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THE 'TURN-AND-HALF' CIRCLE SERVICE

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What goes around comes around – a particularly appropriate expression for an article about the Circle Line. As many readers will be aware from the articles in *Underground News* last year (pages 334 and 501), it is proposed to replace the current Circle Line by a 'T-cup' service, running from Hammersmith to Aldgate, around the southern side of the Circle, and back up to Edgware Road, where trains will terminate and then run the reverse journey back to Hammersmith. This would be in conjunction with the introduction of the new S stock trains, and other rearrangements of train services on the sub-surface lines.

A report from 5 September 1952 describes the 'Turn-and-half' Circle Service. This was proposed to make use of the bay road at King's Cross station, located at the west end between the Metropolitan Line platforms that were opened in 1941. The platform had been intended for use by trains from the Metropolitan main line during the off-peak hours, but the intervention of the war had put paid to the scheme, and the platform remained out of use with no current rails or signals ever installed.

In October 1948 consideration was given to breaking the Circle Line (which had just abandoned its original name of the Inner Circle), and instead operating trains between Putney Bridge and King's Cross. From Putney they would follow the District Line north to Edgware Road, proceed around the Circle to Gloucester Road, and then continue back through High Street Kensington, Edgware Road, and Baker Street to the bay platform at King's Cross. The difficulty was the high volume of trains that would pass over Baker Street Junction – 40 per hour at peak times.

By late-1950 it was decided by the Operating Manager that they would not pursue such a change until after Route C was opened. Route C was the planned new tube line that eventually became the Victoria Line, and was at one time planned to take over the Wimbledon branch of the District Line south of Fulham Broadway. This would permit the 'turn-and-half' Circle service to run from the latter station, providing a useful interchange with the new line. It would mean that the District Line would only have three western branches (Ealing, Hounslow, and Richmond), and so the service to each could be improved without putting more trains through the overcrowded section eastwards from Earl's Court.

At the same time it was suggested that the Circle Line platforms at Baker Street be rebuilt to allow for a reversing road, thus avoiding heavy traffic over the junction east of the station. However, this had two serious disadvantages. Firstly, passengers from the west side of the Circle would have no convenient interchange with Metropolitan trains to the City. Secondly, the Timetable Office calculated that two reversing roads would be required, which would force a prohibitively expensive rebuild at the station (presumably they had found a way of squeezing a single reversing road into the existing station without major structural changes).

In April 1951 the plans for terminating at Baker Street were scrapped, and the Operating Manager decided to proceed with the 'turn-and-half' project independently from any other scheme, including the Harrow to Rickmansworth four-tracking. The plans now began to be worked up in more detail.

Rolling stock was the next part of the project to be examined. The Circle Line service was operated by 14 trains of P stock, in 5-car formation. The Edgware Road to Wimbledon service on the District Line, which would also be replaced, was using six 6-car trains of R stock. One additional train would be required for the new service, and the initial assumption was that all 22 trains would have six cars, although it was noted that a saving could be made if only five were used. However, the heavy loadings on the existing Putney services in the evenings and for football matches necessitated the use of 6-car trains, which would therefore have to be retained. The extra train would cost £99,000, and the 14 additional non-driving motor cars required to make the Circle trains of 6-car length would cost £224,000.

The resignalling of the track between Baker Street and King's Cross was also felt to be unavoidable. Speed-controlled signalling would be required at the latter station, at a cost of £60,000, if a 40 train per hour service was to be possible.

The final cost was the completion of the bay road and platform – the area had been left in an unfinished state, and so £39,000 would be needed to make it fit for use, including electrification of the track.

The total cost of the 'turn-and-half' project was estimated at £422,000, with the majority of this being for additional rolling stock. The 1952 report mentioned in the second paragraph noted that there were 'no obvious working economies', and therefore the work done was only of academic interest as there was no way that the LPTB could fund such a project if there were to be no tangible benefits. The possibility of just bringing the bay platform into service was considered, at a cost of around £99,000. This would allow Metropolitan Line services to terminate at King's Cross instead of Baker Street. However, there were again few benefits to be drawn from this, and the extra car mileage would increase the costs further, and at a time when the Board was seeking ways of reducing off-peak car mileage. The project was therefore abandoned.

As a footnote to this history, it should be noted that the Circle Line trains were all lengthened to 6-cars between June 1959 and January 1960, to help relieve overcrowding.

The Circle Line services have always proved troublesome to operate, having to interwork with the District, Hammersmith & City, and Metropolitan lines across five flat junctions (Praed Street, Baker Street, Aldgate, Minories, and High Street Kensington). There have been several attempts over the years to abandon them and put some other type of service in their place, but these have always failed. It will be interesting to see whether the 'T-cup' service becomes reality, and if so, how successful it will be.