

AUGUST 2006 NEWS UPDATE

London Rail Concession Process Gets Under Way

The shortlist of bidders to take over operation of the Silverlink Metro routes from November, 2007 has now been announced by Transport for London (TfL). They are Govia (operators of Southern), MTR Laing (operators of Chiltern), NedRailways (main train operator in the Netherlands, also operators of Merseyrail) and the current incumbents, National Express Group. Three of them have already asked to meet us to discuss what we want to see under the new regime; we recently had a useful session with Govia and look forward to meeting the others.

Meanwhile, we're front page news – the August issue of Modern Railways has the line's name emblazoned across the cover, with a very good 4-page article inside about the line's chequered past, the recent improvements and the brave new world it's about to enter. Pick up a copy at the newsagents!

Hello Goodbye

It's goodbye to Group Station Manager Andrew Lennox, who has moved up to mastermind National Express's bid, and hello again to his replacement Andrea Valente, who embarks on her third stint on the patch. How she must love it around here to keep coming back!

Train Services

The extra TfL-funded trains are picking up traffic steadily, but one thing TfL need to look at as a matter of urgency is improving Sunday services. Ours starts up too late and finishes too early, and the North London Line's half-hourly service is quite inadequate for the numbers of passengers cramming uncomfortably onto each train – especially in summer.

Penalty Fares Posters

At long last, the misleading PF posters at our stations have been replaced with new posters which explain clearly that our line is NOT included in Silverlink's PF scheme. So people should no longer be afraid of being hit with a fine if they get on one of our trains without a ticket, but they should buy one at the first opportunity – and they should definitely buy one at Gospel Oak, Blackhorse Road or Barking if they are continuing beyond there on another train, as the North London Line, London Underground and C2C are all covered by PF schemes.

Proposed Cycle Restrictions

Still no word on Silverlink's revised proposals; we are scheduled to meet new Metro Route Director Tom Joyner shortly and will raise this then.

Station to Station

Walthamstow Queens Road's "pod" waiting shelter on the westbound platform is area is now open, and offers a much-improved waiting environment for passengers with glazed walls, a door and heating. To deter late-night ne'er-do-wells, it locks automatically in mid-evening and unlocks automatically early next morning (don't worry - anyone still inside when it locks can still get out!). TfL have chosen WQR to see how such a building fares at such a location, so let's hope it remains in a decent state. A cycle shelter has also appeared at the entrance. Less satisfactory is the length of time the station's information screens have been out of action. Those at certain other stations have been packing up too frequently too, notably Leytonstone High Road and Blackhorse Road. Silverlink really do need to get

a grip on this - fully-functioning information screens are essential. They could do with being brighter too – that at Gospel Oak is especially hard to read.

And we understand from Waltham Forest council that the long-awaited direct pedestrian link between WQR's footbridge and Walthamstow Central should be constructed during this financial year, though the exact nature of the route through the carpark is once again under discussion after the July meeting of the council's Transport Liaison Committee voiced strong safety objections to the idea of a fenced-off footpath round the perimeter. We are assured that this should not result in yet more delay, and the Housing Association has finally agreed (8 years late!) to construct the section it is liable for between Queens Road platforms and Exeter Road. The link has been a principal objective of ours for many years, and we and others have urged that it be named Ray Dudley Way, in memory of one of the most dogged and enthusiastic campaigners for its construction who sadly died last year.

No further news yet on the planning application to demolish Crouch Hill's booking office & station house to build a shop and flats; it is now grinding its way through Islington's planning process.

We continue to maintain Leyton Midland's entrance flowerbed (which has survived the vandals' attentions rather better this year) – but Silverlink's cleaning contractors have not been too good at removing the daily accumulation of bottles, bags, cans and other rubbish that ends up in it. As for their lighting contractors, we've got so fed up with their repeated failures to repair lights promptly that we've urged them to give them the boot and engage someone else.

A few weeks ago, local Friends of the Earth activists blitzed the accumulation of cans etc at South Tottenham. Nice work, guys – but why isn't the relevant bit of the railway doing this sort of thing, instead of letting it build up until volunteers take action?

Planning a Trip to Wales This Summer?

If so, here's a reminder to try and work in a trip on the Heart of Wales line between Swansea and Shrewsbury, which goes right up through the middle of the country through superb scenery serving numerous villages and towns on the way. The perfect antidote to the hustle & bustle of London. We have established an informal twinning arrangement with their User Group, the Heart of Wales Line Travellers' Association (HOWLTA). See www.heart-of-wales.co.uk for all the details, including cheap fare offers!

Date of Next Meeting

Tuesday September 19th, 7 15 pm to 9 00 pm at Barking Town Hall. All welcome – until then, enjoy the summer!