

BARKING-GOSPEL OAK LINE USER GROUP

www.barking-gospeloak.org.uk

AUGUST 2008 NEWS UPDATE

STAND BY FOR SEPTEMBER SHUTDOWN!

At the end of August our line closes for major upgrade works, to increase its freight and passenger capacity and enable more frequent services to be run. **The line will be completely closed** (except for engineering trains) **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 and LOROL's websites (www.tfl.gov.uk and www.lorol.co.uk - there are links to both from ours), or at stations.

Our line's replacement bus service will run in two sections: Barking-Blackhorse Road and Blackhorse Road-Gospel Oak, plus a shuttle between Walthamstow Central and Queens Road. Operators LOROL will be monitoring operations closely and may decide to vary the arrangements in the light of experience, but at least all our stations are now staffed so advice and guidance should be readily available. We shall also put details of any changes on our website. 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 weekly or monthly Travelcard. We shall be monitoring the bus arrangements closely and feeding-back to LOROL and TfL, so please email us via our website with full details of any problems you encounter.

OVERCROWDING

Several of our trains have now had the three-seat rows reduced to two, to give more gangway space and standing room, and the others will be done shortly. This is helpful, but it will only make a small difference to the chronic rush-hour overcrowding (and the line is getting busier and busier at other times too). Quite simply, what we need are more frequent and longer trains – the sooner the better. We are still waiting to hear if we shall get any service improvements when the trains start running again on September 29th. We know that TfL aim to increase the frequency to 4 trains per hour in December 2009 – but experience elsewhere proves that a more frequent service attracts still more passengers. Against this background, the present plan for the new trains to be 2-car only is sheer madness – within weeks the overcrowding will be as bad as it is now. **THE NEW TRAINS MUST BE THREE CARS LONG FROM DAY ONE!**

Meanwhile, local London Assembly member Jennette Arnold recently invited London Mayor Boris Johnson to accompany her and ourselves on a morning peak-time train to see the level of overcrowding for himself. No specific dates had been mentioned, so it was rather surprising to read his reply that he would be unable to do so “due to diary constraints”. This will strike members of a certain age as being distinctly Bunter-esque - “Oh crikey – I say, you chaps, I don't know when you want me to travel on your horrid little line but whenever it is, I'm too busy then!”. More seriously it's completely unsatisfactory. Here we have the London Mayor, who is supposedly a champion of public transport, refusing to face up to a serious problem on the only

section of the National Rail network for which he is directly responsible. Not very impressive, not much of a boost to his image or credibility, and not very helpful if he wants to attract support for extending Mayoral control to more sections of London's rail network.

In response to Mayoral questions, the Mayor has also been trotting out the thoroughly misleading mantra that platform works are planned to enable our line to take 3-car trains from 2010. That actually amounts to a short extension to one platform (the eastbound side at South Tottenham) – but it's no use at all if no 3-car trains have actually been ordered!

ELECTRIFICATION

Pressure to electrify our line continues to mount, for the benefit of both passenger and freight users. We recently wrote to Transport Secretary Ruth Kelly, pointing out that it makes no business or environmental sense to leave 13 miles of unelectrified line surrounded by electrified routes, requiring its own special fleet of diesel trains to operate its passenger services, and requiring long-distance freight trains to be hauled by diesels for miles under electric wires because one short section of their route cannot take electric locomotives. Electrifying it would provide a relatively inexpensive "quick win", bringing benefits far beyond the line's own immediate locality. Her Department wrote back replying that Network Rail were currently re-evaluating the case for electrifying non-electrified sections of line, so we have written to their Chief Executive Iain Coucher making the same points and urging that our line be included in the programme. We received a very prompt acknowledgement (by first class post, no less!) promising a full reply shortly; we shall await that with interest.

MEMBERS INVITED FOR NEW LOROL PASSENGER GROUP

LOROL are setting up a Passenger Group and are inviting people to apply to join it. Details from LOROL's website, or from station staff. (We have a rep on it ourselves, naturally!).

FORTHCOMING MEETINGS

Tuesday August 19th, 16 30 to 19 30: Customer Information session at Blackhorse Road. LOROL staff will be on hand to give information and answer questions, including about the forthcoming engineering shutdown.

Tuesday October 7th, 19 15 at Barking Town Hall: our next open meeting. LOROL and the British Transport Police will be on hand as usual to give updates and take comments and questions. All welcome!

And we are working on adding a Message Board to our website – watch this space!

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