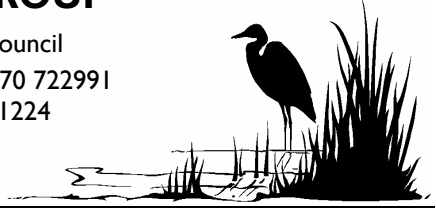


# BARKING-GOSPEL OAK LINE USER GROUP

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## REPORT TO WALTHAM FOREST TRANSPORT LIAISON CONSULTATIVE GROUP 11<sup>TH</sup> 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 11<sup>th</sup> November 2007 until 31<sup>st</sup> March 2014.

The routes included are:-

- Barking-Gospel Oak (including Leytonstone High Road, Leyton Midland Road, Walthamstow Queen's Road and Blackhorse Road stations in Waltham Forest)
- 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 2110) [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.

For the avoidance of doubt, Members are reminded that the other rail lines in the borough (Liverpool Street-Chingford and Liverpool Street/Stratford-Tottenham Hale-Hertford East/Stansted Airport/Cambridge) remain the responsibility of the DfT and services are franchised to National Express until 31<sup>st</sup> March 2011.

### 2. LOROL PASSENGER GROUP MEETING 9<sup>TH</sup> 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.

**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 11<sup>th</sup> 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 may not now happen. We are currently in negotiations with LOROL over the timetable changes planned on 4<sup>th</sup> January and May/June 2011 to try to extend hours of operation and provide a 20-minute frequency during the early morning and 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. In Waltham Forest, only Leyton Midland Road has apparently been completed, while work has now started at Walthamstow Queen's 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 Barking-Gospel Oak Line stations in the borough and elsewhere 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), 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 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 shelter (and another at Crouch Hill) 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 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.

It is therefore disappointing to learn that Waltham Forest Council is to reduce the small staff resources it currently devotes to public transport even further by making the Principal Transport Officer who was involved in administering the GOBLIN campaign redundant. BGOLUG would urge the Council to reconsider this decision and investigate the feasibility of setting up a GOBLIN type campaign lobby group for the line. BGOLUG would be happy to support and advise such a study.

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

**Barking-Gospel Oak Line User Group, 2<sup>nd</sup> November 2010**