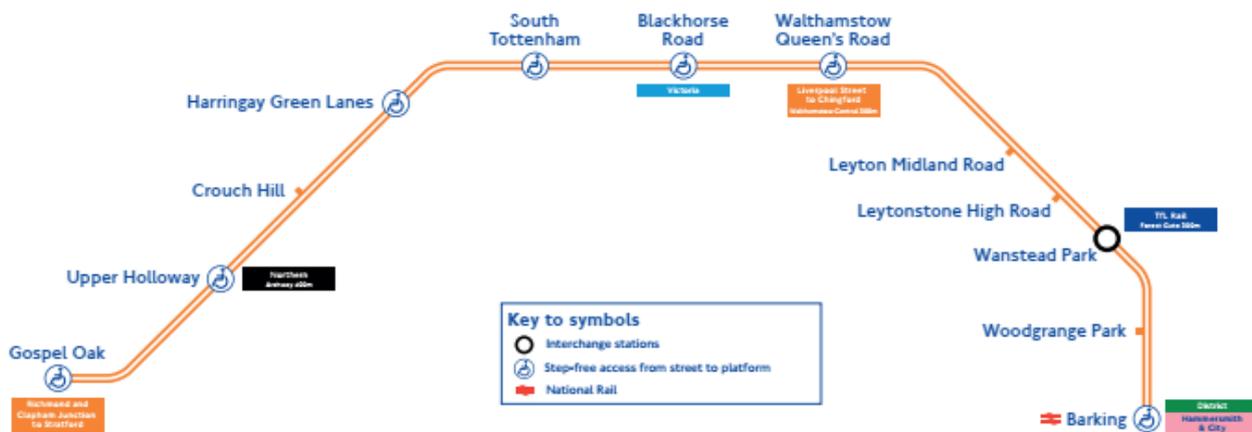




NEWYEAR 2019 CRISIS REVIEW

HAPPY NEWYEAR FOR THE GOBLIN'S PASSENGERS? - NOT LIKELY!

Delays, overcrowding, and cancellations continue, and chaos – even closure - could be on the cards for TfL's London Overground Barking – Gospel Oak line (the **GOBLIN**)



SUMMARY

January 2018 should have seen new high-capacity electric trains for passengers on the **GOBLIN**. But it was not to be. Network Rail were late with the electrification works – not finished and approved until June. Worse, Bombardier had built the new electric trains but their computer software did not yet work – still does not work as we enter 2019, and no-one knows when it will work. Meantime two of the existing trains have left the line for a new life in the **West Midlands**, and the remaining six will depart likewise between now and **March**.

The result, since July, has been reduced peak services with delays, cancellations, overcrowding and passengers left behind on platforms. Since **November** the weekend service has been cut. Transport for London has taken no effective action to solve these problems and has announced no plans to prevent the service getting even worse – and possibly even closing as the existing trains transfer away.

As the passenger user group for the line, **BGORUG** now calls for TfL to take immediate action to obtain a fleet of alternative existing electric trains to operate the line, to provide passengers with the service they have long since been promised, and to compensate regular passengers for the major delays and inconvenience they have suffered throughout 2018.

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THE FULL STORY

1. On 17th December 2018, Transport for London formally announced that the new electric trains (Class 710) for the Barking – Gospel Oak line (the *GOBLIN*) would not now enter public service in December. A new date for introduction has not been given, apart from "as soon as we can".¹
2. This means the peak hour planned cancellations which have been in force since July (with consequent overcrowding) and the delays, unplanned cancellations, worse overcrowding and weekend service reductions in force since November, are now continuing into January.
3. Even more important, as TfL have announced no plans to introduce alternative electric trains, passengers must assume that during January the service will now get even worse as the existing diesel trains (Class 172) are progressively transferred to West Midlands Trains for use in the Birmingham area. This is because TfL have failed to negotiate a deal with West Midlands Trains to pause the transfers until the new Class 710s belatedly enter service.
4. All TfL have managed to do is to get an agreement "to retain the existing 2 car diesel units into the new year, beyond the previous December 9 return date. These units will transfer to the West Midlands gradually now from January to the end of March."²
5. The new Class 710 electric trains are now a year late in delivery from manufacturer Bombardier. The delay is because of serious problems with their on-board train management software – a new system which controls all aspects of the operation of the train including safety critical functions.
6. Since June, when Network Rail finally completed the electrification of the line (itself a botched job which was a year late and subjected passengers to twice as many line closures as originally intended), TfL have simply hoped that Bombardier would solve the Class 710 software problems before they were forced to hand over the Class 172s.³
7. For many months it has been obvious that TfL's approach has been inadequate. The nature of software problems on new trains is that whenever one issue is fixed there is a risk that hitherto satisfactory elements will be upset and thus cause fresh problems. The upshot is that trains are tested – either on a private test track or on Network Rail lines – and tests have to stop each time a new fault is found. This has happened repeatedly with the Class 710s and it is still occurring. This cycle of events prevents the trains accumulating the contractually necessary fault-free mileage before delivery to TfL, and prevents the start of driver training.
8. It is therefore impossible for anyone, however technically expert they might be, to know when these trains will be fit to enter passenger service.⁴ Also TfL know from their experience of negotiating with West Midlands Trains that there can be no further deal to extend their use of the Class 172s.
9. It is therefore essential that TfL now urgently takes the steps necessary to introduce older electric trains, several types of which are available, to the *GOBLIN* before the transfer of Class 172s resumes this month and thus causes further reductions in service and ultimately total withdrawal.⁵
10. There are several tests which must be carried out on the route before older trains can operate on the *GOBLIN*, to ensure that they physically fit the infrastructure and do not cause any electrical interference with the signalling system. However it is a short line and these should all be capable of completion within a week. It may take longer to negotiate lease terms, and it will take longer to agree suitable methods of operation and then to allocate and train staff – but this simply makes it all the more urgent that TfL act now.⁶
11. The use of existing electric trains on the *GOBLIN* has been the subject of considerable discussion on BGORUG's twitter site and elsewhere. Several people have pointed out problems of cost, staff availability should extra staff be needed, and securing agreement from regulatory authorities and

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- other interested parties.
12. So far as cost is concerned, this is not an issue. TfL have received £5m compensation from Bombardier for the late delivery of the Class 710s – and that is just up to mid-September.⁷
 13. Regarding staff, this also should not be a problem. The delay in opening Crossrail means that TfL have staff, taken on to work at new stations, who are not yet needed in their intended roles and are therefore working as supernumerary extra staff at existing stations. If extra drivers are needed, then TfL also have Crossrail drivers who are not yet fully employed, and also drivers taken on for increased services on London Overground which for various reasons – including the problems with the Class 710s - have not yet been introduced.
 14. Less certain is whether approval and agreement could be obtained for a different method of door operation compared to the now established system used on the *GOBLIN*. BGORUG's recognises that this could be an issue, but our view is that -
 - a) No-one knows until formal requests are made to the relevant parties.
 - b) If necessary approval or agreement cannot be obtained, then it would be for TfL to name any organisations whose refusal to agree is placing *GOBLIN* passengers at risk of seeing their train service descend into potential chaos and possible total withdrawal.
 - c) It would then be for any such organisation to explain and defend their stance to the public.
 15. It is BGORUG's belief that TfL must now work on the assumption that new Class 710 trains will not enter service before the existing trains transfer to the West Midlands between now and March, and must therefore do all in their power to secure the use of available older electric trains -
 - a) to reinstate the full weekend service as soon as possible;
 - b) to reinstate the *PIXC busters*³ – no later than mid-January
 - c) to provide for a Class 172 to be released as a daily maintenance spare – no later than mid-January
 - d) to be available as necessary to progressively take over the entire service as Class 172s are transferred out to West Midlands Trains.
 16. BGORUG is concerned that TfL's seemingly laid back attitude to the *GOBLIN* problem (an almost Micawberish hope that “something will turn up”) is borne of a belief that the problem is one for the “too difficult” box. We hope that we are wrong about this, because the great success which is London Overground is very much a result of the positive “how can we?” outlook of its founders around ten years ago. We hope that this approach will now be brought to bear on behalf of the *GOBLIN*'s passengers.
 17. If, whilst TfL energetically pursues the actions BGORUG is calling for, the Class 710 problems are solved then all well and good – but it would be irresponsible for TfL to continue to sit back and hope that this will occur in time to avoid closing the service.
 18. As we write this crisis review we note with interest that eagle eyed BGORUG supporters have seen that a 5-car Class 378 train (the type used on the London Overground North, West and East London Lines and Euston – Watford Junction local service) has been reduced to 4-cars at their Willesden depot and has been observed on test runs. We hope that this is to provide a 4-car electric train suitable for the *GOBLIN* – an idea suggested by BGORUG but previously rejected by TfL. This would enable early reinstatement of the *PIXC* buster trains and if this is indeed the intention then we welcome TfL's change of heart. However we must stress that such a move will not be sufficient to solve all the current problems. The *GOBLIN* needs at least seven, preferably

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eight, electric trains to ensure a reliable full service, and there is no way that this number of Class 378 trains could be released from their present duties.⁸

COMPENSATION FOR PASSENGERS

19. *GOBLIN* passengers have now suffered mistreatment for more than two years. They put up with multiple long term closures between 2016 and 2018 while Network Rail mishandled the electrification of their line, only to find that instead of getting new four-carriage electric trains in June 2018 (which would have been six months later than promised) they suffered a reduction in their rush hour service of two-carriage diesel trains from July, severe delays, cancellations and overcrowding since November, coupled with a 25 per cent reduction in weekend services.
20. BGORUG has consistently called for regular passengers to receive some compensation for the serious and continuing disruption to their service – just as passengers on Southern, Thameslink, Great Northern and Northern Rail have been compensated for major service shortcomings recently.
21. TfL have repeatedly refused our requests. Now that we know that they have received £5m compensation from Bombardier – presumably with more to come – the case for refusal must be viewed as threadbare.

Acknowledgements

BGORUG is grateful to members and supporters for information, suggestions and discussion through our twitter site [@RidingtheGoblin](#) and other media which have helped us develop our thoughts. We are also grateful to MLAs and MPs who have supported our cause for more than two years, indeed in some cases, for far longer.

FOOTNOTES

¹ Full text of TfL statement issued to the Barking – Gospel Oak Rail Users' Group and other stakeholders on 17th December 2018.

“I am writing to update you further on our plans to provide new electric trains on the Gospel Oak to Barking line.

As you may know, the manufacturer, Bombardier Transportation, has needed to do more work before the new trains can be introduced. This means we will not now be able to bring the new trains into service in December. We will continue to push hard to get them running as soon as we can.

The Mayor and the TfL Commissioner have personally spoken to the President and Chief Executive Officer of Bombardier to ensure all possible effort is being made to fix the problems.

The diesel trains currently running on the line will remain in service into the New Year. To allow crucial train maintenance to take place on these old trains, we will have to continue running a less frequent service at weekends until the new trains are introduced.

I am very sorry for the continuing delay. I know it is extremely frustrating.

We will continue to keep you and our passengers updated. If you have any questions, please do get in touch. I hope you will be able to join us to view the new electric trains at the Willesden depot in the New Year.

Yours sincerely,

Public Affairs & External Relations | Transport for London

FOOTNOTES CONTINUED

- ² See notes of meeting BGORUG / TfL 19th November 2018, item 8 – http://www.barking-gospeloak.org.uk/documents/20181119_stock_crisis_meeting.pdf
- ³ TfL leased eight Class 172 two-carriage diesel trains. Seven were needed to run the full service, with one spare for maintenance. With the new electric trains originally intended to enter service in January 2018, arrangements were made for the Class 172s to be re-leased to West Midlands Trains (WMT) in June, to be overhauled and fitted with toilets ready for their planned service increases in December. WMT agreed to sub-lease seven units back to TfL temporarily, but took one at the end of June to assess the works needed to make them suitable for their needs. This resulted in TfL, in July, cancelling the special peak period trains which had operated for several years to prevent overcrowding (the so-called *PIXC-busters*). Fortunately the national timetable problems last May resulted in WMT's planned December service increases being deferred, so they were able to leave the remaining seven Class 172s with TfL. However WMT will need them for May 2019, and on 10th November they took back another unit. This left TfL with just six units – the number needed to operate the normal daily service. With no spare unit now available for maintenance this was unsustainable and passengers immediately suffered train breakdowns and multiple unplanned cancellations. To ease the situation on weekdays – partially but not wholly successfully – TfL reduced the weekend service to four units to allow more time for maintenance. This has resulted in the weekend service featuring daylong 30 minute gaps in what is supposed to be a “turn-up-and-go” service and this is the present situation. The assumption appears to be that weekend travel is largely for leisure purposes and therefore less important than weekday travel. This of course is not the case; many people work at weekends and depend on the railway for their travel, and it is unacceptable that as a matter of course TfL should be subjecting them to long waits for their trains.
- ⁴ There is a pointer to this of which TfL is fully aware. Some of the new trains for Crossrail – Class 345 also a new design built by Bombardier – have been working some services between Liverpool St. and Shenfield since June 2017 and now also between Paddington and Hayes. These trains have new software – but of a less advanced design than the 710s - which has also been problematic. Although allowed to operate in public service, every such train still has a Bombardier software technician on board to deal with any defects. Whilst it is normal for new trains to have a technician on board for a few days or weeks, to the best of BGORUG's knowledge it is unprecedented for this to be necessary for 18 months or more. Therefore for TfL to base its policy for the Barking – Gospel Oak line's more advanced new Class 710 trains on an assumption that the problems will be fixed before the transfer of Class 172s to the West Midlands resumes this month is – to put it as politely as possible – thoroughly misguided.
- ⁵ The following 4-car older electric trains are possible candidates -
- a) Class 315 used by TfL on its Liverpool St. - Enfield / Chingford / Cheshunt / Shenfield services. Many such units are spare at weekends and could therefore be used to reinstate the full weekend service on the Barking – Gospel Oak line. Some may also be spare on weekdays from the Shenfield line where they have been replaced by new Class 345 Crossrail units – although BGORUG does not know how many because TfL (most unwisely) has returned some of these off-lease to their owning company which has sent them for scrap.
- b) Class 319 previously used on Thameslink, now returned to their owning company and in store. Some, but not all, of these units have been taken on by Northern Rail to operate in the Manchester area. Northern should therefore be able to provide TfL with advice on some of the issues involved in re-

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FOOTNOTES CONTINUED

commissioning them for use on lines where they have not previously operated.

c) Class 365 previously used on Great Northern, also now returned to their owning company and in store. Some, but not all, of these units have been taken on by ScotRail to operate in the Edinburgh / Glasgow area, so Scotrail too should be able to give useful advice to TfL.

- ⁶ The main issue to be sorted relates to operation of the doors at stations. The existing Class 172s and the forthcoming new Class 710s are fitted with train-borne cameras which display images of all the doors on a screen in the driver's cab. Thus the driver can see that it is safe to close the doors and depart the station. None of the existing trains which would be available for the *GOBLIN* have this equipment. It will therefore be necessary to adopt an alternative method of working, which might involve staff on the platforms to observe the doors and give a hand-signal to the driver when it is safe to close them, or to employ a conductor on each train to work the doors.
- ⁷ See TfL Board 21/11.2018 - Confirmation of £5m compensation is here - "...rail income (to 15/9) is £5m above budget owing to London Overground receiving contractual payments from Bombardier for delayed delivery of trains." See <http://content.tfl.gov.uk/board-20181121-agenda-papers-public-web.pdf> ... - Page 110.
- ⁸ It may be possible to obtain two more 4-car trains from the North, West and East London Lines and Euston – Watford Junction fleets by changing operational methods at some of their terminal stations. However as the *GOBLIN* needs at least seven (preferably eight) trains, this would only suffice for a short time. It therefore remains essential that TfL acts **NOW** to bring some existing older trains (Classes 315, 319 or 365) onto the line.

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10th January 2019