

# THE ISLAND LINE CONTINUES WITH TRANSFORMATION

by John Mitchell

This article began being written over the Easter weekend when the modernised Island Line was originally scheduled to reopen using the refurbished Class 484 units, formerly the District Line's D Stock. The resumption of rail services between Ryde and Shanklin still appears to be some weeks off, but the opportunity presents itself to look at what has happened on this modernisation project to the start of April.

As 483.006 pulled away from St. John's Road station to enter Ryde Depot late on the evening of Sunday 3 January, engineers were on hand to commence work. Traction current was quickly discharged and the line became an engineering possession. Within days, the project was underway with excavation work starting at both Shanklin and Brading stations. These are the two stations where the trackbed has been lowered, the height of the platforms remaining at the same. At all other stations the platform level has been raised.

Track was quickly removed at Shanklin. At Brading, excavators started work preparing to reinstate the former down platform with the construction of a new passing loop. Lake was the first station to be fitted with a new raised platform and this happened quickly. Supports were bolted onto the existing wooden structure and panels then assembled on top. By 23 January, work was completed here and the similarly designed station at Smallbrook Junction was receiving similar treatment.

Work at Sandown started on the Up platform around 20 January, here the new platform structure being bolted onto the existing tarmac surface of the station platform. By the end of the month the Down platform was receiving attention. What had become apparent by this stage was that the ends of the newly raised structures did not slope at the platform ends. A barrier will be placed at each and this looks like being one of the final tasks to be completed.

The footbridge at Foxes Close off the A3055 to the north of Sandown was found to be in poor condition. It was condemned at the beginning of February, to be replaced by a new structure which opened in early April. Prior to its closure a crane could be observed offloading equipment into the nearby electric substation as part of the power upgrade. Similar work could be seen from a road bridge taking place at Rowborough to the north of Brading and also at Ryde St. Johns Road. Part of the infrastructure upgrade at Ryde has seen a separate electric supply installed for the depot, which means that trains can now be shunted under their own power there.

The first week of February had seen the Down road excavated at Brading and work start on that platform. Immediately to the south of the station, a new point had been installed for the passing loop and there was evidence of the lowering of the track level by the foot crossing. By the end of February the single track had been skewed away from the up platform. Work at Sandown for all intents and purposes had been completed by then.

In Ryde, very little evidence of work was apparent until mid-February, when work started on platforms 2 and 3 at Ryde St. John's Road. The raised platform here stops a little beyond the blue footbridge and presumably will receive a barrier before services resume. This was completed in around a week before the upgrade moved over to platform 1.

At Ryde Esplanade, some excavation work had taken place on the disused down road, which was last used when the Pier shuttle service was in operation in the mid-1990s. The Down starting signal is now relocated here for sighting purposes with the forthcoming 484s. The author understands that on a more permanent basis, a new signal will be placed on a gantry. Car stopping sign signs have also been placed on the disused line. There does not seem to be any plans to remove this track at present. A number of large bags containing ballast were also placed by the former Down road towards the crossover.

It was into March before work to raise the platform at Ryde Esplanade commenced. This was pretty much completed by the 20 March, the section of raised platform just being long enough to accommodate two Class 484 units. At the 'wet' end of the pier, supports were being assembled onto platform 1 by this date.

Ryde Pier Head has a wide island platform going across what was platform 2 in steam days. The raised platform does not go right across to what became the Pier Shuttle platform and no doubt a barrier will

be assembled to cover the change in height for a point of passenger safety. In future, access to the platform will likely be restricted to the actual part where trains stop. Platform raising at the Pier Head was not completed until well after Easter.

Brading station had very much been turned into a non-accessible work site, with access all but impossible. However, there are two footpaths in the vicinity and by 27 March, it was possible to walk and see progress. What a transformation with a completed passing loop! Finishing work was still being required on the two platforms and signalling installed. Those signals appeared during the week which followed Easter. They are single aspect signals and can digitally show either red, yellow or green.

The mention of signalling allows the opportunity to review an important safety change. Up to the end of Class 483 operation, all signals approaching junctions had trainstops, so any train passing a signal at danger would be brought to a stop by activating the tripcock on the train. The same method is, of course, in operation on the London Underground. To conform with current Railtrack systems, all these locations have now been changed over to a standard advanced warning system.



**Above:** One of the new TPWS 'grids' in place for the updated signalling system on the Island Line on the Up line at Ryde St. John's Road, with a trainstop to the right at the current rail gap.

**Above:** (Centre) A close-up view of one of the trainstops on the Island Line, which will be redundant when the line reopens. Their design seems reminiscent of the type used on the London area DC lines and on the Merseyrail third rail electric lines?

**Right:** One of the new signals in place on the approach to Brading, which is the Up home. These, too, are reminiscent of the former 'searchlight' signalling style on the DC lines but of course operate with LEDs and can display red, yellow or green.

**All photos: John Mitchell**

The infrastructure for the project which was originally due to completed by 1 April was, in reality, not that far behind. However, what is especially late in the project is working trains. With the line being an engineering possession, there has been no opportunity to test 484.001 on the Island other than shunting it up and down Ryde Depot. Units 484.002, 003 and 004 were transferred to Eastleigh in March and testing commenced overnight on 1/2 April between Eastleigh and Fareham, with four trips taking place. This was the start of mileage testing and how soon these trains can be transferred to the Island is dependent on satisfactory results. Resumption of rail services at the time of writing is projected to start in late May but that timescale could easily slip. *(It soon became clear that this would not be met and it had slipped to 21 June. But now see also page 392 – Ed.)*

At the conclusion of Class 483 operation, there remained six units on the Island plus 484 001. Happily, four units have found new homes but unit 002 (car No's 122 and 225) and unit 009 (car Nos.129 and 229) had reached the condition where scrapping was the only realistic option. 002 had not run for many years and had donated most of its usable parts to keep other units in operation. 009 had, right up to the end, been used for shunting in Ryde Depot where its use was restricted, again due to condition.

Some asbestos content meant that specialised breaking was required on the mainland and a project was drawn up to remove these vehicles from the Island Line. Southern Cranes were contracted to lift the cars from the line and then onto lorries. The crane arrived at Ryde St. John's Road around 08.00 on the morning of Monday 29 March, having travelled from Southampton via Red Funnel's car ferry to

East Cowes. Five lorries with trailers from Reid Freight had travelled across to the Island on Wightlink's Portsmouth – Fishbourne route.

Whilst the crane was assembled, a complex shunt round occurred and with the exception of 004, every Class 483 car was moved somewhere. All of this was undertaken using Mercedes 'Unimog' Road-Rail vehicle Reg. AE06 PFN. 483 008 and 483 006 were separately placed into the south end of the Up platform positioned close together but not coupled. 483 002 (122 and 225) were then shunted onto the Up line up to 006, adjacent to the signalbox, ready to be craned off the tracks later on.

009 was then shunted to allow the release of 007 from inside the depot to be placed onto the rear wash depot road which had for so long been occupied by 002. This then allowed 009 to be propelled into the works for removal of any remaining useful parts, including shoe gear. From the hammering which could be heard when this work was happening, this task was not done delicately!! At the end of the day, the immaculate 007 was safely back in the depot shed.

A little after noon and with the crane ready for action, the two cars of 002 were uncoupled, again with the assistance of the Mercedes, and car 122 was attached to the crane strops and gently raised off the track. It was lifted high just immediately south of the signalbox and swung round to the waiting lorry trailer. Removal of the bogies followed and then it was the turn of 225 to be craned off. The lorries were then parked to the sides of the station car park as departure was not scheduled until the following day. The Mercedes then went back across to the depot to extract 009, and car 129 was to join the other two cars on the back of a lorry that afternoon.

The following morning, everything seemed to happen at once. As 229 was about to be lifted from the Up line, the Mercedes ran through platform 3 to the north siding which has been occupied by 483.004 for some time. Sadly, the unit has been the target of graffiti attacks whilst stabled here. After coupling up, 004 was hauled into platform 3, its destination being the depot sidings. It had to pause at the shunt signal as the lift of car 229 was just commencing. 004 will eventually head to a new home on the Island. The original plan had been for it to also be removed this week, but the writer understands the new owners were unable to accept it at this time. It will now await the arrival of the next 484s and at the same time the remaining 483s will leave Island Line by way of Sandown yard.

St. John's Road yard by this time consisted of five lorries, four with the carriages on and the other containing the bogies. All the bogies proved to be too bulky for one lorry and cars 129 and 229 were readjusted on their lorries leaving with their bogies attached at each outer car end.



**Above:** Stock lined up at Ryde St. John's Road on the Up line (Left) at the start of operations to remove 002 and 009 for scrapping. Unit 008 is nearest the camera, behind which is 006. At the far end was 002 (Right) which is seen minus shoebeams and adjacent to the signal box.

**Both photos: John Mitchell**



**Top:** (Left) Mercedes 'Unimog' Road-Rail shunter runs alongside unit 002, prior to shunting it on the Up line for disposal. In the Up platform, unit 008 is on the left and 006 on the right.

**Top:** (Right) North-facing motor car 122 is seen lifted from the tracks, to be put on a waiting lorry for disposal. South facing motor car 225 will be next, whose trailing end may be seen next to the signal box.

**Above:** (Left) Motor cars 229 on the left and 129



**Above:** Two cars 122 and 225 at Fishbourne prior to boarding the ferry.

**All photos: John Mitchell**

At just after 10.00, the two lorries with cars 122 and 225 pulled away from St. John's yard and headed up St. John's Road en route for Wightlink's Fishbourne ferry. The main road was taken

right awaiting departure from St. John's Road yard.

**Above:** (Centre, Right) Motor car 225 (nearest) and 122 (in the distance) in St. John's Road heading off to the Fishbourne to Portsmouth ferry.

On this occasion, both 483 cars were taken on the same sailing. The lorry with the bogies followed two hours later, travelling once more aboard St. Clare on its 13.00 sailing. Predictably, 129 and 229 followed a further two hours later on the 15.00 sailing. The detached convoy was to spend the Easter weekend and sometime after in storage at Reid's yard before heading to Booths in Rotherham for final 'despatch'.



**Left:** Although unit 009 was withdrawn from passenger service on 12 December 2016, it was retained operationally as a depot shunter at Ryde Depot. Motor car 229 is seen at Fishbourne on its final journey, ultimately to the scrapyard.

**Photo:** John Mitchell

As mentioned above, the remaining Class 483s will, in all probability, leave Island Line by way of Sandown. Whether they will go under their own power or be towed by the Mercedes Unimog or similar, remains to be seen at the time of writing. These are the following plans:

- 483 004 is to be used in a static role as part of a restaurant in a garden centre on the Island.
- 483 006 and 483 008 are both going to the London Transport Traction Group.
- 483 007 will go to the Isle of Wight Steam railway at Havenstreet.

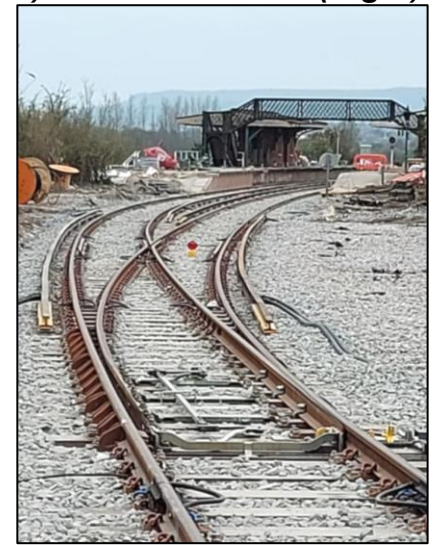
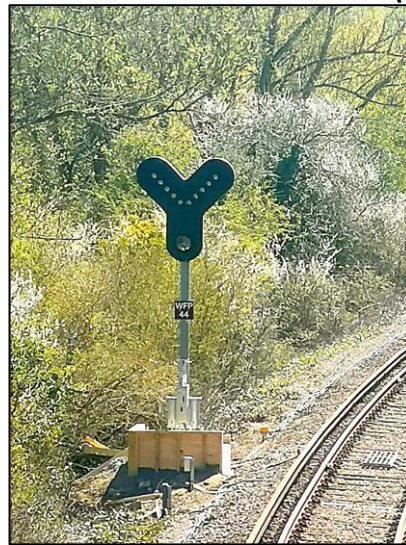
Finally, the Mercedes was used to extract 484.001 out of the depot shed and into the platforms at St. John's Road station on Thursday 1 April to test clearances with the new raised platforms. That night, 484.002 coupled with 003, started test running between Eastleigh and Fareham. The project to transform Island Line suddenly looked to be well in hand.

Insofar as the five two-car units for the Island Line is concerned, unit 005 was the last to be transferred from Vivarail to Eastleigh for testing.



**Above:** Two units of D Stock destined for the Isle of Wight are seen in the station at Eastleigh (Left) on 2 April 2021 and passing Hedge End (Right).

**Photos: Michael York (Left) and Chris Addoo (Right)**



As well as providing replacement rolling stock, several of sections of track were replaced, other sections improved and the passing loop and second platform at Brading reinstated. Moreover, because the replacement trains are of sub-surface stock and not 'tube' stock, platform heights have had to be adjusted. The terminal platform at Ryde Pier Head is seen (Above) with the new sections of platform being installed. The new Brading Down home signal is in place (Above, Centre), offering two routes, the left when two trains are running and booked to pass here or the right when one train is operating or the service is disrupted and have to pass at Sandown. The approach to Brading is seen (Above, Right) with track and current rails in place.

**All photos: John Mitchell**



**Left:** The last two-car unit of D Stock for the Island Line, 484.005, arrived at Eastleigh on Monday 19 April 2021 and is seen (Left) in Dutton Lane, Eastleigh. Even trains can get delayed by traffic jams in the street!

**Photo: Stuart Butt**

On that date, four out of the five units were at Eastleigh for testing on the main line, prior to shipping to the Isle of Wight.

As this issue closed for press, South Western Railway made public that the service reopening will not even make the revised date of June. No further date has been forthcoming other than "later this summer".

Complex computer software had been adapted to utilise the 3rd rail system and has created serious issues, meaning that four out of the five fully refurbished trains are yet to be delivered to the Island. Vivarail have taken full responsibility for the problems, which planning and analysis did not highlight, and only came to light with main line test running.

## ISLAND LINE CLASS 484

		Ex-LT		Ex-LT	Arrive Derby	Arrive Eastleigh	Arrive I.o.W.
484.001	131	7086	231	7011	–	–	19.11.20
484.002	132	7068	232	7002	11.02.21	22.02.21	–
484.003	133	7051	233	7083	–	01.03.21	–
484.004	134	7074	234	7111	–	03.03.21	–
485.005	135	7124	235	7093	–	19.04.21	–

The list (Left) shows the status of the ex-LU D Stock destined for the Isle of Wight as at the end of April 2021. Further updates with movements will be published as and when they are known.