

BARKING-GOSPEL OAK LINE USER GROUP

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NEWS UPDATE: SATURDAY, 20TH DECEMBER 2010

A NOT SO HAPPY CHRISTMAS FROM LONDON OVERGROUND! THREE TIMETABLE CHANGES IN A MONTH – SURELY A RECORD!

Apologies for posting this information so late but this was due to continuing confusion over what timetables would apply right up to the introduction date.

NOT MUCH CHRISTMAS CHEER

The timetable changed last weekend and this weekend it changes again with a REDUCED service until after Christmas when the previous timetable resumes! But only until another timetable commences on 4th January! You won't find these changes in the Winter National Great Britain Timetable (GBTT) which commenced on 12th December 2010, published a month earlier, because they were not finalised until several weeks after it had been published. You won't find them on the Transport for London (TfL) website either! The correct timetables are summarised below, however you will find the full timetables by pressing the 'timetable' button in the menu bar on our website www.barking-gospeloak.org.uk.

From 12th December 2010

The **Sunday** timetable is unchanged, and still includes the 23:20 train from Gospel Oak, shown as withdrawn in the GBTT. BGOLUG is sure that our protests had something to do with its reinstatement.

Monday to Friday times stay the same **except** for an earlier first train from Barking at 06:17 and the 06:24 from Barking retimed to 06:32. These changes are shown in the GBTT but **not** on the TfL website.

Saturday times are now the same as the Monday to Friday times above. The GBTT shows these times but weirdly has a 22:39 train from Barking, when it is actually 22:47. The TfL website fails to show these changes at all and still displays the times that applied up to 11th December! Anyone relying on the TfL website could be misled into thinking that there was an earlier first train from Gospel Oak and later last trains from Barking and Gospel Oak than is actually the case. Although advised of these errors TfL have not corrected their website. TfL never makes mistakes!

Saturday 18th December 2010

There is an additional 15:50 departure from Gospel Oak.

The blockade of the North London Line (NLL) to finish off the Dalston Kingsland - Camden Road resignalling work starts around 18:30 and lasts until 4th January. To see a copy of the TfL leaflet detailing the closures and alternative travel arrangements click on the 'timetable' button on the menu bar on our website www.barking-gospeloak.org.uk.

From 20th December 2010

Because of the blockade of the North London Line between Stratford and Camden Road, all freight trains normally booked via the NLL will be again diverted via the Barking - Gospel Oak Line. In spite of the 2008-9 resignalling of this route, there is not the capacity to handle all the diverted freight trains, so the passenger service is being cut to every 20-minutes during the peak periods. The same timetable that applied during the last NLL blockade from 20th February to 31st May 2010 will apply again. On **Christmas Eve** the last train will depart from Gospel Oak at 20:12 and from Barking at 20:23. Then of course there is no service on Christmas Day or Boxing Day.

From 27th December 2010

The service restarts after the Christmas break with trains running at the same times that applied from 12th December including the additional 15:50 from Gospel Oak. On 1st January **New Year's Day** the first train will depart from Gospel Oak at 08:50 and from Barking at 09:05 and trains will then run in the same times as applied since 27th December. Although the NLL is still under blockade, freight traffic is expected to be light enough to allow a 15-minute peak frequency passenger service to resume.

HAPPY NEW YEAR FROM TRANSPORT FOR LONDON!

This is the timetable we have been waiting for, just over a year later than originally promised by TfL London Rail. But of course, there is a sting in the tail!

From 4th January 2011

Monday to Saturday services start at 06:17 from Barking and 06:35 from Gospel Oak. Trains run every 15 minutes until 22:17 from Barking and 22:35 from Gospel Oak, then at 30-minute intervals until the last train at 23:05 from Gospel Oak and 23:17 from Barking. The 22:20 from Gospel Oak is a late addition which was not shown in earlier drafts or the GBTT; added again as a result of our protests?

Sunday services again remain unchanged and the 23:20 from Gospel Oak survives.

From 19th until 27th February

In order to complete the NLL resignalling scheme the following sections of line will be blocked:-

- Camden Road - Richmond
- Upper Holloway - Gospel Oak
- Willesden Junction - Shepherd's Bush

The service between Euston and South Hampstead is also withdrawn; the Watford Junction - Stratford service via Primrose Hill will be revived once more!

WE WEREN'T SUPPOSED TO NOTICE

TfL's original promise when they took over three years ago was for an all day 15-minute service frequency by December 2009, extended to include Sundays by December 2010. By that time, as a result of progressively extending operating hours to match the Underground, last trains would be after midnight.

However, during all the distraction of the NLL blockades last February, it seems these commitments were quietly dropped. A new policy of later first trains and earlier last trains and a thinning out of late evening service was gently eased in on the NLL and Barking-Gospel Oak Lines. The Euston - Watford local services are the latest recipients of the new policy, while it has been applied to the East London Line since full reopening.

Ever since London Overground Rail Operations Ltd (LOROL) managers gave the LOROL Passenger Group a general outline of the planned 4th January 2011 timetable back on 9th September, we have been trying to put some flesh on the bones and get some details. It has not been easy. The information from LOROL and TfL London Rail regarding services in December was contradictory. A copy of the 4th January weekday timetable showed that 06:25 from Gospel Oak was not being reinstated and that the surviving Saturday 06:25 was being cut back to 06:35 as well. The last train from Gospel Oak was remaining at 23:05 when from December 2007 until February 2010 it had been 23:25. The all day 15-minute frequency we were promised in 2007 only ran up to around 22:00.

We protested, arguing that we expected first trains to be no later and last trains no earlier than what had prevailed between December 2007 and February 2010. Also a 30-minute interval was incompatible with the high number of passengers using the late night services and that a 20-minute frequency should be the minimum. In reply we were told that **"2tph (trains per hour) before 0630hrs and post 2200hrs simply reflects the relatively low average ridership during those**

periods” and “a 3tph service may simply impose substantial delivery costs for no commensurate sustained customer service benefit”.

In reply we quoted from a member’s email, “*My main feedback is that the last train service can be surprisingly busy, indicating that the frequency is too low at that time of night or that everyone piles on to the last train, but really would appreciate extended service times. Indeed a friend of mine uses the phrase "rammed" for the last service particularly from Blackhorse Road to Barking. The trains really do appear busy throughout the day (from first service until the end).*” We received a number of similar responses from other members. We set out our aspirations for the timetable.

Our response stated what we felt the basic timetable should be, given current and likely future demand:-

- **Monday to Saturday start of service** First departures from either end to be as near 06:00 hours as possible (we would even be prepared to accept the first eastbound train starting from Upper Holloway). Departures to follow at x20-minute intervals until approximately 07:00 hours and then to follow at x15-minute intervals.
- **Monday to Saturday close of service** Departures every x15-minutes until as near to 21:00 hours as possible and then at x20-minute intervals until the last train which should be no earlier than 23:30 hours, although we would prefer the last departure to be as close to midnight at possible.
- **Sunday** The first departure from either end should be approximately 08:00 hours as possible although we would prefer trains to commence as close to 07:00 hours as possible. Departures should then follow at x20-minute intervals until the last train which should be no earlier than 23:30 hours although we would again prefer the last departure to be at about midnight.
- **Connections into and out of the NLL at Gospel Oak** Obviously providing adequate connections with NLL trains to and from the west at Gospel Oak is desirable but BGOLUG recognises that timetabling constraints may not always allow this; the improved service frequencies for most of the day mean this is not essential. However, we would like to see some care taken to ensure connections are made at Gospel Oak after 21:00 hours.

We also submitted two proposed amendments to the draft timetables we had received; one restored the cut first (06:25) and last (23:25) Monday-Saturday trains from Gospel Oak, while the other also provided a 20-minute service from 20:30 - 21:00 on Monday to Saturday. We believed that these proposals would give some scope for savings if that was what TfL was seeking.

Nothing was heard for over a month. In answer to a letter sent to LOROL MD Steve Murphy, we received copies of the finalised timetable booklets for December and January (on our website, click on ‘Timetable’ on the menu bar). Steve Murphy wrote explaining the 4th January 2011 timetable changes, and outlined plans for the 22nd May 2011 timetable. There was no mention in the letter of the additional 22:20 Monday to Saturday train from Gospel Oak or the retention of 23:20 Sunday departure from Gospel Oak, but we could not help but think these two trains were in the timetable as a result of our protests.

From 22nd May 2011

For 22nd May 2011 the promise was held out of a **Monday to Saturday 06:05** from Gospel Oak and new last trains at **23:35** from Gospel Oak and **23:47** from Barking. Steve Murphy said, “*I note that this does not meet the User Groups wish to see a 20 minute interval service after 22:00 but this plan reflects LOROL’s obligation to maintain a 15 minutes service until 22:00 and train crew limitations associated with resourcing the service*”.

The **Sunday** timetable was planned to run at 15 minutes intervals from the first trains from Barking at **08:53** and Gospel Oak at **08:55** until **22:08** from Barking and **22:10** from Gospel Oak, it is assumed that half-hourly frequencies will then start although there was a commitment to retain the 23:20 from Gospel Oak.

The most interesting quote from Steve Murphy's letter was, **"Our timetables are developed in response to a specification that is part of our agreement with RfL** (Rail for London Ltd, a wholly owned subsidiary of TfL which lets and manages the London Rail Concession contract). **The timetable seeks to meet passenger demand to the extent possible with the assets available to us and to the extent that funding is available to support the service."**

This seems to confirm that this change in timetabling policy is being driven by TfL London Rail. Yet no consultation has taken place with user groups, ORR, London Travelwatch or Passenger Focus. London Rail's Julie Dixon told our Secretary Richard Pout that there was no obligation upon TfL to consult, while Kulveer Ranger, the Mayor's transport advisor also told Richard, at a recent conference, that no change in Overground timetabling policy had been discussed at the TfL Board. The mystery deepens!

We are now seeking the assistance of London Assembly members to arrange a meeting of user groups with Transport for London. Transport Commissioner Peter Hendy recently had a much publicised meeting with London's transport bloggers, perhaps he might like to meet user groups too?

TRAFFIC SNIPPETS

Something not previously mentioned here was the loss by Freightliner, several months ago, of the contract to move Barking and Dagenham's refuse by rail to the landfill site at Calvert, Buckinghamshire. This contract by Shanks & McEwen required three trains a week, leaving the Dagenham railhead around lunchtime and returning late at night. The refuse is now transported to Essex landfill sites by road. Freightliner immediately scrapped the refuse containers at Dagenham and shipped the scrap to Newport. "So much for sustainability!" says our Secretary!

Steam Locomotive 60019 *Bittern* was spotted by a member passing Gospel Oak at lunchtime on Saturday 27th November. The A4 Pacific, a classmate of the world record breaking *Mallard*, which had earlier worked a special into Kings Cross, was seen running towards Crouch Hill and was presumably returning to Ferme Park to pick up the coaches for its return trip after servicing at the steam depot at Southall.

With all essential points heated and diesel trains, one would expect the Barking - Gospel Oak passenger service to be pretty resilient during snow. But word reaches us that three of our *Turbostars* failed in quick succession in the snow on Saturday 18th December, due to snow getting into places it shouldn't! Thankfully, full service was restored within a few hours, however.

Glenn Wallis
Assistant Secretary
Barking - Gospel Oak Line User Group