

New digital signalling on Northern City Line tested with first train runs

June 7, 2022



The testing of the new digital signalling on the Northern City Line has commenced with the running of the first Great Northern train between Finsbury Park and Moorgate under the new system.

The testing is carried out with a Great Northern Class 717 train and marks an important milestone in the Government funded East Coast Digital Programme, which will ultimately see traditional signals removed from the tracks along this route. Digital signalling reduces delays and enables a more reliable service for passengers.

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Toufic Machnouk, Network Rail's Director, Industry Partnership for Digital Railway, said: "The running of the first Northern City Line train in digital signalling as part of the test campaign is a big moment for the East Coast Digital Programme, this is the first step to migration following the successful upgrade of the system earlier in May which will change the way the railway works to deliver a more reliable service.

“We are working in close partnership with Great Northern and Siemens to deliver the extensive testing required to ensure we can proceed to the next stage of transforming this route into the capital.”

The first test train ran in the early hours on Sunday 29 May. An ongoing intensive period of testing will ensure that the train fleet, already fitted with the necessary technology, works well with the new digital signalling infrastructure that will communicate directly with the trains cab.

Oly Turner, Head of ERTMS at Govia Thameslink Railway which operates Great Northern, said: “We’re thrilled with this landmark use of digital signalling along our route to Moorgate. Working with Network Rail and Siemens, we prepped carefully for this day and it was rewarding to see the train perform well. I’m looking forward to proving the system in time for driver training to begin next year.”

Testing is taking place overnight and weekends to minimise disruption to passengers as much as possible. The process continues throughout 2022 to ensure complete assurance of its safety and reliability, with driver training and migration to digital signalling operations due to commence in early 2023. The Northern City Line is expected to operate solely using digital signalling in 2024.

Mark Ferrer, Operations Director, Technology, Rail Infrastructure at Siemens Mobility UKI, said: “This project is a prime example of how sustainable investment in digital technology can unlock benefits and support growth in the UK economy and we’re proud to be a part of it, bringing technology, people, skills and our UK supply chain to transform the everyday journeys of passenger and freight, and the communities along the line. Working collaboratively with Network Rail and GTR we were able to achieve this milestone, bringing us one step closer to delivering a next generation railway.”

Photo credit: Network Rail