

THE KING'S CROSS WESTERN TICKET HALL by John Gillham

Underground News for August 2006 devotes a total of 5¾ pages (scattered in three places) to the opening on 28 May of the new Western Ticket Hall at King's Cross. But it only describes and illustrates the good points, and fails to mention the major nuisance caused to westbound passengers from Metropolitan and Circle lines who need to interchange to any of the three tube lines. Until 27 May, if they rode in the rear of a Metropolitan or Circle Line train they could alight onto the extreme eastern end of the westbound platform, very close to the ticket barrier, which itself was very close to the steps up to the short passage leading to the tops of the escalators down to the three tubes. But now they have to waste several extra minutes walking to the far end of the westbound platform before they can find any Way Out, and then go up a new stairway into the new Western Ticket Hall, and then walk all the way back again parallel to the railway tracks for at least one train length before entering the slightly enlarged tube ticket hall. Passengers changing from the three tubes to the Met. also now have to walk a longer distance than previously, although the increase is not as bad as the Met. to tube detour.

The account in *Underground News* does mention that the exit at the east end has been closed and hoarded off, but does not point out the nuisance that this causes. It also says that the Met. ticket hall gives direct access to the tube ticket hall, but it does not mention that you have to go to the far end of the Met platform before you can reach the new Met ticket hall, nor that you then have to walk a long way back again before you reach the direct access to the tube. All this seems to me to be in agreement with what sadly seems to be the official policy nowadays, in which most of the new or rebuilt Underground stations of the past 10 or 20 or 50 years have deliberately very greatly increased the distance that passengers to or from the trains have to walk to reach either the street level or the interchange to another railway, or both, in addition to the fact that more and more Bus Stops have gradually been moved further away from station entrances.

Page 470 also says that the Western ticket hall has been built partly above the Met and Circle tunnels. This is wrong, and it is in fact entirely alongside these tunnels on the north side, with a substantial horizontal space in between. The railway tunnels (three of them) are, and always have been, far too close to the surface of Euston Road, under which they were originally built by "cut -and-cover", and

there is no space at all to build anything new between the top of the tunnels and the underside of the road. The information was apparently obtained from an official TfL website or press handout, but I still think it is wrong. It is of course correct in saying that the new hall has been built mainly under the forecourt of St. Pancras main-line station, but in fact it is entirely thus, and horizontally does not even go underneath the pavement, much less under the road or above the Metropolitan railway.

Passengers have to climb 23 steps from the third tunnel, which is between the two Met. running tunnels and platforms, to the main floor of the new Western ticket hall, although there is also a lift. Then another 23 steps, with another lift, lead upwards from here to a mezzanine or gallery, which runs around the outer edges of all four sides of the Western ticket hall. Being only a gallery this does not make the hall a two-storey structure as is stated elsewhere, although it is exactly at street (pavement) level. The gallery on the south side is parallel to and just to the north of the line of 16 very lovely ornamental stone-and-brick arches along the edge of the pavement in Euston Road. These have been protected, and never disturbed, except just two in the middle, and they still remain in original condition.

Euston Road here is on a gentle gradient, rising towards the west, but the roof of the ticket hall, also the original forecourt, are horizontal. Hence the arch at the western end is quite low, each of the first seven being progressively higher. The next arch always did accommodate a narrow subsidiary pedestrian entrance through a tunnel to the concourse of the main-line station. This has now been widened to occupy two arches, which lead directly onto the gallery of the new ticket hall instead of into the main-line station. The last seven arches at the eastern end are both wider and higher, and were formerly occupied by small retail shops ranging from fish-and-chips to Thos Cook the travel firm, but their future use, except one which now holds an internal staircase, is not yet identifiable.

The new Western ticket hall has four ticket-selling windows on its south side, also ten automatic ticket machines. The passageway from it to the enlarged Tube ticket hall goes down a slope and traverses a new subway underneath Pancras Road. Directly above this passageway but before it reaches the subway there is a new pedestrian entrance from the eastern end of the gallery opening directly onto the pavement of Pancras Road itself. This entrance is

close alongside the front wall of the Midland main-line station and immediately to the south of it the original wide external brick-and-stone staircase of 36 steps formerly led from Pancras Road up to the forecourt of the Midland station. This had to be completely dismantled and removed to make way for the enormous excavations and new construction, but it has now been rebuilt and reinstated exactly to the original design and location, with a lovely pair of large ornamental iron gates at the bottom. It presumably now leads up to the roof of the new Western ticket hall, or will do, but at the time of my inspection this area was still being worked on and not yet open for public access. One imagines that the original forecourt may be reinstated on the roof of the ticket hall, but this remains to be seen, as also does whether or not it will be accessible for road vehicles, with access at the west end but no way out at the east end, the same as before.

Although threatened with demolition during the Beeching era, St. Pancras station fortunately escaped all this, and is now officially regarded as a valuable survivor from more than a century ago, and is being carefully renovated and respected, as the re-creation of a Masterpiece. All the exterior new work connected with the new Western ticket hall is in the same style of Midland design as the front of the main station, and not in any of the usual Underground styles of design. However, drastic alterations are promised for the Channel Tunnel services to Paris and Brussels, which are to be given priority, banishing internal trains for Nottingham and Sheffield, etc, to a less accessible part of the station, so it remains to be seen whether that new work will be to the original Midland style of design or something more modern or even futuristic.

Incidentally, while the new Western ticket hall was being built a year or two ago, and an enormous hole being dug, I had a look at it every few weeks. The excavation was so extremely deep, and so extremely close to the foundations of the front of the main-line station, that I was genuinely worried that the whole of the front of the station was going to collapse, but it did not, and is still there today unharmed!