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## **WELCOME!**

Welcome to the first BGORUG Members' Bulletin. It is my intention to launch a new members' newsletter, but as is often the case, pressure of events and time has dictated the production of this bulletin.

The Group's email account [info@barking-gospeloak.org.uk](mailto:info@barking-gospeloak.org.uk) may have been hacked. The Group does not send out emails from that address, so if you receive an email from it, please delete it.

## **TRANSPORT FOR LONDON DECIDE TO REMOVE GUARDS FROM TRAINS**

Last week London Overground Rail Operations Limited advised us that it had been instructed by TfL to convert trains on the Barking – Gospel Oak, North and West London Lines to Driver Only Operation (DOO) at the December timetable change. The East London Line and the Watford DC Local service is already DOO. DOO means what it says on the tin, the driver is the only member of staff on the train. This move has become possible since Network Rail recently introduced the new GSM-R communications system across the London area. GSM-R is replacing the British Rail era National Radio Network (NRN) and Cab Secure Radio (CSR). Her Majesty's Railway Inspectorate (HMRI), now a part of the Office of Rail Regulation (ORR) require a reliable system of two-way radio communication between the signal box and the driver where passenger trains are driver only operated. CSR was the previous system for this, but there were limited frequencies available and the government licenses for these frequencies were about to expire, but the new GSM-R will be the new standard.

Traditionally on the British railway, the driver was responsible for driving the train safely and the guard was responsible for the safety of the train and its passengers. British Rail first brought in DOO in 1983 and it has slowly spread on suburban services, aided by the phasing out of 'slam-door' trains and introduction of power doors.

Rail union RMT, not surprisingly, has condemned the plan to take the guards off Overground trains and is planning a demonstration outside City Hall on Wednesday morning (17<sup>th</sup> July) before Mayor's Question Time, all welcome! It is quite likely that industrial action will be balloted for as negotiations between LOROL and RMT proceed. The union for train guards is RMT, but the majority of drivers are members of ASLEF who seek enhanced payments for drivers of DOO trains.

It should be noted that LOROL classifies its guards as Conductors, as this was a situation that it inherited from Silverlink back in 2007. 'Conductor' was a grade introduced by British Rail for train guards who also sold tickets. Time served members will remember that

Barking – Gospel Oak trains were ‘Pay-trains’ between the 1980s and the TfL takeover in 2007, with Conductors issuing tickets and running the train.

Conductor, Senior Conductor, Train Manager and many other titles have been coined over recent years but all are basically Guards. The Guard’s role is the safe running of the train and especially supervising the safe alighting and boarding of passengers at stations. The Guard gives the driver the ‘train ready to start’ signal when platform work is complete and the doors are proved closed and it is safe to start. Since the introduction of new trains by London Overground, it has been possible to see the Guard (‘Conductor’ on his hi-viz waistcoat) at work. With door controls at many passenger doors along the train, LOROL encouraged Guards to come out of the back cab and work the train from inside the passenger saloons when conditions (lack of overcrowding) allowed.

On DOO trains it is the driver’s responsibility to check platform work is complete before closing the doors and starting the train once they are proved shut. Since they are driving the train, drivers on DOO trains tend to make less public address announcements of useful things like disruption on connecting services than the Guards do.

Should the withdrawal of train Guards mean an enhanced role for the Station Assistants at Barking – Gospel Oak Line stations? Since they were introduced at LOROL managed stations (except Gospel Oak, LUL managed Blackhorse Road and c2c managed Barking) their role has been simply that, customer assistance. They have minimal training and are not classed as Safety Critical Staff. Indeed, it took several months lobbying in the background, back in 2007-2008, to get them officially told how to stop trains in an emergency! There is now a poster in every staff cabin explaining this with the phone number of the signaller controlling trains in their area. Originally they were told to phone LOROL’s control, who would then phone Network Rail’s control who would then phone the signaller!

If one grade of safety critical staff, the train guards, are to disappear, should not the Station Assistants be reclassified as safety critical staff? They would then be fully trained in trainside assistance and dispatch and when present on the platform (obviously they cannot be present for every train) they would give the ‘close doors’ and ‘train ready to start’ signals to the driver. They should also be trained in how to retrieve passengers’ possessions dropped onto the track. Originally they were told by LOROL that nothing could be done, now they are told to report the matter and Network Rail will be asked to send someone to retrieve the dropped item. There is provision in the railway rulebook for station staff to arrange with the signaller for the passage of trains to be stopped while a dropped item is retrieved from the track, but this involves more training and of course, expense.

What about wheelchair users? Without the train guard, the whole responsibility for placing the wheelchair ramps, and assisting the wheelchair user will fall upon the Station Assistant. Surely another reason for making them safety critical staff? And what about the last 3-4 hours of ‘the traffic day’ when the Station Assistants are replaced by agency security staff, who will deal with wheelchair users at stations then?

BGORUG has been invited to a special LOROL Stakeholders and Passengers Group meeting on Thursday (18<sup>th</sup> July) to discuss the removal of train guards.

EMAIL COMMENTS ON THE WITHDRAWAL OF TRAIN GUARDS TO THE SECRETARY NOW!

### **WE CANNOT WAIT 5 YEARS FOR ELECTRIFICATION!**

When the partying celebrating the authorisation of electrification of our line finally died down and in the cold light of day we began to think about how long before we could say

goodbye to our inadequate 2-car diesel trains. TfL had to look at the figures and decide what could be afforded:

- Universal 5-car electric trains on all London Overground routes and if so whether to:
  - Extend Barking trains to Clapham Junction and Richmond
  - Rebuild Gospel Oak station or discontinue Barking trains stopping there
- Retain the current Barking – Gospel Oak service and provide a sub fleet of 3 or 4-car electric trains and reduce the platform extension works

Obviously this would take a little while to evaluate. LOROL were non the wiser when we visited them a few days after the electrification announcement to discuss what could be done to the existing diesel fleet to ease overcrowding during the next year or so.

It was a little concerning to read in **RAIL** 726 of 10<sup>th</sup> July that a Network Rail spokesman who said that the £115m quoted by Government included wiring the connections to the Midland Main Line at Junction Road, the East Coast Main Line at Harringay and the Thames Haven Branch to London Gateway port. The spokesman didn't seem to think that the £25m TfL had pledged was to fund

capital expenditure, which was not the way TfL were telling it. The increase in quoted cost from £90m to £115m was due to adding in the Thames Haven Branch. The NR spokesman claimed that the company had only just started the required GRIP 3 assessment, which if true would be a disappointment to TfL. Finally, it was expected the scheme would be complete by 2019!

The final blow came at TfL's Rail & Underground Panel on 11<sup>th</sup> July. Rail & Underground Managing Director Mike Brown reported that,  
*"The Government's decision to progress the electrification of LO's Gospel Oak to Barking line was also welcomed. This will allow the introduction of longer, electric trains to reducing congestion and improve local air quality. Details are still to be worked out but it is hoped that the work will be completed within the next five years."*

With peak period trains completely full now **WAITING 5 YEARS FOR ELECTRIC TRAINS IS NOT AN OPTION!**

We need work to start next year and be finished by 2016 at the latest. At our meeting with LOROL on 3<sup>rd</sup> July it was agreed that the severe overcrowding would soon choke off demand for the service if it was not already happening.

### **WEEKENDS ON THE BUSES CONTINUE THIS MONTH & NEXT!**

This weekend sees buses replacing trains as follows:

- Saturday 20<sup>th</sup> July Buses replace trains between Barking and South Tottenham
- Sunday 21<sup>st</sup> July until 12:00 – 13:00 Buses replace trains between Barking and Gospel Oak (the buses stop a long way from Gospel Oak station so the buses run on to Hampstead Heath station)
- Sunday 21<sup>st</sup> July from 12:00 – 13:00 Buses replace trains between Barking and South Tottenham

Network Rail has been renewing track between Blackhorse Road and Walthamstow Queen's Road stations and work is continuing on the Lea Valley Viaduct. It is also believed that a bridge was replaced in Leytonstone. According to TfL's weekly email detailing weekend Underground, Overground & DLR closures, *"In addition, there is no service all weekend between Gospel Oak and Barking due to Network Rail bridge replacement work on*

*Tottenham High Road.*” The original 145 year old bridge is most definitely still in place and is expected to be replaced during a 3-day post Christmas closure.

### **c2c INFORMATION PROBLEMS PERSIST AT BARKING**

In spite of agreeing a number of actions with the c2c station manager a month ago, most of these have still to be put in effect. BGORUG will be in contact with the station manager again (although she does not answer emails) and monitoring the situation this weekend.

### **WALTHAMSTOW STATIONS LINK TO MISS LATEST COMPLETION DATE?**

At the time of writing the new Edison Close entrance to Walthamstow Queen’s Road station is still closed, awaiting its Oyster readers while there is no sign of the new footpath link to Walthamstow Central being started even though the last completion date given by Waltham Forest Council was for next month!

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