

## BARKING-GOSPEL OAK LINE USER GROUP

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## NEWSLETTER, SEPTEMBER 2008

### ENGINEERING WORK: AT LAST, THE WORST IS OVER?

At least we hope so! As far as we know, there are no more long engineering blockades planned for our line, but many more weekend closures, over the next twelve months. We remain to be convinced that the amount of work carried out warranted a four week closure and we believe that not all the planned work was actually carried out.

We know for sure that the line will be closed on Sunday, 16<sup>th</sup> November and for longer periods in January and February 2009 while the road bridge at Shrubland Road, Walthamstow is demolished and rebuilt. EDF Energy is blamed for the failure to rebuild this bridge during this blockade. Bridges at Albert Road, Walthamstow and Sussex Way, Islington were dealt with, being finished in the nick of time due to the original schemes having to be redesigned because of poor planning. This work is to do with making the line fit to carry 9' 6" high cube shipping containers on normal height wagons (W10 loading gauge). Track was slewed at Crouch Hill for this as well. In addition, advantage of the blockade was taken to relay track between Woodgrange Park Junction and Wanstead Park, renew bridge track timbers on the viaduct section from Wanstead Park to Leyton and relay the junction and track between the aptly named Junction Road Junction and the site of the long proposed Tufnell Park station. London Overground also repainted the footbridge at Walthamstow Queen's Road in house colours and carried out other minor works at stations along the line.

Since the £18.5m Transport Innovation Fund grant from the Department for Transport, match funded by Network Rail's Discretionary Investment Fund, was for bringing the Woodgrange Park Junction to Kensal Green Junction line up to W10 loading gauge **and** re-signalling Wanstead Park to Upper Holloway to carry four passenger and four freight trains an hour, it is disappointing that no signalling work has been carried out. That is why we believe that passengers have a year of Sunday, complete weekend and Bank Holiday closures to look forward to. The re-signalling has to be finished by the end of 2009 at the latest, to handle the extensive freight traffic to be diverted by engineering work between Stratford and Camden Road on the North London Line. The freight "No. 1 Lines" between Dalston Western Junction and Camden Road East Junction are to be closed from April 2009 and the entire route between Stratford and Camden Road closed between January and April, 2010.

We have asked TfL and LOROL to advise us at our 7<sup>th</sup> October meeting what arrangements will be made for the remaining closures on our line. With the economies being made on replacement bus services, Transport for London (TfL) announced cutting the Gospel Oak-Kensal Rise Route 'A' Sunday service to two buses an hour from Sunday 28<sup>th</sup> September the previous Friday lunchtime, we are pessimistic.

### THE BLOCKADE SAGA

We were invited to meet LOROL managers on 26<sup>th</sup> February to discuss our proposals for the relief of overcrowding on our peak services and the September blockade. We stated that a through Barking-Gospel Oak bus had to be provided whether or not it was supplemented with shuttle links to nearby Underground stations, the latter favoured by LOROL. When our representative attended a "Bus Workshop" on 18<sup>th</sup> June, he found that TfL was proposing two bus services meeting at Blackhorse Road and this was to be adopted. Our representative said that we would only agree to this if the western route "overlapped" the eastern one by running on to Walthamstow Central. This was agreed.

The publicity started to appear shortly afterwards and what had become Route 'B' clearly terminated at Blackhorse Road and not Walthamstow Central as we were told it would. In fact what happened was that Route 'B' had a "secret" extension to Walthamstow Central which London Buses apparently would not allow to be advertised. There was also an unadvertised extension at the other end beyond Gospel Oak to Hampstead Heath and occasionally Chalk Farm. As the month progressed we learnt that in the TfL rail replacement bus pecking order, officialdom gives priority first to London Buses

own routes, then London Underground rail replacement services and lastly any other rail replacement bus services. It took a week before most buses, especially Route 'B', were equipped with proper blinds, destination cards and route diagrams, although this was erratic until the end. We complained about station entrance posters not carrying first and last bus times and Route 'B' station posters not acknowledging the existence of Route 'C' onward from Blackhorse Road to Barking and vice versa with Route 'C' posters not acknowledging the existence of Route 'B' to Gospel Oak. We were told that the posters would not be reprinted and passengers would receive leaflets from station staff. Here was another problem.

TfL planners had designed everything around the assumption that every passenger would speak to a member of staff and receive a leaflet. We do not live in a perfect world, due to vacancies not all stations were always staffed and the agency staff drafted in were a mixed bunch, very few being willing to engage with passengers. Our regular staff got so much stick when the train service was withdrawn a day early, at midday on Sunday, 31<sup>st</sup> August that many became reluctant to volunteer for further verbal punishment. Indeed, one of the agency staff at Blackhorse Road was assaulted. Incidentally, the reason for the short notice withdrawal of trains on Sunday 31<sup>st</sup> August was that no one had noticed until a few days previously that Network Rail had brought forward the engineering possession from Camden Road through Gospel Oak to Willesden to start at 14:00 on the Sunday, thus cutting off the route back to the depot for our trains. We have asked the Rail Regulator to investigate Network Rail's actions.

We complained about the lack of direction signs from stations to bus stops, only to be told that they had been provided. LOROL had to admit, nearly a week later that their contractor had failed to put the signs up. When they were erected, they were small, inconspicuous, white lettering on pale blue signs. Those at Leytonstone High Road and Leyton Midland Road directed Barking bound passengers to the Blackhorse Road buses and vice versa. The sign at Walthamstow Central was only discovered five days before the blockade ended, tied to a lamppost on a traffic island at the Selborne Road/Hoe Street junction.

Then on Monday 15<sup>th</sup> September, TfL announced that due to poor patronage Route 'B' was to have its frequency cut from Thursday 18<sup>th</sup> September. Timetable leaflets and posters arrived at stations the day prior to the cut. All buses additional to those that Network Rail was funding were withdrawn leaving a 20-minute peak service with 30-minute intervals at other times. The original frequent service had helped to compensate for the inevitable extra time the road journey took and the reduced service was none too reliable, but LOROL's response to complaints about cancellations was to deny that they had occurred!

### **"IT'S ELECTRIFICATION JIM, BUT NOT AS WE KNOW IT!"**

Our attention was drawn to the 22<sup>nd</sup> September edition of the on-line magazine *Rail Management*, [www.keepingtrack.co.uk/railmanagement](http://www.keepingtrack.co.uk/railmanagement). The headline "Gospel Oak-Barking may be electrified as DC line" certainly grabbed the attention! *Rail Management* had been to a press event at Derby to mark the conclusion of works testing and the imminent dispatch to c2c's Shoeburyness Depot for further testing of 378 001, the first TfL ordered electric train for the North London and Watford Local Lines. *Rail Management* had interviewed TfL London Rail's Chief Operating Officer, Howard Smith, who revealed that there had been recent talks behind the scenes on extending third rail 750v DC to Barking instead.....after repeatedly failing to persuade industry partners to approve 25kv. "So the lease on the DMUs is flexible: we are not committed to them long term", said Mr. Smith.

We find it hard to believe that Network Rail would extend third rail electrification to our line but it may be that TfL are offering to pay for it, hoping that Network Rail will pay for the difference between third rail and 25kv overhead electrification. However, this may explain TfL's reluctance to order a third coach for the Class 172 diesels ordered by LOROL for our line, which the article says are now expected in 2010.

### **PEAK OVERCROWDING UPDATE**

As mentioned previously we met LOROL on 26<sup>th</sup> February and listened to their reasons why they felt our proposals for a 15-minute frequency service for one hour in the busiest part of each peak period were operationally flawed. We duly reworked our proposals to either deal with LOROL's objections or show that they were groundless and sent them the revised plan. Unfortunately, LOROL promptly reiterated the same reasons for objection as for the previous plan! Very frustrating!

At our June meeting LOROL stated that it was negotiating with Network Rail to find a path for an additional morning train (essentially what we were proposing) but no more was heard and we wondered if the real problem was a shortage of rolling stock since those two trains were handed back to Angel Trains in November. This was given some credence when a TfL source recently divulged that they were searching for another train. Given the current state of the rolling stock market, this will not be easy.

### **ONE YEAR ON**

Although not yet a year since TfL formally took over from Silverlink, it is a year since we had our first meetings with TfL and LOROL. What have we learned? We have learned slowly and painfully that we are now in an entirely different ball game and that TfL London Rail appears to be 'micromanaging' almost every detail of the Overground Concession. It is therefore very difficult for any of the user groups to know who is responsible for making particular decisions. TfL London Rail seems to formulate policy on everything, no matter how small and then passes that on to Rail for London Ltd. (RfL), the TfL subsidiary that lets and manages the Concession and ensures LOROL's compliance with its contract. We have learned that TfL considers rail companies, local authorities, businesses and London TravelWatch to be stakeholders but passengers and their user groups not to be stakeholders! It appears that management is sometimes 'economical with the *actualité*' when dealing with our queries and problems. A beautiful example of this was our request for London Connections maps to be displayed in the trains in place of one of the Tube maps, only to be told that such a vinyl map would be a fire hazard!

### **STATIONS: NEWS BAD AND GOOD**

As this e-newsletter appears, the TfL board are expected to approve major cuts in the infrastructure and track works on the North London Line around Camden Road. It is rumoured that some station works will also be cut from the "Phase 3 Programme" and from the Barking-Gospel Oak Line in particular. We have asked TfL's Craig Tucker to come to our next meeting on 7<sup>th</sup> October to tell us exactly what works will now take place.

Passenger shelters on our line have always been basic and three, Upper Holloway, South Tottenham and Blackhorse Road retain BR brick shelters while the others have the basic *Macemain* shelters, all installed about 10 years ago. Only Walthamstow Queen's Road received the enlarged *de luxe* version also tried at West Hampstead. If money is tight, we need to work with TfL and LOROL to ensure what money is available is used in the most effective way. A station like Harringay Green Lanes which has seen remarkable passenger growth and has the most minimal, basic shelters needs major improvements. In the short term we would be happy to see modest improvement to the existing *Macemain* shelters at many of the other intermediate stations. Changes might include Perspex panels replacing the current perforated steel ones, lighting (they were designed to be lit) and the roofs cleaned. Generally we would like to see more weatherproof cover on all the stations as they now all handle so many more passengers and additional shelters, made redundant elsewhere could be reused.

Waltham Forest Council has initiated court proceedings against the current and previous owners of Exeter Road Estate in order to get the Edison Close entrance to Walthamstow Queen's Road station built. This was a condition of the planning permission for the estate all those years ago.

After London TravelWatch took up the case of the closed Midland Road entrance gate at Leyton, LOROL has decided to reopen it again. LTW merely asked LOROL if it had gone through the correct procedure to close it in the first place.

### **FRIENDS IN THE RIGHT PLACES**

As usual our friends, GLA members John Biggs and Jenette Arnold have been battling for us with the following questions to the Mayor. We congratulate Jenette upon being elected Assembly Chair.

**Barking to Gospel Oak Line    Question No: 1920 / 2008    John Biggs**

When will the much needed 3-car trains be ordered for the Barking to Gospel Oak Line? Why have only 2-car trains been ordered when works are planned to lengthen the sole platform that is currently too short to enable 3-car operation? As part of the North London Railway, this line is TfL's first and flagship management of an overground line. Ordering 2-car trains when works are planned to enable 3-car operation seems at best confused, at worst wasteful if new 3-car trains then have to be ordered

shortly afterwards. Can the 2-car order for 2009 please be amended to 3-car to deliver a scheme that meets demand, utilises the lengthened platform, and proudly wears TfL's London Overground brand?

*Mayor's answer: The new trains for the Gospel Oak to Barking line are being ordered by LOROL the train operator as part of the concession agreement. TfL is currently in discussion with LOROL to discuss the options for 3 car on the line. This would require some infrastructure work including lengthening of platforms and relocating signalling and communication equipment which we are investigating. We will be doubling the number of trains per hour on this line from September 2009 to relieve current overcrowding issues.*

**Barking to Gospel Oak line      Question No: 1971 / 2008      Jennette Arnold**

I was sorry to hear that due to "diary constraints", you are unable to accompany me on an early morning trip to witness the terrible overcrowding on the Barking to Gospel Oak line. I am disappointed that at no time over the next 4 years you will be able to find the time to experience the awful conditions endured by my constituents each and every working day on what is politely known as the horror express. Is this a move away from your promise to be a Mayor for all Londoners?

*Mayor's answer: You will appreciate that it is not always possible for me to accept every diary request. However, I acknowledge the severe overcrowding that your constituents experience.*

*As you will be aware TfL only took over control of the line in November and they are committed to increasing capacity. In September 2009 TfL will increase the frequency on the line to 4 trains an hour. The trains on order are currently 2 car, and I have instructed TfL to investigate whether this can be amended to deliver 3 car trains, although funding is not yet available.*

**NEXT MEETING**

The next full open meeting of the Group will be at 19:15 hours at Barking Town Hall on Tuesday, 7<sup>th</sup> October when we hope to have representatives of TfL London Rail and LOROL present.

**AND FINALLY.....**

Shepherds Bush station joined the Overground network at 08:42 hours on Sunday 28<sup>th</sup> September 2008 with a small informal ceremony organized by our friends, the West London Line Group and those present adjourned to the local hostelry for a celebratory breakfast. Whatever happened to the plans for Tufnall Park.....?