

IN WITH THE NEW AND OUT WITH THE OLD ON ISLAND LINE

by John Mitchell

The modernisation project of Island Line has definitely not proceeded to plan, but it is not alone. Crossrail, East-West and HS2 are other projects which are also running behind and have exceeded their budgets.

Software issues on the Class 484s had resulted in very little testing taking place between Eastleigh and Fareham but this did resume overnight on 14 May with 484.003 and 484.002 venturing onto SWR metals.

It was known that SWR were keen to clear Ryde depot of the remaining Class 483 sets. Four units remained at Ryde with 007 and 004 staying on the Island, whilst 008 and 006 are to head back to the mainland under the custody of LTTG, the London Transport Traction Group.

Delivery of a further 484 would enable the 483s to be cleared from Ryde leaving just one set on Island Line rails until the next 484 is delivered. That was the plan, but as will be seen all did not work out.

Tuesday 18 May was to see 483.007 pushed south to Sandown by a unimog with 483 004 following later. Whilst this was due to take place 484.004 would be crossing the Solent en route for Sandown Yard where all remaining stock deliveries and departures are now taking place. In the event some crucial paperwork was not signed off to temporarily release Island Line from its engineering possession and the 483s could not be moved.

Both cars of 484.004, 234 and 134 had left Eastleigh by road, heading to Portsmouth, Reid Freight again being contracted. They arrived in Gunwharf Road together at around 14.20. Car 234, the 'D' end Shanklin facing vehicle, was first away across the Solent on Wightlink's 14.40 sailing operated by St. Clare. This was the same vessel which 484 001 had travelled back on 19 November 2020. Car 134 was to wait two hours for St. Clare's next sailing at 16.40.

Once offloaded at Fishbourne, with an escort vehicle, the cars made their individual journeys to Sandown by way of Newport, exactly as 484.001 had done in November. Unloading in Sandown yard was a relatively simple operation and completed around 19.00, both cars being placed in the former Newport bay platform, together, but were not coupled until the next morning.

So into Wednesday 19 May and the necessary paperwork had still not been signed off to move anything from Ryde, the master plan had well and truly been blown out of the water, so to speak! No doubt some lively conversations took place that afternoon, but it was not until almost 18.00 that the unimog had made it to Ryde having been coupled to the 'A' end car 127 of 007. With no further delay 007 was propelled south to Sandown at a sedate 5mph. The 483 had to be pushed due to the constraints of Sandown Yard which of course also contained 484.004.

This was the first time a 483 had encountered the new passing loop layout at Brading, the Up line being used. 007 was pushed off the running lines and into Sandown yard just after 19.00, meeting 484.004 for the first time. The cars were uncoupled and loaded onto Reid's freight lorries and at dusk departure was made for the IoW Steam Railway at Havenstreet.

The route had been planned to go via Newport and Wootton, but in the event, Island Roads requested the more direct route via Arreton and Downend be taken due to roadworks in Newport, which would have involved a tight one way diversion. This was the way the 483s had been delivered back in 1989/90. It was dark by the time Havenstreet was reached. 227 was manoeuvred in position ready to be unloaded early the next morning. Being the 'D' end car it was correctly facing Wootton. Had the line remained open to Cowes and been operated by tube stock, the 'D'-end cars would have faced Cowes as they faced Shanklin on the former Ventnor line.

Thursday 20 May was to be the last day where every remaining Class 483 vehicle on the Island moved somewhere. As 007 was offloaded into Havenstreet yard, past the station and into 'trainstory', the 484 was enjoying a tow by the unimog in the direction of Ryde. It stopped short of St. John's Road signalbox for the unimog to run round via Smallbrook Junction. Now attached at the south end 484.004 was shunted across to the depot sidings and propelled into the depot shed alongside 484.001. On the way into the depot the three remaining 483's were passed including 483 004 which was awaiting its push to Sandown. The two 004 units thus very briefly shared each other's company.

The Unimog, having dealt with 484.004, was then sent onto the south end of 483.004 which was then shunted onto the up running line just south of the signalbox. The unimog then headed back to Smallbrook to run round, in order to be at the north end of 004. The same operation had been carried out with 007 the previous evening. No time was wasted in getting 004 onto Reid's lorries. Neither was any time wasted for the unimog to return to Ryde to collect 008. 006 and 008 were stabled together with 006 at the south end. In order to release 008, 006 was shunted into the south end of the bay platform 3. 008 was then shunted across to the up road and in a repeat of the earlier operation a run round was again achieved via Smallbrook Junction.

The original intention had been for 008 to have travelled back to the mainland on the 20.40 ferry that evening. In the event, Sandown yard was as far as it made and indeed it was to remain there until the next 484 put in an appearance.

Whilst 008 was being pushed south to Sandown, 004 had been loaded up and left (in the middle of the school time rush) for its forever home at Hale Common on the Sandown – Newport road. The actual location is at Holliers Farm, the House of Chilli, where a bus already serves a café function. A short section of track had been laid alongside a row of trees at the side of the car park and it was onto this that 004 had to be positioned. Your writer had visited the site some days previously and considered the room to manoeuvre 124 and 224 to be tight. Indeed it proved to be. The skill of Reid's crew was put to the test in an operation which involved lifting some track panels to allow space to ease the cars round and then winched onto the rails. It was around 19.00 before 224 was offloaded and there was still the other car to go. Any hope of the booked 20.40 ferry being caught had long disappeared. 124 was finally offloaded after dark at 22.00. Reid's then had to return to Sandown to drop off some track panels and they finally left the Island on different ferries the next day, making Stoke by midnight.

From a conversation with the new owner, the intention is to externally restore one car to LT condition and the other to Island Line. The inside is to see use as a café seating area and some modifications for this new use are likely.

008 remains at Sandown and has been partially covered by tarpaulins. 006 remained in platform at Ryde St. Johns Road. The original plan had been for 008 to have departed and 006 wait at Sandown for the next 484 to arrive, expected to be late-June. With the unimog on the Island, the plan had been to propel 484.004 into Ryde tunnel to check clearances and prove to the doubters that it would fit!

That day was to happen just three weeks later on Thursday 10 June, when the unimog returned to the Island. It was 484.001 which was to test the tunnel and it was accordingly shunted out of the depot, the unimog eventually being attached at the northbound end of car 131. Some time was spent in the Up platform at Ryde. St. John's Road, clearances being checked with the platform canopy, which can best be described as tight.

A low speed departure was then made north from St. John's on the double track section, passing both Park Road and Rink Road bridges. A team of workers walked ahead of the train, the clearances at both bridges being thoroughly checked. 484.001 was drawn right up to the tunnel mouth by the unimog and stopped. A brief evacuation exercise using ladders from the side passengers doors of car 131 was undertaken here to be repeated later in the tunnel. A potential problem does exist as the end sections of Ryde Tunnel are single bore and, in the modification, the former outer driving cab doors have been plated over and replaced with additional electrical equipment. In their original condition evacuation would have been much easier as it was under LUL ownership. Whether the issue was resolved on these tests is unknown.

484.001 was finally eased into the tunnel and sometime later was to emerge at the Esplanade end. Many had speculated that it would not fit the tunnel and whilst clearances are undoubtedly tight it did fit, no scrape marks being evident! The train ran into the Esplanade station but proceeded no further. Ryde Pier has, following an inspection, been condemned for use by trains and that will remain the position until Network Rail undertakes repairs. A lunch break was taken at the Esplanade before a return to St. John's Road was made on the Down line. Again the 484 cleared the tunnel.

Further 484s are due to come across to the Island in the next few weeks and when the engineering possession is lifted, train testing, accumulation of miles and crew training can take place. September is being speculated as to when the rail service will restart. With no official announcement, once again it is a wait and see.

In the humble opinion of your writer this project like so many others has been made more complicated than needed and costs and delays could have been reduced. For instance, was there the need to

computerise the train control? The D Stock as it was with LUL was a particularly reliable train. Plenty of spares exist! Why tinker beyond refurbishment. Removal of the front cab door was undoubtedly an error, bearing in mind the single bore sections of tunnel. Logic would appear to have been in short supply in the planning of this project. With further hindsight there was a missed opportunity to undertake the repair to Ryde Pier when not only the train service was suspended but also during the pandemic when for months there has been no catamaran service to the mainland. The whole project upgrade appears not to have seen different sectors work together as they might and should have done.

Of the cars which returned to the mainland in April, all were initially stored at Reid's yard in Stoke-on-Trent. 122, 129 and 229 subsequently went to Booths and have been advertised on ebay for the 'bargain' price of £32,000 each! In the probability of there being no takers it is likely that they will be cut up, but do watch this space. 225 remains at Reid's yard and has been privately sold. Your writer has conversed with its new owner but is unable to reveal any more information on plans for the time being.

UNIT 483.004 TO HOLLIERS FARM ON THE SANDOWN – NEWPORT ROAD



Photos: John Mitchell (Top and Right) and Paul Bradley (Above, Left)

UNIT 483.008 FROM RYDE TO SANDOWN



Photos: John Mitchell (Opposite, Lower and Above, Left) and Andy Jona Jones (Above)
UNIT 483.007 AT HAVENSTREET



The arrival of 483.007 at Havenstreet, headquarters of the Isle of Wight Steam Railway (Top, Left and Right, Above, Left and Right) and 007 in its new home in the "Train Story" building, with a 1938 Tube Stock bogie in the foreground.

Photos: Clifford Reed (Left) and John Faulkner (all other photos)

THE DELIVERY OF 484.004



Both photos: Paul Bradley

TUNNEL TESTING AT RYDE



Above: Hauled by the Unimog, 484.001 approaches the tunnel from the south end (Left) and is gingerly entering the tunnel (Right).

Both photos: John Mitchell

Below: 484.001 emerges from the tunnel unscathed (Left) and is then seen at Ryde Esplanade (Right). The clearance between the top of the train and the platform canopy is rather tight to say the least ... Because of the condition of Ryde Pier, now being unsuitable for trains until repairs are undertaken, the furthest 'north' the replacement trains have reached is Ryde Esplanade. It will be seen that the former Down line to the right has been severed. The train returned to Ryde St. John's Road via the Down line tunnel and also encountered no serious problems.

Both photos: John Faulkner

