



## Presentation to London TravelWatch – 2 April 2019

In July 2018, in a presentation to the London Assembly Transport Committee about our line, the GOBLIN, we said TfL's London Overground is a vast improvement on previous British Rail and Silverlink operations. The difference has largely been due to better funding (now being squeezed), a very positive “can do” management attitude (but this now less evident) and – at least in the LOROL period from 2007 to 2017 – a well crafted concession agreement.

Today, sadly, there is one huge gaping hole. After a botched electrification project which Network Rail delivered a year late and after many many months of total line closures, new electric trains should have entered service in mid-2018 on the existing 4 tph timetable (i.e. every 15 minutes). Instead we have had reduced peak services since last July, reduced weekend services since November, and the daily service reduced to 2 tph (just every 30 minutes) since 18<sup>th</sup> March two weeks ago. No-one knows how long this is going to last.

Primary blame rests with Bombardier whose new Class 710 trains should have been ready for service in January 2018, but which a year and three months later have still not obtained their safety certificates.

However TfL are little less culpable. Despite being warned – not least by BGORUG – of the grave danger of the existing diesel trains having to be transferred for planned new services around Birmingham before our new trains were ready, TfL did nothing. For months they sat back and hoped the problem would go away until, belatedly in late December, they decided to convert three existing Class 378 trains from 5-cars to 4-cars to run a basic 2 tph GOBLIN service. This was a last resort option put to them by BGORUG many weeks earlier and which TfL had then rejected out of hand.

This is what came to pass two weeks ago – a double whammy of a totally unacceptable service on the GOBLIN, with no spare units to cover for failures, and prejudicing the reliability of the ELL, NLL, WLL and Euston – Watford services by stripping them of their spare trains.

This Friday and Saturday the inevitable happened. On Friday an incident damaged one train, and another had to tow it back to the depot at Willesden. Result – no service at all, followed by several hours of just a shuttle service between Gospel Oak & South Tottenham and no service thence to Barking. On Saturday a train broke down – result for most of the day again just a shuttle service between Gospel Oak & South Tottenham and no service eastwards to Barking.

To run a train every 30 mins on what should be – and has been now for around 10 years – a turn-up-and-go service is quite unacceptable nonsense. You at LTW will know how this affects people juggling their day between jobs – perhaps two jobs – child care and other responsibilities. A minimum of 4 tph is something which BGORUG and LTW fought for 20+ years and to have it now taken away – and for an unknown period - is little short of a scandal.

What TfL should have done – and BGORUG asked them to do this as long as three years ago – was to investigate ways of bringing spare older electric trains onto the line. For technical reasons more

staff would be needed to run such trains – but TfL have spare staff available at the moment. We have put multiple options to them for this, but every one has been consigned by TfL to the “too difficult” box without any investigation. If this had been the attitude of the Overground founders 10 – 15 years ago, we would not have the Overground as we know it today.

The situation now is that the new 710s are running on test, but no-one knows when they will be certified for passenger operation. Even when they are there will be much to do before they can enter service.

It is our firm belief that EVEN NOW, TfL should seriously and positively investigate using older trains to restore the full GOBLIN service as soon as possible. Scotrail did exactly this a year ago when faced with the same situation and brought a fleet of trains of a totally alien design (for them) into service in little over a couple of months. Just in the last couple of weeks Scotrail have finished with these Happy Trains as they called them – Class 365s to the technically minded. They work and they are still warm and they could make us Happy too. TfL could have one for necessary technical tests on our line within days if they wanted to – if they get on the phone now, perhaps tomorrow night. Other trains may be available<sup>1</sup>, and to guard against unforeseen problems TfL should be investigating these in parallel.

Of course nothing comes for free – there is always a cost. But TfL's own board papers last autumn said they had already received £5m in penalty payments from Bombardier for late delivery of the 710s and we gather their budget now makes provision for £15m from this source. The one positive thing TfL have said to us about this appalling saga is that money is not a problem.

If there is one useful thing to come out of this meeting here today, it will be for LTW to join with us in demanding that TfL – to put it bluntly – get off their backsides and don't take no for an answer. A 30 mins service across inner north-east London – and with not a single spare train to cover for failures - is simply not on.

Thank you for listening to this rant. We have many aspirations for the future of the GOBLIN which we would like to have talked about, but in the ten minutes available to us today the priority has to be the here and now. We do have a shopping list for the future and we've included it on the power-point slides. Our AGM later this month may develop it further, in which case we'll send you an update.

Meanwhile, just two more things of urgent importance. First, as long as we only have our present three trains, BGORUG reluctantly accepts that if only two of them are available then the least bad option is to operate only half the line. Last Friday and Saturday TfL operated the western section between Gospel Oak and South Tottenham. This is the wrong choice. The eastern section between Barking and South Tottenham carries 50 per cent more passengers, so this is the section which should have trains in these circumstances. We ask LTW to endorse this point to TfL.

The second is that at Gospel Oak many passengers board our trains by interchanging across the platform from an eastbound NLL train. Forty eight years ago in 1970 I joined London Underground and I was sent on the training course for guards. One of the things drummed into us was that if a train ran into the opposite platform and passengers would want to interchange (e.g. as happens today at Finchley Road between the Met and Jubilee lines), we should wait the short time needed to allow them to do so. To see a train depart as theirs ran in, or even worse closing the doors in their face, was a no-no. Yet this is exactly what happens at Gospel Oak in 2019 and TfL have persistently refused our entreaties to end this practice. May we please urge that the might and diplomacy of LTW be brought to bear on this nonsense.

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<sup>1</sup> Classes 313 – starting to be replaced on GTR 314 – being withdrawn by Scotrail 315 – spare on TfL Rail  
319 – stored pending future use.