

LONDON OVERGROUND BARKING – GOSPEL OAK LINE CLOSURES FOR ELECTRIFICATION WORKS - PASSENGER CONCERNS

This note is being sent to the Mayor, local Assembly Members, local MPs, local councils and the media

Executive Summary

- a) The London Overground Barking – Gospel Oak orbital line across north-east London is to be partially closed on weekdays from 6^h June. It will be totally closed at weekends from 4th June and then totally closed every day from 24th September until February 2017. This is to enable the line to be electrified.
- b) The Barking - Gospel Oak Rail User Group (BGORUG) – welcomes the works. They will enable longer trains to be operated and thus relieve severe overcrowding. They will also enable faster journeys. We regret the need for major closures of the line, but accept that this is inevitable.
- c) During the closures passengers will have to find alternative routes for their journeys. Whatever routes they choose, they will be much slower and much less convenient than their normal train journeys.
- d) It would be completely wrong for passengers who are faced with much longer and much less convenient journeys than normal to be expected to pay higher fares.
- e) Some passengers may choose to travel via central London. TfL have undertaken to refund extra fares for such regular passengers by rebating weekly in arrears onto their Oyster or contactless cards. However this concession is hedged with unreasonable restrictions.
- f) Also, many passengers – probably most – will find alternative routes which do not involve Zone 1. Many of these will entail higher fares than normal – particularly if they use a normal service bus for part of their trip. TfL have refused to allow any fares protection to these passengers.
- g) We attach a table showing sample alternative journeys. This shows a common extra cost of **£15** if you work five days per week – which could be **£510** over the whole of the closures.

Immediate action needed -

We URGENTLY ask that all necessary political and other pressure be brought to bear on TfL to ensure that no existing passengers - regardless of their type of ticket - have to pay any more than they pay now. This must include use of alternative National Rail lines and stations and any normal service buses in the area of the line.

BGORUG will be pleased to supply any additional information, either by e-mail or by discussion with political representatives.

- h) BGORUG also has concerns about the planned Replacement Bus Services and the fact that the longer electric trains are not scheduled for introduction until May 2018 – almost a full year after the electrification works are completed. However these aspects are less urgent than the fares issue.

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Introduction

1. Starting on 4th June this year TfL's Barking – Gospel Oak London Overground service will see major closures whilst Network Rail and TfL work to electrify the line and lengthen station platforms. These works will enable longer trains to operate (thus relieving severe overcrowding) and run to accelerated timings, this reducing journey times. It is a project for which we - the Barking - Gospel Oak Rail User Group (BGORUG) – have campaigned for many years.
2. The closures mean that -
 - From 4th June, on Mondays – Fridays trains will only run between Gospel Oak and South Tottenham
 - The rest of the line, South Tottenham to Barking, will be closed.
 - On Saturdays and Sundays the whole line will be closed.
 - From 24th September until February 2017 the whole line Gospel Oak to Barking will be closed every day.

The issues

3. We have made representations to TfL on four areas which are important to passengers -
 - Fares during the closures
 - Replacement buses
 - Publicity
 - Delay in introducing electric (and therefore longer) trains
4. This paper focuses mainly on fares, because these can affect most passengers and problems need to be dealt with quickly. We briefly mention the other issues, on which more information can be supplied on request.

Fares – the immediate priority

5. BGORUG has made detailed proposals to TfL aimed at ensuring that no existing passengers have to pay higher fares than they pay now. It would be completely wrong that passengers who are faced with much longer and much less convenient journeys than normal should also be expected to pay higher fares.
6. TfL have almost entirely rejected our submission. The one exception is that passengers who decide to use the Tube to travel via Zone 1 using nearby stations (e.g. Seven Sisters - Archway as a substitute for South Tottenham - Upper Holloway) will be refunded their extra costs weekly in arrears.
7. Even this concession has serious limitations -
8. It does not apply if you have a travelcard issued on a paper ticket.

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9. It only applies if you have travelled three days every week since the start of April and continue to use the same Oyster or contactless card - so if you've had a holiday or been off sick, only just started your job, work just one or two days per week, or change your card for whatever reason - you get no protection.
10. As the refund is in arrears, if you use Oyster you must add extra money to cover the gap until you receive the first refund. This can be as high as **£23** if your journey starts in Zones 5 or 6 (e.g. Dagenham or Upminster), rising to **£31** if you start from just over the Essex boundary (e.g. Grays). This could be a lot for people in low wage jobs. A large number of our passengers travel from these areas.
11. In any case, for only a minority of journeys will it make sense to travel via Zone 1. Whilst TfL will provide Rail Replacement Buses - but only along parts of the line, sometimes at lower frequencies than the trains, and in some cases requiring long walks between the station and the bus stop - for most journeys the sensible alternative route will use normal service buses and / or non-Zone 1 Tube and / or National Rail routes.
12. We have tested sample journeys on TfL's own journey planner, and these are the types of routes which it frequently offers. In all such cases, TfL's position is that for all journeys NOT via Zone 1 the full fare for the route taken will be charged.
13. We have calculated examples of the extra weekly costs for PAYG passengers travelling five days per week. The attached table shows these can be up to **£15**. Taken over nine months June - February, say 34 weeks to allow for holidays, that's **£510** for journeys which will take much longer than the normal train and require the hassle of several interchanges. This is unacceptable for the many passengers who are on low incomes and for whom the much extended journey times may cause great difficulty in juggling complex lives of work and child-care etc.
14. BGORUG, and we are sure all passengers, welcome the fact that the Barking - Gospel Oak line is to be electrified and that this will eventually (albeit not until 2018) allow longer trains to be operated and thus ease the present serious overcrowding. We therefore accept that there will be disruption whilst the work is carried out. However it is simply **not acceptable** for existing passengers - even if they only travel once per week - to be charged higher fares for much worse journeys.

Immediate action needed

We URGENTLY ask that all necessary political and other pressure be brought to bear on TfL to ensure that no existing passengers - regardless of their type of ticket - have to pay any more than they pay now. This must include use of alternative National Rail lines and stations and any normal service buses in the area of the line.

BGORUG will be pleased to supply any additional information, either by e-mail or by discussion with political representatives.

Replacement bus services

15. Two replacement bus services will be provided during the closures. One will operate between Gospel Oak and Seven Sisters (for South Tottenham), the other between Walthamstow Central and Barking. This leaves a gap between Seven Sisters / South Tottenham and Walthamstow, which passengers are advised to cover by using the Victoria line between the two.

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16. This is a huge inconvenience for travellers between the western and eastern sections of the line. As neither Seven Sisters nor Walthamstow Central stations have step-free access it is a particular problem for passengers with mobility problems.
17. At the planning stage BGORUG urged TfL to make the two replacement bus routes link together at South Tottenham, as they have done for weekend closures for many years. Instead, they actually introduced this new method of working during weekend closures at the beginning of May.
18. There are also other aspects of the replacement bus routes which cause us concern.
19. As there is now no time to re-plan the replacement bus routes before the closure start date on 4th June, we will wait to see how passengers respond before pursuing replacement bus service issues further.

Publicity

20. BGORUG has submitted suggestions regarding publicity for the closures and we are pleased to see that TfL has adopted the most important of these.
21. When initial notices appeared about the closures we were concerned that these lacked clarity and failed to convey the key message. We are pleased that TfL has made the necessary changes.

Date for introducing electric (and therefore longer) trains

22. The line will reopen, on weekdays only, in February 2017, with the existing 2-carriage diesel trains reinstated. Network Rail will continue works to commission the electric power supply during evenings and weekends, with this being completed in June 2017.
23. TfL have ordered new 4-carriage electric trains for the line. However the first delivery is not scheduled until the end of 2017. They then need to be commissioned and staff need to be trained for their operation and maintenance. For these reasons the new trains are not scheduled to enter service until the May 2018 timetable change.
24. Therefore, after enduring an eight month line closure which will cause major disruption to their daily lives, passengers will have to endure the present overcrowded 2-carriage trains for some 14 months before finally gaining the benefit of their sacrifice.
25. BGORUG sent a paper to TfL pointing out that older – but perfectly serviceable – 4-carriage electric trains will start to become available from their own Liverpool St. to Shenfield line in May 2017 and that these could be transferred to the Barking - Gospel Oak line as soon Network Rail complete their electrification works in June.
26. TfL have rejected our proposal in the following terms; “In spite of BGORUG’s very thoughtful paper, our procurement strategy must balance the needs of passenger demand and on-going pressure on public finances. Therefore it is not currently planned to change London Overground’s rolling stock procurement strategy.” TfL have provided no details to explain this decision.
27. BGORUG will supply further information about this important matter to political representatives shortly.

26th May 2016

BGO Full Closure – PAYG Fares comparisons (assuming Replacement Buses J & T are not charged)

| Journey example | | Alternative route | Extra weekly cost – Peak - Oyster | Extra weekly cost – Off-Peak - Oyster | Extra weekly cost – Peak – Contactless | Extra weekly cost – Off-Peak – Contactless |
|-----------------|---------------------------------------|---|-----------------------------------|---------------------------------------|--|--|
| Z4 | Barking – Woodgrange Park | <i>District line to East Ham, then Replacement Bus T – same fares</i> | Same | Same | Same | Same |
| Z4 – Z3 | Barking – Leyton Midland Rd. | <i>District line to Mile End, Central line to Leyton, Bus 69 or 97 to Leyton MR</i> | 15.00 | 15.00 | 7.30 | 9.30 |
| Z4 – Z2 | Barking – Upper Holloway | <i>Via Z1, Northern line to Archway</i> | 15.00 – but refunded weekly | 13.00 – but refunded weekly | 15.00 – but refunded weekly | 13.00 – but refunded weekly |
| Z3 | Wanstead Park – Harringay Green Lanes | <i>Replacement Bus T to Walthamstow Cent., Victoria line to Seven Sisters, Replacement Bus J to Harringay GL – same fares</i> | Same | Same | Same | Same |
| | <i>or</i> | <i>TfL Rail Forest Gate – Stratford, LO to Highbury, then National Rail to Harringay</i> | 7.00 | 5.00 | 7.00 | 5.00 |
| | <i>or</i> | <i>TfL Rail Forest Gate – Liverpool St., walk or LUL to Moorgate, then National Rail to Harringay</i> | 23.00 – but refunded weekly | 25.00 – but refunded weekly | 21.00 – but refunded weekly | 23.00 – but refunded weekly |
| Z3 | Walthamstow Queens Road – Crouch Hill | <i>Walthamstow Central, Victoria line to Finsbury Park, Bus W7 to Crouch Hill</i> | 15.00 | 15.00 | 7.30 | 9.30 |

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|---------|--|---|------------------------------------|------------------------------------|------------------------------------|------------------------------------|
| Z3 – Z2 | Blackhorse Road – Upper Holloway | <i>Victoria line to Highbury, Bus 43, 263 or 271 to Upper Holloway</i> | 15.00 | 15.00 | 7.30 | 9.30 |
| Z3 – Z2 | Crouch Hill – Gospel Oak | <i>Walk to Replacement Bus J to Highgate Road, then walk to Gospel Oak</i> | Free | Free | Free | Free |
| | <i>or</i> | <i>Bus 210 to Archway, then bus C11 to Gospel Oak</i> | 5.50 | 7.50 | 5.50 | 7.50 |
| | <i>or</i> | <i>Bus W7 to Finsbury Park, Victoria line to Highbury, LO to Gospel Oak</i> | 9.50 | 15.00 | 7.30 | 9.30 |
| Z3 – Z2 | Harringay Green Lanes – Hampstead Heath | <i>Harringay, National Rail to Highbury, LO to Hampstead Heath</i> | 7.00 | 5.00 | 7.00 | 5.00 |
| Z2 | Upper Holloway – Gospel Oak | <i>Bus C11 Archway – Gospel Oak</i> | Cheaper | Equal | Cheaper | Equal |
| Z2 | Upper Holloway – Willesden Jct. | <i>Northern line Archway to Euston, LO to Willesden Jct.</i> | 12.00 – but refunded weekly | 9.00 – but refunded weekly | 7.30 – but refunded weekly | 9.00 – but refunded weekly |
| Z5 – Z3 | Dagenham Heathway – Leytonstone High Rd. | <i>District line to Mile End, Central line to Leyton, Bus W14 to Leytonstone HR</i> | 15.00 | 15.00 | 2.30 | 11.80 |
| Z5 – Z3 | Dagenham Heathway – South Tottenham | <i>Via Z1, Victoria line to Seven Sisters or LO Liverpool St. - Seven Sisters</i> | 23.00 – but refunded weekly | 16.00 – but refunded weekly | 23.00 – but refunded weekly | 16.00 – but refunded weekly |
| Z5 – Z2 | Dagenham Heathway – Upper Holloway | <i>Via Z1, Northern line to Archway</i> | 19.00 – but refunded weekly | 16.00 – but refunded weekly | 19.00 – but refunded weekly | 16.00 – but refunded weekly |

| | | | | | | |
|----------|----------------------------------|---|--|--|--|--|
| Z6 – Z3 | Upminster – Leytonstone High Rd. | <i>NR to West Ham, Jubilee line to Stratford, Central line to Leytonstone, Bus 257 or W14 to Leytonstone HR</i> | 15.00 | 15.00 | 4.20 | 15.00 |
| Z6 – Z3 | Upminster – South Tottenham | <i>NR to Z1, Victoria line to Seven Sisters or LO Liverpool St. - Seven Sisters</i> | 23.00 – but refunded weekly | 16.00 – but refunded weekly | 23.00 – but refunded weekly | 16.00 – but refunded weekly |
| Z6 – Z3 | Upminster – South Tottenham | <i>NR to Z1, Northern line to Archway</i> | 23.00 – but refunded weekly | 16.00 – but refunded weekly | 23.00 – but refunded weekly | 16.00 – but refunded weekly |
| c2c - Z3 | Grays – Leytonstone High Rd. | <i>NR to West Ham, Jubilee line to Stratford, Central line to Leyton, Bus W14 to Leytonstone HR</i> | 15.00 | 15.00 | 15.00 | 15.00 |
| c2c - Z3 | Grays – South Tottenham | <i>NR to Z1, Victoria line to Seven Sisters or LO Liverpool St. - Seven Sisters</i> | 31.00 – but refunded weekly | 29.00 – but refunded weekly | 31.00 – but refunded weekly | 29.00 – but refunded weekly |
| c2c - Z3 | Grays – Upper Holloway | <i>NR to Z1, Northern line to Archway</i> | 28.00 – but refunded weekly | 27.00 – but refunded weekly | 28.00 – but refunded weekly | 27.00 – but refunded weekly |