

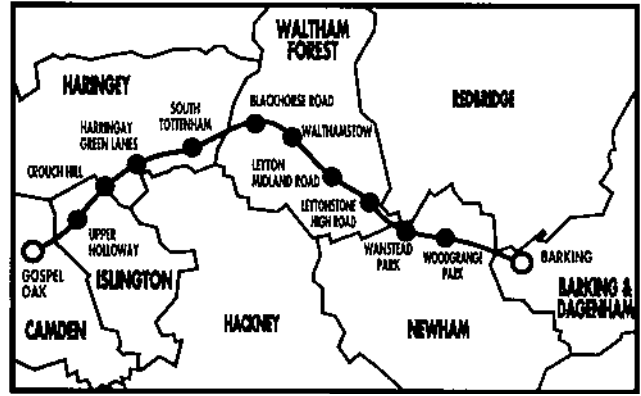
BARKING-GOSPEL OAK LINE USER GROUP

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NEWS RELEASE

3rd March 2009

CAROLINE VENTURES WHERE BORIS FEARED TO TREAD!

London Assembly Transport Vice-Chair experiences Barking – Gospel Oak Line overcrowding for herself

While London Mayor and Transport for London (TfL) Chair, Boris Johnson, refused to travel on the overcrowded, TfL run, London Overground Barking – Gospel Oak rail service when invited by London Assembly Chair Jennette Arnold¹, Caroline Pidgeon², Liberal Democrat Vice-Chair of the London Assembly Transport Committee was made of sterner stuff. She travelled with members of the Barking – Gospel Oak Line User Group (BGOLUG)³ on a crowded morning peak train from Barking last Friday (27th February) in order to see the overcrowded conditions for herself.

The Assembly's Transport Committee has recently published its report, *The Big Squeeze*, into rail overcrowding in the capital and BGOLUG had contributed to the Committee's inquiry.

Caroline was amazed that Barking residents and commuters from connecting District Line and c2c Southend and Tilbury Line services were filling the trains before they left Barking station. Together with BGOLUG members, after watching the 7.40 am train leave full with standing passengers, Caroline boarded the 8 am train for Gospel Oak.

Caroline said, "The level of overcrowding on this line is simply shocking and I challenge any politician who thinks it is acceptable to take the same journey that I have!"

After calling at Woodgrange Park and Wanstead Park (Forest Gate) stations the train was uncomfortably full. But after Leytonstone High Road and Leyton Midland Road stations, crush loading prevailed through Walthamstow to the Blackhorse Road interchange with the Victoria Line. Even then the train remained



very full through South Tottenham (Seven Sisters) with many standing passengers when the party alighted at Harringay Green Lanes. The train still had to call at Crouch Hill and Upper Holloway (Archway) before arriving at the Gospel Oak interchange with the North London Line at the southern end of Hampstead Heath.

"What is most concerning is that in speaking to passengers many pointed out that the serious overcrowding I experienced was less than is normally the case on other days of the week," Caroline continued.

"Caroline was surprised to see the trains departing Barking already full with standing passengers", said BGOLUG Vice-Chair Bill Measure. "I told her that passengers at Leyton Midland Road station were at their wits end struggling to board the packed trains and often being left behind. She was very concerned to learn that TfL Rail had failed to give any guarantee that new 2-car diesel trains⁴, now expected in 2010 would have a third coach added. We also explained how we believed that TfL Rail could improve the current 20-minute peak period service by introducing a limited high-peak 15-minute frequency now instead of waiting for Network Rail's re-signalling⁵, which always seems to be slipping back over the horizon."

"I really feel that TfL must ensure that extra carriages are provided as soon as possible and to sort out the electrification of this crucial line," said Caroline.

"We explained to her that there was no commitment to electrify this, the only purely diesel line in north east London and asked for her help in ensuring that Lib Dem MPs signed the Early Day Motion⁶ in the House of Commons moved by Jeremy Corbyn MP⁷ calling for the line's electrification," said BGOLUG Secretary Richard Pout. "When the year long rebuilding of the Stratford to Camden Road section of the North London Line⁸ starts later this year, more and more electric freight trains are going to be dragged over the Barking – Gospel Oak Line by diesel locomotives."

Caroline added, "I am urging all London Lib-Dem MPs to support the motion on this issue in Parliament."

Caroline then concluded her visit by boarding a later train through Crouch Hill and Upper Holloway to Gospel Oak and sampling the London Overground North London Line, also TfL run, from there to Highbury & Islington, where she was to discuss with local councillors mobility access problems at the station.

- ENDS -

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Caroline Pidgeon AM, in discussion with BGOLUG's Bill Measure (left) and Richard Pout (far right) at Barking Station, while London Overground security chief Julian Dixon looks on.

Friday 27th February 2009



BGOLUG members Richard Pout, Glenn Wallis and Bill Measure with Caroline Pidgeon AM and her researcher Denys Robinson (far right) at Barking Station on Friday 27th February 2009.



NOTES FOR EDITORS

1. Jennette Arnold AM is Chair of the London Assembly and a Labour Assembly Member for the North East Constituency (Hackney, Islington & Waltham Forest). Last year, along with BGOLUG, she asked London Mayor and Chair of the Transport for London Board, Boris Johnson, to accompany her on a visit to the Barking – Gospel Oak Line to see the overcrowding at first hand. Boris declined.
2. Caroline Pidgeon AM is Vice-Chair of the London Assembly's Transport Committee and the spokesperson for the London Assembly Liberal Democrats on transport matters. She was elected from the Londonwide List.
3. Formed as the Barking – Kentish Town Line Committee to fight Dr. Beeching's closure proposals in the 1960s, the Barking – Gospel Oak Line User Group has continued to represent the line's passengers and campaign for improved services and station facilities, and also for the electrification of the only non-electrified railway in North East London.
4. As part of the London Rail Concession contract let by TfL Rail to London Overground Rail Operations Limited (LOROL), LOROL undertook to order, in conjunction with rail leasing company Angel Trains, 8x2-car Class 172 *Turbostar* diesel multiple units from the former British Rail Engineering plant at Derby, now owned by Bombardier Transportation. Originally to be delivered in late 2009, expected delivery has now slipped back to 2010.
5. In 2007 the Department for Transport awarded a grant of £18.5m from its Transport Innovation Fund, match funded by Network Rail's Discretionary Investment Fund for a £37m scheme to increase the clearances (W10 loading gauge) between Woodgrange Park and Willesden to allow an alternative route to the North London Line for the passage of 9' 6" high cube international shipping containers from the current and planned Essex and Suffolk ports. The scheme also funded re-signalling between Wanstead Park and Upper Holloway to double the number of trains that could be run, allowing TfL Rail to run a 15-minute interval passenger service and more freight to be carried. The clearance work for W10 loading gauge was carried out during autumn 2008, but Network Rail postponed the re-signalling and has yet to announce when it will be completed.
6. EDM 446 Barking to Gospel Oak Line Electrification. Principal Sponsor, Jeremy Corbyn MP

That this House recognises that the Barking to Gospel Oak Line is a very valuable part of the rail network; notes that it is the only section of the North London Line without electrification; believes that to become an even more effective part of the passenger and freight network it should be electrified; and calls upon the Secretary of State to support this development and to open negotiations with Network Rail and Transport for London to achieve it.

Currently signed by 21 MPs

7. Jeremy Corbyn is the long serving MP for Islington North and an equally long-time supporter of the Barking – Gospel Oak Line.
8. As part of a £326m scheme to improve services before the 2012 Olympics funded by TfL, Network Rail and the Olympic Delivery Authority, the Stratford to Willesden section of the North London Line will be re-signalled, with lengthened platforms, while the Dalston to Camden Road (exclusive) section will be rebuilt to accommodate the East London Line extension from Dalston Junction to Highbury & Islington and extra tracks for freight trains between Highbury & Islington and Camden Road. The existing freight tracks between Dalston Junction and Camden Road will close for the rebuilding work this April and the *entire railway* between Stratford and Camden Road will be closed from Christmas 2009 until April 2010. This means the high number of freight trains, many are hauled by electric locomotives, using the North London Line will have to be diverted to the Barking – Gospel Oak Line. North London Line passengers will have to use substitute buses.

