

THE ISLE OF WIGHT "ISLAND LINE" AN UPDATE AS AT SEPTEMBER 2020

by Paul Raven-Hill – LURS Member

This is something of a follow up to my previous articles on 'preserved' (or not so preserved!) LU vehicles that were published in previous issues of *Underground News*.

My wife and I had decided to have a short holiday on the Isle of Wight, which had had to be postponed from last May, due to the Covid-19 pandemic and nationwide lockdown. However, with some easing of lockdown restrictions, we arranged to go to the IoW in the first week of September, after schools had gone back, when it might be a bit quieter. The main reason was to visit the Isle of Wight Steam Railway (which I had never previously visited) and, more importantly with relevance to LURS, to have a ride on the other 'mobile railway museum', otherwise known as the "Island Line" from Ryde Pier Head to Shanklin on the veteran Class 483 ex-LT 1938 Tube Stock, before they are fully retired at the end of this year and replaced by the 'new' Class 484 EMUs being rebuilt from LU 'D' Stock by Vivarail, the first of which is not now due to arrive on the IoW in a few months' time. To say that the ride on 008 was "very lively", is something of an understatement, as it almost 'bounced' its way along from Ryde Pier Head to Shanklin and back, but could still show a good turn of speed between stations, where the line speed limit of 45mph felt more like 75mph!

I was able to photograph every station, either by car or train, and two of the three remaining serviceable units (006 and 008), as well as the three withdrawn units (002, 004 and 009) in Ryde Depot. I wasn't able to see or photograph unit 007, as this was inside the Depot Shed awaiting completion of its C4 overhaul, but hopefully it will be out before the well-deserved retirement of these enigmatic and idiosyncratic veteran trains, which have served the Island Line for over 30 years, which is well beyond what service life had been intended.

Having been in touch with the London Transport Traction Group, who are aiming to preserve one complete unit at the Epping-Ongar Railway, Essex, they have given me some additional information about the current fleet, but it was so sad to see some of them covered in graffiti, as the units outside had been 'attacked' over the night of 6/7 September, including 008, which had to be cleaned before it could start service:

483002: Essentially a spare set of shells and bogies, but in reality good for little more than scrap. Stored on back road of depot alongside cleaning stage.

483004: Stripped of almost all operational spares. Both DM cars heavily graffitied. Dumped at end of down bay siding, beyond road bridge.

483006: Bodywork, roof, and interiors in reasonable condition. Recurring bogie and earthing issues (which occurred again on Thursday 10 September, requiring it to be replaced by 008). Preservation candidate.

483007: Under Overhaul. Bogies were at Eastleigh in March, believed to now be back under the unit. It is reported to be looking immaculate and a definite preservation candidate!

483008: Bodywork in fairly poor condition, but according to staff mechanically it's better than 006. It rides slightly better too (not that you would notice!). Also a preservation candidate.

483009: Retains only those parts required for movement and to rescue another unit in case of emergency. Some graffiti on DM 'A' 129; DM 'D' 229 heavily graffitied. Possible preservation candidate for static display.



Above: Ryde St. John's Road Depot on 7 September 2020. Unit 009 nearest with long-withdrawn unit 002 at rear on cleaning stage road.

Below: Unit 006 at Ryde Esplanade on 11 September 2020. Note the totally disused former 'Down' platform and Down track on the right.



Above: Unit 006 approaching Ryde Esplanade on 11 September 2020. The tunnels in the distance apparently can accommodate D Stock.

Below: Unit 008 at Shanklin on 9 September 2020. Note that graffiti has been removed from windows and body sides.



006 and 007 (and possibly 008) have been designated as the best units by the Science Museum's Railway Heritage Designation Advisory Board so will, in some way or another, have to be preserved. LTTG are hoping that will mean them getting one and the other going to the IoWSR. Which one remains to be seen, but as LTTG requires decent running gear more than the IoWSR, they hope they might possibly get 007 as it's the best of the bunch. Failing that, 008 is not a completely lost cause, but any of the others are not far off that. At the time of writing, there has been no announcement of who will be getting which unit, but LTTG are not aware of any other groups being interested in operational units. They think the Brading Station Group would like to have one, but there's nothing official on that. It would make sense, as they would likely locate it in the old Bembridge Branch platform. Beyond that, they believe it's just individuals who want them for various static purposes. One complete unit as a static exhibit at Brading Station in the former Bembridge Bay platform would make some sense, to complement the excellently restored signal box, and the period feel of the station. There's going to be a lot of redundant track panels when sections of the line are relaid. The down island platform and the footbridge are going to be restored to passenger use when the passing loop is reinstated as part of the Island Line modernisation for the Class 484s. I wish they (SWR) wouldn't keep referring to it a "new loop line". It isn't 'new', as it was there until BR/SR removed it and singled the Brading – Sandown section in 1988. So, it's really a "reinstatement".



Above: A charming children's "Thank You NHS" painted poster featuring an interpretation of an Island Line train on draught screen of 'A' end DM 128.



Above: Inner end of DM 'D' car 228 seen on – 9 September 2020. The car interiors are in a fairly reasonable condition.

All photos: Paul Raven-Hill

It's going to be interesting to see how they will get the Class 484 cars across to the IoW, as they are somewhat larger than the current and former tube stock. I assume they will have to go by road on low loaders on the Portsmouth – Fishbourne ferry (I think they will need the largest one, given the size of the 484s!) and then to Sandown for rerailing. I can't see that there is anywhere else to do it, as most

island roads are fairly narrow. Presumably, if LTTG is successful in obtaining one of the units, it will have to make its way back the same way, as did the 485s and 486s before them.

If IoWSR does get one of the units, a temporary connection *could* be installed at Smallbrook Junction to enable it to be moved to Havenstreet without having to take them by road, as there was some talk of engineering trains being stabled at Smallbrook Junction on the IoWSR tracks during the Island Line rebuilding, whilst the IoWSR is in its “closed season”.

A future issue will take a look at the last days of the stock on the island.