

FAREWELL TO MOORGATE (WIDENED LINES)

by Iain Frew

The last regular passenger trains on the $\frac{3}{4}$ mile long branch from Farringdon to Barbican and Moorgate stations ran on Friday 20 March 2009 giving the official closure date on 22 March 2009 (the first day when a regular service was no longer operated). For many years this short line running immediately south of the Metropolitan/Circle/Hammersmith Lines tracks provided an entry to the City for trains coming from the LM&S route from Bedford and Luton, and the L&NER from Welwyn or Hertford. The ex-L&NER services were discontinued about thirty years ago but many peak period trains still ran from the Bedford route which has now become the Thameslink line. A problem arose from the undoubted success of the Thameslink Line which has re-established north – south services across the western edge of the City. So much traffic is being carried that twelve-coach trains are planned instead of the present maximum of eight. Platforms are being lengthened including those at Farringdon.

Looking at the station on 11 March 2009 I could understand the problem. East of Farringdon station the line divides into the Moorgate route going straight ahead and the major route heading south to City Thameslink, Blackfriars and all the routes served to the south of the River Thames. There is no space for any significant

lengthening at the east end if both routes are to remain open. At the west end of Farringdon station the line drops down steeply at a gradient of 1 in 38, taking the tracks under the London Underground lines which lie to the north. Buildings are very close to the south leaving no space at all for platform extensions, and even if there were enough space any extensions to the west would meet with opposition from the Department of Transport which strongly dislikes new platforms on any significant gradient. That rules out extensions to the west so they must be at the east end and will have to be built over the Moorgate tracks.

However, suppose some magic solution was found and the Moorgate branch could survive, there would then be another problem similar to that encountered when the Jubilee Line was extended to Stratford. The new route left a short stub to Charing Cross which had always been a busy station, but if any significant service had remained to Charing Cross it would have been necessary to cut the service to Stratford to a level that would have been below what was required. The short branch had to close, and so it would be with Moorgate. A very frequent north – south service across the City is essential and any Moorgate service would reduce the through service to a level below that which is needed. City Thameslink station will be a reasonable

alternative for people working in much of the area served by Barbican and passengers can change at Farringdon to join a London Underground service to both Barbican and Moorgate; a new wider footbridge is at an advanced stage of construction to assist passengers changing trains here.

I have to say that in its death throes much of the branch's traffic seems to have melted away and the remaining trains are a lot

quieter than before as passengers find alternative ways. At Moorgate there is a very large sign indicating how long it will be before the last train leaves Moorgate – the time was counting down relentlessly showing days, hours, minutes, and seconds until closure. Will the last train's doors close firmly as the last second is reached? Perhaps if a reader is there they will let me know!