

# THE DISTRICT RAILWAY PLATFORM INDICATORS

by Kim Rennie

On 30 June 2022, the historic Metropolitan District Railway (MDR) platform indicators at Earl's Court were returned to service. Their distinctive blue-enamelled appearance has been a familiar feature of the District Railway, and then the District Line, for over 110 years.

The MDR first announced a scheme to provide such indicators in 1905, and their installation was complete by 1906. They formed part of a modernisation process that included the electrification of services, new multiple unit rolling stock, automatic signalling and the introduction of track circuits; all of which combined to transform the MDR from a traditional Victorian steam railway into a modern rapid-transit system based on contemporary North American practice.

A new electromechanical system was devised to allow signalmen to send train description details from cabin-to-cabin, replacing the old bell codes, and it was but a simple step to adapt this to operate passenger information displays on platforms.

Although the term 'train describer' is often used when referring to these signs, and historically this has often been so in *Underground* and *Underground News*, this is actually the equipment that transmits the codes between cabins. The correct title is 'platform indicator' (or 'train indicator'), and the former term is thus used throughout this article.

The new signs comprised of a rectangular frame/box that carried either 10 or 15 blue-enamelled plates on each side, upon which the train destinations were lettered in white. The 4-wire code transmission system meant each sign could only display a maximum of fifteen stations. The plates were stacked in groups of 5, and adjacent to each stack was a light-grey glass panel. The glass panels were back-lit by tungsten bulbs, allowing an illuminated arrow to point to the destination concerned. At some locations, the arrows were replaced by the numerals '1', '2' and '3' to indicate the destination of up to the next three trains. The indicators were originally hung from metal brackets fixed to station walls, but when the early overall arched roofs were removed, they were generally suspended from platform canopies or ceilings instead.

By 1907, a form of semi-fast train operation was introduced, with some services booked to non-stop certain stations. This survived in various forms until 12 October 1964. On the westbound, these trains were indicated by new white NON-STOP indicator plates. Mike Horne's original notes (q.v.) show the plates lettered in black, but his later book *London's District Railway Vol. 2* suggests that red may have been used. There is no evidence of such plates being provided for eastbound fast trains.

The actual stations non-stopped were listed on the sides of cars using swivelling plates operated by Porters and Guards. A further indication was the display of a NON-STOP plate on the front and rear of trains. The early plates were circular and similar to the disc 'targets' subsequently used on stabled trains. Later on, a revised design was introduced in the familiar rectangular size and shape used for train destination plates. The NON-STOP plates were reversed to show ALL STATIONS at other times. As an example, in 1932 eastbound trains calling at all stations to Aldgate East, then passing various stations from Whitechapel to Barking, showed ALL STATIONS as far as Victoria and NON-STOP beyond. Westbound trains passing various stations beyond Sloane Square, showed ALL STATIONS as far as Whitechapel, and then changed to NON-STOP.

At one time, through trains to Uxbridge operated on Bank Holidays. In order to accommodate these, special paper slips from the Bill Stores reading UXBRIDGE were pasted over the ACTON TOWN plates on the westbound indicators from Mansion House to Earl's Court and at Hammersmith.

As the years passed, the indicators' original plates were often rearranged or replaced altogether. The reasons for this could include the extension of a service (e.g. to Upminster), provision of a new reversing point (e.g. Tower Hill), or changes to a station or line name (e.g. Addison Road to Kensington (Olympia), or Inner Circle to Circle Line).

At some point, the white non-stopping plates were replaced by black-on-yellow versions, and these lasted until the final end of semi-fast District Line trains in 1964. At other times, the entire set of plates on an indicator might be replaced just to modernise the typeface used.



**Above:** A two-panel 10-plate '1,2,3' eastbound indicator. The SOUTHEND THROUGH TRAIN plate suggests this is 1910 or later. The arrows adjoining the numerals were omitted on some signs. Note the 'coffee pot' platform repeater on the right, some of which remain in use today.

**Photo: Author's collection**



**Above:** A three-panel 15-plate '1,2,3' westbound indicator at St. James's Park (also illustrated in Underground News No.733, page 36). The various branches of the MDR meant more destination plates were required in this direction. The EALING plate has HARROW and HOUNSLOW in smaller letters as some trains divided at Mill Hill Park. The UXBRIDGE name has been covered up as the MDR was not serving this line at the time.

**Photo: LT Museum**

Fig.1 is a recreation of the westbound platform indicator at St. James's Park in 1964. The stations listed on the yellow plates as being non-stopped were as follows: EALING NOT STOPPING AT SOUTH KENSINGTON GLOUCESTER ROAD, WIMBLEDON NOT STOPPING AT WEST BROMPTON, HOUNSLOW NOT STOPPING AT RAVENSCOURT PARK STAMFORD BROOK, RICHMOND NOT STOPPING AT WEST KENSINGTON BARONS COURT. The exact layout of the NOT STOPPING AT plates is illustrated later. Both SPECIAL and CIRCLE LINE were by then now in Johnston.

Fig.1 ST. JAMES'S PARK 1964 looking west

<b>PARSON'S GREEN</b>		<b>EALING</b>		<b>EALING</b>	1
<b>NORTHFIELDS</b> (WEST EALING)		<b>WIMBLEDON</b>		<b>WIMBLEDON</b>	
<b>ACTON TOWN</b>		<b>HOUNSLOW</b>		<b>HOUNSLOW</b>	
<b>STH. KENSINGTON</b>		<b>RICHMOND</b>		<b>CIRCLE LINE</b> VIA HIGH ST. KENSINGTON	
<b>SPECIAL</b>		<b>PUTNEY BRIDGE</b>		<b>RICHMOND</b>	2

NOT STOPPING AT details omitted

A recreation of the eastbound platform indicator at St. James' Park in 1967 (Fig. 2). This had the unique feature of a NEXT TRAIN IN 40 SECONDS display which was triggered when an approaching train reached a specific point on the track.

Fig.2 ST. JAMES'S PARK 1967 looking west

<b>MANSION HOUSE</b>		<b>CHARING CROSS</b>	1
<b>CIRCLE LINE</b> VIA CHARING CROSS		<b>WHITECHAPEL</b>	
<b>BARKING</b>		<b>PLAISTOW</b>	
<b>DAGENHAM EAST</b>	2	<b>SPECIAL</b>	
<b>UPMINSTER</b>	3		NEXT TRAIN IN 40 SECONDS

Indicators of this design are thought to have been installed at most, if not all, MDR stations from Earl's Court to Mark Lane. Similar signs were provided at Mill Hill Park (now Acton Town) – where CITY, HARROW AND UXBRIDGE, HOUNSLOW, SOUTH ACTON, and SOUTHBEND THROUGH TRAIN are known to have appeared on plates. Were they provided at other locations? If so, photographic evidence may not have yet come to light or still exist. At less busy suburban stations, no doubt time-honoured slot-in boards and/or the shouted voice sufficed. Many MDR indicators installed west of Earl's Court were supplanted by variations of the 'sectioned' 'lightbox' type in the early-1930s when stations were rebuilt by Holden.

In the central area, the first to be replaced were at Charing Cross, when the District Line platforms were modernised for the 1951 Festival of Britain. The new indicators (Fig.3) were unpainted metal-framed 'lightbox' signs with three grey glass panels and developed from the 'Tombstone' indicators installed circa-1950 on the Central Line.

For probably the first time on the Underground, the destinations were fluorescently-lit, though tungsten bulbs were needed for the numerals – which also had a small arrow underneath pointing to the station concerned. EALING COMMON may have taken the place of ACTON TOWN in 1965. The middle panel originally carried the NOT STOPPING AT displays but was replaced by permanently-lit information sign after 1964.

Fig.3 CHARING CROSS 1964 looking west

	SPECIAL	ALL TRAINS GO TO		CIRCLE LINE <small>VIA HIGH ST.KEN</small>
3	PARSONS GREEN	ST. JAMES'S PARK		WIMBLEDON
	PUTNEY BRIDGE	VICTORIA		HOUNSLOW
	EALING COMMON	SLOANE SQUARE	2	RICHMOND
	STH KENSINGTON	SOUTH KENSINGTON	1	EALING
		GLOUCESTER ROAD		

Unlit lettering on all the lightbox indicator Figs. is shown in grey

The early-1960s saw the (then) modern glass 'lightbox' signs introduced (possibly first at King's Cross St. Pancras). These had large panels of black glass and an extra-thin version of Johnston designed to be legible from a distance when back-lit by fluorescent tubes. This style of indicator became the standard for over 20 years and started to replace the MDR indicators when station platforms and/or equipment were modernised. By 1980, there were signs of this type at Blackfriars, Cannon Street, South Kensington, Tower Hill and Victoria – plus at other District Line locations – e.g. Barons Court, Ealing Broadway, Turnham Green; and from Aldgate East (Fig.4) to Upminster (Figs.5 and 7), but excluding Barking (Fig.6). The MDR indicators still survived at Earl's Court, Gloucester Road, Mansion House, Sloane Square, St. James's Park, Temple and Westminster.

Fig.4 ALDGATE EAST 1962 looking west

NOT STOPPING AT	FIRST TRAIN	
WEST BROMPTON	HAMMERSMITH	SPECIAL
RAVENS COURT PARK	VIA KING'S CROSS	STOPS HERE
STAMFORD BROOK	WIMBLEDON	PUTNEY BRIDGE
WEST KENSINGTON	HOUNSLOW WEST	NORTHFIELDS
BARONS COURT	RICHMOND	PARSONS GREEN
SOUTH KENSINGTON	EALING BDWY	ACTON TOWN
GLOUCESTER ROAD		

Fig.5 (below left) EAST HAM to BROMLEY-BY-BOW 1962 inclusive looking east/west.

Fig.6 (below right) BARKING (BR) 1961 looking east (lettered in Gill Sans)

FIRST TRAIN
DISTRICT LINE
CHARING CROSS
& VICTORIA
METROPOLITAN LINE
LIVERPOOL ST.
& KING'S CROSS
CHANGE AT ALDGATE EAST
FOR METROPOLITAN LINE

FIRST TRAIN	
DISTRICT LINE	METROPOLITAN LINE
CHARING CROSS	LIVERPOOL STREET
VICTORIA	KING'S CROSS
FOR METROPOLITAN LINE	NEXT TRAIN TO FENCHURCH ST
CHANGE AT ALDGATE EAST	PLATFORM 5
PROCEED TO PLATFORM 3	PLATFORM 8

Fig.7 UPMINSTER 1962

PLATFORM

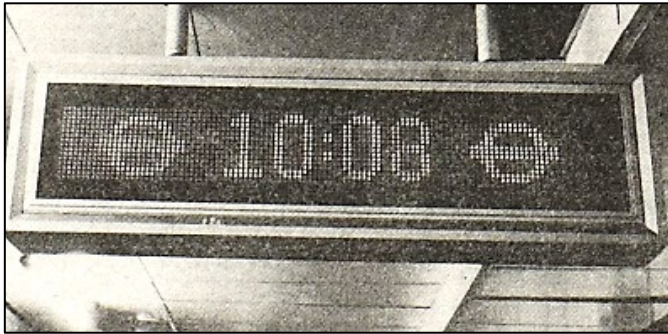
5 4 3

FIRST WESTBOUND

UNDERGROUND

TRAIN

London Transport experimented with dot-matrix signs in 1979, with an example installed at South Kensington, later moved to Westminster and a prototype was demonstrated at Ruislip depot in July 1980 during the Fellowship of Engineering Exhibition held there. An experimental dot-matrix sign was installed at St. James's Park eastbound on 15 May 1981, and a second example followed on the westbound from 10 July 1981. As well as train destination details, they were able to show the time, plus other information, and could default to LONDON TRANSPORT or roundels if no train was due (See *also Underground News No.773, page 13, for more details*). They were in trial use until November 1983 and were subsequently replaced by another experimental pair from 23 January 1984. Dot-matrix designs of various types gradually began to replace the MDR pattern, and by 1989 only the Earl's Court and Gloucester Road installations remained in use.



*Above: The experimental 1981 dot-matrix indicator at St. James's Park eastbound.*

*Photo: LT News*



*Above: The experimental 1981 dot-matrix indicator at St. James's Park westbound.*

*Photo: LT News*

## CASE STUDY – THE EARL'S COURT PLATFORM INDICATORS

The destinations, typefaces and layout of plates on the MDR indicators have changed many times. The best 'case study' involves those at Earl's Court, as not only have they lasted longest and undergone the most changes, but have also been photographed the most, either as a subject in their own right, or in the background of other views.

In the absence of suitable photographs of each stage of development over time, the known changes are mainly depicted by using tables created in *MS Word*. Some of the actual typefaces used over time are unknown, or are not commercially available for PCs, so what follows can only be an approximation of their actual appearance.

The Earl's Court indicators first appeared in 1905 or 1906 and were originally located in a staggered position in relation to each other – towards the rear of eastbound platforms 1 & 2, and towards the rear of westbound platforms 3 & 4. Each platform had a 10-plate indicator using the 'arrow' system – i.e. four in total.

In 1937, a subway and additional station entrance was constructed to serve the Earl's Court Exhibition Centre and the indicators were re-sited to be in alignment with each other mid-way along the platforms, where they remain today. The indicators were now mounted on concrete supports that sat over and framed the staircases leading to the Exhibition Subway and Piccadilly Line escalators.

There now follows a detailed look at the Earl's Court indicator displays over the years. For the most part, the two pairs of indicators on eastbound platforms 1 and 2, and on westbound platforms 3 and 4, carried the same sets of plates unless otherwise shown. We start first with the eastbound:

### EASTBOUND PLATFORM 1

A very early and almost original layout (Fig.8). With the idea of corporate identity then in its infancy the MDR probably used a generic commercial typeface for the lettering.

Fig.8 1910 looking east

<b>BOW ROAD</b>		<b>CHARING CROSS</b>	
<b>HIGH ST. (KEN)</b>		<b>STOPS HERE</b>	
<b>WHITECHAPEL</b>		<b>EAST HAM</b>	q
<b>STH. KENSINGTON</b>		<b>BARKING</b>	
<b>MANSION HOUSE</b>		<b>SOUTHEND THROUGH TRAIN</b>	

In the early-1930s (Fig.9), the SOUTHEND THROUGH TRAIN plate was replaced by UPMINSTER LINE following the 1932 extension of MDR services over the LMS from Barking to Upminster (though the LMS Southend 'All Corridor Express' trains continued to serve Earl's Court until September 1939).

Fig.9 1930s looking east

<b>BOW ROAD</b>		<b>CHARING CROSS</b>	
<b>HIGH ST. (KEN)</b>		<b>STOPS HERE</b>	
<b>WHITECHAPEL</b>		<b>EAST HAM</b>	
<b>STH. KENSINGTON</b>		<b>BARKING</b>	
<b>MANSION HOUSE</b>	q	<b>UPMINSTER LINE</b>	

By 1938 (Fig.10), UPMINSTER LINE had been moved to replace S<sup>TH</sup>. KENSINGTON and allowed a HIGH STREET (KEN) & EDGWARE ROAD plate to be included. At some stage, the style of the direction pointer had been changed to the standard 'Signalling Arrow' type.

Fig.10 1938 looking east

<b>BOW ROAD</b>		<b>CHARING CROSS</b>	
<b>HIGH ST. (KEN)</b>		<b>STOPS HERE</b>	
<b>WHITECHAPEL</b>		<b>EAST HAM</b>	
<b>UPMINSTER LINE</b>		<b>BARKING</b>	
<b>MANSION HOUSE</b>		<b>HIGH STREET (KEN) &amp; EDGWARE ROAD</b>	q

The 1950s saw MANSION HOUSE and HIGH ST. (KEN) change places (Fig.11). EAST HAM was replaced by a reinstated S<sup>TH</sup>. KENSINGTON. There were hooks provided above the HIGH ST. KENSINGTON AND EDGWARE ROAD plate allowing a board reading ALDGATE to be hung over it on the days when District Line Edgware Road services were extended to Aldgate.

The indicators were modernised in the early-1960s (Fig.12). The existing plates were replaced with new ones lettered in Johnston Condensed Type and the majority of destinations rearranged. Condensed (narrow) Johnston was developed for bus destination boards and blinds. Its use was extended to the Underground on the roller destination blinds of the experimental 1935 Tube Stock, and it was subsequently also used at times on the 1956/59/62 Tube Stock, 1960 Tube Stock, R Stock, and A60/62 Stock. The rarely-used or abolished termination points of BOW ROAD and S<sup>TH</sup>. KENSINGTON were removed. CHARING CROSS was replaced by TOWER HILL in 1967, when the re-sited station opened, and most Mansion House reversers were extended to there.

Fig.11 1950s looking east

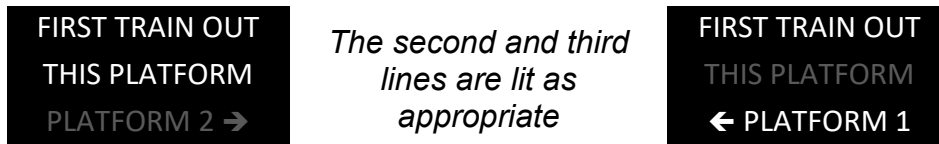
<b>BOW ROAD</b>	q	<b>CHARING CROSS</b>
<b>HIGH ST. (KEN)</b>		<b>STOPS HERE</b>
<b>WHITECHAPEL</b>		<b>S<sup>TH</sup> KENSINGTON</b>
<b>UPMINSTER LINE</b>		<b>BARKING</b>
<b>HIGH ST. (KEN)</b>		<b>HIGH ST. KENSINGTON AND EDGWARE ROAD</b>

Fig.12 1967 looking east

<b>MANSION HOUSE</b>	q	<b>TOWER HILL</b>
<b>PLAISTOW</b>		<b>STOPS HERE</b>
<b>DAGENHAM EAST</b>		
<b>UPMINSTER</b>		<b>BARKING</b>
<b>HIGH ST. KENSINGTON</b>		<b>HIGH ST. KENSINGTON AND EDGWARE ROAD</b>

In February 1980, two separate new indicators (Fig.13) of the then standard modern 'lightbox' design were installed above each of the existing signs on platforms 1 and 2. These operated in conjunction with each other to show which of two 'City' trains would leave for Gloucester Road first.

Fig.13



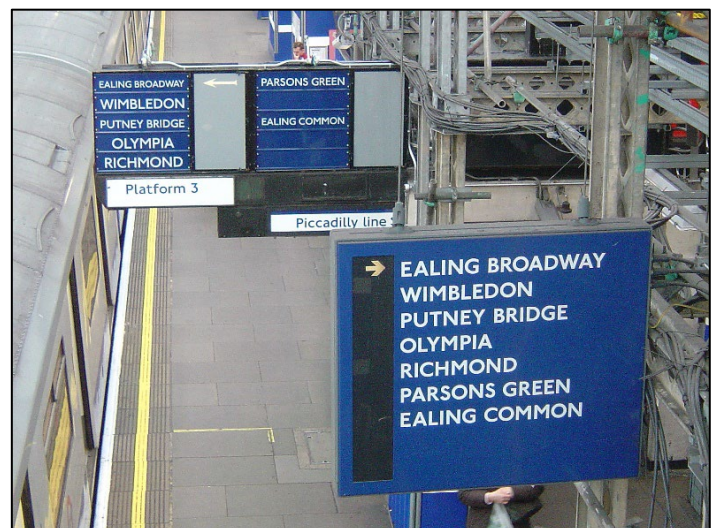
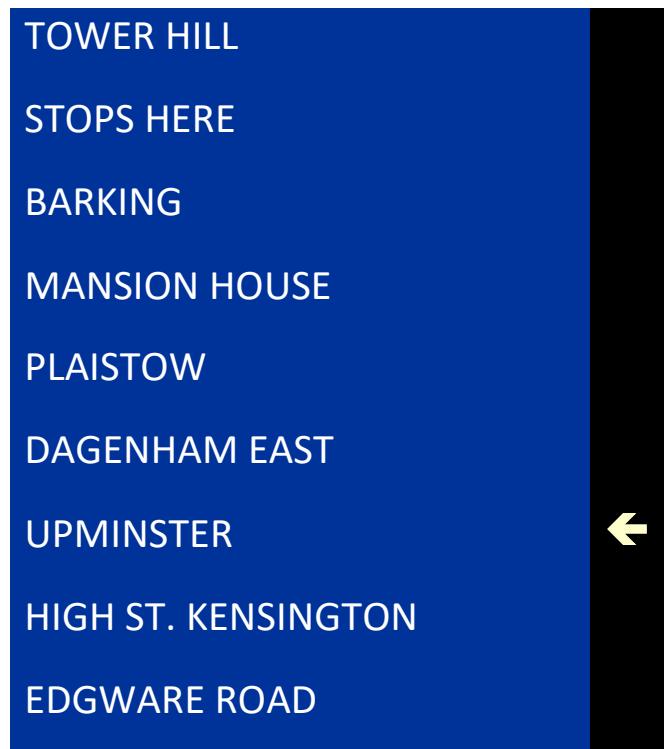
Between October 1989 and February 1991, Mansion House station was closed for reconstruction. Trains continued to reverse there using the bay road but detrained at Blackfriars first. As a consequence, during this period, the MANSION HOUSE plate was covered with a BLACKFRIARS sticker in Johnston Bold or Medium (Fig.14).

Fig.14 1989-91 looking east

<b>BLACKFRIARS</b>	q	<b>TOWER HILL</b>
<b>PLAISTOW</b>		<b>STOPS HERE</b>
<b>DAGENHAM EAST</b>		
<b>UPMINSTER</b>		<b>BARKING</b>
<b>HIGH ST. KENSINGTON</b>		<b>HIGH ST. KENSINGTON AND EDGWARE ROAD</b>

Earl's Court station was refurbished by Metronet in the late-2000s as part of the PPP project. The MDR indicators were switched off in 2007 and subsequently removed for refurbishment. Temporary signs were provided in their place and remarkably were designed to replicate the MDR display style (Fig.15). These caused some confusion at first, because the arrows pointed towards the destination name rather than to the train and track concerned.

Fig.15 2007-2008 looking west



**Above:** The temporary indicators used between 2007 and 2008. In the background is an MDR sign with the new plates fitted in 2008.

**Both photos: Colin Smith**

In December 2008, the old indicators were reinstated, but with the plates replaced by new ones lettered in New Johnston Type (Fig.16). The background colour was changed to a lighter blue (probably 'Piccadilly line blue/Underground dark blue NCS S 3560-R80B' as per the Design Standards Manual).

The glass arrow panels underwent a number of changes, with either grey or black background colours used at times. In addition, the arrow colour was changed from cream to a brilliant white. The downside was that the 'shadow' of any unlit arrows became clearly visible and there were various attempts made later to tone down the prominence of these.

On 27 March 2022, the extension of the Four Lines Modernisation (4LM) CBTC signalling project to the Earl's Court area caused the MDR indicators and FIRST TRAIN OUT signs to be temporarily taken out of use. The plates were covered with stickers lettered in a non-Johnston typeface that were arranged to show a message advising passengers to consult the small dot-matrix indicators, which remained in operation (Fig.17).

Fig.16 **2008** looking east



MANSION HOUSE	q	TOWER HILL	q
PLAISTOW	q	STOPS HERE	q
DAGENHAM EAST	q		q
UPMINSTER	q	BARKING	q
HIGH ST. KENSINGTON	q	HIGH ST. KENSINGTON AND EDGWARE ROAD	q

Fig.17 2022 looking east

PLEASE USE	q	PLEASE USE	q
ALTERNATIVE	q	ALTERNATIVE	q
PLATFORM	q	PLATFORM	q
INFORMATION	q	INFORMATION	q
SCREENS	q	SCREENS	q

The MDR indicators returned to use on 30 June 2022 (*not 1 July 2022, as stated in Underground News No.730*) after having yet another set of plates installed, and the overall layout was rearranged (Fig.18). The plates were manufactured by A.J. Wells of the Isle of Wight and may be lettered in Johnston 100. The arrow colour was changed to once more be akin to tungsten bulbs. WEST HAM was added to reflect the new reversing siding in use from 2011, and MANSION HOUSE deleted following the decommissioning of the bay road in 2016. The joint HIGH ST. KENSINGTON AND EDGWARE ROAD display was altered to plain EDGWARE ROAD, whilst EMBANKMENT was also added (it had last appeared as CHARING CROSS until 1967). The destination positions now roughly followed geographical order from west-to-east, reading from bottom-to-top, and this was claimed to be more “customer friendly”. Also reinstated were the 1980 FIRST TRAIN OUT indicators.

Fig.18 2022 looking east

UPMINSTER	q	NOT IN SERVICE	q
DAGENHAM EAST	q	PLAISTOW	q
BARKING	q	WEST HAM	q
TOWER HILL	q	EMBANKMENT	q
EDGWARE ROAD	q	HIGH ST. KENSINGTON	q

#### WESTBOUND PLATFORM 4

The history of the westbound indicators generally follows that of those on the eastbound, though is a little more complicated. In the early days, the EALING plate included HARROW and HOUNSLOW in smaller lettering, as some Ealing Broadway trains were split in two at Mill Hill Park, with one part proceeding to

Ealing and the other to one of the subsidiary destinations (though not both of course). A third destination, UXBRIDGE, was initially provided too. This was later obscured as trains did not normally run beyond South Harrow until 1910. This plate also catered for when shuttles were in operation and it was necessary to change at Mill Hill Park for the Hounslow Barracks or South Harrow branches. Semi-fast services to Ealing Broadway or Wimbledon were soon indicated by white NON-STOP plates lettered in black (or possibly red). These had a different and serified typeface and replaced some of the lesser-used destinations (Fig.19).

Fig.19 1907 looking west

<b>EALING</b> <small>HARROW HOUNSLOW</small>	q	<b>EALING</b>	q
<b>WIMBLEDON</b>		<b>NON-STOP</b>	
<b>PUTNEY BRIDGE</b>		<b>WIMBLEDON</b>	
<b>HAMMERSMITH</b>		<b>NON-STOP</b>	
<b>RICHMOND</b>		<b>PARSON'S GREEN</b>	
		<b>HOUNSLOW BRKS</b>	
		<b>ADDISON ROAD</b>	

On the platform 3 indicator HOUNSLOW BRKS was replaced by MILL HILL PARK (Fig.20).

Fig.20 1907 looking east

<b>EALING</b> <small>HARROW HOUNSLOW</small>	q	<b>EALING</b>	q
<b>WIMBLEDON</b>		<b>NON-STOP</b>	
<b>PUTNEY BRIDGE</b>		<b>WIMBLEDON</b>	
<b>HAMMERSMITH</b>		<b>NON-STOP</b>	
<b>RICHMOND</b>		<b>PARSON'S GREEN</b>	
		<b>MILL HILL PARK</b>	
		<b>ADDISON ROAD</b>	

By the 1950s, many changes had taken place (Fig.21). The EALING plate was now lettered EALING B'DWAY, whilst HARROW and UXBRIDGE no longer appeared, as this service had been transferred to the Piccadilly Line in 1932-33. ADDISON ROAD was renamed KENSINGTON [OLYMPIA] in 1946 and replaced HAMMERSMITH. HOUNSLOW BRKS, renamed Hounslow West in 1925, was now HOUNSLOW (and on platform 3 replaced MILL HILL PARK – which had itself been renamed Acton Town in 1910). The former ADDISON ROAD space was now used for ACTON TOWN. The most obvious change were the new black-on-yellow plates used for non-stopping trains. A 1950s photo shows the yellow HOUNSLOW NOT STOPPING AT plate replaced by a standard white-on-blue HOUNSLOW version, but it is not clear which of these was in use earlier, or why and when the switch was made. The indicator remained lettered in a pre-Underground Group typeface, with the exception of ACTON TOWN, which was now in Johnston.

Fig.21 1950s looking west

<b>EALING B'DWAY</b>	q	<b>RICHMOND</b>	q
<b>WIMBLEDON</b>		<b>WIMBLEDON</b>	
<b>PUTNEY BRIDGE</b>		<b>PARSON'S GREEN</b>	
<b>KENSINGTON [OLYMPIA]</b>		<b>HOUNSLOW WEST</b>	

<b>RICHMOND</b>		<b>ACTON TOWN</b>	
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The actual layout of the RICHMOND, WIMBLEDON and HOUNSLOW NOT STOPPING AT plates was as follows:

<b>RICHMOND</b>	NOT STOPPING AT
	WEST KENSINGTON BARONS COURT
<b>WIMBLEDON</b>	NOT STOPPING AT
	WEST BROMPTON
<b>HOUNSLOW WEST</b>	NOT STOPPING AT
	RAVENCOURT PARK STAMFORD BROOK

As on the eastbound, new plates lettered in Johnston Condensed Type were installed in the 1960s (Fig.22). The NOT STOPPING AT, HOUNSLOW and ACTON TOWN plates were not replaced, either because of the withdrawal of semi-fast trains, and of all District Line services on the Hounslow Branch – both from 1964; or due to the rationalisation of the track layout at Acton Town in 1965, which meant that District Line trains were no longer able to detrain in westbound platform 3 and go ‘across the lot’ to enter Ealing Common depot from the east (Acton) end. Yellow NOT STOPPING AT plates in Johnston Condensed were actually manufactured and still exist, but were probably never fitted, being made redundant by the October 1964 timetable changes. EALING COMMON was introduced to cater for trains terminating there to enter Ealing Common depot from west (Ealing) end, whilst PARSON’S GREEN was now PARSONS GREEN and followed the post-1951 LT convention by losing its possessive apostrophe.

Fig.22 1965 looking west

EALING BROADWAY	9	PARSONS GREEN
WIMBLEDON		
PUTNEY BRIDGE		EALING COMMON
OLYMPIA		
RICHMOND		

The westbound MDR signs were also removed during station refurbishment work from 2007 to 2008 and replaced by temporary indicator displays (Fig.23).

Fig.23 2007-2008 looking east

EALING BROADWAY	←
WIMBLEDON	
PUTNEY BRIDGE	
OLYMPIA	
RICHMOND	
PARSONS GREEN	
EALING COMMON	

New plates were fitted to the westbound MDR signs in December 2008 with the background colour of a lighter blue and the typeface changed to New Johnston (Fig.24). STOPS HERE was added for trains stabling at Lillie Bridge that detrained in platforms 3 or 4 and then worked empty to depot via Olympia. The grey arrow panels were eventually altered to black and the arrow colour from cream to brilliant white

Just as with the eastbound indicators, in March 2022, the 4LM CBTC re-signalling scheme reached the Earl's Court area. In association with this, these MDR indicators were also temporarily taken out of service. Again, the plates were covered with stickers lettered in non-Johnston type arranged to show the message advising passengers to use alternative signs (Fig.25).

The westbound signs were also returned to use on 30 June 2022, with new plates and the layout rearranged, and with the typeface also probably now in Johnston 100 (Fig.26). The new signalling system allows a greater number of destinations to be shown, and ACTON TOWN, GUNNERSBURY and WEST KENSINGTON have been added. Meanwhile, PUTNEY BRIDGE has been deleted following the abolition of the bay road in 2014. STOPS HERE is now replaced by NOT IN SERVICE. Some plates initially read plain OLYMPIA, but were changed to KENSINGTON (OLYMPIA) prior to the recommissioning.

One less than satisfactory aspect of the new signs on both sets of platforms is the use of different-sized fonts and character spacing, or 'kerning', to ensure each station name fills the whole width of the plate, as the overall effect of this seems less pleasing to the eye compared with some earlier layouts. Unlike on the eastbound, the new westbound plate layout does not attempt a geographical order from east-to-west. The restoration of both sets of plates has been nominated for the 2023 National Railway Heritage Awards.

Fig.24 **2008** looking west

EALING BROADWAY	q	PARSONS GREEN	q
WIMBLEDON	q		q
PUTNEY BRIDGE	q	EALING COMMON	q
OLYMPIA	q		q
RICHMOND	q	STOPS HERE	q

Fig.25 **2008** looking west

PLEASE USE	q	PLEASE USE	q
ALTERNATIVE	q	ALTERNATIVE	q
PLATFORM	q	PLATFORM	q
INFORMATION	q	INFORMATION	q
SCREENS	q	SCREENS	q

Fig.26 **2022** looking west

EALING BROADWAY	q	NOT IN SERVICE	q
EALING COMMON	q	WEST KENSINGTON	q
WIMBLEDON	q	PARSONS GREEN	q
RICHMOND	q	GUNNERSBURY	q
KENSINGTON (OLYMPIA)	q	ACTON TOWN	q

The Earl's Court MDR indicators have now seen over a century of service, though of course what with all the changes over the decades, they are very much a case of 'Trigger's Broom' when it comes to originality. Nevertheless, let's hope they continue to inform and delight passengers (and enthusiasts) for many years to come.

**Author's note:** Full acknowledgement is given to the data published in draft form on the late Mike Horne's Metadyne website ([www.metadyne.co.uk](http://www.metadyne.co.uk)), which took the story of the MDR platform indicators from 1905 to 2003. Unfortunately, this was one of Mike's many ongoing and unfinished projects, and he was unable to reach a definite conclusion on some aspects of the story. Nevertheless, this expanded and updated article would not have been possible without his original research.



**Above:** The westbound (and distant eastbound) indicators at Earl's Court in 1910, and as originally installed in a staggered position to each other. The MDR Renshaw battery locomotive and works train are engaged in the construction of access subways to the forthcoming escalators, which also saw the wooden platform surfaces replaced by concrete.

**Photo: Author's collection**



**Above:** A view from platform 3 looking east. Stairs lead down off the platforms and the 1911 escalators are probably now in place. The eastbound indicator was suspended then from a triangular bracket.

**Photo: LT Museum**



**Above:** By 1939 the indicators had become aligned with each other and were mounted on concrete beams above the stairs to the Piccadilly Line escalators. The stairs also gave direct access to the 1937 Exhibition Subway. Note the spot lamps added later to illuminate the plates.

**Photo: LT Museum**



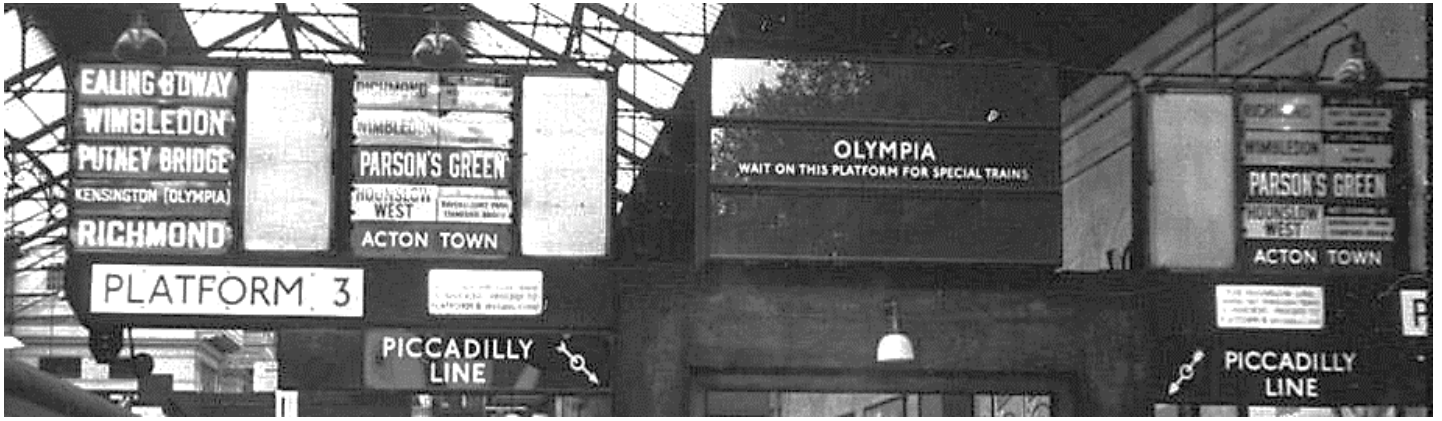
**Above:** A red-painted R Stock arrives at Earl's Court westbound platform 3 bound for Ealing Broadway in the 1950s. The yellow NOT STOPPING AT plates are clearly visible. Above the staircase is a 'switchable sign' operated by station staff. This advised Olympia passengers to wait for special trains or, if these were not operating, change at West Kensington for bus route 28.

**Photo: LURS collection**



**Above:** Another 1950s view. The ACTON TOWN plates are the only ones lettered in Johnston. Note the inner face of the platform roundels carried directional information to the Piccadilly Line.

**Photo: Author's collection**



**Above:** The westbound indicators in the late-1950s or early-1960s. At this time, the space once used for HOUNSLOW has a black-on-yellow HOUNSLOW WEST NOT STOPPING AT plate fitted instead. The four-panel 'switchable sign' with grey glass has been replaced by a three-panel version using black glass.

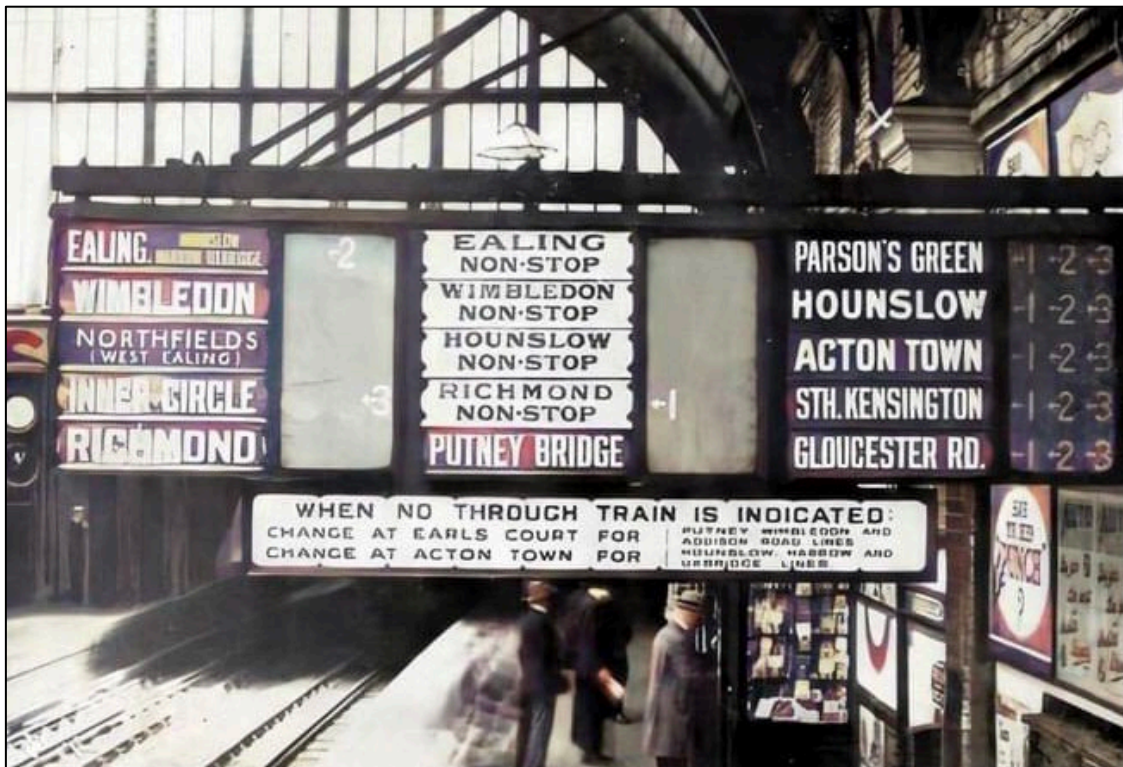
**Photo: Author's collection**



**Above:** Charing Cross in 1960 with the middle NOT STOPPING AT indicator panel still in use.

**Photo: LT Museum**





**Above:** A coloured photo of St. James's Park in the early 1920s with the westbound '1,2,3' indicator carrying a full set of white NON-STOP plates. The EALING plate shows the three subsidiary destinations of HOUNSLOW, HARROW and UXBRIDGE, though a permanent sign below advises passengers to change at Acton Town "when no through train is indicated". Only NORTHFIELDS (WEST EALING) then appeared in Johnston.

**Photo: LT Museum**



**Above:** The same indicator at St. James's Park in 1964 after the station was rebuilt as part of the 55 Broadway complex. NORTHFIELDS (WEST EALING) and HOUNSLOW have changed places, whilst INNER CIRCLE had been replaced by CIRCLE LINE via HIGH ST. KENSINGTON in Johnston. GLOUCESTER ROAD is now SPECIAL and appears in Johnston and the NON-STOP/NOT STOPPING AT plates have been modernised and are coloured black-on-yellow.

**Photo: Author's collection**



**Above:** Earl's Court in the 1960s with the indicators now using Condensed Johnston. These plates remained in use until 2007. Note that a 'switchable sign' has now been fitted above the stairs.

**Photo: LT Museum**



**Left:** A 2000s view of an eastbound Earl's Court indicator just prior to the 1960s-era plates being removed. TOWER HILL had replaced CHARING CROSS in 1967.

**Below:** Gloucester Road westbound platform 1 on 15 May 1983 during the R Stock farewell tour. Participants carry the optional white lunchboxes supplied by LT Catering. Here, two 5-plate 'arrow' indicators were hung side-by-side but operated as one.

**Photo: Author's collection**





**Above:** The Gloucester Road platform 1 indicators were moved closer together when the station was reconstructed in 1989-90 and currently remain in situ, albeit disused.

**Photo: Kim Rennie**



**Above:** A westbound indicator at Earl's Court platform 4 on 30 June 2022.

**Photo: Kim Rennie**



**Above:** An eastbound indicator at Earl's Court platform 1 on 30 June 2022.

**Photo: Kim Rennie**



**Left:** One of the indicators digitally-altered for a 2022 TfL television advert encouraging off-peak leisure travel.

**Photo: Kim Rennie**



A 1960s NOT STOPPING AT plate lettered in Johnston Condensed but probably never installed.

**Photo: LURS collection**