

Central line records broken

Hainault loop track renewed in record time

The weekend of 18-19 March 2006 was a landmark for the Central line, bringing to completion a long programme to renew most of the track on the Hainault loop at the east end of the line.

But this was no ordinary milestone. As work progressed on the 10.5 kilometres of track, productivity records were steadily broken, to the extent that by the end, three times the length of track was being re-laid during a 56-hour weekend possession than when Balfour Beatty began. The highest figure was 649 metres during the weekend of 17-20 February.

Challenging

As Steve Bedford, Project Manager Track Programmes, said: "This was achieved by constantly challenging past practice and devising better methods of working. We created facilities to outstable trains of materials as near as possible to the worksite so that we would have a head start as soon as we were given possession of the line.

"The east end of the Central line is the worst location for track work from a logistical point of view, because it is at the opposite end of the line from the track depot at Ruislip. So it made a huge difference to run trains out during the mid-week nights and stable them in Hainault depot, Woodford and Loughton sidings. We also created a satellite ballast supply at Fairlop, loading trains over the station wall."



Track relaying continued without a break when Metronet took over, first with TrackForce and GrantRail, and then Balfour Beatty carrying out the work. New machines, such as remote-controlled whackers, which consolidate the ballast before sleepers are laid, were introduced, reducing manning levels from three to one as well as avoiding the incidence of "vibration white finger" caused by vibration from the old manually controlled whackers.

The achievement is all the more remarkable when one considers the particular problems pointed out by Steve: "The Central line has two signalling systems: the conventional signals and the Westrace automatic train control, so both have to be reinstalled and tested before the line can be handed back. Also CCTV cables at stations are laid between the tracks, rather than to the side, adding to the complication."

Hedgehog thoroughfares

Not only have seven temporary speed restrictions been lifted by the renewals work, and a better ride given to passengers, but knowledge gained from developing faster working practices will reduce the need for future possessions. And readers will be happy to know that hedgehogs can still cross the line safely: half a dozen orange pipes thoughtfully installed beneath the track between Chigwell and Roding Valley have been reinstated – just for them.



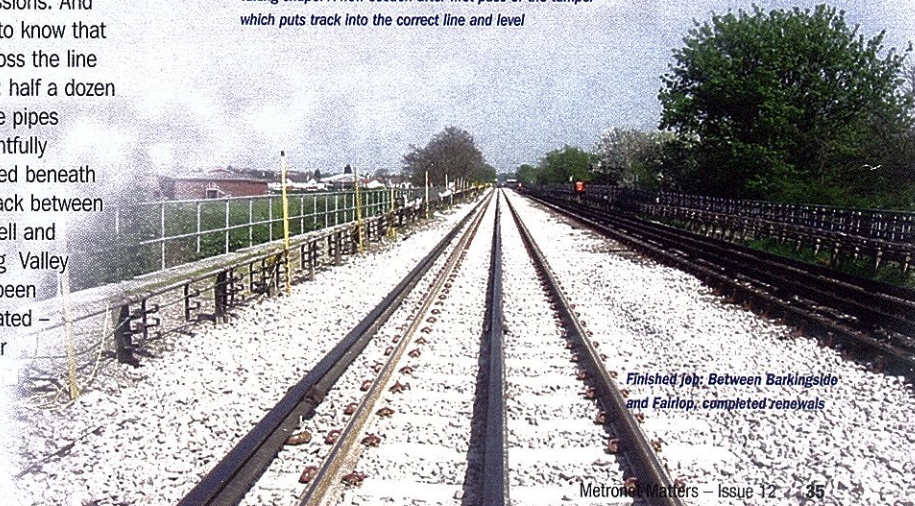
Restrictions: Chigwell-Roding Valley before works began when there were several temporary speed restrictions in place



Work gets under way: Between Fairlop and Barkingside, rail removed



Taking shape: A new section after first pass of the tamper which puts track into the correct line and level



Finished job: Between Barkingside and Fairlop, completed renewals