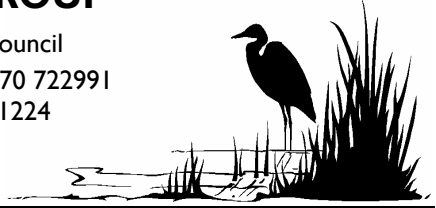


BARKING-GOSPEL OAK LINE USER GROUP

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REPORT TO BARKING AND DAGENHAM PUBLIC TRANSPORT LIAISON GROUP 24TH NOVEMBER 2010

I. LIAISON WITH LONDON OVERGROUND RAIL OPERATIONS LTD (LOROL) AND TRANSPORT FOR LONDON RAIL (TfL LONDON RAIL)

Following lobbying from the Mayor of London, the Secretary of State for Transport agreed in 2006 to transfer responsibility for the rail services comprising the North London Metro rail franchise from the Department for Transport (DfT) to Transport for London (TfL). In 2007 TfL London Rail awarded the London Rail Concession (LRC) contract to LOROL to operate *London Overground* from 11th November 2007 until 31st March 2014.

The routes included are:-

- Barking-Gospel Oak
- North London Line (Stratford-Dalston Kingsland-Highbury & Islington-Gospel Oak-Willesden Junction-Richmond)
- West London Line (Willesden Junction-Kensington Olympia-Clapham Junction)
- Watford DC Lines (Euston-Willesden Junction-Wembley Central-Harrow & Wealdstone-Watford Junction)
- East London Line (from 2010) [Highbury & Islington (from 2011)-Dalston Junction-Crystal Palace/West Croydon/Clapham Junction (from 2012)]

As part of the LRC requirements LOROL holds meetings of its Passenger Group three times per year. Rail user groups and other passenger representatives are invited.

LOROL also holds 'Stakeholder' Group meetings inviting representatives of the rail industry, local authorities and large employers and other bodies such as schools and hospitals along the *Overground* routes. TfL London Rail does not consider passengers or their representatives to be 'stakeholders'. TfL London Rail does not hold regular meetings with passenger representatives.

The other rail passenger services in the borough are managed differently:-

- The District and Hammersmith & City Lines are operated directly by London Underground Limited, a wholly owned subsidiary of Transport for London
- The London, Tilbury & Southend lines, now referred to as Essex Thameside by the Department for Transport, are franchised by the Department to National Express until 31st May 2011 and trade under the 'c2c' name. The DfT are widely expected to give this franchise a 28 week extension.

2. LOROL PASSENGER GROUP MEETING 9TH SEPTEMBER

At this meeting several issues of concern to BGOLUG arose.

New Trains TfL London Rail's original plan was to retain and refurbish the existing Barking-Gospel Oak *Sprinter* diesel units and increase each train to 3 coaches. It was thought that this would tide the line over until it was electrified. However, LOROL (then known as MTR Laing)

included in its bid for the LRC contract, procurement of eight 2-coach trains of an upgraded version of the Bombardier *Turbostar* diesel train, built at Derby. LOROL won the contract and placed the order. The last of these trains were delivered in October, almost a year late. The *Turbostars* are the first trains to be delivered new to the line in 50 years. The *Sprinter* trains were immediately transferred to the West Country.

Reliability The *Turbostars* are giving some cause for concern due to late running. They are losing a few minutes on a schedule that has not changed for decades. BGOLUG believes this may be due to staff unfamiliarity and a rather convoluted method of operating the passenger doors. If this late running persists, BGOLUG will raise the matter with LOROL. There were three consecutive weekdays in early November where train failures caused serious disruption. Operator LOROL has advised that this was mainly due to a problem with the fuel system which it hopes has now been rectified. Bombardier has a number of technicians on standby to deal with faults as they arise.

Overcrowding This has been a long standing major point of contention. Creating the *London Overground* brand in 2007 involved putting the *London Overground* lines on the Tube Map and introducing Oyster Pay As You Go. It also brought these *Forgotten Railways*, the North London and Barking-Gospel Oak Lines, to the attention of a large segment of the population who had been unaware of their existence. This led to intolerable peak period overcrowding, just as BGOLUG had predicted.

Many would-be passengers had been deterred by an infrequent, highly unreliable train service over the previous thirty years. Removal of these constraints from 2006 onwards, together with the *London Overground* launch on 11th November 2007 has unleashed that suppressed demand. This will continue to grow with the introduction of the new trains and daily 15-minute frequencies in 2011. BGOLUG predicts that within a few months the new 2-coach *Turbostars* will be as crush loaded in peak periods as the *Sprinters* have been this year.

Timetable BGOLUG is concerned that TfL London Rail's original plans to introduce "tube style frequencies" on *London Overground* with earlier first trains and later last trains does not now seem to be happening. We are currently attempting to discuss with LOROL and TfL London Rail the timetable changes planned on 4th January and May 2011 to try to reinstate withdrawn first and last trains and provide a 20-minute frequency during the late evening where 30-minute service intervals are currently planned.

Station Improvements BGOLUG has been concerned at the slow progress of the current "Phase III" of these works, considering they started over a year ago. Only Crouch Hill and Leyton Midland Road has apparently been completed, while work has now started at Walthamstow Queen's Road and Leytonstone High Road. The works generally consist of upgrading steps to platforms, replacing lighting, help-points and improving Customer Information Systems. It should be remembered that the current state of the intermediate Barking-Gospel Oak Line stations along the line is due to the GOBLIN campaign led by Waltham Forest Council during the 1990s. Coordinated through the Gospel Oak-Barking Local Authority Group (GOBLAG), of which Barking and Dagenham, along with Newham, Haringey, Islington and Camden were members. Waltham Forest submitted bids for government funding on behalf of the six boroughs along the line. Lighting was improved and most stations received new steel *Macemain* passenger shelters, the exceptions being Blackhorse Road, South Tottenham and Upper Holloway. BGOLUG has been pressing for the *Macemain* shelters to have the manufacturer's lighting kit fitted and for the perforated steel panels to be replaced with glazing. Unfortunately TfL London Rail has ignored our requests.

At Crouch Hill and Leyton Midland Road, new signalling standards mean that the stopping point for Gospel Oak bound trains has been moved further down the platform, resulting in trains stopping some way away from the shelter. This prolongs station stops, especially in inclement weather, as passengers leave the shelter and make their way to the train. Again, BGOLUG pleads to re-site the shelters have fallen upon deaf ears.

Bicycles TfL London Rail does not favour bicycles on its trains, as evidenced by the lack of signed bicycle accommodation and its stated bicycle policy, which in the case of the Barking-Gospel Oak Line is subject to a long running dispute over consultation, with both BGOLUG's and Waltham Forest Council's comments being ignored. Waltham Forest Council, in consort with Haringey

Council, invested much time, effort and some finance in marketing the line as the *Rolling Cycleway* in the 1990s, producing glossy maps and timetable leaflets, and in participating in the design of the cycle accommodation in the *Sprinter* trains when they arrived on the line in 2000. The cycle ramps at Blackhorse Road were funded by Waltham Forest Council after much struggle with the privatised railway bureaucracy. BGOLUG would welcome the Council's support for the two wheelchair spaces on the new *Turbostar* trains being designated as priority wheelchair spaces but available for bicycle stowage, with designated peak period trains being banned to bicycles and not whole sections of line for lengthy periods. Ideally, bicycles should not have to be banned.

3. LOCAL AUTHORITY INVOLVEMENT

North Orbital Rail Partnership (NORP) NORP provides a forum between TfL London Rail, LOROL and the councils along the routes of the West London, Watford DC, North London and Barking-Gospel Oak Lines as well as Tower Hamlets and the City. BGOLUG is concerned that NORP, which also coordinated the councils' bids to TfL for LIP funding, is to be wound up.

A new lobby group? It is essential that London's orbital rail routes and the Barking-Gospel Oak Line in particular has an advocate organisation to argue the case for a share of the available funding, even in a time of growing financial stringency. This is not something a purely volunteer group like BGOLUG can successfully undertake alone. The support of local councillors, London Assembly Members and MPs helps reinforce the message.

There have been several references in Section 2 to the GOBLIN (Gospel Oak-Barking Line Improvement Now!) campaign led by Waltham Forest Council in the 1990s. This alliance of volunteer campaigners and the six local councils along the route (Barking & Dagenham, Newham, Waltham Forest, Haringey, Islington & Camden) was able to lever in funding for the line in a previous period of financial austerity. Every effort was made to involve the line's passengers, including newsletters, post card writing campaigns and a special centenary train to Southend. There was also the infamous press call where local MPs and Transport Minister Steve Norris had about an hour's wait for a train at Harringay Green Lanes. Neil Gerrard MP also obtained an Adjournment Debate in the House of Commons in 1996.

BGOLUG is supported by a number of London Assembly Members including Jennette Arnold and was invited to give evidence to the Transport Committee scrutiny of *London Overground* in May.

The aims for such a lobby group should be:-

- Sensible and cost effective improvements to stations, reflecting their increased usage and importance to the local economy, including local regeneration schemes around stations, such as Leyton Midland Road.
- Electrification of the line, the only non-electrified line in North-East London, allowing the removal of diesel traction from freight and passenger trains, making a significant reduction to London's emissions and permitting the passenger services to carry more passengers in comfort and serve more destinations across North and West London. The rail arm of a major British infrastructure company is eager to become involved in this project with an innovative development that reduces the cost of electrification. This company is also prepared to discuss ways of combining local regeneration, training and employment with the electrification project.

BGOLUG urges the council to consider the setting up a new GOBLIN type campaign lobby group for the line jointly with the other councils along the route. BGOLUG would naturally support and advise such a group.

BGOLUG can supply further detail on all the issues referred to in this report, if requested.