

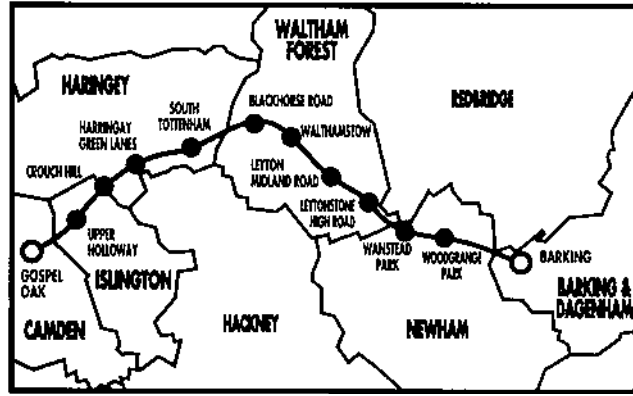
BARKING-GOSPEL OAK LINE USER GROUP

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OVERGROUND MISERY SET TO CONTINUE!

- ❖ **No end to chronic weekday overcrowding**
- ❖ **Weekend engineering closures continue**
- ❖ **Rail replacement buses slashed**
- ❖ **Promised timetable improvements in doubt**
- ❖ **New trains delayed until 2010**

Passengers vent frustrations to rail managers at user group meeting

Frustrated passengers from the beleaguered Barking – Gospel Oak Line made their feelings clear to managers from Transport for London Rail (TfL Rail) and their operator, London Overground Operations Ltd (LOROL) at the meeting of the Barking – Gospel Oak Line User Group (BGOLUG)¹ at Barking Town Hall last Tuesday (10th February).

Managers were warned that such was the frustration of passengers at Leyton Midland Road station at being unable to board their train and being left behind day after day that many were actively discussing mounting some kind of protest action at the station.

Said BGOLUG Vice-Chair Bill Measure, “Passengers at Leyton Midland Road are at the end of their tether. They are fed up with being left behind on the platform day after day as their morning train to work arrives packed solid. Some passengers have started taking the train in the opposite direction to Barking, just to have a chance of a seat when it starts back towards Gospel Oak.”

Similar grievances were aired at a meeting of the Waltham Forest Transport Liaison Consultative Group at Walthamstow Town Hall on Wednesday 11th February, when various residents criticised TfL Rail and Waltham Forest Council for their failure to work in partnership to improve services and stations along the line. The Council was also heavily criticised about the poor, scruffy environment around the entrances of Leyton Midland Road station.

BGOLUG had reluctantly agreed to TfL Rail’s short term proposal to reduce seating to make more room for standing passengers. The existing trains had 18 seats removed last autumn. The user group also put forward carefully considered proposals a year ago to



relieve the worst overcrowding by using a spare train for the busiest hour in the morning and evening². TfL Rail said the scheme was unworkable because Network Rail would not make the additional timetable slots available, even though the freight companies they were allocated to were not using them.

The Department for Transport Rail and Network Rail both contributed £18.5m to a £37m scheme to increase clearances to allow freight trains to carry 9' 6" high cube international shipping containers to and from Willesden over the line, and provide extra signals so that more passenger and freight trains could be run. While the clearances have now been provided for the larger containers, the new signals originally planned to be working by Easter 2009 will not now be ready until late October. This could jeopardise TfL Rail's plans to introduce an increased frequency service (every 15-minutes Monday to Saturday) from September with new trains.

"TfL Rail says that Network Rail is still promising the improved timetable can start in September", said BGOLUG Secretary Richard Pout. "But with Network Rail's poor reputation for delivering projects on time we are not hopeful."

Adding to the weekday misery of overcrowding is the weekend misery of no trains and precious few replacement buses. At the meeting passengers were told that weekend train services would be curtailed or withdrawn almost every weekend until late October. They were also astounded to learn that due to 'budgetary constraints', adding insult to injury, TfL Rail would only be running one bus an hour in place of trains that ran every 20 or 30 minutes.

"You have to ask if TfL Rail is really serious about providing a replacement bus service", continued Richard Pout. "What passenger is going to wait for an hourly bus when they cannot even find out when it is supposed to be running! Information provision at stations is totally inadequate!"

The final blow was delivered when TfL Rail announced that due to delays at the manufacturer, new 2-car diesel trains due in September are now unlikely to be delivered until 2010. TfL Rail undertook to borrow a train from another operator to enable the promised 15-minute Monday to Saturday frequency timetable to operate. "Of course that also depends upon Network Rail completing their signalling work in time", said Richard, adding, "Is this really the way to run our railway?"

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NOTES FOR EDITORS

1. Formed as the Barking – Kentish Town Line Committee to fight Dr. Beeching's closure proposals in the 1960s, the Barking – Gospel Oak Line User Group has continued to represent the line's passengers and campaign for improved services and station facilities, and also for the electrification of the only non-electrified railway in North East London.
2. In early 2008, BGOLUG had worked out a timetable, taking into account LOROL's requirements and those freight trains actually running, showing how to run a passenger train every 15 minutes in each direction for the busiest hour of each peak period.

