all had trailers with two compressors. When the Victoria Line opened on 1 September 1968, each train was formed of two three-car units in anticipation of the extra traffic that interchange with it at Highbury & Islington would generate. Being Northern Line based, any M-T-M formation from that line would suffice and continued to be changed over at Highgate. With the Victoria Line fully open as far as Victoria, signalling alterations were made at Drayton Park from 1 August 1969 so that seven-car trains could operate on the Northern City which took place during that month. However, that was soon thwarted by the craftsmen's strike at Acton Works which started in September and carried on until January 1970. The 1938 Tube Stock situation was critical with many trains cancelled on the Northern and Bakerloo lines and six-car trains became the norm again in October 1969. The precarious situation with the Northern Heights infrastructure, where single line working was already in operation between Finsbury Park and Highgate, led to the route being closed and from 5 October 1970, stock transfers were between Neasden and Drayton Park, via the City Widened lines and King's Cross main line. A total of 12 dedicated units to form six six-car trains for the Northern City Line were thus maintained at Neasden henceforth.



**Above:** (Left) From October 1964, Northern City Line trains reversed in the northbound platform at Drayton Park, this being after 1938 Tube Stock took over from October 1966.

**Photo: Alan A. Jackson**

**Above:** (Right) the exit from Drayton Park Depot with a train entering the northbound tunnel, where it would reverse and run to the northbound platform to return southbound.

The Northern City Line was taken over by British Rail (Eastern Region) for its Great Northern inner suburban electrification scheme, which was eventually authorised in August 1971 after several years of waiting<sup>4</sup>. The last day of operation for the Northern City Line (which had been retitled 'Northern Line – Highbury branch' from 14 March 1970) was 5 October 1975. By then, three of the dedicated units had been replaced – two to release units for Extra Heavy Overhaul (EHO) and life extension, and one to replace that damaged beyond repair in the Moorgate collision of 28 February 1975. The six trains (units shown below in **bold**) were returned to Neasden after closure and the Underground's involvement with the Northern City Line ended after 71+ years (14 February 1904 until 5 October 1975). Out of the six trains (12 units), two units were selected for EHO, while the other ten were scrapped.

#### **THE NORTHERN CITY FLEET FROM 5 OCTOBER 1970**

<b>UNIT</b>	<b>NOTE</b>
<b>10105-012161-11105</b>	
<b>10109-012151-11109</b>	012151 was ex-NDM 12151
<b>10111-012162-11111</b>	
<b>10113-012517-11113</b>	012517 was ex-DMs 10296 and 11073
<b>10115-012167-11115</b>	
<b>10151-012309-11151</b>	
10155-012247-11155	To EHO January 1972 and replaced by <b>10117-012416-11117</b>
10157-012245-11157	Withdrawn June 1974 and replaced by <b>10147-012181-11147</b>
<b>10169-012256-11169</b>	
10175-012263-11175	Moorgate collision unit and scrapped. Replaced by <b>10043-012404-11043</b>
<b>10187-012273-11187</b>	
<b>10287-012380-11287</b>	

#### **NORTHERN CITY 1938 TUBE STOCK SUMMARY**

- Each train either 3-car (M-T-M) or 4-car unit (M-T-NDM-M) from October 1966 randomly from the Northern Line fleet.
- Eight 4-car Standard Stock sets transferred out – one 1 September 1966, the remaining seven on 25/26/27/28 October and 1/2/3 November. 1938 Tube Stock transferred in on a one-for-one basis.
- 1938 Tube Stock changed over via Highgate, one unit per stock move. One Northern Line train (start ex-Golders Green) was nominated to stable at Highgate Wood Sidings after the morning peak and from it, the relevant unit changed over. The train then ran in the evening peak on the Northern Line and stabled after the peak at Golders Green. Any four-car unit could be used and any three-car unit in the formation M-T-M could be used. The train stabled at Highgate was not to include an UNDM.
- Three-car units fitted with two compressors, identified by letter 'C' under/over trailer car number.
- Each train 6 cars of two 3-car units (M-T-M+M-T-M) from September 1968 for Victoria Line opening.
- Stock continues to be non-specific three-car units from the Northern Line fleet, provided above criteria met (i.e., no UNDM units). No longer any need for two-compressor trailers as each six car trains would have two.
- Signalling modified at Drayton Park from 1 August 1969 to operate 7-car trains. 5x3-car transferred out and 5x4-car transferred in over six dates 5/7/12/14/19/21 August 1969, during which time a mix of six- and seven-car trains operated.
- Six-car trains replaced seven-car trains in October 1969 (q.v.) because of a shortage of 1938 Tube Stock. 4x4-car transferred out and 4x3 transferred in on 12 October 1969, 1x4-car transferred out and 1x3-car transferred in two days later.
- With closure of the Finsbury Park – Highgate section, dedicated stock was allocated and based at Neasden. Line allocation 6x6-car trains of two 3-car M-T-M units, nominal transfer date 5 October 1970. All Neasden stock allocated to Northern City Line had 'Northern Line' car line diagrams.
- Route taken by stock transfers: Neasden – Baker Street – Farringdon (cross over to Up City Widened Lines – Barbican (reverse) – Down City Widened Lines to King's Cross main line via Hotel Curve – Finsbury Park (reverse) – Drayton Park.

<sup>4</sup> It was hoped that the GN electrification would be authorised at the same time as the Victoria Line, which was in September 1962 – a further nine years were to elapse before it was.

**Below:** One of the last trains to leave the Northern City Line seen at Drayton Park with battery loco L51 nearest and at the rear of the train, with the Station Manager acknowledging its departure. With handover to British Rail, the current rails on what was to have been the southbound line from the Northern Heights have already been displaced – the running rails look none too good either ...

**Photo: LURS Collection**

