



## COMMENT



FELLOWSHIP IS LIFE

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## Waiting for the train

Glenn Wallis, secretary of the Barking to Gospel Oak Rail User Group, keeps track of the line's progress toward reopening this year



Overcrowding at Leyton Midland Road Station, prior to the London Overground line's temporary closure to allow for electrification

**W**altham Forest commuters have been waiting for a train on the Barking to Gospel Oak line since last June. That was when the stretch through the borough was closed, allowing Network Rail to adapt it to carry electric trains powered from 25,000-volt overhead wires.

The whole line closed in September. Transport for London (TfL) provided London Overground passengers with two rail replacement bus services which failed to link up and missed out half of the stations, but apart from that, passengers were on

their own.

If you used the line five times in the eight weeks before 4th June, TfL promised to refund those who had to change their route to include central area Zone 1. According to TfL's figures supplied to London Assembly Member Jennette Arnold, 43 percent of regular travellers are receiving refunds. That leaves a majority who are not.

The Barking to Gospel Oak Rail Users' Group (BGORUG) has estimated that a large proportion of those receiving no refunds, for whom the limited replacement bus services are not a solution,

have been forking out around £15 per week extra.

So when will things return to normal? Given Network Rail's dreadful record of missing completion dates for other electrification schemes, it is not surprising that this is a concern. Initially programmed to finish at the end of January, completion has recently slipped to the end of February and there is so much work still outstanding that it seems hard to accept that there will not be further slippage.

There seems to be a drainage problem at Pretoria Avenue and the bridge over the Lea Navigation is missing. While some overhead wires have been erected at Barking and Gospel Oak stations, there are not enough overhead line masts currently in place to put up any more. The station platforms have to be extended to accommodate four-carriage trains and apart from Walthamstow Queen's Road this work has hardly started. TfL say that six extra platform shelters and ten additional canopies will be provided.

A best guess is that the line will reopen at the end of February with continuing weekend closures into the summer. This is because, after all the inconvenience of the many months of closure, the same two-carriage diesel trains will return to service!

« After many months of closure, passengers will have to squeeze and struggle aboard just as they did before »

Passengers will have to squeeze and struggle aboard just as they did a year before.

The new four-carriage electric trains will not arrive until early 2018 and it could be May 2018 before all are in service. There are new trains being delivered for the Liverpool Street to Shenfield service, which is to become the eastern end of Crossrail. The existing 37-year old four-carriage electric trains are to be scrapped.

Providing the electrification of the Barking to Gospel Oak line and the platform extensions are completed by the summer these redundant trains could be used as a stop-gap until the new Barking to Gospel Oak trains arrive and give passengers some relief from the chronic overcrowding suffered on the two-carriage diesels. So far, TfL are refusing to do this.