

BARKING-GOSPEL OAK LINE USER GROUP

www.barking-gospeloak.org.uk

JANUARY 2008 NEWSLETTER

Not So Happy Christmas And New Year

There was a deal of confusion over exactly what service would be running on our line over Christmas and New Year. Eventually it turned out that a half-hourly service would operate daily from December 27th until January 1st inclusive, but information about this was hard to come by (even for the station staff!) and there were no timetables posted on the stations until we took matters into our own hands, produced and printed some off and went round on Boxing Day putting them up. During this exercise we found passengers waiting forlornly at each station for non-existent trains, having assumed that because the line was on the Underground map it would be running on Boxing Day like the Underground was. The late start on certain days over the festive period also caught people out. All in all, not a happy time for the line's users, and all too redolent of "the bad old days" of the mid-90s. Much of the confusion seems to have been down to the rostering/staff availability situation inherited from Silverlink, which meant that the full service could not run, but full and accurate information should have been made available before and during the period – and if our volunteer user group could get this organised, the combined resources of TfL and operators LOROL should surely have been able to do so. No doubt one or two sharp lessons have been learned, and we shall wait to see what Easter brings - but we do expect a full Saturday timetable to apply on bank holidays. On a brighter note, a few days before Christmas our very own Santa delivered Christmas cards and mince pies to the staff at each station as a small token of our appreciation. Without a doubt, the restaffing of our stations has been one of the most welcome improvements the new regime has introduced, and we've been impressed by the cheerful enthusiasm and helpfulness of the new team.

Penalty Fares Come In On January 21st

Penalty Fares will be introduced on our line on January 21st, meaning that anyone boarding a train without a ticket may be liable to a £20 fine. Obviously legitimate exceptions will be allowed – eg if the machine at the station isn't working – but we hope a measure of discretion will be exercised in the first few weeks. After so many years of erratic or non-existent fare collection – including instances when people offering the fare were rebuffed because the conductor had no machine – it is only fair to give people time to get used to the new system. Plus a significant proportion of our line's users do not have English as their first language - and our ticket machines aren't exactly easy for the uninitiated to negotiate, though of course the station staff are there to help if you need it. One thing the machines can't do is issue you with a top-up ticket from a zone boundary to a station further out, so if (say) you have a Zone 1-3 TravelCard and want to go to Barking, you are perfectly entitled to buy the add-on ticket en route or on arrival without incurring a penalty fare.

Any appeal against incurring a Penalty Fare on London Overground should be addressed to the following (not to London TravelWatch):

London Overground Appeals/Payments Office
IRCAS
PO Box 212
Petersfield
GU32 9BQ.

If you get a penalty fare when travelling on the London Overground you can elect not to pay on the spot and instead be issued with a penalty fare notice. You can then appeal to the Independent Penalty Fares Appeal Service (IPFAS), whose address appears on the penalty fares notice, but for it to be considered it must be received by IPFAS within 21 days. If you ignore a penalty fare notice you could find yourself prosecuted for fares evasion.

London TravelWatch has a limited role in respect of Penalty Fares and appeals should not be sent to them. Ordinarily London TravelWatch's sole role is to consider whether the agreed procedures for handling penalty fares appeals have been followed and it will not be able to consider the merits or otherwise as to whether a penalty fare should have been issued in the first place.

Services, Frequencies And Overcrowding

The 9th December timetable change means that the service now always operates at least every 30 minutes, with 20-minute intervals on Monday-Saturday mornings and afternoons/early evenings; the last trains are now 23:08 from Barking and 23:25 from Gospel Oak. (The later last eastbound trains are a long-overdue and very welcome enhancement). On Sundays departures are 08:50 from Gospel Oak until 23:20 and 09:05 from Barking until 23:05. The station staff can supply you with a timetable booklet. We are still awaiting a response from TfL to our latest proposed rush-hour crowd-busting timetable, morning peak services are now regularly delayed by the sheer number of passengers trying to board and alight. Unfortunately our plea to LOROL to retain the full fleet inherited from Silverlink fell on deaf ears; they insisted that they only needed six units to provide the current 4-train peak timetable, but recent reliability has been so bad that the peak periods have had 40-minute gaps as only three units were available. The London Overground Passenger Charter (available from station staff) states that a refund can be claimed for delays of more than 30 minutes. Apply to www.tfl.gov.uk/fares or get a feedback/ refund form from the station staff.

Subscriptions, Date of Next Meeting and AGM

Our next open meeting is on Tuesday February 12th (7.15 pm at Barking Town Hall), followed immediately by the Annual General Meeting. As per usual we hope to have representatives from the line's management and from British Transport Police on hand to update us and answer questions. While everyone is welcome to attend the open meeting, the AGM is open to members only – which is a good opportunity to remind you that this year's subscriptions are now due!

Still only £3 – please make cheques payable to Barking-Gospel Oak Line User Group and send to the Secretary, 35 Carr Road, London E17 5ER (or pay at the meeting). Although things have undoubtedly got better, there's still much to be done (eg pressing hard for 3-car trains, and for the line to be electrified) and there will be a role for a strong, active User Group on this line for a long time to come – so your continued support is vital. The AGM will review the past year, consider future priorities, take any Motions that are proposed, and elect the Executive Committee for the coming year: Chair, Vice Chair, Secretary, Treasurer and three others. Not all existing EC members are standing for re-election, so if you'd like to get involved, now's your chance. Nominations and motions should reach the Secretary by February 5th, and should be signed by two members – alternatively they may be accepted from the floor at the AGM.

Barking-Gospel Oak Line User Group, 35 Carr Road, E17 5ER