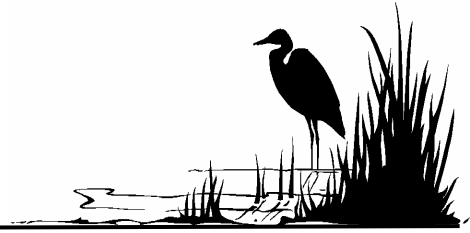


BARKING-GOSPEL OAK LINE USER GROUP

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APPENDIX

MANAGING PASSENGER DEMAND ON THE TOTTENHAM & HAMPSTEAD LINE

HISTORY

The main driver behind the construction of the two railways that make up the Barking – Gospel Oak route of today was the establishment of an alternative route to the Thames-side docks at London and Tilbury for freight traffic.

Passenger facilities were provided from the outset, but there seemed little idea, at first, as to what services would be required by the populace of the dense residential areas that surrounded many of the stations along the route. The growing bus and tram services, unimpeded by today's congestion along with the growing tube network all contributed to 'creaming off' some of the passenger traffic that might otherwise have used the line.

From 1868 when the Highgate Road-Tottenham section opened and 1894 when the South Tottenham-Woodgrange Park section opened, there were many and varied services. Services ran from Moorgate and St. Pancras to Barking, East Ham, Southend and Hunstanton (it was once known as "The Royal Route"), from Highgate Road to Stratford and Fenchurch Street, Gospel Oak to Chingford and South Tottenham to Victoria via Blackfriars!

By WWII the services had settled down to four St. Pancras-Barking-Southend trains a day, with local services between St. Pancras, Kentish Town and Barking or East Ham. Through services to Southend ended in 1962 while all local services were diverted to Barking from the end of 1958. During the 1960s diesel railcars maintained the Kentish Town-Barking service with a few trains to and from St. Pancras until the close of 1966. Apart from the change of western terminus from Kentish Town to Gospel Oak in 1981 little else has changed.

SERVICE PROVISION IN THE LATTER HALF OF THE 20TH CENTURY

Up until the 1980s, the route always had competition from good local tram, trolleybus and motorbus services and to a lesser extent from tube and radial rail services. Trains were never less than three coaches, though they never ran more frequently than half-hourly and hourly intervals were more common. One exception was the summer Sunday diesel railcar service of the 1960s, which ran every 15-minutes to Barking in the morning, for connections to Southend and every 15-minutes back to Kentish Town in the evenings.

In the 1980s trains were generally 2-car Diesel Multiple Units (DMUs), operating a half-hourly service during the day with an hourly evening service which finished around 22:00, compared with a somewhat irregular all night service which had survived into the 1950s. Sunday services were confined to the Summer Timetable. At this time the service had a definite peak flow from Barking and intermediate stations towards Gospel Oak in the mornings and back in the evenings. In spite of the “secret railway” nature of the line, growing traffic congestion was making the infrequent service more attractive to commuters, as providing the train turned up the journey time was far shorter than any alternative and many passengers were prepared to wait for an hour for a train because of this.

As the 1980s gave way to the 1990s passenger numbers continued to grow slowly while the reliability of the service declined. The route was managed by two British Rail regions, the London Midland west of Crouch Hill and the Eastern (later Anglia) Crouch Hill and points east. Each region provided station and signal staff for its section, the London Midland provided train crews from St. Pancras and the Western Region supplied the trains from Old Oak Common. Consequently these two regions made sure their own services were resourced before allocating crews or trains to the Barking-Gospel Oak route. The line was “nobody’s baby”.

Sectorisation saw the administration of the route pass to “Network North” at Watford in 1993 along with those services that passed to Silverlink upon privatisation in 1996. The ‘Networker Turbo revolution’ at Old Oak Common passed the line by as Bletchley TMD became responsible for train provision from a collection of aging Modernisation Plan DMUs. The 08:08 from Barking, when it ran, was regularly carrying 200 passengers, many standing in the brake van. The Barking-Gospel Oak Line Committee, formed to fight closure proposals in the 1960s, pressed for Class 150 *Sprinters* to replace the increasingly unreliable “heritage” DMUs and together with the newly formed Waltham Forest Transport Action Group pressed for service improvements.

A passenger survey by the volunteers found great demand for more frequent services and general dissatisfaction with reliability, with many stories of passengers making long journeys to work by bus in the morning when reliability mattered but getting the train home in the evening. The make-up of the passengers on the route is largely of the blue-collar type and in spite of the continuance of Thames-side industry there is still a flow from the Upminster-Dagenham area to the surviving industry around Blackhorse Road as well as more local passengers joining the Victoria Line. White-collar usage of the line has increased, the number of schools and further education establishments along the line aiding this. The main morning passenger destinations are Upper Holloway and Gospel Oak, for onward journeys via the North London Line, apart from the large Gospel Oak school traffic. There is also much short distance intermediate traffic.

The pressure from the transport campaigners and local boroughs won gradual improvements, generally in the extension of the half-hourly frequency by a train or two and a slightly later last train. But it was at the turn of the century that the biggest constraint to passenger demand, reliability, was removed. Class 150 *Sprinter* DMUs were finally allocated to the route.

THE NEW MILLENNIUM

The Class 150 *Sprinter* DMUs were 15 years old, grubby and had variable reliability upon receipt from Central Trains, but after a light overhaul in Glasgow and growing familiarity by the Bletchley fitters reliability soon exceeded even the best periods of the “heritage” units. Patronage of the trains slowly began to grow again. Other factors were the reintroduction of an all year Sunday service and an improved, though far from perfect train running information system. Service frequency and lack of capacity were probably the main constraints upon traffic growth. The Class 150 *Sprinters* had less seats than the last ‘heritage’ units used on the line, the Class 117s, and the nearest thing to a brake van on a Class 150 was the former parcels area which was supposed to be available for four bicycles.

None the less, passenger overcrowding began causing the Barking-Gospel Oak Line User Group (BGOLUG) concern and in 2005 the group began seriously pressing Silverlink for the *Sprinters* to be reformed as 3-car sets or for a 20-minute frequency service, at least in the peaks, to be introduced. The Group received the whole hearted support of London TravelWatch (LTW) who found that at least 260 passengers were now crammed into the 08:08 from Barking. LTW arranged a meeting between BGOLUG, Silverlink, Transport for London (TfL) and Network Rail. The upshot was that TfL agreed to fund two morning and one evening extra weekday trains from 12th December 2005, along with the winter Sunday and some late evening trains they were already funding. These trains only eased the overcrowding, it now becoming clear that the latent passenger demand for the route was such that as new capacity was provided it was quickly filled. This has been confirmed by the fact that just over a year following the introduction of a peak 20-minute frequency service funded by TfL, introduced on 12th June 2006, peak trains were again seriously overcrowded. The decline in reliability as the Silverlink era drew to a close causing large numbers of passengers to be left behind at stations by the next train following a cancellation and again stories being told of passengers deserting the service in the mornings in favour of a longer, but more reliable bus journey.