

The Bulletin



New York Division, Electric Railroaders' Association

Vol. 49, No. 6

June, 2006

The Bulletin

Published by the New York Division, Electric Railroaders' Association, Incorporated, PO Box 3001, New York, New York 10008-3001.

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FIFTY YEARS OF SUBWAY SERVICE TO THE ROCKAWAYS

IND trains started running to the Rockaways fifty years ago, June 28, 1956, on an embankment that replaced the Long Island Rail Road's burned-out wooden trestle. Member Robert Wasche sent us newspaper clippings describing the events leading up to New York City's purchase of the Long Island Rail Road's Rockaway Division.

These clippings reveal that the Long Island's wooden trestle over Jamaica Bay caught fire frequently. A fire, which started at 3:30 AM on a cold windy December night, damaged 1,300 feet of the trestle. Service could not be resumed for several days because material was not available for repairs. Meanwhile, the railroad asked Green Bus Lines to provide service for passengers stranded at Broad Channel and The Raunt.

On December 15, 1948, another fire at The Raunt delayed northbound trains 9 to 19 minutes during the morning rush.

The July 4, 1949 fire destroyed 300 feet of the trestle and disrupted morning rush hour service the next day. Fortunately, evening rush hour service was normal.

The May 7, 1950 fire, which burned all night and destroyed 1,800 feet of the trestle, was probably the worst. Because the cost of reconstruction was estimated at \$1 million, the railroad abandoned the trestle and rerouted Rockaway Park trains via Valley Stream.

When it became apparent that the bankrupt railroad was unwilling to spend large sums of money to repair it, the City of New York decided to purchase the Rockaway Line. On June 11, 1952, the Rockaway Line was sold to the city for \$8.5 million.

The railroad's General Manager explained

that the LIRR wanted to sell the Rockaway Line because it needed cash for its big safety program. The \$8.5 million covered the cost of its \$6 million safety and rehabilitation program. This included installation of automatic train speed controls, the first of which would go into service on the Port Washington Line.

As soon as the sale was approved, the Board of Transportation started preparing contracts for rebuilding the line. The first phase was a \$2 million contract for building an embankment by dredging and pumping sand from Jamaica Bay. Work was nearly complete in April, 1954. An artificial island, also using sand from Jamaica Bay, supported two new swing bridges, which opened horizontally to avoid interfering with the air traffic to and from New York ("Idlewild," now John F. Kennedy) International Airport. A \$5.5 million contract for foundations and piers and a \$4.14 million contract for the superstructure were awarded.

Work was completed just before the 1956 summer season, but the power supply was inadequate. A strike delayed delivery of substation equipment. To conserve power, there was a slow order for trains operating across Jamaica Bay. R-1 to R-9s, which consumed less power than R-10s, provided E service in rush hours and shuttle service in non-rush hours. On June 28, 1956, the first trains were the first evening shuttle leaving Euclid Avenue, the 6:38 PM to Rockaway Park and the 6:48 PM to Far Rockaway. When additional power was available, the slow order was canceled, as shown in the following table:

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