



A new Northern line

In the last issue of *THE ARCHER*, we reported that the weekend shutdowns of the Northern line from East Finchley to Camden Town had been extended until the end of November and that further closures could last into 2007.



Here, we talk to David Millard, general manager of the Northern line, to find out why the work is taking place and exactly what lies ahead for long-suffering East Finchley tube passengers.

• THE ARCHER: What work is being carried out on the High Barnet branch of the Northern line?

David Millard: There is an extensive programme of track replacement work under way. Doing the work now means that the new track will have a working life running into decades, subject to regular inspection and maintenance. One prime premise of the work is to prepare the ground for a major signalling upgrade of the Northern line. That upgrade will start in two years' time. The whole process of updating the Northern line will finish in 2012.

• What difference will passengers notice to their journeys?

I have noticed the difference on the Northern line already. The smoothness of the ride is much improved and it is much quieter. Regular passengers will probably notice the benefits more than occasional users, but everyone should feel the trains are gliding into platforms, rather than clunking over joints. And the more secure track we are laying down will give us a more reliable service overall.

• How much more reliable will the service be?

The situation is too volatile to put targets around improved reliability.

• Why does the High Barnet branch have to be shut completely at weekends when it causes so much inconvenience for people travelling to work or shop in central London?

I regret the extra journey time for weekend workers and I have experienced personally some of the longer journeys on the line. London Underground and Tube Lines, who are carrying out the work, took the decision that weekend disruption was a better alternative than shutting down the line completely for a month. To make things as comfortable as possible for passengers during the shutdowns we have put a lot more attention in recent years into the quality of the substitute bus services and I hope that is noticeable.

• What have passengers said to you about the closures?

I have had a low level of concern shown to me but generally people acknowledge that the Northern line needs updating and so the closures have been accepted and understood.

• Will there be more shutdowns on the High Barnet branch or other parts of the Northern line after the end of November?

There is nothing planned for the High Barnet branch beyond the end of November but I wouldn't rule out further closures at this stage. What I can say is that I expect the High Barnet branch will be clear of major track work between April 07 and March 08. However, in February next year, there will be some work needed in the Kings Cross area as work is carried out to integrate the Channel Tunnel rail link connections. For travellers, that will mean that trains will not stop at Kings Cross for a period and there will be some suspension of the service on the Bank branch in April.

How your journey will be affected

There will be no tube service between East Finchley and Euston on the following weekends: 14-15 October, 21-22 October, 28-29 October, 18-19 November and 25-26 November. A replacement bus service will be in operation.

What is happening on the tracks?

By the end of the first 26 weekend closures, it is expected Tube Lines will have renewed 8km of track, representing 70 per cent of the total work programme.

Tube Lines is replacing the traditional bullhead rail and old wooden sleepers with a more stable and secure flat bottom rail that is either fixed to concrete sleepers or directly to the concrete floor. This new formation is designed to deliver a smoother, quieter ride.

Shutting the line over an entire weekend means the engineering teams can make progress much faster than would be possible by working within standard overnight engineering hours between 1am and 5am.

Every weekend, Tube Lines has a team of up to 700 people working nine-hour shifts on at least five work sites carrying out re-railing, track re-alignment and track re-conditioning.

A fund of knowledge

By Diana Cormack

Children attending our three local primary schools may soon be benefiting from a new fund. Backed by the East Finchley Community Development Trust (EFCDT), the East Finchley School Children's Fund has been established to provide financial support for pupils at Holy Trinity, Martin Infant and Martin Junior Schools.

The rising costs of educational visits due to security issues and price increases mean those who would most benefit from school trips are less likely to be able to afford them. With help no longer available from the Millie Apthorpe Trust, primary school children could miss out on a valuable part of their education which develops social skills as well as knowledge.

This is particularly applicable to school journeys, where the annual cost in Year 6 can easily be around £200 or more. Money from the fund would be allocated by head teachers to help those in need first, with priority being given to overnight

trips and then day visits. All children at the schools are eligible and the more money received, the more children can be helped.

Every penny to reach the children

As the fund is being administered by the EFCDT there will be no administration costs, so every penny raised will go to the children. Money would be donated by local businesses, ideally on the basis of a three-year commitment so the schools have some certainty for the future. Letters are being sent inviting them to participate in this unique scheme, which was devised by local resident Judith Salomon. She was inspired by a conversation she had with her mother Kathryn, a volunteer reading helper at Martin Junior School. Head teacher Maggie Driscoll told *The Archer* that

the importance of such trips should not be underestimated. "We want to ensure that all our children can take advantage of the wealth of experience available," she said.

Donors will be acknowledged on the EFCDT's website and will receive an EFSCF window sticker. For further information contact Judith Salomon on 07931 736 270 or jsalomon@london-first.co.uk

Housebound Reading Group

If a trial project is successful, Barnet's housebound residents may soon be able to go out to their own reading group.

Every few weeks, up to 10 elderly users of the borough's Home Library Service are being taken to Hendon Library, to take part in a discussion group about their favourite books. The trial project is being held in the western part of the borough, but could be extended to other Home Library Service readers across Barnet.

The Home Library Service delivers books (including large print), spoken word cassettes, CDs, videos and DVDs to people made housebound through age or infirmity. For more information, contact 020 8458 1139 or homelibraryservice@barnet.gov.uk.

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