

Boris Johnson  
Mayor of London

**29 July 2010**

Dear Mayor

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

I am writing, on behalf of the Transport Committee, to set out the findings from our recent review into the delivery of improvements to the orbital rail network.

**Overview of our findings**

We are very supportive of TfL's ongoing work to improve London Overground services. We recognise that the development of an orbital rail network which will link 20 London Boroughs and result in around one-third of Londoners living within 15 minutes of a London Overground station has an important role to play in the capital's public transport system. We believe it should help address the growth in demand for public transport, reducing overcrowding and congestion on other transport modes including the Tube.

Our review has shown that, whilst the network is being improved, passengers may not yet be experiencing all the benefits nor being given sufficient opportunity to contribute their views and ideas for enhancing the network further. Whilst this is a period of financial constraints, there is clearly a need for more investment in the network if it is to realise its full potential. There is also a need for improved working between all the organisations involved in the operation of the network. We note that, in your recently published proposals for more powers, you are seeking a greater role in relation to suburban rail lines in order to address variations in the transport systems currently operated by Network Rail and TfL.<sup>1</sup> We would welcome hearing how these additional powers might also help develop existing London Overground services.

**Background information**

Our review has focused on the scope for further work to maximise the benefits from recent improvements to the orbital rail network and develop it further in future. We have explored all parts of the network (the Gospel Oak to Barking line, the North London line, the West London line, the Watford DC line and the East London line), receiving views and information from various organisations. These have been provided in writing and at our meeting in May when we heard from, and questioned, representatives of TfL London Rail and various local borough and passenger groups. A copy of all written submissions we have received is enclosed with this letter. The transcript of our meeting can be found on the website at:

<http://legacy.london.gov.uk/assembly/transport/2010/may26/minutes/appendix-B.rtf>

The remainder of this letter sets out our findings in detail. It builds on our previous work relating to the orbital rail network including the report *London's Forgotten Railway* (March 2006). In this, we urged the previous Mayor to develop long-term plans to improve the service and stations on the network (or North London railway) prior to TfL assuming responsibility for this in 2007. We hope our

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<sup>1</sup> The Mayor of London's proposals for devolution, June 2010, page 7 and page 12



findings will inform your and TfL's future work to develop London Overground services including any future submission to Government for further funding under the High Level Output Specification (HLOS) 2 process.

We would welcome receiving your response to this letter by 30 September 2010. We also welcome receiving responses from any of the other organisations which are being sent copies of this letter.

## **Our findings in detail**

### *Reducing closures and improving information and alternative travel arrangements for passengers*

Following the recent closures of the North London line which generated significant disruption for passengers, we are keen to ensure that future closures of the network are kept to a minimum. Where these are unavoidable, passengers need to be provided with sufficient alternative travel arrangements and information. The importance of this is highlighted by the results for London Overground in the most recent national survey of rail passengers (Spring 2010) conducted by Passenger Focus. London Overground recorded the lowest overall passenger satisfaction rating of all the train operating companies (72 per cent). Passenger Focus has suggested that this could, at least in part, be due to the major engineering works that have been taking place on the North London line.<sup>2</sup>

Some passenger groups have raised concerns in relation to recent closures. The Barking-Gospel Oak Line User Group has highlighted overcrowding on the Gospel Oak to Barking Line as a result of the North London line closure and expressed disappointment that Network Rail's resignalling work on this line has fallen behind schedule. It has sought reassurance that all improvements to the line will be delivered by May 2011 so passengers do not have to endure further closures and disruption.<sup>3</sup> The West London Line Group has suggested inadequate information has been provided to passengers about the timings for engineering works on the West London line and the alternative services operated by other train operating companies from stations on this line.

Whilst services have recently resumed on the North London line, there will be some further closures to this line in late 2010 and early 2011 and weekend closures on all parts of the network until 2011.<sup>4</sup> At our meeting, we asked TfL about the scope to reduce such closures. It subsequently told us it had pressed Network Rail about the need for blanket Sunday closures on the West London line.<sup>5</sup> We welcome this step and hope Network Rail will work to reduce such closures. It is important that all the organisations work together to minimise future closures and ensure alternative travel arrangements and information are provided for passengers. We do not want people to have bad experiences of the network which dissuade them from using it now and in the long-term.

**We recommend that TfL, Network Rail and relevant train operating companies review the programme of future planned closures on the orbital rail network with a view to minimising these wherever possible and, where closures are necessary, ensuring passengers are provided with detailed alternative travel arrangements and information. This should include, where relevant, full details of alternative services provided by other train operating companies. At the least, TfL should ensure such information is included in its weekly e-bulletin on weekend engineering works and in its online journey planner.**

<sup>2</sup> National Passenger Survey Spring 2010, Passenger Focus, page 55

<sup>3</sup> Transcript of Transport Committee meeting on 26 May 2010, page 27

<sup>4</sup> TfL press release PN 150, 1 June 2010

<sup>5</sup> Letter to Transport Committee from Ian Brown of TfL, 8 July 2010



### *Developing London Overground stations particularly interchange stations*

We welcome recent improvements to London Overground stations and also the areas immediately outside these stations. The North Orbital Rail Partnership (NORP) has highlighted to us local boroughs' work to improve such areas including introducing improved access schemes using TfL's boroughs partnership funding.<sup>6</sup>

At this time of constraints on public funding, we recognise plans to improve stations may come under pressure. Indeed, it was recently reported that proposals for improving platforms 9-14 of Clapham Junction station under Network Rail's 'Better Stations' scheme have been shelved.<sup>7</sup> Nevertheless, we hope you will continue to make the case for funding improvements to London Overground stations, particularly those interchange stations already included in the long-list for Network Rail's 'national stations improvement programme.' Namely Crystal Palace, Norwood Junction, West Croydon and Barking and also, as part of the East London line extension phase 2, Denmark Hill, Peckham Rye and Queen's Road Peckham.

Many people have suggested focusing on improving the interchange stations. In part, this accords with proposal 46 in your Transport Strategy where you state your intention to prioritise improvements to strategic interchanges including providing opportunities for orbital public transport services.<sup>8</sup> Some organisations which have highlighted the scope to develop interchange stations are detailed below.

- London TravelWatch has argued that the "easiest and quickest wins" for improving the network further are to develop the interchange stations. It suggests the public might not know about the options for orbital journeys at interchange stations such as Stratford, Hackney Downs/Hackney Central, West Hampstead, Willesden Junction, Clapham Junction and Richmond, particularly if journeys involve using more than one transport operator's service.<sup>9</sup>
- NORP has highlighted the importance of promoting the interchange between Hackney Downs and Hackney Central. It also suggests improvements to facilities at other links between the London Overground and bus services such as at Acton Central where the main arterial bus route (207) is some distance away from the station.<sup>10</sup>
- The Barking-Gospel Oak Line Users' Group has raised the importance of improving facilities at interchange stations. It believes these stations should have warm, comfortable shelters for people waiting to change trains to encourage more passengers.<sup>11</sup>

In the long-term we are keen to see the provision of cycle parking facilities at all London Overground stations. Although TfL has taken steps to introduce cycle parking facilities, we are disappointed that in the programme recently provided, 15 of the 52 London Overground stations listed (or 28 per cent) are not expected to have cycle parking installed within the station area. Given your emphasis on encouraging more cycling, we hope that every effort will be made to introduce cycle parking at all stations at the earliest opportunity. At our meeting TfL reported it would consider the planned cycle parking programme with a view to "oomping it up a bit where it is a bit latent."<sup>12</sup>

We are also keen that every effort is made to ensure London Overground stations have step-free access. Whilst we recognise that this can be expensive it is nevertheless desirable to ensure as many Londoners as possible have the opportunity to use the network. In our ongoing investigation into accessibility of the wider transport network, we are exploring this and other, less costly, measures that

<sup>6</sup> Transcript of Transport Committee meeting on 26 May 2010, page 27

<sup>7</sup> Clapham Junction revamp falls victim to austerity axe, The Evening Standard, 29 June 2010

<sup>8</sup> The Mayor's Transport Strategy, May 2010, page 347

<sup>9</sup> Written submission from London TravelWatch, May 2010

<sup>10</sup> Transcript of Transport Committee meeting on 26 May 2010, page 43

<sup>11</sup> Transcript of Transport Committee meeting on 26 May 2010, page 43

<sup>12</sup> Transcript of Transport Committee meeting on 26 May 2010, page 23



could be taken to improve accessibility. We intend to publish our report and recommendations in the next few months. This is likely to cover London Overground in addition to other TfL services.

**We request that in response to this letter you provide details of the steps you are taking to ensure improvements to the London Overground stations long-listed in Network Rail's 'national stations improvement programme' are progressed and what further actions you intend to take to develop London Overground stations. This should include specific proposals to ensure information is made available to passengers on the range of travel options available at interchange stations.**

### *Improving work between organisations involved in the orbital rail network*

We have heard that improved working between TfL, Network Rail, the Department for Transport and various train operating companies could help maximise the benefits of recent improvements to the orbital rail network. For example, the West London Line Group has suggested that TfL, Southern and South West Trains could improve the provision of information to passengers about services available at Clapham Junction station and that TfL and other rail operators could work more closely in the timetabling of services. It argues that if the West London line is to realise its true potential, there will need to be better integrated working between all the organisations involved including TfL, Department for Transport, Network Rail, Southern and London Underground.<sup>13</sup> At our meeting, TfL told us it "really wanted to integrate London Overground services in terms of planning and also in terms of day-to-day operation."<sup>14</sup> We welcome this commitment and any actions that can be taken to enhance closer working to improve the service provided to passengers.

In addition, we are also keen to ensure local borough and passenger groups have a regular opportunity to hear about developments with the network and contribute their views and suggestions. Many local groups who draw directly from the experiences of users of the network have insights and suggestions for minor as well as major changes which could help enhance the network. For example, the Barking-Gospel Oak Line User group has argued for later last train times as a step towards improving the service.<sup>15</sup> The West London Line Group has some proposals for timetable alterations to improve passenger services.<sup>16</sup> Other organisations have also suggested the reinstatement or development of new services on the network. For example, the Royal Borough of Kensington & Chelsea has suggested the resumption of a service to Gatwick Airport on the West London Line would be welcomed by passengers.<sup>17</sup>

We have heard that, as part of TfL's review of its funded partnerships, the leading borough organisation for orbital rail, NORP, may cease to exist from April 2011. This could further reduce the scope for local views and suggestions to be obtained. We suggest, therefore, that TfL identify a suitable mechanism whereby it engages regularly with all relevant organisations and passengers to discuss developments with the orbital rail network. This might take various forms including a forum that meets frequently. Such a mechanism could help address concerns raised by local groups about existing consultation. For example, the Barking-Gospel Oak Line User group has queried how TfL currently communicates and works with relevant stakeholders. It has argued that TfL should work more closely with passenger groups, local authorities and other business/regeneration groupings and partnerships in developing the orbital rail network.<sup>18</sup>

<sup>13</sup> West London Line Group written submission, April 2010

<sup>14</sup> Transcript of Transport Committee meeting on 26 May 2010, page 30

<sup>15</sup> [www.barking-gospel oak.org.uk](http://www.barking-gospel oak.org.uk)

<sup>16</sup> West London Line Group written submission, April 2010

<sup>17</sup> Transcript of Transport Committee meeting on 26 May 2010, page 41

<sup>18</sup> Barking Gospel Oak Users Group written submission, May 2010



**We suggest TfL identifies a mechanism which provides for all organisations responsible for the orbital rail network, including Network Rail, and for all interested parties, including relevant London Boroughs , local passenger groups and individual passengers, to share news about existing services and ideas about developing the orbital rail network on a regular basis.**

### *The future of the South London Line*

The importance of a mechanism through which people can hear about and be consulted on developments with rail services is demonstrated by TfL's handling of the proposed Victoria to Bellingham service. As the Save the South London Campaign Group has highlighted, TfL's decision to withdraw this proposed partial replacement for the South London line, which is due to cease in 2012 as a result of works to London Bridge, was not transparent.<sup>19</sup> Whilst TfL subsequently argued it could not fund both this proposed service and the East London Line extension and the latter had greater benefits, it should have reported this publicly at the earliest opportunity so passengers could offer their views.

Whilst it is welcome that TfL and London TravelWatch have now undertaken a joint study to explore alternative options to the South London Line, the option identified - option 7 - will only provide additional stops in long distance Kent coast services at peak times to Denmark Hill and Peckham Rye and a Bromley South to Victoria service outside of peak times to serve all stations between Peckham Rye and Wandsworth Road. As TfL has recognised, this is not a perfect solution since it will not provide direct services from Wandsworth Road and Clapham High Street to London Victoria in the peak periods. The Save the South London Line Group has highlighted to us the importance of identifying an alternative which satisfies the current demand for radial rail services which the South London Line serves.<sup>20</sup>

In any event we are keen to ensure that the South London Line is retained for as long as possible and at least until any works actually commence at London Bridge for the Thameslink services. We welcome you having now put this suggestion to the Secretary of State for Transport<sup>21</sup> and we hope you will share any response you receive. In recent weeks there has been considerable speculation that the works at London Bridge might be subject to changes including that they might not happen at all. Users of the South London Line service will be keen to know how this will affect their service, particularly as TfL reports decisions about the future of the service and any alternatives need to be taken by this Autumn.

**We ask that you provide details of the Secretary of State for Transport's response to our suggestion to delay the withdrawal of the South London Line service until works for Thameslink services actually commence at London Bridge.**

**We request an assessment of the likely impact on the South London Line service if the planned work for Thameslink services at London Bridge changes. This should include what will happen if the works start later than 2012, are de-scoped or do not take place at all.**

<sup>19</sup> South London Line Campaign written submission, May 2010

<sup>20</sup> Transcript of Transport Committee meeting on 26 May 2010, page 36

<sup>21</sup> Letter to Transport Committee from Ian Brown of TfL, 8 July 2010



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

In the current financial climate we recognise there will be difficulties in securing funding for further major improvements to the network. Nevertheless it is important to continue to plan for such improvements, making the case for funding wherever possible and prioritising schemes should funding become available.

In this regard, we urge you and TfL to focus on progressing the long-standing proposal to electrify the Gospel Oak to Barking line. This could be a major improvement to the existing network. TfL has highlighted that funding is already available with the Secretary of State for Transport offering £25 million for this scheme. As such, even if Network Rail is estimating a higher cost of £40 million, every effort should be made to progress the scheme via the completion of a detailed engineering study.<sup>22</sup> The Barking-Gospel Oak Line User group has highlighted that without this study it is difficult to identify what work is actually necessary and whether £25 million might, in fact, cover the cost.<sup>23</sup> We urge all concerned including you, TfL, the Department for Transport and Network Rail to ensure such a study is undertaken at the earliest opportunity. While we recognise funding is tight, in the context of TfL's gross expenditure of £9.6 billion in 2010/11, a £15 million contribution to the electrification would represent less than one per cent of this expenditure. Given the benefits, including the environmental benefits, that would accrue, we remain to be convinced that funding this project should be dismissed as unaffordable.

We recognise that the electrification of the Gospel Oak to Barking line is only one of a number of proposals for further improvements and that TfL is currently pulling together its submission for any further government investment under the HLOS 2 process. Many organisations will have proposals for further investment including potential new stations at Surrey Canal Road and Brixton on the East London Line. Not all of these suggestions will have a strong business case. For example, TfL has told us that the cost of a new station at Brixton would be high given the need to make major changes in Brixton town centre and it might not represent value for money. In light of such feedback, we request that TfL share details of its proposals for future improvements with London Boroughs and local passenger groups, including its proposed submission for HLOS 2, so they can have an informed debate. TfL has highlighted that making the case for further investment will be crucial and that on-going engagement with stakeholders is a key part of the work relating to HLOS 2.<sup>24</sup>

**We urge you and TfL to work with the Department for Transport and Network Rail to ensure a detailed engineering study for the electrification of the Gospel Oak to Barking line takes place. The electrification of this line should be a priority for any future investment in the orbital rail network.**

**We also welcome TfL sharing with all relevant stakeholders including London Boroughs and local passenger groups its proposed submission for any further funding for improvements to the orbital rail network under the Government's High Level Output Specification (HLOS) 2 process.**

In just under three years, TfL has made great strides in developing London Overground services. In the next two years, with the delivery of further planned improvements including the East London Line extension phase 2, there is potential for London to have a truly orbital rail network. This would be an important addition to the transport system and every effort should be made to ensure it realises its full potential. As our findings highlight, there is a need for further measures to involve passengers in the

<sup>22</sup> Transcript of Transport Committee meeting on 26 May 2010, page 31

<sup>23</sup> Transcript of Transport Committee meeting on 26 May 2010, page 32

<sup>24</sup> TfL written submission on London Overground, May 2010



development of the network and critical challenge to the idea that further investment in the network is not possible. We believe there is also a need for closer working between all the organisations involved in operating the network, including TfL and Network Rail, and would welcome your views on how your proposals for more powers over suburban rail lines might facilitate this.

We look forward to receiving a response to this letter. We intend to continue to monitor developments with the orbital rail network.

Yours sincerely



**Valerie Shawcross AM**  
**Chair of the Transport Committee**

Enc.

Cc:

Rt. Hon. Philip Hammond MP, Secretary of State for Transport;  
Peter Hendy, Commissioner, TfL;  
Iain Coucher, Chief Executive, Network Rail;  
Chief Executive, Southern; and  
Chief Executive, South West Trains.