

BARKING-GOSPEL OAK LINE USER GROUP

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NOTICE OF MEETING

THE NEXT BARKING - GOSPEL OAK LINE USER GROUP MEETING IS ON 10TH FEBRUARY 2009 AT BARKING TOWN HALL, STARTING 19.00 HOURS

WINTER 2009 NEWSLETTER

IMPROVING OUR OVERGROUND SERVICES

Progress has been slow to bring in the fundamental changes we have wanted for so long. Big changes are on TfL's agenda too, but sometimes the vast bureaucracy that is TfL, may be stifling initiatives, and sometimes gets in the way of obvious common sense solutions.

But we must be fair, there has been some good progress. On the other hand Overground has been a victim of its own success. The result is serious overcrowding on all routes, not just the Barking-Gospel Oak Line, during peak periods.

We are not convinced TfL has all the right solutions yet.

NEW TRAINS - IN 2010

TfL and LOROL have ordered new trains for all Overground routes, but the credit crunch has caused some delay in the supply chain. Putting that in simple terms there is a train-production bottleneck, partly due to problems with component suppliers. Overground trains are assembled at Derby, and manufacturer Bombardier is being kept busy as train orders are coming in and so their factory is hard at work. Which is a very good thing for what is left of our railway manufacturing industry.

Overground trains are being delayed as the extra trains for Thameslink have to be built first. The first new Overground train came south late last year for testing. It has completed initial operating trials on both the Southend and Uckfield lines to check out both electrical operating systems.

Later this year, the first of the new electric trains should go into service on the Euston to Watford line.

There is no firm date for when the Barking-Gospel Oak Line diesel units will leave the factory, nor news about whether our trains may have three coaches, or just the two as planned. We'll keep you posted, as this may affect the start date of the 15 - minute interval service promised for September.

STATION IMPROVEMENTS

During the first six months of 2008, London Overground stations were given a 'deep clean', and station cleanliness has much improved since LOROL took over management. Cleanliness standards, which are part of the LOROL operating contract are not the same for stations now managed by London Underground, which are not so good

Most of these LU managed stations are between Queens Park and Harrow & Wealdstone, having more frequent Bakerloo Line services. Also Gunnersbury and Kew Gardens come under the District Line. On this side of London, LU manages just Blackhorse Road and Highbury and Islington. Both are at best scruffy, Highbury being rather worse of the two shared with the Victoria line.

TfL and LOROL have asked us what our priorities are for station improvements, even though this year's programme does not include any major station rebuilding of Barking-Gospel Oak Line stations. There is very little information about station refurbishment programme, which still seems rather fluid.

We are asking for the existing blue and grey 'Macemain' style shelters to be improved with lighting, more poster sites and platform shelters. We would even be happy with some recycled second-hand

shelters from North London Line stations like Canonbury and Caledonian Road which should be extensively rebuilt over the coming year. Despite 10 years' use these are still in relatively good condition.

We understand the first priority is to improve staff accommodation, in itself very important, and that should progress over the next six months or so. Signage is to be further improved, but our concern is better notices and information, rather than replacing the quite reasonable '*Temporary Signs*' on the platforms.

LOROL and TfL are looking at all Overground stations, and we need to set out our priorities for what we know is a relatively limited budget. We hope to have a further meeting with LOROL and TfL managers after our meeting on 10th, to discuss their ongoing programme.

Our greatest priority has to be better passenger shelters at more exposed, windswept elevated stations like Harringay, Leyton Midland Rd, Leytonstone and Wanstead Park. Also simple ways to improve, enlarge or replace the brick (or concrete) structures at Blackhorse Road, South Tottenham and Upper Holloway need looking at.

It is disappointing that we cannot expect any major station rebuilding schemes. There is a strong case to look again at modular products which are manufactured to provide simple shelter solutions that are made to a much higher standard than the original basic shelters put up by BR, which have survived an inordinate time at South Hampstead and a couple of other stations.

Lighting is also another important issue, and while some stations are now quite well lit, particularly following the minor improvements undertaken a year ago, others could be better, and in particular shelter areas should be brightly lit; presently they are not.

NORTH LONDON LINE OVERGROUND UPGRADES

Along with work on the Barking-Gospel Oak line, major works are happening on the NLL which will affect passengers changing at Gospel Oak. Posters are advertising weekend engineering work will affect our trains until 25 October, and possibly on to December, while the resignalling work proceeds.

The freight tracks on the NLL are due to close in April 2009, and this will mean more freight trains using the Barking-Gospel Oak Line. While our line can carry some extra freight trains now, we are concerned at the slow progress of the resignalling. This may affect reliability of the existing crowded trains, and may force TfL to delay introducing the 15 minute service in September.

... AND THANKS AGAIN

... to our retired Secretary Graham Larkbey, who had Honorary Life Membership conferred on him at our last meeting. We must thank Graham for his enthusiasm for putting the case to improve our train services in so many letters to local papers and railway journals. The Barking – Gospel Oak Line now has a national profile, due both to its strategic and local importance.

RP/GW 02/09