



# BARKING – GOSPEL OAK RAIL USER GROUP

FOUNDED 1964

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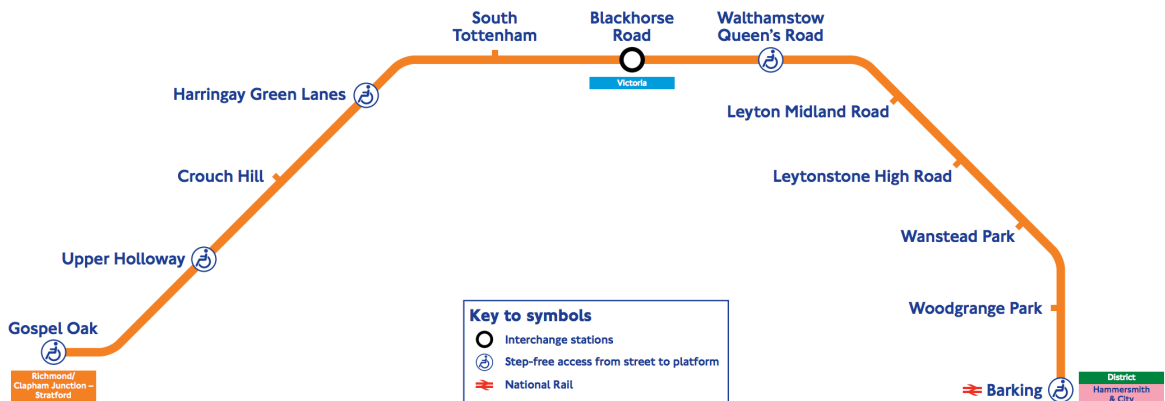
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## Barking – Gospel Oak Line Electrification Blockades 2016-17

### Proposals for alternative arrangements for passengers

This note puts forward the Barking – Gospel Oak Rail User Group's (BGORUG) proposals for alternative arrangements for passengers during the forthcoming electrification blockades of the London Overground (LO) Barking – Gospel Oak line. It takes account of discussions between BGORUG and Transport for London (TfL) on 10<sup>th</sup> March and on public statements by TfL at the Waltham Forest Transport Liaison Consultative Group on 15<sup>th</sup> March.



### Introduction

1. The Barking – Gospel Oak (BGO) line provides an orbital link across north-east London. It connects with London Underground (LUL) lines at Barking and Blackhorse Road, with National Rail (NR) Southend and Tilbury line services at Barking and with the LO Stratford – Richmond / Clapham Junction line at Gospel Oak.
2. Several BGO stations are within a short walking distance of other LUL, LO, TfL Rail and NR stations. Some of these are officially recognised out-of station interchanges (OSI) for Oyster / Contactless pay-as-you-go purposes, although not always marked as such on the Tube map.
3. All BGO stations are in fares Zone 3, apart from Barking (Zone 4) and Upper Holloway and Gospel Oak (Zone 2).

4. The particular value of the line to passengers is that it provides much quicker journey times than can be achieved by bus, and quicker and cheaper journeys than by travelling through central London (Zone 1). A significant number of BGO passengers make journeys to or from further afield, using the various interchanges with other lines.
5. BGORUG hugely welcomes the fact that TfL has secured funding for Network Rail to electrify the line, and accepts that there is a price to be paid in terms of major closures to enable the work to be carried out. Currently it is planned that the whole line will be completely closed from September 2016 to February 2017. Before that the whole line will also be closed on Saturdays and Sundays from June to September 2016, and the South Tottenham – Barking section will be closed every day. From June to September 2016 trains will run between Gospel Oak and South Tottenham, but only on Mondays – Fridays.
6. We understand that TfL are pressing Network Rail to reduce the duration and extent of these closures, and BGORUG offers its full support for this. Nevertheless it is clear that major closures (blockades) will occur. BGORUG's aim is therefore that the best possible alternative arrangements are made for passengers.

#### **Design considerations for blockade alternative services**

7. Unlike many of the radial routes into central London, the BGO lacks any nearby parallel railways to which passengers might transfer. There are no parallel main roads which could carry tolerably fast replacement buses, and no existing bus services provide direct links between all stations on the route.
8. It is therefore inevitable that most BGO passengers will have to find alternative routes which will be much slower, require more interchange, and (unless there are special arrangements) will be more expensive.
9. BGORUG considers that alternative arrangements must be designed to -
  - Minimise the increased journey times
  - Minimise the number of times passengers have to interchange
  - Provide special fares protection to ensure that existing users pay no more than the fares they pay for their current journeys.
10. To achieve these objectives BGORUG believes that account should be taken of the fact that people do not simply travel from one station to another. Their actual journeys are from one specific place (e.g. home) to another specific place (e.g. work or a hospital appointment), either of which might be a long way from the line.
11. Many long journeys might best be made by completely avoiding the BGO route. To take an extreme example, someone who travels from Shepherd's Bush, changing at Gospel Oak, and then to Leytonstone High Road, might wish to use the Central line direct to Leytonstone and then either walk or catch a normal service bus to their destination. This would minimise the increased journey time (in fact it might be quicker) and minimise the number of interchanges, but it would need a special fares arrangement to protect against the cost of going via Zone 1 and against the cost of a bus journey.
12. Medium distance journeys might also best be made by avoiding the BGO route. An example would be Upper Holloway to South Tottenham. If the passenger's start point is south of Upper Holloway station then a normal service bus to Highbury and then the Victoria line might be best, with fares

protection against the cost of the bus journey. However if they start north of Upper Holloway station, then they might wish to choose between this route or walking to Archway to take the Northern line and then the Victoria line to Seven Sisters with fares protection against going via Zone 1.

13. Another example might be a trip from Barking to Harringay Green Lanes. If the passenger starts somewhere north of Barking station then a normal service bus to Ilford, then TfL Rail to Stratford, LO to Highbury and NR thence to Harringay might suit them best. In this case they would need fares protection for the bus journey and against any additional cost of using NR for the Highbury to Harringay section.
14. Some medium distance journeys and most short journeys will best be made by bus. As no normal service buses exactly parallel the BGO line for any significant distance, passengers making these journeys will have to be offered the option of a specific rail replacement bus service. However many such passengers may find that a service bus suits them better, or two such buses in which case the need for fares protection arises.
15. At present BGO replacement bus services – which run when there is BGO engineering work at weekends - have been operated in separate eastern and western sections, meeting at South Tottenham. BGORUG understands the case for this arrangement, as randomly occurring traffic congestion would make a route running the entire length of the line particularly prone to unreliability.
16. From our meeting with TfL we are aware that they are considering different routes from those currently used, in the interest of faster journeys but at the price of being rather remote from some stations. We have no objection to this in principle, provided we are consulted before plans are cast in tablets of stone and provided we have the opportunity at an appropriate stage to discuss the precise location of stopping points.
17. However BGORUG is concerned at suggestions we have seen that separate eastern and western services might be operated with a gap in the middle between Walthamstow and Seven Sisters / South Tottenham, which passengers would be expected to bridge by using the Victoria line. We consider that any speed advantage of the tube between these points would be more than offset by the time and inconvenience (and for less mobile people who dislike escalators, real difficulty) of having to make two surface to underground interchanges. For example a journey from Leyton Midland Road to Crouch Hill comes to mind for which this would be an unreasonable imposition.
18. BGORUG is very mindful of the value of Stratford as an interchange point between TfL Rail from Ilford, LUL and DLR from West Ham, LO towards Highbury and Gospel Oak, and NR to Tottenham Hale. Building on this we draw attention to the value of Tottenham Hale as an interchange point between NR and the replacement buses, particularly as it offers an additional route to and from Stratford.
19. In summary, BGORUG wishes passengers to have the maximum possible flexibility in choosing their alternative journeys, and to have fares protection such that they pay no more than they would pay were the line fully open. As well as providing the best possible solution for each passenger, this principle will enable BGO passengers to be dispersed as widely as possible across normal bus routes, LUL and NR and thus minimise any additional crowding on any one service. This will be to the benefit of passengers generally, and financially to TfL by minimising the need to provide additional resources beyond those needed for the replacement buses.

### **Putting the design considerations into practice**

20. Pulling together the issues discussed above, we recommend that alternative provision should embrace the following points.

### **Rail Replacement buses**

21. Rail Replacement bus services should operate along the full length of the line and should include calls at Tottenham Hale. If the services are divided into eastern and western routes, both should call at Tottenham Hale.
22. When trains are operating between South Tottenham and Gospel Oak, the eastern bus service should call at the entrance to South Tottenham station and be timed to connect with trains. At other times it should terminate at Tottenham Hale to provide an interchange with the western bus service. There are adequate bus stand facilities clear of the bus station in Ashley Road and Burdock Road, and a suitable pick up point outside the station (stop F, Watermead Way).
23. Not only is Tottenham Hale a good location for passengers to connect between the eastern and western routes, but it provides a good link with the NR train service to the vitally important interchange at Stratford,
24. Our understanding of TfL's current proposals for replacement bus services is that the western one would run empty from Seven Sisters to Tottenham Hale for turning purposes, whilst the eastern one would require empty running from Walthamstow to Blackhorse Road station car park (where parking spaces would be reduced) for driver meal reliefs. The additional costs of operating both routes in passenger service to Tottenham Hale should therefore be relatively modest whilst the potential benefits for passengers would be high.
25. Detailed routing of buses may be a compromise between stopping as close as possible to stations and achieving reasonable running times. BGORUG would like to bring its detailed local knowledge to bear on what is planned, and we therefore ask to be consulted before final decisions are taken.
26. Once the routes are finalised, we would then suggest further discussion – perhaps on site with the chosen operator – to identify any additional stopping points which might offer useful interchange with other buses, LUL, LO or NR. An example, on what we understand to be the current plans for the eastern bus service, would be a stop at the western end of Warren Road / Grove Green Road near Leyton Central line station.
27. In the interests of minimising increased journey times, those who would normally be required to 'touch in' and 'touch out' (i.e. PAYG passengers) should not be required to visit stations to do so. TfL should therefore ensure that rail replacement buses have operative card readers, or continue current practice and waive the requirement to 'touch in' at all.
28. Rail replacement buses should have operative I-Bus equipment and should be shown on Countdown screens at bus stops where these are provided.

### Normal service buses

29. At our meeting on 10<sup>th</sup> March TfL suggested that BGO passengers could be permitted to travel on specified normal service buses. Appropriate cash rail tickets would be accepted on the buses. PAYG passengers using more than one specified bus per journey (or – we assume – one specified bus and one or both rail replacement buses) would have their fares protected by an overnight Oyster / Contactless reconciliation which would refund any excess over the appropriate single bus journey fare. Under this system it would not be necessary for BGO passengers to register their cards to obtain the protection, as TfL would accept the revenue loss – presumably modest – from any non BGO passengers who happen to use these particular combinations of routes.
30. However as we see it, a major problem with this is that it would not allow individual BGO passengers the flexibility we seek for them to choose whatever combination of bus (and LUL, LO or NR) routes provides the journey which is most convenient for them. For this system to work it would be necessary for TfL to work out in advance which combinations of routes are permissible. Given the myriad combinations of passengers' real origins and destinations it would be impossible to consider and identify all reasonable options. Also, to allow too many combinations would increase the revenue losses from non BGO passengers and would result in an unwieldy list of routes and permitted boarding points.
31. BGORUG therefore advocates an alternative concept, namely to designate a geographical area (see below) within which BGO PAYG passengers would have fares protection on all buses and LUL, LO and NR routes. To achieve protection would require a two-stage process:
  - a) Bona fide BGO passengers would have to register their cards in advance. Registration would be automatically granted for any card which had been used for a journey on BGO within four weeks prior to a specified date. There could be an appeal process for any applicant who has not used the line within that period, for example if they had been off work because of sickness.
  - b) Registered cards would have a special cap applied, to limit their charge for any journey starting or finishing on any bus or at any station within the designated area to the appropriate normal BGO rail fare – i.e. £1.50 off-peak, and £1.70 peak Zones 2 / 3 & Zones 3 / 4 or £2.40 peak Zones 2 / 4.
32. Registration under this system would be a one-off affair, apart from transferring the registration if a passenger changes their card. BGORUG considers it reasonable to ask passengers to make the effort to register (which should offer on-line, telephone and written options). We would also accept that it means fares protection is limited to existing users and will not be available to passengers who start to use the route after the blockades have started.

### Travel via Zone 1

33. We are pleased that TfL has publicly stated that BGO passengers will be permitted to travel via Zone 1 at no extra charge. Under the principle of allowing BGO passengers a free choice of their best alternative route, there should be no specified limitations on their choice of route apart from a prohibition on exiting / entering a station within Zone 1. However an exception to the latter must apply for recognised OSIs for interchange between LO / NR services and LUL at Euston, St. Pancras / Kings Cross, Liverpool Street and Fenchurch Street / Tower Hill.

34. This arrangement would apply to holders of registered PAYG cards (see above), to holders of cash tickets valid at BGO stations, and to holders of Travelcards who register them using the same criteria as for PAYG cards.

#### The designated area

35. BGORUG suggests that the designated area for use of normal service buses should be bounded by appropriate LUL, LO and NR stations. As an initial rule-of-thumb proposal we would suggest as follows -
36. Upney – Ilford – Leytonstone – Wood Street – Tottenham Hale - Bruce Grove – Turnpike Lane – Hornsey - (Crouch End Broadway + route of bus 41 thence towards Tottenham Hale) – Highgate – Hampstead – Hampstead Heath - Belsize Park – Chalk Farm – Kentish Town West – Kentish Town – Holloway Road - Highbury – Stoke Newington – Clapton – Stratford.
37. Any ticket valid for BGO should be accepted on any bus and at any TfL station within this area, and also on NR between Stratford, Lea Bridge and Tottenham Hale and between Highbury and Hornsey. This would include accepting Freedom Passes on these NR routes without time restrictions.
38. In addition to this designated area and the Zone 1 arrangement, any ticket valid for a journey to or from a BGO station should be accepted via West Ham and Stratford and by any other reasonable LO or TfL Rail route.
39. BGORUG would be pleased to meet TfL to discuss and develop the details of the designated area at the appropriate time. If technical issues make our proposed scheme impracticable, we would wish to discuss alternative means of achieving our objectives.

#### Other issues

40. BGORUG expects there will be a range of detailed issues regarding the BGO blockades, many of which can no doubt be satisfactorily dealt with through TfL's customary procedures for such events. Points we would particularly draw attention to are as follows -
41. Tube maps etc. should be re-issued for both the partial and complete blockades, with BGO distinctively shown as closed.
42. A dedicated information service should be provided with its own phone number and web pages. This should include special versions of the internet journey planner for both the partial and complete blockades which should be available as soon as official publicity is launched. This should enable people to investigate alternative routes without having to select specific dates, and should encourage users to plan on a postcode to postcode basis rather than station to station. This information service should also be the means of dealing with card registration for bona fide existing BGO passengers.
43. In addition to electronic information, individual station posters and leaflets should be provided - or be available for station staff to print from the internet - showing recommended alternative routes to other BGO stations. This provision should extend to North and West London Line stations west of Gospel Oak.
44. BGO stations should remain staffed, with ticket machines open – including for sale of the normal full range of NR tickets. When answering enquiries staff should be encouraged to make use of the special journey planner and encourage passengers to state their origin and destination postcodes.

45. Rail replacement bus stops should be staffed as already provided for in the TfL Rail concession and in the new London Rail Concession contract . Bus stop staff should be equipped with mobile devices to contact a bus control point to obtain information on bus running and report any local problems that occur.
46. Many BGO stations have signs or posters directing passengers to the stops for the existing weekend rail replacement bus services. These will need to be revised take account of any altered routeing for the new services.

### **Conclusion**

47. BGORUG looks forward to working with TfL to ensure the best possible passenger experience during the electrification blockades, and we will be pleased to discuss any issues arising from the proposals in this paper.

*20 March 2016*