

BARKING-GOSPEL OAK LINE USER GROUP

www.barking-gospeloak.org.uk

RESPONSE TO CROSS-LONDON RUS CONSULTATION

Introduction

The Barking-Gospel Oak line (BGOL) is one of the few unelectrified routes in an otherwise electrified area. Electrification would be highly desirable, yet it does not feature in the RUS. This is very disappointing, as it would bring a number of advantages: electric-hauled freight trains would be able to use it, and the operator of the Silverlink Metro/North London railway passenger concession would only have one type of rolling stock to maintain. An added advantage is that 3 or 4-car electric units would cope better with increasing passenger loadings than the existing 2-car DMUs, which have difficult coping with peak loadings even now. We believe that without investment in the electrification of the Barking – Gospel Oak Line and other link lines considered in this RUS (Cricklewood to Acton Wells, Acton Wells to Acton Main Line and the Kew Curves) that many of the benefits that this RUS seeks to achieve will not be achievable.

We strongly urge Network Rail to upgrade the Felixstowe- Ely – Nuneaton line to the W10 standard loading gauge, so that freight which has no need to pass through London can avoid it altogether and free up much-needed space for additional passenger services and additional freight traffic originating from the planned new Shellhaven development, which is envisaged on both the Barking – Gospel Oak and North London Lines. The same applies to reinstating Cambridge-Bletchley-Bedford. (NB – some existing freight paths on Barking-Gospel Oak have never been used!).

Improving line capacity does not depend solely upon complete resignalling of the NLL/BGOL, which could not be achieved in less than five years. There are more modest, less expensive “quick fix” measures which can be taken. Barking-Gospel Oak capacity would be improved by installing intermediate block signals between South Tottenham and Leyton at Blackhorse Road. Coupled with extending the opening hours of Harringay Park signalbox (east of Crouch Hill) from the present 07 00 – 15 00 to 07 00 – 23 00, this would allow the much needed 3 trains per hour passenger service to be introduced and still leave enough capacity for additional freight. Restoring Holloway Goods Loop to full use by repairing the points at the Junction Road end would allow westbound freights to be recessed to avoid causing congestion at Gospel Oak. Raising the 15 mph speed restriction at Junction Road and the other low permanent speed restrictions at the west end of the line would also help. The RUS should also include reinstating the former station at Junction Road to improve local transport options & provide interchange with the Northern Line at Tufnell Park. This has been an aspiration of LB Islington & ourselves (and London TravelWatch) for many years and featured in London Transport Users Committee’s “Small is Beautiful” document.

Any comprehensive resignalling scheme must include enough added capacity to accommodate both improved passenger services (4 trains per hour minimum) **and** freight. Increased use of the line for freight must not be allowed to squeeze out Transport for London's (TfL) and our aspiration for 4 trains per hour. In the short term further intermediate block signals between Leyton and Wanstead Park would allow additional freight or a 4 trains per hour service, although existing terminal capacity at Barking and Gospel Oak would be put under some pressure. This could be eased by adopting the "stepping up" traincrew turnround system employed by London Underground (LUL) at Brixton (crew of arriving service are relieved by crew of preceding arrival, and remain on platform to take out next arriving service), also by using platforms 7/8 at Barking as well as Platform 1.

Richmond-Stratford trains should be extended to 4 or 6 cars AND made more frequent, especially with the Olympics looming. Removing significant numbers of seats would have only a marginal effect and would be deeply unpopular. However, on both Class 313s and 150s the end seats of the rows of 3 could usefully be removed – people don't like the middle seat and it would create more gangway space for standing passengers, buggies, conductors & revenue protection officers etc. The existing Class 150s could continue on the Barking-Gospel Oak Line throughout the RUS timeframe BUT strengthening to 3-car formation would be essential, especially if any services are extended to the West London Line. The RUS refers to TfL's desire to replace the 20m long Class 150 vehicles with 23m long Class 170 series *Turbostar* vehicles. It cannot be over-emphasised that if these trains are ordered they **MUST** be at least 3-car units, and the platform lengthening required for these should be made sufficient to accommodate 4x23m car trains, to allow further strengthening when required. If replacement stock is being contemplated for the Barking-Gospel Oak line, care must be taken in its selection as some longer-distance units' door configurations are not suitable for intensive suburban operation – on lines such as Barking – Gospel Oak the average journey length is at maximum 15-20 minutes with a high turnover of passengers. Adequate accommodation for cycles should also be provided.

Other issues:

The North London Line link to Queens Park should certainly be reinstated - including reopening Primrose Hill to improve local travel options, interchange with LUL at Chalk Farm and improve access to north end of Camden Market.

Linking the Barking-Gospel Oak and West London Line services certainly has its attractions, not least removing the awkward interchange between Platforms 1 and 3 at Gospel Oak, but there could be a risk of knock-on delays if there are problems on any one section of the extended route. An alternative might be to extend the Barking-Gospel Oak service down to Grays (via Platforms 7/8 at Barking), or better still to a reinstated basic station at Tilbury Riverside. This would restore the rail link to the Gravesend ferry, would relieve C2C of the Rainham Loop service, and would enable the Tilbury Riverside shuttle bus service to be withdrawn.

P18 of the RUS refers to ticket issue data. This should not be treated as any kind of guide on the Barking-Gospel Oak line, which has unstaffed stations with no ticket machines or gates. Coupled with erratic on-train fare collection (frequently not undertaken at all) this means a significant number of users travel without tickets. Re Table 3.3, we find it hard to believe that Upper Holloway is much less busy than other stations at peak times, and would query this data. We believe that, with the regeneration of many areas adjacent to the Barking – Gospel Oak line and the further enhancements proposed by Transport for London, there is likely to be significant growth in usage of this service which would warrant the expansion of the current train service provision.

“Quick wins” we should like to see initiated as soon as possible on Barking - Gospel Oak include increasing the 1 train per hour evening service to 2 trains per hour, and an earlier start & later finish on Sundays.

P33: There needs to be more about station accessibility improvements. A priority should be Blackhorse Road, where ramps could be put in from the road bridge and a lift installed in the LUL ventilation shaft (as per Tottenham Hale). A better, more direct pedestrian link is also needed between Walthamstow Queens Road (WQR) platforms and the High Street shopping area, via a subway under the Chingford line. Waltham Forest Council are already working on a better link between WQR & Central stations. As stated above, reinstatement of Junction Road (Tufnell Park) station is one of our priorities, and we should like to see it in the RUS. There is also a local aspiration for a new station on Lea Bridge Road at Leyton (Bakers Arms).

P57: we understand that the efficiency of Barking-Gospel Oak line telecommunications, CCTV & CIS systems is compromised by the basic nature and capacity of the equipment. This clearly needs to be upgraded.

In summary we would comment on the Options proposed for this RUS as follows:-

Option 1: Reconfigure Rolling Stock layouts – please see our comments above regarding class 150s.

Option 2: Extension of PIXC Buster concept – we would support this option.

Option 3: Longer Trains – please see our comments above.

Option 4: Introduce 2 trains per hour Barking – Clapham and 2 trains per hour Stratford – Queens Park – we would support this option with the proviso that re-opening Primrose Hill station is included. However 2 tph Barking-Gospel Oak would still be required, to bring total frequency up to 4tph.

Option 5 :Introduce 4 trains per hour Barking – Clapham and 4 trains per hour Stratford – Queens Park – we would support this with the same proviso as Option 4 re Primrose Hill.

Option 6: 2 Southern Trains per hour on the West London Line – we would support this.

Option 7: Divert London Bridge – Victoria services to Clapham Junction – we have no view on this Option as it is not relevant to Barking – Gospel Oak. However members with knowledge of this route have expressed considerable reservations and feel such a service should be additional to the existing route, not instead of it.

Option 8: Raise speeds over Crofton Road bridge – again not in our area, but we would support this option.

Option 9: Move AC/DC changeover on the WLL to Shepherds Bush Station – no objection, but we believe that modern pantographs do not require a stationary changeover point.

Option 10: Provide a southbound freight loop at Kensington Olympia – we would support this option.

Option 11: Raise speeds over Chelsea Bridge – we would support this option.

Option 12: Improve speeds approaching Willesden Junction – we would support this option provided that it would not compromise potential platform lengthening.

Option 13: Improve Barking – Gospel Oak infrastructure and the restrictive signal aspects on the North London Line – we would strongly support this option.

Option 14: Stratford Issues – this seems commonsense to us.

Option 15: Sustainable engineering access – we would support this option.

Option 16: Freight Gauge – we would support this option.

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