



BARKING – GOSPEL OAK RAIL USER GROUP

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NOTES OF THE PUBLIC MEETING AT WALTHAM FOREST TOWN HALL HELD ON 30 OCTOBER 2013

VICE-CHAIR'S INTRODUCTION

Mr Pout welcomed all present, and explained that he was chairing the meeting as Ald. Jones had a prior commitment. Network Rail was not represented although they had sent an initial response to the invitation to attend.

UPDATE FROM LOROL (LONDON OVERGROUND RAIL OPERATIONS LTD)

Sam Russell, LOROL Stakeholder Manager, introduced himself; some time prior to his present role with LOROL, he had been the Group Station Manager for the Barking-Gospel Oak route. He had met recently with BGORUG officers so this presentation would be a further update. Performance records showed a PPM figure of 96% to 98% for London Overground, which was slightly above the national average. The percentage of trains arriving within 5 minutes of booked time at their final destination was 85% to 86% - in the Top Three nationally – but LOROL were trying to improve further on that figure. The recent freight derailment at Camden Road had had a severe impact, as had the storm two days ago. The derailment had affected North London Line services for about a week, although the Barking-Gospel Oak line had been only marginally affected, and an investigation into its cause was ongoing. Following Monday morning's storm, a national decision had been taken not to try to run any services before 09 00 when the situation was reviewed. LOROL had sent trains out at 05 00 to monitor the extent of any damage. Overhead lines had been brought down at Kensal Rise.

Looking ahead, work in connection with the 5-car train project was under way on the North London and East London lines. Train/platform lengthening on the BGO line depended on electrification decisions (type/length of trains etc), but LOROL were committed to extending platforms. The Access for All programme included South Tottenham, Kensal Rise, Hampstead Heath, West Hampstead (put back pending rebuilding of the entrance) and New Cross Gate (a particularly complex site).

Trains were being adapted for Driver Only Operation (DOO) and most would be done by Christmas. BGO trains would be adapted sometime during 2014 and would continue to carry conductors until then. LOROL hoped to be able to redeploy all staff who wanted to stay, and a positive relationship with the RMT had helped with this process. LOROL were planning Mystery Shopper exercises involving passengers using wheelchairs, and would use this to help review all access issues. About 200 wheelchair passengers a week now used Overground.

No major timetable changes were planned in December, except for an extra PIXC-buster service from Barking (06:52) to South Tottenham, from where it would run empty back to Woodgrange Park to form the 07:57 to Willesden Junction. LOROL were continuing to talk to Chiltern Railways about possible transfer of their Class 172 units, but there was no timescale for this. Overground was now carrying 130m passengers a year, four times the number carried in 2007.

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Mr Pout thanked Mr Russell for his presentation, which was very encouraging. He particularly thanked LOROL for the introduction of the extra PIXC-buster service. He noted that as many of the line's users did not have English as a first language, they tended not to articulate their dissatisfaction about overcrowding levels via official channels, so the User Group had a particular responsibility to do so on their behalf.

Members had the following questions and comments for Mr Russell:

The reglazing of the shelters at Leyton Midland Road was very welcome.

This had been a long-standing LOROL commitment, but the work required was surprisingly complex. LOROL would assess cost-effectiveness and time involved and would then hopefully be able to do similar work at other stations.

Shelters at Shepherds Bush had been retro-fitted with internal lighting. Could the same be done at BGO stations?

LOROL would take this point away.

What was being done about Blackhorse Road?

The station's Access for All plans were on hold pending electrification, which might also involve other work and remodelling. It was better to wait and devise a robust plan, rather than press ahead now with work which might then have to be redone. Mr Pout recommended asking users what they needed from an Access scheme; this would result in a better scheme.

The BGO service needed to start up earlier.

There were cost and staff availability issues here, but it was on the agenda. The introduction of Driver Only Operation might help, as trains that currently ran empty with no conductor might then be able to run in service. Network Rail also needed track access time for maintenance.

When did BGO trains start running following the storm?

Mr Russell would check on this. Carolyn Agocs added that London Overground had resumed operation earlier than a number of other operators (some lines were still suspended eg Watford Junction-St Albans Abbey).

Blackhorse Road had old, partially-operational Help Points and no platform staff, due to its transfer to London Underground. It was thus arguably the least safe station on the route. LO and LU needed to co-operate to address this situation. Also the platforms were too narrow and became very overcrowded. LOROL/TfL needed to see what could be done in the next financial year.

Although the Information buttons on the Help Points had been taped over, the Emergency buttons did work. The station staff now took more of an interest in the Overground part of the station. Signage had been improved but there was still work to be done on this. Electrification would provide a major opportunity to improve the station. Ms Agocs would also take back the points raised.

UPDATE FROM TFL (TRANSPORT FOR LONDON)

Mr Pout welcomed Carolyn Agocs, who began by saying that Mr Russell had covered much of the ground already. She was new to the job, but she would be happy to answer questions if she could and take points away. Members raised the following issues:

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What measures would TfL take in the next few years to relieve overcrowding? The Group had said from the outset that 2-car trains would not be sufficient, but TfL had been adamant that they would. The units were packed, and the problem had been exacerbated during the Camden derailment with passengers being left behind. The Group had made thoroughly-researched suggestions re taking out seats and installing handrails and straps to increase standing space.

Mr Russell replied that the issue was not as simple as it looked. Not all Class 172 units were exactly the same - the fleet manager had considered the Group's suggestions very carefully on three occasions, but had concluded that there were significant problems with implementing them. The suggestions had been taken seriously, and the situation was frustrating for all concerned.

A dialogue was needed re electrification - what would happen and when? 2017 was too far ahead. Such projects were being progressed much more swiftly in Scotland – could the BGO project be brought forward, eg using ex-North London Line stock brought back from Southern? Line clearances should already be adequate following the upgrade to accommodate W10 gauge freight traffic. What about the platform-length issue at Gospel Oak? Might running trains onwards further west be an option?

Mr Russell replied that Gospel Oak's bay platform could take a three-car train, and could just about accommodate four cars, but moving the buffer-stop further back would be counter-productive as new buffer-stops had to have increased clearances in advance of them.

Passengers did not always understand why line closures for engineering works were a necessary part of improving the railway. TfL needed to issue public bulletins explaining what work was going to be done and why. Ms Agocs noted this point.

The removal of conductors and conversion to Driver Only Operation was a cause for concern. Could conductors be redeployed as Travel Safe officers? Staff needed training to help passengers with disabilities. How would station staff manage both to control the gate lines at gated stations and still meet trains on the platform?

Ms Agocs agreed to take these points back. TfL took safety very seriously, and she was not aware that DOO resulted in any increased risk. Station staff and Help Points were there to help ensure that stations were safe. Mr Russell added that falls from trains etc were actually fewer with DOO, as there was one less link in the chain. Assisting passengers with disabilities was the responsibility of station staff, not of conductors. DOO would save £5m annually, which would go back to TfL to invest in useful roles and purposes. It would also make it easier to run current empty-stock workings in passenger service. Roger Blake added that the DOO decision had been included in the Chancellor's statement; it was widely believed that it was a *quid pro quo* for approving BGO electrification.

Who would decide who would get the BGO's eight Class 172 units when the line was electrified? Nobody knew at this stage.

UPDATE FROM BTP (BRITISH TRANSPORT POLICE)

Mr Pout welcomed the three BTP officers, PC Roger Andrews, PCSO Bowman, PCSO Fearne. PC Andrews gave an update on activities and developments. Cycle marking surgeries had been held and had been very successful, with a subsequent reduction in cycle thefts. There was a link to this scheme on the BTP website (www.btp.police.uk). A proposal to site a betting shop and an off-license near Barking station had been successfully opposed, as crime and anti-social behaviour tended to increase around such establishments. A half-term exercise had been mounted, including officers riding in train cabs, and exercises were planned for Halloween and 5th November. New trespass signs had been put up at stations – these

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covered and complied with all the relevant legislation, enabling prosecutions to be brought for disobeying them.

Anybody seeing a crime or offence being committed could report it by text on 61016 or by phone on 0800 40 50 40 (999 for emergencies). BTP also had a Twitter site, including a “Be Aware” section on how to discourage personal theft (eg bag dipping). People could also contact PC Andrews direct by email at roger.andrews@btp.pnn.police.uk . BTP were doing a lot of work with the Samaritans – this both helped individuals and reduced the number of disruptive incidents.

A high-profile campaign had been mounted on 17th October, resulting in 25 arrests. Crime was down 8% on the London rail network. LOROL had the lowest crime rate in the whole sector, and figures on the BGO line were greatly reduced.

Campaigns planned for Christmas included an anti-theft campaign (including raising awareness) and travelling safely including only using licensed cabs. On-train officers advised individuals if they saw a particular issue, e.g. someone with a half-open bag. People who left items on train might report them as stolen, so BTP liaised with Lost Property to see if the item described had been handed in. BTP were also going into schools, highlighting issues of safety and anti-social behaviour.

PC Andrews concluded by saying that BTP were an intelligence-led organisation, so the more information they received the better. People could contact BTP using any of the links he had outlined.

Thanking PC Andrews, Mr Pout said that the impression was of a much safer railway nowadays. Station staff were also very good.

Mr Larkbey asked if there were any safety or other issues delaying the opening of the Edison Road entrance at Walthamstow Queens Road, and urged all parties to work together to enable it to open as soon as possible. Mr Russell replied that the only issue was the siting of the Oyster reader, which was awaiting a Council response to an amended proposal. Separate discussions were taking place on the installation of a ticket machine, but this was not a precondition for opening. Cllr Russell said that he would get an update from the Council in time for the Transport Liaison meeting on 17th November, and asked if the footbridge would be designated as a public right of way following opening of the new entrance. The Edison Road ramp was not within LOROL’s area and might belong to the Council. Mr Russell undertook to check on these aspects.

UPDATE FROM NETWORK RAIL

It was noted that Network Rail had been invited but had not sent a representative. There was not much feedback from them. Mr Pout said that he understood that ten bridges were to be replaced, of which five had been completed, and asked what the rest of the programme comprised. Mr Russell agreed to try and find out. Cllr Russell commented on the noise nuisance to residents during bridge works and the damage caused to the adjacent area. He asked that Network Rail be urged to carry out a “lessons learned” exercise to minimise future problems. Mr Pout added that following recent track bed works to reduce vibration between Queens Road and Blackhorse Road, the situation appeared to be much improved.

Closing the meeting, Mr Pout thanked all members and visitors for attending. An incredible step-change had taken place on the line in recent years, and (to quote Rev Awdry) it was now “a really useful railway”!

Date of Next Meeting

To be announced.