

BARKING-GOSPEL OAK LINE USER GROUP

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APRIL 2010 E-NEWSLETTER

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EDITORIAL

We have to thank the respected industry magazine *Modern Railways* for providing much of the content of this newsletter since Transport for London Rail (TfL) insist we communicate with their rail contract operator London Overground Rail Operations Ltd (LOROL) and most of our emails and telephone calls to that august organisation are ignored. Our Secretary Richard Pout has been desperately trying to contact LOROL regarding the station upgrade works currently ongoing at Leyton Midland Road and Crouch Hill, but to little avail. LOROL did advise us of the opening of the East London Line (ELL), but only some 4½ hours *after* the event!

The May edition of *Modern Railways* contains a useful free up to date railway map of the Greater London area and should be available in station bookstalls including Barking and in the shops operated by the same bookseller. It also contains an article, written with the cooperation of TfL London Rail back in late March/early April, on the newly opened ELL and gives a general update on the North London Line Route Improvement Project (NLLRIP), timetables and rolling stock.

Since the timetable cutbacks of the Barking-Gospel Oak (B-GO) service in February, due to diverted NLL freight while the Stratford-Gospel Oak section was closed, we have had growing concerns about the NLLRIP works overrunning and causing the restricted B-GO service to be retained beyond 31st May, as Richard Pout has been keeping a close eye on the slow progress of the works.

TfL London Rail assured Greater London Assembly Deputy Chair Jennette Arnold's office in mid-February that a peak hour 15-minute interval service would commence between Barking and Gospel Oak on 1st June. By mid-March we had learnt from other sources that TfL London Rail was "hedging its bets" regarding when the diverted freight would return to the NLL with the obvious repercussions for the B-GO passenger services. TfL London Rail was also admitting that the resignalling element of the Stratford-Gospel Oak blockade was late and some work was being postponed in an attempt to reopen the line on time (see webcast of TfL board meeting).

All this has caused concern at the London Assembly and the Transport Committee has decided to conduct a scrutiny exercise into London Overground. Labour Transport Committee Chair elect, Val Shawcross has asked BGOLUG to submit our ideas on what needs looking at and we have been happy to assist.

FEBRUARY SLIM-LINE TIMETABLE TO STAY IN FORCE FOR AT LEAST ANOTHER 5 MONTHS?

When the Stratford-Gospel Oak section of the NLL was closed on 20th February for rebuilding for the NLLRIP and the extension of the ELL to Highbury & Islington, all freight traffic displaced from the route was diverted to the B-GO Line. In spite of this line's recent resignalling, there was *still* insufficient capacity to accommodate all the freight trains alongside the existing passenger service.

Said BGOLUG Secretary Richard Pout, "As seems traditional with railway managers, it's **always** the Barking-Gospel Oak Line passengers who get the short straw!"

A new timetable was introduced on 20th February which actually **cut** the number of peak period trains, causing mayhem as displaced commuters from the NLL joined those passengers trying to board the reduced number of trains running.

Both Labour (Jennette Arnold) and Liberal Democrat (Caroline Pidgeon) London Assembly members asked TfL London Rail for explanations and both were assured by TfL London Rail that not only would at least some of the cut trains be restored from 1st June but that peak services would be stepped up to every 15 minutes. TfL London Rail would not be drawn on when the full 15-minute all day service would start. It is worth remembering that when TfL London Rail assumed responsibility for the B-GO service in November 2007 they were promising trains every 15 minutes Monday to Saturday from December 2009. This was brought forward to September 2009 in response to BGOLUG demands that something be done to relieve the serious overcrowding. In the event both deadlines were missed.

TfL London Rail have told *Modern Railways* that the current reduced timetable will be "improved" during the peaks in September, with the full all-day 15-minute interval service starting in December. The concerns of our Secretary, Richard Pout, about the slow progress of work on the Dalston Kingsland-Camden Road blockade site, together with our 'informed sources' advising that signalling design and installation work was falling seriously behind have been confirmed by *Modern Railways* referring to "slippage" and stating that "many" NLL freight trains will have to continue to be diverted via the B-GO Line for the remainder of the year.

That, to all of us seems about as clear as mud! If the Stratford-Camden Road blockade does not overrun, from June it appears that there will be only two tracks between Dalston and Camden Road where there used to be three and for part of the way four tracks. Apparently these two tracks will have simplified signalling, controlled from the original signal boxes, not the Upminster control centre. TfL London Rail has told *Modern Railways* that this section of the NLL will have to be closed again **twice**, over the 2010-2011 Christmas and New Year period and again in February 2011 to complete the signalling and both the two additional freight loops between Highbury & Islington and Camden Road East.

We have no idea just what this "improved" September peak service will be. TfL London Rail told Jennette Arnold's office that it was not possible to run an all-day 15-minute interval B-GO service until the whole of the NLL resignalling was complete. If that is true it could well be some time in 2011 before we get an all-day 15-minute frequency. Said Richard Pout, "Indeed it is likely that any 15-minute interval peak period service introduced in September may have to be withdrawn again during these two extra blockades. It would be nice to get some clear, unambiguous answers from TfL London Rail!"

The comparative success of the ELL stems from the fact that TfL London Rail has let and supervised the contract to upgrade its own railway, which included the Kingsland viaduct. The problem with NLLRIP, as a senior TfL London Rail manager once said to our Secretary, "It's not our railway". Is it now a case of 'too many cooks', 'fingers in pies' etc., etc.....?

FIRST OF NEW 2-COACH DIESEL TRAINS EXPECTED 6 MONTHS LATE

When TfL London Rail took over responsibility for the former Silverlink Metro services in November 2007, it promised 8xnew 2-carriage Class 172 *Turbostar* diesel units from the Derby works of Bombardier to be delivered in December 2009. TfL London Rail has told *Modern Railways* that it is now hoped to have the first two trains in service in June. So far none have been delivered and each unit will have to run 2,000 trouble free miles before LOROL will accept it from the manufacturer and then LOROL staff will have to be trained to operate the new trains.

The Department of Transport Rail (DfT) have allocated our current 6x2-car Class 150 *Sprinter* diesel sets to First Great Western and the operator is anxious to get hold of them as soon as possible to relieve overcrowding on services in the West Country. In order to speed this up it is again being suggested that a 2-coach Class 165 *Networker Turbo* diesel train might be hired by LOROL from sister DB Regio company Chiltern Railways. Visitors to our website www.barking-gospeloak.org.uk will find photographs of the new trains on the 'News' page. We have received several comments complementing the superior seating layout, compared with the new trains being introduced on the rest of London Overground.

MAYOR BORIS & LORD ANDREW STILL AT "LOGGERHEADS" OVER ELECTRIFICATION

Modern Railways confirms that the 1-year old stand off between London Mayor Boris Johnson and Secretary of State for Transport Lord Andrew Adonis over the latter refusing a contribution of £200,000 towards a detailed implementation and cost options study [Guide to Rail Investment Projects 3 (GRIP 3)] into the electrification of the whole B-GO Line is still at stalemate. A year ago Lord Adonis offered Mayor Johnson £25million towards the cost of the electrification of the whole line. In 2006 TfL London Rail had consultants come up with a 'guesstimate' of £40million but the consultants said that they had included a large amount for contingency as well as overhead line clearance works, which were subsequently carried out as part of last year's gauge enhancement project. Therefore an updated study was needed. TfL London Rail was happy to accept the £25million offer from the government but said that now was the time to ask Network Rail (NR) to carry out the detailed GRIP 3 study and asked the DfT to pay half the £400,000 NR wanted to do the study. The DfT refused, adding that regardless of the outcome of any such study, the Department would not contribute more than the £25m offered. So TfL London Rail said that without detailed costings it could not go ahead. On 17th March our Secretary Richard Pout tackled Junior Transport Minister Chris Mole MP about the impasse at a pre election rail debate at Westminster Central Hall. Richard was shocked to be told by Chris Mole that Lord Adonis's offer of £25million had now been withdrawn. He was further amazed when Chris Mole asked him, "Why do you want it electrified?"

Richard couldn't believe what he had just heard! A transport minister in a government which only a few months previously had announced a multi £billion scheme to electrify hundreds of miles of railway from London to South Wales and in the North West of England on environmental and efficiency grounds was asking him why he wanted to electrify a 12-mile line in North East London which was surrounded by electrified railways!

The folly of the Minister's decision has been exposed by the news that the government **will** be funding the electrification of around 2 miles of the B-GO Line, including Upper Holloway and Crouch Hill stations as part of the Thameslink project, to allow empty electric trains to reach their depot at Hornsey. The B-GO line is already electrified between Barking and Woodgrange Park and through South Tottenham, while the wires start again at Gospel Oak. It is fast becoming a matter of filling in the remaining unelectrified gaps.

BGOLUG's case for electrification was set out in a 2007 paper which can be found in the 'Library' section of our website www.barking-gospeloak.org.uk, also on pages 4, 5 & 8 of our response to Network Rail's Draft Electrification Route Utilisation Strategy which is also on our website. The main points in favour of electrification are:

- ◆ Reduction in carbon emissions and improved air quality
- ◆ Services could be provided by electric trains being replaced on the NLL by new stock
- ◆ Would allow services to be extended off B-GO Line, TfL have suggested Clapham Junction.
- ◆ More cross London freight services could be electrically hauled, utilising locomotives currently stored through lack of work and under threat of export to Eastern Europe. At the same Westminster event, Graham Smith, recently retired Director of Planning at DB Schenker (formally EWS), told Richard that he estimated that within three years of the B-GO Line being electrified, about 50 electric freight trains a day could be using either the NLL or B-GO Lines to cross North London.

SOUNDS FAMILIAR?

Lord Adonis and the DfT are developing form when it comes to “now you see it, now you don’t” offers of financial support to TfL London Rail. Is it just that they don’t like Mayor Boris? Mind you the last time they agreed with Mayor Johnson and diverted the £24m set aside for the South London Line replacement Victoria-Bellingham service to the Clapham Junction extension of the ELL all hell broke loose, with not only London Assembly members but government ministers railing against the noble Lord’s department. Now the £7m the DfT offered TfL London Rail towards a new station at Surrey Canal Road is suddenly no longer available. Where have we heard something like that before?

ELECTION FEVER!

As the current General and London Council election campaigns reach their climax, we thought we would take the opportunity to highlight the support we have received from the politicians and thank them for their work on our behalf.

PARLIAMENTARY

Jeremy Corbyn, Labour, Islington North Jeremy has been a staunch supporter of BGOLUG and the line’s passengers and has been especially pushing the case for electrification. He has tabled two Early Day Motions and asked several Parliamentary Questions.

Neil Gerrard, Labour, Walthamstow Neil has supported the line over many years and we wish him a long and happy retirement. **Stella Creasy** is hoping to replace him as Walthamstow MP and she too has demonstrated her support for us and the line.

GREATER LONDON ASSEMBLY

No elections at the GLA this time, but we are very grateful for the positive support and assistance we have received from **Labour AMs Jennette Arnold, John Biggs and Val Shawcross** and **Caroline Pidgeon** from the **Liberal Democrats** and their staff. You may remember that Jennette Arnold asked Mayor Boris Johnson to travel with her to sample the overcrowding on our line but the Mayor declined. Jennette has tended to specialise on the overcrowding issue while John Biggs has concentrated on electrification. Caroline Pidgeon visited the line just over a year ago (a copy of the Press release is on our website) and she has kept up the pressure on both issues and prompted Liberal Democrat Parliamentary Transport spokesman **Norman Baker MP** to ask two Parliamentary Questions about electrification.

LONDON COUNCILS

It is sad to say that there is scant interest in our line or the trials and tribulations of its passengers by any local councillors or local authority officers. The sole exception to this rule is **Barking & Dagenham**, as thanks to the lobbying of our Chairman, this authority has come to our aid with a grant on several occasions over the years when our finances have been all but exhausted.

So if you live in any of the wards or constituencies through which the line passes and you are accosted by a candidate or one of their supporters canvassing your vote, you might like to apprise them of the existence of our line and the problems its users face.

AND FINALLY...

Should you fancy doing some lobbying on our behalf, writing to politicians or local newspapers, leafleting passengers etc, please join us, if you have not already done so and contact the Assistant Secretary offering your services. We especially need more regular users of the line to get involved in the battle to improve **their** rail service. We really do need all the support we can get!

STOP PRESS

LOROL have started **refitting** the 18 seats removed from our Class 150 *Sprinters* in autumn 2008 to create more standing room. This at a time when fewer peak trains are running and passengers displaced from the NLL are adding to the crush conditions. This raises the spectre of the imminent transfer of some of our *Sprinters* to First Great Western before the new *Turbostars* have even been accepted into service. What chances an increase in cancellations due to a shortage of rolling stock?