

GREATER LONDON AUTHORITY

Mayor's Office

City Hall
The Queen's Walk
More London
London SE1 2AA
Switchboard: 020 7983 4000
Minicom: 020 7983 4458
Web: www.london.gov.uk

Valerie Shawcross CBE AM

City Hall
The Queen's Walk
More London
London SE1 2AA

Our ref: MGLA020810-6709

Date: 18 OCT 2010

Dear Val

Re: Transport Committee's review into the delivery of improvements to London's orbital rail network

Thank you for your letter of 29 July and for the Assembly's support of Transport for London's work to upgrade the London Overground network. I apologise for the delay in responding to you. As you note, there is still more work to be done, however, some vital improvements have been made since November 2007.

I note the Committee's point on passenger input and I can reassure you that TfL London Rail is committed to engaging with its stakeholders and has a number of processes in place for doing so. As well as attending User Group and Local Authority Transport Liaison meetings, TfL and London Overground Rail Operations Ltd (LOROL) host regular passenger and stakeholder update meetings. In the past, officers have also sought input from relevant local stakeholders when planning bus replacement services. Additionally, they are in the process of developing an electronic newsletter to keep stakeholders informed about services and improvements to the network to complement the information that is already available via the TfL website.

However, although stakeholder input can be very valuable, we have to be realistic about the level of ideas that can be sustained from user groups and individuals. As you are fully aware, resources are very constrained and responding to such proposals can be extremely time-consuming. Therefore, it is only possible (and fair) for TfL to consult on decisions where there is real opportunity for stakeholders to influence the outcome.

I shall now respond to the specific recommendations in your letter.

Reducing closures and improving information and alternative travel arrangements for passengers.

We understand that the lengthy closure of part of the Richmond to Stratford line between February and June this year will have generated significant disruption for passengers. However, the closure was essential to upgrade the line to allow longer trains and more frequent services to run. TfL works closely with Network Rail and other rail industry partners to ensure closures are absolutely necessary and disruption to passengers is minimised. Closures are always accompanied by a comprehensive communications campaign to ensure passengers are provided with information about the services affected and alternative travel options. These details are always made available on TfL's website and Journey Planner, via email alerts to registered users and the weekly press notice and Metro pages.

GREATER LONDON AUTHORITY

In your letter you refer to the latest National Passenger Survey figures which were carried out during the suspension of London Overground services when replacement buses were in operation. For this reason it is understandable that passenger satisfaction wasn't as high as usual. You also mention that the West London Line Group indicated that inadequate information was provided to passengers about the timing of these works, but this is in contrast to research conducted for London Overground, which indicated that 75% of passengers were aware of the closures beforehand and 86% were aware of the rail replacement buses to complete their journey.

In response to the points raised by the Barking–Gospel Oak Line Users Group, TfL was aware of the crowding on this line during the closure, however, running additional services was simply not possible due to the heavy freight usage on the line. I am pleased to advise that the new class 172 diesel trains have now started to enter service and from January 2011 services will run every 15 minutes Monday to Saturday all day. I can also reassure you that Network Rail's resignalling works on the North London Line are on course for completion by May 2011.

Developing London Overground stations particularly interchange stations

Although the DfT have had to cut their "Better Stations" programme, which will affect Clapham Junction and Barking stations, London Overground is continuing with its comprehensive programme of station enhancements. These will provide additional Help points, increased CCTV, better lighting and enhanced customer information systems at all stations, including interchanges. Willesden Junction station - which is a major interchange between different London Overground routes and London Underground - benefits from a large canopy area, passenger toilets and is fully accessible since becoming step free. Gospel Oak station - a key interchange between London Overground services - has recessed waiting rooms and a large canopy and will soon have an accessible toilet for passengers.

We are in agreement with the North Orbital Rail Partnership (NORP) about the importance of promoting the interchange between Hackney Central and Hackney Downs stations. As a key interchange during the 2012 Olympic and Paralympic Games, we see accessibility improvements and improving connections between both stations as paramount and London Rail is exploring the possibility of a modular walkway scheme to improve the interchange between the two stations. The scheme - which has strong stakeholder support - is affordable and offers good value for money and TfL continues to work with stakeholders to find funding.

Unfortunately, the 207 bus, which you specifically mention in your letter, is unable to stop closer to Acton Central station, as the road geometry would cause particular problems for a high frequency bus service.

With regard to improving information at stations, I am pleased to advise you that as a result of the Train Operating Companies (TOC) summit, TfL, ATOC and London TOCs now work more closely to share service information more effectively. TfL and ATOC have agreed a project programme to consolidate the various rail network maps at stations and conduct passenger research to identify requirements for a new map. Additionally, rail engineering works are now more visible on the TfL website and links have been improved between the National Rail Enquiries and TfL sites. TfL and ATOC web teams now meet on a quarterly basis to discuss future opportunities.

GREATERLONDONAUTHORITY

As you are well aware, I am keen to encourage cycling and am pleased to report that London Overground is making good progress installing and increasing cycle parking facilities at their stations. Of the 55 stations managed by LOROL some 43 stations (78%) benefit from cycle parking facilities. Of the 12 stations which do not have cycle parking within the station boundary, 7 stations have nearby local authority cycle storage. Although we would like to be able to provide parking at all stations, in some cases it is just not possible as there is limited space available for cycle racks within the station footprint.

TfL continues to work with the London Boroughs to seek station access improvements through the Local Implementation Plans (LIPs) funding, and this includes a scheme proposed at Sydenham. Station improvements are also being made via major projects. For example, a wayfinding scheme is being implemented for the new London Overground East London route; Crystal Palace station is being rebuilt; and station works are underway at Canonbury and Highbury & Islington stations as part of the northern extension of the network to Highbury & Islington.

Furthermore, we continue to seek accessibility improvements through the DfT's Access for All programme. The DfT has announced three tranches of step-free access schemes across the whole of England and Wales and the current programme, if adhered to, "expires" in 2015. However, the programme is currently under review by the government as part of the Comprehensive Spending Review.

A next phase of Access for All beyond 2015 is likely to be part of the DfT's next High Level Output Specification (HLOS) settlement for the railways, although the DfT is not yet seeking recommendations. In the meantime, London Rail is working with the DfT, industry partners and stakeholders to develop their HLOS2 proposals, and has identified a priority list of 20 stations for future step-free investment. Details of TfL's work on step-free stations were included in its submission to the Transport Committee's recent investigation into the accessibility of the transport network.

TfL also continues to make the case for further improvements to the London Overground network and to other National Rail stations in London via close engagement with the DfT and Network Rail on the National Stations Improvement Programme (NSIP). NSIP forms part of the government's four-year funding settlement for the rail industry. We are currently in 'Control Period 4' which covers the period from 2009 to 2014. The outputs the government requires from this period were specified in the HLOS, alongside the Statement of Funds Available. The HLOS fixed the amount of money for the NSIP programme for 2009 to 2014, and TfL lobbied for the listed London stations to be included. It is a fixed programme rather than a "long list" and changes only arise when, for whatever reason, schemes fail to come to fruition. Network Rail is otherwise committed to delivering those schemes, subject to availability of third party funding where appropriate. At Clapham Junction TfL has helped to specify the Access for All and NSIP scheme, and to work with the local authority and other third party funders to develop a workable, funded scheme.

As with the Access for All programme, the NSIP programme is under review as part of the Comprehensive Spending Review. However, TfL continues to lobby for investment in London and it is currently working with industry partners to develop the priorities for the next NSIP programme for Control Period 5 (from 2014 to 2019), which is due to be announced in summer 2012 through a second High Level Output Specification.

GREATER LONDON AUTHORITY

Improving work between organisations involved in the orbital rail network

TfL London Rail values engagement with local stakeholders and user groups, who provide important input about how to improve London Overground services. A range of mechanisms already exists to enable this exchange of information, as referred to earlier in this letter. In the event of NORP being disbanded, TfL will continue to arrange meetings with the relevant boroughs and user groups.

I acknowledge the suggestions of the Barking – Gospel Oak Users Group for later trains on the Gospel Oak to Barking line. The last eastbound train terminates at Barking at 23:41hrs and westbound 23:53hrs but there would need to be clear demand for later trains.

In response to the proposal from the West London Line Group to resume services to Gatwick, London Rail believes the existing Southern service along the West London line calling all stations to Croydon serves a useful purpose and is a good use of both scarce track capacity and dual voltage trains. However, its extension beyond the London boundary to Gatwick is a matter for the Department for Transport and such a decision is likely to be at the cost of another service. Furthermore, trains would be limited to four car length because of the short platforms on the West London line and running dual voltage trains further south of Croydon would also mean trains would have to be taken away from Thameslink. I would also like to highlight that since London Overground started operating on the West London line, passengers have benefited from additional peak trains and new stations at Imperial Wharf and Shepherds Bush.

The future of the South London Line

Although my recent letter to the Secretary of State about the outcome of the South London Line study asked if, in the event of Thameslink being delayed, it would be possible to retain links from the South London Line corridor to London Bridge; unfortunately this particular question was not acknowledged in Philip Hammond's reply.

However, the withdrawal of the existing South London Line service in 2012 is specified in Southern's franchise and therefore, were it to be retained, an amendment to the franchise specification would be required and funding to operate the service would need to be found. As you are aware, the savings from not operating this service (over ten years) have been allocated by the DfT to the London Overground extension to Clapham Junction. Furthermore, a timetabling study conducted by Network Rail has identified difficulties associated with operating the new London Overground services and the existing South London Line services together.

We will work with the Department and the Southeastern train operator to try to ensure, at the very least, an interim solution to the issues brought about by the Thameslink works at London Bridge. The current proposed solution (of stopping existing Kent services at additional stations) addresses at least some of the concerns raised by the forthcoming service changes but I fully recognise that it is not ideal. It cannot address the gaps in service at Wandsworth Road and Clapham High Street stations because the trains are too long to call at these short platforms. However, we have still been unable to find a solution to this issue which is affordable and provides value for money in the context of a Spending Review that is likely to be the tightest in a generation.

GREATERLONDONAUTHORITY

To address the situation in the longer term, TfL will also press for the study's full recommended proposed service package (Option 7) to be specified in the next Southeastern franchise when it comes up to be re-let.

Future priorities for investment including the electrification of the Gospel Oak to Barking line

I am pleased that you acknowledge the difficult financial times in which we currently find ourselves. In the case of progressing the electrification of the Gospel Oak to Barking line, TfL has offered to contribute 50 per cent of the cost of an engineering study to fully quantify costs and risks, enabling the business case to be finalised and the affordability of the project to be considered further. However, we have been unable to obtain the balance of the costs from other sources.

The electrification of this route would indeed bring benefits to TfL but it would bring even more to the rail industry more generally, notably rail freight. In fact, 75 per cent of the benefits generated by the project accrue to freight, which is why it is appropriate that this scheme is planned and funded at a national level. We are very keen to see this project go ahead and we will continue to work with the DfT and Network Rail to try to resolve the outstanding issues.

I thank you again for highlighting the significant progress that TfL London Rail is making in delivering a truly orbital rail network around the capital and in raising the standards of service across the London Overground network. I understand that London Rail's Head of Strategy has already provided the Transport Committee with a briefing on TfL's proposals for the Government's next High Level Output Specification, including how an extension of Mayoral powers could extend London Overground standards to the rest of the rail network in London. We keenly await the outcome of the Comprehensive Spending Review, which will determine the future of so many of our important work programmes.

Yours ever,



Boris Johnson
Mayor of London