



BARKING – GOSPEL OAK LINE USER GROUP

Chairman: Alderman Frederick Jones, Barking & Dagenham Council
Secretary: Richard H Pout B.Sc. Econ. MILT, (020) 8348 5064, 07970 722991
Assistant Secretary: Glenn Wallis, (020) 8529 2361, 07789 791224

www.barking-gospeloak.org.uk
info@barking-gospeloak.org.uk



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Please reply to:
227 Old Church Road,
Chingford,
London,
E4 6RB

(020) 8529 2361
glennwallis@btinternet.com

John Larkinson,
PR13 Programme Director,
Office of Rail Regulation,
One Kemble Street,
London WC2B 2AN

19th February 2013

Dear Mr. Larkinson,

NETWORK RAIL'S STRATEGIC BUSINESS PLAN FOR CONTROL PERIOD 5

Please forgive the late arrival of this letter, I hope that you will appreciate that BGOLUG is a volunteer organisation and our work output is governed by the availability of members' free time.

The Barking – Gospel Oak User Group (BGOLUG) and its predecessors have represented the users of the line' passenger services since the line was proposed for closure in the Beeching Report. We currently enjoy a good working relationship with the operator of Transport for London's London Rail Concession, London Overground Rail Operations Limited (LOROL). BGOLUG was not consulted by Network Rail at any time during the PR13 process.

BGOLUG is deeply concerned about the continuing delay in proceeding with the electrification of the Barking – Gospel Oak route in the face of the obvious benefits that electrification would bring for all train operators using the line and the widespread support for it throughout the rail industry.

BGOLUG is therefore objecting to the failure of the Network Rail Strategic Business Plan for CP5 to include the electrification of the Barking – Gospel Oak route in the schemes it is proceeding with in CP5.

Electrification of the Barking – Gospel Oak route has been supported by Network Rail itself for several years, the 2009 Network Route Utilisation Strategy: Electrification and the 2011 Initial Industry Plan being two examples of this. It is also known that electrification of the route is also supported by the Rail Freight Group, DB Schenker (DBS), Freightliner & Transport for London (TfL).

The benefits of electrification of the Barking – Gospel Oak Line include:

- TfL/LOROL can dispose of 8 diesel trains and run Overground with one type of electric train

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- Due to extreme peak period overcrowding TfL urgently want to provide more capacity on their train service, the overcrowding is such that passengers are left behind and it is difficult to avoid having concerns about passenger safety with such high load factors. But, there are currently no new diesel coaches or trains available “off the shelf” for operation in this country that comply with the latest emissions limits.

- Barking – Gospel Oak is a joint strategic freight route with the North London Line
 - There is no more freight capacity on the North London Line due to the high frequency London Overground service
 - The newly cleared Felixstowe – Nuneaton route may well not reduce freight via North London since it is not electrified and Freightliner are unlikely to want to convert a large number of their electric trains to diesel. In addition, the large expansion at Felixstowe (Bathside Bay) will increase demand for the extra capacity that the Felixstowe – Nuneaton route enhancement has created
 - Freightliner’s electric Tilbury traffic could be kept away from the busy Great Eastern Main Line at Stratford and the North London Line if it could travel via an electrified Barking – Gospel Oak Line
 - The new London Gateway port (opening in the autumn), downstream from Tilbury will require 30 train paths a day when fully operational, unless these paths can be released on the North London Line, these trains will have to use Barking – Gospel Oak.
 - Use of HSI (Channel Tunnel Rail Link) for electrically hauled freight, while currently low, is steadily increasing, this traffic accesses the national rail network at Barking and will require electric route capacity, without Barking – Gospel Oak only the North London Line is available.

In the current Network Rail Strategic Business Plan for CP5, Barking – Gospel Oak electrification is unfunded and there is has been much speculation regarding its cost. It is easy to assume that Network Rail would have a good grasp of the costs involved but this is not the case, in spite of their stated support for the scheme they have only progressed the scheme to GRIP 2 which does not accurately quantify the cost.

BGOLUG believes that the final outturn costs from electrification would be somewhere in the region of £50m and compared with the costs of other funded electrification schemes is not excessive, especially in view of the local and network benefits that would accrue.

TfL have already offered £25m toward electrification and BGOLUG believes that contributions from the Department for Transport’s Strategic Rail Freight Network Fund (SRFNF) and Network Rail’s Discretionary Fund could fill the funding gap. The Rail Freight Group has advised BGOLUG that it would support a “token” contribution from the SRFNF due to the small size of the fund.

BGOLUG requests the ORR to discuss the funding of Barking – Gospel Oak electrification with Network Rail and in any event include it in the final determination of PR13, thereby instructing Network Rail to proceed with the scheme by adding the cost to the Regulated Asset Base.

BGOLUG hopes that you will look upon these representations favourably.

Yours sincerely,

Glenn Wallis

Glenn Wallis
Assistant Secretary