

BARKING-GOSPEL OAK LINE USER GROUP

www.barking-gospeloak.org.uk

JULY 2008 NEWS UPDATE

September Shutdown

Plans are now pretty much fixed for the September shutdown of our line for major upgrade works to increase its capacity and enable more frequent services to be run. **Our line will close completely from September 1st to 28th inclusive, with buses replacing trains.** In addition, the North London Line will be closed completely from September 1st until November 16th between Gospel Oak and Willesden Junction, also from September 22nd to 28th between Gospel Oak and Camden Road – again, with buses replacing trains. (Between Camden Road and Willesden, trains will be diverted via Queens Park). Full details can be found on TfL's website, or at stations. The current plan is for our line's replacement bus service to run in two sections: Barking-Blackhorse Road and Blackhorse Road-Gospel Oak. LOROL feel (and we agree) that this will give better reliability than trying to run all buses right through. However, we have suggested that the Gospel Oak-Blackhorse buses could extend to Walthamstow Central and loop straight back to their layover point at Blackhorse (regrettably, they can't be accommodated in Walthamstow bus station, which was our first choice break-point), and LOROL are now considering this. People with Oyster cards will be advised to touch in and out at stations as per usual, but check the likely cost of your journey if you decide to take an alternative route – if you have to touch in/out more often than usual, you may be better off getting a Travelcard. We and other user representatives have been closely involved in the planning process for the alternative services, which has been a good example of how meaningful consultation with user reps ought to work. Indeed, relations between us and TfL/LOROL have improved greatly in recent times, which we warmly welcome.

Congratulations!

Our line won recognition in this year's Railway Forum Innovation Awards (Small Projects category), in which London Overground operators (LOROL) gained a "Highly Commended" for restaffing all Barking-Gospel Oak Line stations from Day One. This is the biggest step change our line has seen in many years, and it has improved the ambience and feeling of safety at our stations out of all recognition. Congratulations to all concerned – especially the station staff themselves!

Overcrowding

Of course, the biggest single problem since the new regime took over has been the big increase in usage, which our little two-car trains are unable to cope with. We continue to exert pressure on TfL and LOROL to do something about this, but nothing is as easy as that on the present-day railway (gone are the days when spare carriages could simply be pulled out of sidings to lengthen trains as needed. Oh for the 80s when our trains were sometimes four cars long!). As a stop-gap the three-seat rows are to be converted to two-seaters to increase standing room, but regrettably it seems the North London Line trains are taking precedence over ours for this work to be done. What we HAVE said in no uncertain terms is that as all the track works to permit 4-trains-per-hour running will be complete, commissioned and tested by Easter 2009, we want that service frequency to start ahead of schedule in May 2009, using existing rolling stock and whatever additional spares may be needed (if that means one of the rather rudimentary Pacer units being drafted in as the emergency spare, so be it). And of course we continue pressing strongly for the

new trains arriving in December 2009 to be three cars long, not two. Especially in view of the next paragraph.....

Cycle Restrictions

TfL have consulted us and other passenger groups on proposals to implement peak-time cycle restrictions on London Overground later this summer. Though this is regrettable, it's no surprise in view of the serious and worsening overcrowding situation. We have replied that we reluctantly accept that some restrictions are necessary, but that blanket ones between x and y hours are too blunt an instrument; instead, we have asked that TfL/LOROL decide which trains need to have restrictions placed on them, and show these in the timetable by means of background colour shading – a system used successfully by South West Trains.

Electrification

This appears to be back on the Government's agenda, and not before time. In a recent letter to the Guardian, Rail Minister Tom Harris said that he was looking at ways to reduce the cost, so we wrote to him pointing out that one way to do this was to include it in already-planned line upgrade schemes, such as that which our line is undergoing in September. His department's reply (Ministers never reply personally to these communications!) basically said that when our upgrade scheme was submitted the case for electrification was not made, either for freight or for passenger services. Well, that was then and this is now, and Tom Harris's boss Ruth Kelly has indicated that she believes the case for electrifying non-electrified sections of line now needs revisiting. So, when will her department be looking at ours?

Station to Station

London Underground at last seem to be getting to grips with running our side of **Blackhorse Road**, and (after a poke in the ribs from London TravelWatch) Network Rail have at last cleared the rubbish from behind the platforms.....Waltham Forest Council have assured us that there is firm commitment at senior level to getting the long-overdue pedestrian link constructed between **Queens Road** and Central.....the side gate at **Leyton Midland Road** has been locked on police advice due to its misuse by undesirables, but we are urging that it at least be opened during rush hours.....approach lighting is much improved at **Leytonstone High Road**....the new in-train maps show useful details of walking distance between our stations and others nearby – but oddly omit the **Wanstead Park/Forest Gate** interchange (and we still await the reinstatement of in-train London Connections maps).....TfL are liaising with C2C to improve Oyster retailing facilities at **Barking**.

DATE OF NEXT MEETING

Tuesday October 7th, 19 15 at Barking Town Hall. All welcome! We shall issue another news update in mid-August before the blockade begins, including any late news or changes to the arrangements. These will also be posted on our website.

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