

Docklands Light Railway The First Year





Cliff Bonnett M.D., on the first train out of Poplar, 05.17.31 August, 1987.



Bridging the Docks

Introduction

The first year of a new railway is crucial in gaining support from travellers and establishing itself within the community. In these terms, as well as financially, the Docklands Light Railway's first year has proved to be a successful one.

The initial railway was financed through its joint clients, London Regional Transport (LRT) and the London Docklands Development Corporation (LDDC) and capital costs have been contained within the budget set of £77 million.

In spite of early teething troubles, the railway's record of maintaining its schedules and the regularity of service has been good by most standards. Doubtless this has played a part in attracting consistently high numbers of passengers. It is also evident that the easy accessibility of railway staff on trains is welcomed by travellers.

Passenger security has proved to be outstanding in contemporary London, with no single passenger assault recorded. This is attributed largely to the high level of staff visibility.

This early success has also exacerbated some problem areas, including certain difficulties with validators and ticket machines. Work is already well advanced to overcome these difficulties.

Certainly the railway has attracted enormous attention both at home and overseas. After only a year it is clear that the DLR is both popular with travellers and will become financially viable. So now we are more confident than ever about the major two extensions to the City and to Beckton.

This booklet is intended to provide a brief summary of our experience during the first year.



Ed Pritchard

Opened by Her Majesty the Queen on 30 July 1987

Opening

The railway was formally opened by Her Majesty the Queen on 30 July 1987, and then opened to the public on August Bank Holiday, 31 August 1987. Because the contractor needed extra time to complete testing and installation work, the public opening was just one month later than planned.

This allowed sufficient time to complete staff training so that the railway was fully ready for passenger service from the first day of operation.



Control Room at the Operations and Maintenance Centre, Poplar

Performance

A high level of service was maintained during most of the year with the trains in operation regularly achieving 99% of the scheduled mileage.

A number of technical problems emerged in the early days of operation resulting in some system or branch closures. Many of these problems have been overcome, and action is being taken on those still giving trouble.

An independent survey carried out in January looked at the 'Excess waiting time' this gave an encouraging figure of 0.33 minutes, which was better than almost all London Underground Lines.



Train Captains and Staff at Poplar Station

Staff

The railway employed around 140 staff for most of the year, a high proportion of these coming from Docklands and the East End. It is railway policy to recruit locally to establish links with the community and to avoid long distance travelling.

The approach to staffing has been innovative from the start. A small railway cannot afford a host of specialists so staff have to accept a range of duties. For example, Train Captains have responsibilities for both trains *and* platforms, they can be involved in both cleaning and inspection, and they have administrative duties.

All jobs are salaried and representation is through elected councillors. This staffing concept marked a major change from practices established in Victorian times and has proved very attractive in recruiting.



Getting disabled aboard

Stations

Stations without staff need a wider than normal package of facilities. We are particularly concerned with disabled passengers and have provided special lifts that take wheelchairs. The lifts are also intended for travellers with pushchairs or heavy shopping. Generally these have worked well apart from some cases of overloading.

Platforms are under constant video scrutiny and passengers can contact the control staff straightaway if they have problems. In fact, during the first year stations have remained largely free from vandalism.



Artists impression of Canary Wharf development

Business

The railway has played a major part in encouraging new business in Docklands. Indeed, its very existence was a pre-requisite for the developers of the vast Canary Wharf scheme which is the largest urban development in the world.

During its first year, over 600 businesses have come to Docklands: These include a wide variety of companies spanning computers, precision engineering, publishing, food and drink, packaging as well as a host of small businesses. It is estimated that over 10,000 extra staff have been employed in Docklands as a result – many of whom are doubtless helping to swell our passenger traffic.



Lord Mayor's Show 1987

Tourists

The railway's visually spectacular route has attracted large numbers of tourists, both from Britain and overseas. The historic associations of the route has also proved popular with school parties where there are special rates.

The introduction of the cheap rate 'Docklander' ticket has demonstrably helped to increase tourist traffic at weekends and on public holidays.

The information centre at Island Gardens has supplied a vast amount of literature to travellers and tourists (a range of 58 items, including souvenirs) and handles hundreds of verbal enquiries daily.



Updating

The rigorous testing programme before opening told us a lot, but actual operation has revealed greater variability than expected.

Some had confidently predicted much misbehaviour, trespass and vandalism. This has not materialised. Equally, the on-train ticket checking policy, with the possibility of additional fares, has worked much better than some expected.

A number of passenger predilections have emerged. For example, the fit and unencumbered use of lifts intended for the disabled and people with loads. Door design is not liked, and many have expressed surprise that there is no Stratford to Tower Gateway through service. And many more tourists and visitors start from the Greenwich end than was forecast.

These and other small but important aspects are under review.



Ed Pritchard

Longer train leaving West India Quay

Upgrading

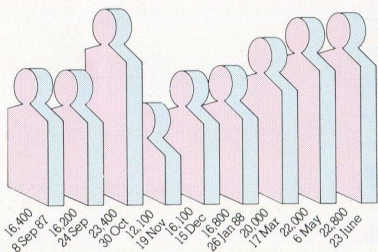
Unexpectedly high passenger demand has led to a need for early enlargement and improvement of the railway. This will involve doubling the length of platforms at 11 stations; designing and building a major station at Canary Wharf; and building ten more trains. Some other structures will be strengthened and signalling improved.

Work has already started and it has inevitably caused interruptions to services. Mostly the work is carried out at weekends and after 9.30 at night. During these times we run a special bus service.

When work is completed in a few years' time we shall look for an improved service with greater comfort for passengers.



Some younger passengers



DLR Daily Sample Passenger Count

Passengers

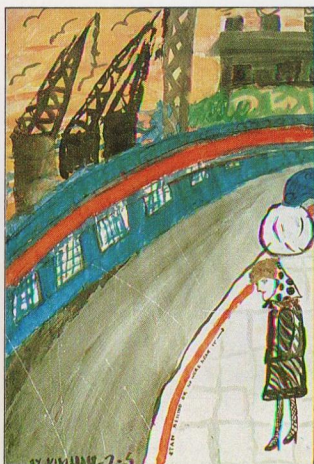
In the early months, journeys on the whole railway were recorded at around 16,000 a day; by June 1988 these had risen to nearly 23,000 a day. It seems certain that this trend will continue so the delivery of our new trains within the upgrading process will relieve pressure.

Both complaints and commendations have tended to rise during the year but the level of recorded verbal commendations has considerably outweighed the level of written complaints.



Mike Seaborne

On board



Painting by Kim Hau, of George Green's School

Community

With its high visibility, a necessary ingredient of the railway's success has been strong support from the whole of the local community. We have made great efforts to secure this, starting with basing the original project team at Poplar in the heart of Docklands.

Early contacts were set up with the police, fire brigade and ambulance services; there are regular local planning group meetings with local authorities; and meetings take place with local action groups like the Docklands Forum and the Association of Island Committees. We also deliver 'DLR News' door-to-door.

All the evidence we have suggests that local people now see us as 'their' railway.



Daily Telegraph, South Quay Station

International

There are over 300 Light Rail systems in operation around the world so it is not surprising that world wide interest has been shown in the DLR. Each system has been designed to suit individual circumstances, thereby demonstrating the flexibility of Light Rail technology. And more and more places are recognising the economic benefits of the small Light Rail vehicles which can cope with far higher passenger flows than buses yet travel much quicker in relative silence.

Our first eleven trains were built in Germany but the next 10 for the railway's upgrading are being built in Britain. Already there is considerable interest in these new trains coming from overseas - and from many places in Britain as well.



Train over Marsh Wall

Clients

Our joint clients, the LDDC and LRT have kept closely in touch with the railway's progress. LRT is naturally concerned exclusively with the transport system but the LDDC has wider spheres to consider. Development of the whole Docklands Enterprise Zone is in its brief, and its success is very much the success of the whole community, both domestic and business.

Schemes like the Docklands Information & Technology Centre for young people and the Business Development Group and other initiatives by the LDDC are contributing to establishing the successful environment necessary for development – and the LDDC recognises that DLR plays a vital role in this process.



Exhibition and Information Centre, Island Gardens

Sales

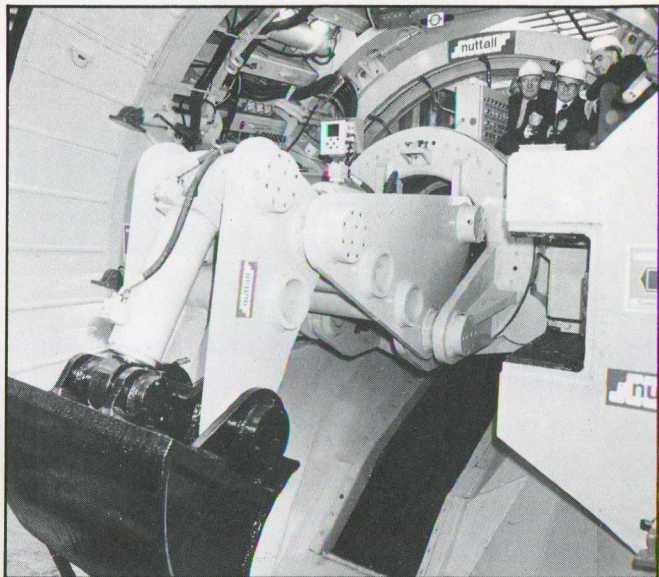
Promoting the railway has generated a huge array of items; these include many brochures and leaflets, cardboard models, childrens' games, badges, mugs, carrier bags, medallions, swim tubes, spoons, erasers, pencils and stickers. Most of these have been put on sale in the shop within the Exhibition Centre at Island Gardens station.

Over 500,000 people have visited the Centre and the volume of sales has surprised everyone. The Centre is also the focal point for general and tourist information and the successful shop within it has helped create a sympathetic environment for information staff - with the result that rapport between the railway and its public has been enhanced.

City Extension

The Canadian development group, Olympia & York, responsible for the Canary Wharf project made it clear at an early stage that the project would not be viable without direct Light Rail access to the City.

Royal Assent for construction of an extension to the City was obtained late in 1986, and an agreement with the consortium was signed in July 1987.

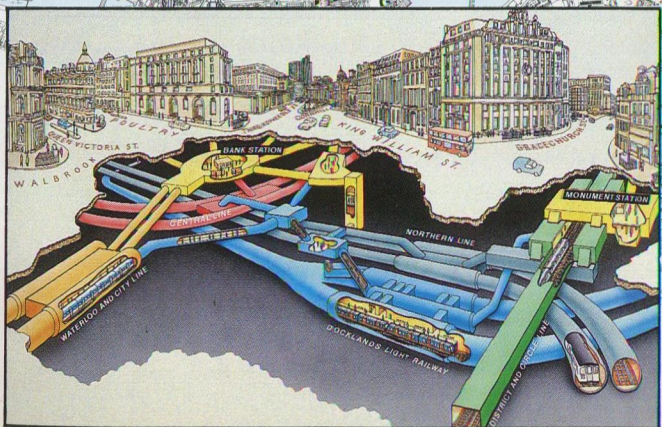
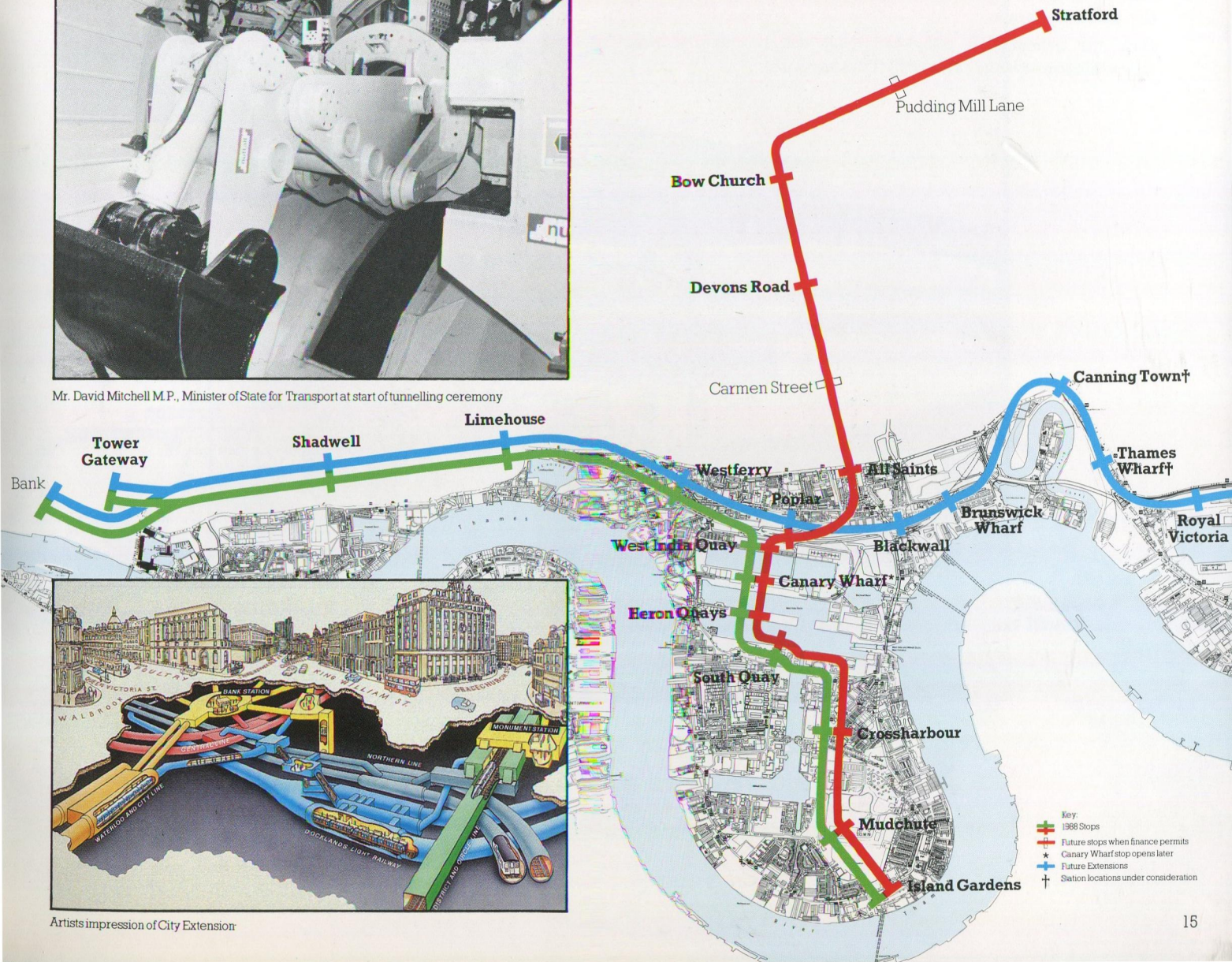


Mr. David Mitchell M.P., Minister of State for Transport at start of tunnelling ceremony

Construction of the tunnel section of the railway has now started. The extension will span 1.5Km and run from near Tower Gateway Station to a terminus under King William Street in the City.

Half the cost will be met by private capital, the remainder coming from Government. Discussions with Olympia and York on the redesign of Canary Wharf Station are continuing.

Work is expected to be completed in early 1991 with one tunnel opening in 1990.



Artist's impression of City Extension

Beckton

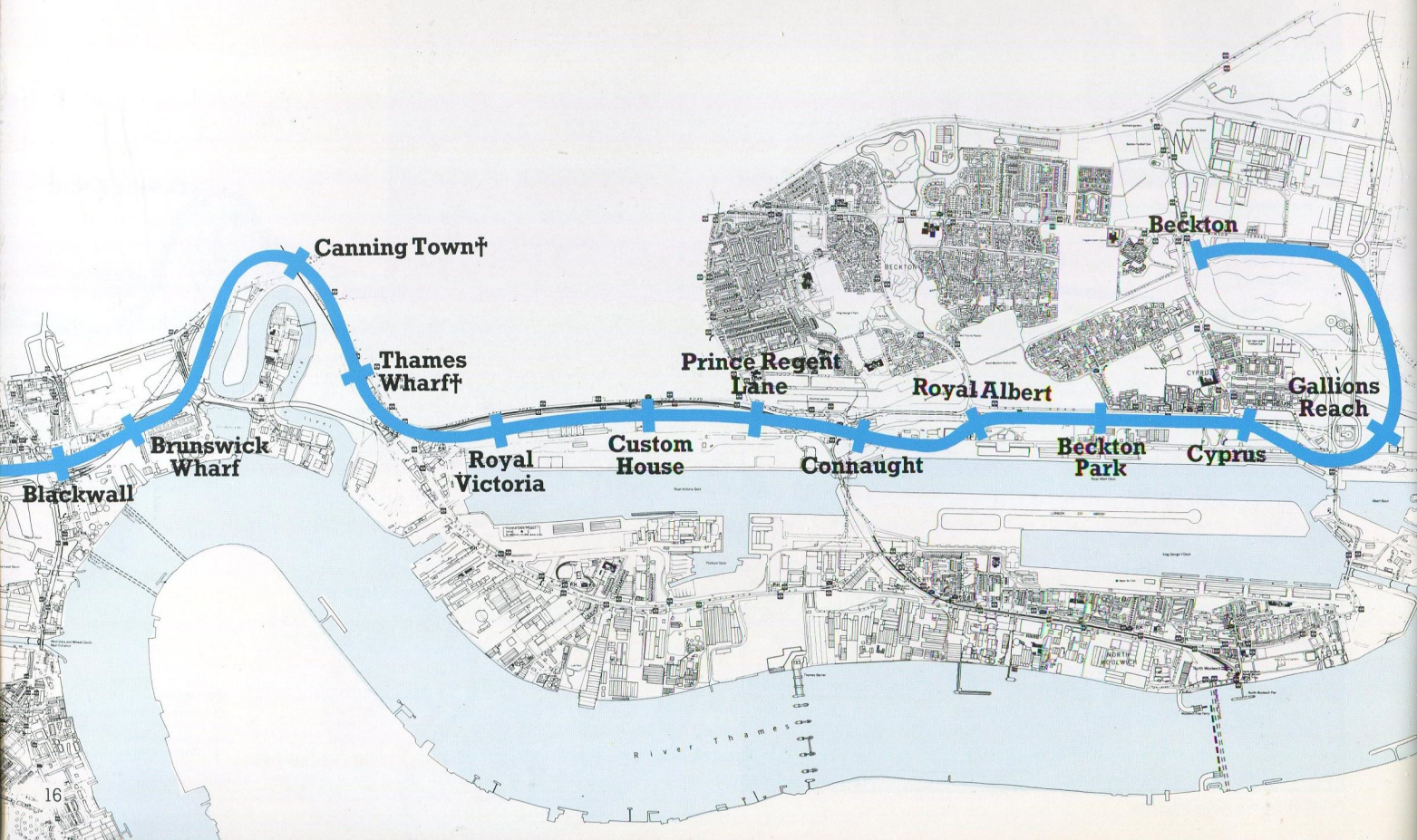
The logic of extending the railway downstream to the Royal Docks and Beckton has always seemed convincing to Docklands planners. Ultimately, firm plans were formulated and a Bill deposited with Parliament in 1986. It has been subject to an amendment by the Select Committee – to incorporate a deviation through Canning Town – but Royal Assent is anticipated early in 1989.

The extension is likely to have 13 stations and will include a number of refinements suggested by operational experience. The extension will be financed by the LDDC through the increase in land prices before and after the railway is built.

Once this extension is completed, DLR will be able to offer comprehensive coverage of the whole Docklands area.



Over the Royal Docks looking West





Heron Quays

Docklands

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