

# LONDON OVERGROUND DEVELOPMENTS

by Wayne Asher

*Editor's note: Back in August 2014, Wayne kindly addressed the Society on London Overground and the report was published in Underground News No.635, pages 595-596. These notes bring readers up to date.*

## BARKING RIVERSIDE

Work is soon to start on the Overground extension to Barking Riverside after the planning inspector recommended approving TfL's Transport and Works Act Order application, and Whitehall gave its approval.

The extension will be 4.5 km long, and Gospel Oak – Barking trains will move from the terminal platform No.1 at Barking to the c2c platforms 7/8, and follow their track east for around 2 km. After passing under the Renwick Road bridge the line will divert south to a station serving a 10,800 housing development on the site of the former Barking power station. There is passive provision for a future station near Renwick Road to serve Overground trains.

Development at this vast but remote site has been stalled because planning rules ban housing developments of that size without acceptable transport. The 2007 planning permission for the development was predicated on the basis of a DLR extension from Gallions Reach to Dagenham Dock, which Boris Johnson canned a year later through lack of cash.

In view of London's housing crisis, TfL tried with a Plan B to extend Overground to the new development. Extending Hammersmith & City trains was ruled out due to power compatibilities.

The plan is fully funded: £172m of the cost will come from Barking Riverside Ltd., a Greater London Assembly and London & Quadrant Housing Association joint venture, with £91m coming direct from TfL through the 2016 business plan.

A shortlist of contractors has already been drawn up and services could start in 2021, bringing the journey to Fenchurch Street down from 55 to 34 minutes.

At the same time, the tortuous electrification process on the Gospel Oak – Barking line is edging forward with services due to start next year. Instead of the overcrowded two-coach diesels, four-coach electrics will nearly double capacity. The trains – to be known as class 710 – are being built by Bombardier at Derby and are due for delivery next Spring, when the new service can finally commence.

TfL – and its passengers – have sweated blood to phase out north London's diesel island. Electrification was blocked in 2008 due to the difficulty of upgrading a line with so many bridges and viaducts. In 2012 Whitehall continued to dig its heels in on cost, arguing that a £40m estimate from TfL should really have been £90m.

Only in 2013 did George Osborne finally agree to the plan when he added £90m to £25m TfL had already offered, suggesting that some of the early estimates really would have heavily understated the cost. In fact, it was, mile for mile, one of the most expensive electrification projects Network Rail has done.

A major issue is that the project scope was as much a civil engineering one, with substantial track lowering works needed, as a purely electrification led one. The line was closed between Barking and South Tottenham on 4 June 2016, closure between there and Gospel Oak followed on 24 September. Diesel trains were not restored until 27 February this year.

Further closures will be needed over a series of weekends and weeks later this year, to complete the installation of structures and overhead wires needed to power new electric trains set to arrive in early 2018.

Delays to the work, which started in July last year, included incorrect design and late delivery of the huge masts and structures to carry power cables, with TfL saying it was "extremely disappointed" and would be seeking compensation from Network Rail.

## NIGHT OVERGROUND AND OTHER NEWS

December's launch of weekend 24 hour operation on part of London Overground reminds us that the Orange line continues to make progress, despite TfL's inevitable focus on Crossrail.

From December, trains will run from New Cross Gate to Dalston Junction, before being extended to Highbury & Islington in 2018. TfL is in control here as, unlike the rest of the Overground network, there are no paths taken up by Network Rail freight. However, night trains will not stop at Whitechapel until 2018, because of Crossrail work.

Overground is now operated by a new concessionaire, Arriva, which took over from the MTR/Arriva joint venture last year. The £1.5 billion contract runs for 7½ years with an option to extend for up to two more. As before, TfL sets service levels and takes the revenue risk and pays Arriva to run the service.

The deal included a pre-priced package of extra options including 24-hour weekend service and Boxing Day running for some sections. Arriva will now get penalised if Overground is affected by National Rail incidents – something designed to give Arriva a financial incentive to push back harder on Network Rail. The handover saw TfL pick up a £9m bonus in the former of a higher profit share after the final accounting settlement.

For Q3 2016/17 the Public Performance Measure was second best in the UK and there were 132.9m passenger journeys. This was only a 2 per cent increase on Q3 2015/16 – but the Barking – Gospel Oak section had been closed for much of this period.

In the meantime, TfL has been working on its wish-list for HLOS3 – the High Level Output Specification which will guide Network Rail's capital spending from 2019 to 2024. This excludes monster projects like Crossrail 2 and those where Network Rail is not involved, like the Bakerloo Line extension.

Its wish list comes out at £3.6 billion, including proposals to increase frequency on the East London section to 24 trains per hour, to be achieved, it seems, by improved signalling. Also proposed is a mixture of train and platform lengthening and/or frequency increases on the North and West London lines. However, talk of running Overground trains onto the Hounslow Loop is definitely deferred until post-2024.

There still is nothing about the original 2001 aspiration to run a Stratford – Primrose Hill – Queen's Park service. There must be a good chance, however, that the HS2 works at Euston will demand that some or all of the Watford services are diverted to Stratford over this chord.

An Access All Areas project to provide step free access for West Hampstead, and at the difficult Brondesbury station is also recommended. Station improvements are called for at Hackney Central and Dalston Kingsland to curb overcrowding which is an unfortunate consequence of such a popular and efficient service.

TfL's HLOS3 submission also calls for a 'review' of the project to build two Overground stations to serve the Crossrail/HS2 interchange at Old Oak Common. The Mayor had demanded an Overground link here as his price for supporting HS2 and in 2014 TfL put detailed options out for consultation, and the latest draft of the Mayor's Transport Strategy refers to 'potentially new stations at Old Oak', but the project is by no means assured.

Sadiq Khan has already inherited a 'mess' (his words) from Boris Johnson. It turns out that the newly built £142m Crossrail depot sits on prime development land at the heart of the Old Oak site. With no relocation or engineering solutions to allow decking over this, valuable development land has been lost, and the ability to create an attractive place has been compromised. Unfortunately, the political climate for capital investment is worsening. Whitehall cuts mean TfL has to save £2.8bn over the five years starting in 2017/18. It was hugely significant that Crossrail 2 didn't even get a mention in the 2017 Tory election manifesto. Sadiq Khan may well find he has a fight on his hands to get the money London needs.