

BARKING-GOSPEL OAK LINE USER GROUP

www.barking-gospeloak.org.uk

AUGUST 2007 NEWS UPDATE

MTR Laing Poised to Take Over

TfL have selected MTR Laing Rail to run the London Rail Concession (the existing Silverlink Metro, plus the revamped East London Line) from November. MTRLaing is a joint venture between MTR (operators of the Hong Kong Metro) and Laing Rail (parent company of Chiltern Railways), and the new Managing Director will be Steve Murphy, formerly of Chiltern but more recently on secondment to Irish Rail, where he has been responsible for driving forward a major modernisation programme. We have met both TfL and MTR Laing in recent weeks to discuss their plans, which amount to the most comprehensive, radical and exciting make-over our line has ever had. The headline points are as follows:

- **December 2007:** A modest but welcome start: The current Monday-Friday timetable will also apply on Saturday, with 3 additional services on Mondays-Saturdays and 7 extra on Sundays (exact times to be confirmed).
- **December 2009:** Services stepped up to 4 trains per hour all day Monday-Saturday, using brand-new air-conditioned trains. The internal layout of these will be specified by TfL/MTR Laing with 2+2 seating giving wider gangways, standing areas by the doors and no toilets. Conductors will be able to operate the doors from any door on the train, thus reducing dwell times at stations.
- **December 2010:** Sunday services increased to 4 trains per hour. Services to finish well after midnight on all days.
- **All stations will be restaffed** (from first train to last) from Day One (11th November 2007), by which time all stations will have ticket machines (indeed some are appearing already!). Oyster Pay-As-You-Go will be valid from Day One.
- **All stations to be deep-cleaned** by May 2008, with any deficiencies in existing facilities rectified. This will be followed-up by a 3-year programme of improvements and (where necessary) rebuilding.
- **Improved security** measures on trains and stations.
- **Rebranding** and full marketing & promotion programme.

The existing trains will continue in service on the line until December 2009, but enhancements are planned at Willesden depot to improve both their reliability and cleanliness. One of our main reservations concerns the new trains: whilst it is great news that (for the first time ever) we are to get brand new trains instead of hand-me-downs, under current plans they will initially only be 2 coaches long, with an option to extend them to 3 in the future. **We say now to TfL: Two coaches will not be enough.** The existing trains are already packed at rush hours, and will become busier still once the improvement and marketing programme kicks in. The planned increase from 2 or 3 trains per hour to 4 in December 2009, coupled with the arrival of new modern trains, will encourage still more people to use the line. The new trains will have longer carriages which will be able to carry more passengers, but we bet our bottom dollar that if they are only 2 coaches long, within months TfL will be getting complaints of overcrowding and accusations of not planning ahead properly for the likely growth in traffic. **The new trains need to be 3 coaches long from the outset!**

And Millions to be Spent on Track & Infrastructure Too!

And there's yet more good news.....the Dept for Transport has announced a funding grant of £18.5m to upgrade our line so it can carry more freight from key ports in the South-East, including the new development at Thames Gateway. This work will also benefit our passenger services, as the extra signalling to be installed will facilitate the increase to 4 trains per hour from December 2009. Sadly (and we believe shortsightedly), electrification is not on the immediate agenda, due to lack of support from the rail freight sector, so passengers will suffer all the inconvenience of major engineering work for less-than-optimum gain, due to the current inexplicable antipathy of the rail industry and government to further electrification. We will continue to press strongly for the faster, cleaner and more efficient services that electrification would bring to our line.

But Still No Progress At Walthamstow

In contrast to all the good news, there is a frustrating lack of progress on getting the pedestrian link built between Walthamstow Queens Road and Central stations. This link is now nearly a full decade overdue, and once again seems to have become bogged down in a combination of the Housing Association's delaying tactics, Network Rail's legendary slowness, and Waltham Forest Council's apparent inability to kick either of them into action. The Council is now taking the Housing Association to court, though surely the Association should be putting its money into building much-needed social housing rather than wasting it on trying to wriggle out of something they were supposed to do nearly ten years ago?

Information Please!

We have received a number of complaints recently about a lack of correct, up-dated information on the help-points, help-phone, public address system and departure screens during periods of disruption. If you have a horror story about this please let us know. You can email us from the link on our website.

Date of Next Meeting

Tuesday 18th September, 7:15 pm at Barking Town Hall. Hopefully we shall have representatives of TfL and/or MTR Laing present to give us the latest news. All welcome!

And Finally.....Holidaying in Wales This Summer?

Try and fit in a trip on our rather-more-scenic "twin", the Heart of Wales line, which runs from Swansea and Llanelli up to Craven Arms and Shrewsbury. A lovely run through fine countryside, stopping at many towns and villages en route. Check out www.heart-of-wales.co.uk for all the details!

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