

Rt Hon George Osborne MP  
Chancellor of the Exchequer  
HM Treasury  
1 Horse Guards Road  
London  
SW1A 2HQ

**Our Ref:**  
**Your Ref:**

30 May 2013

Dear Chancellor,

### **Funding for the electrification of the Gospel Oak to Barking line**

As you will know, London TravelWatch is the statutory consumer body representing the interests of passengers in London. We would like to urge your department to agree funding for the electrification (and associated signalling and track upgrades) of the Gospel Oak to Barking line (and associated track). This project promises substantial benefits to passengers, taxpayers and freight customers and to the local economy.

These can be summarised as follows:-

- Local passenger services would benefit from reduced overcrowding, improved timekeeping and reliability, and reduced journey times. Currently crowding on this route is becoming quite acute and this then has a negative effect on timekeeping, reliability and journey times not only on the passenger services but on following freight trains also.
- Passenger services on all major rail routes north and east of London would benefit from the increased resilience in electricity supply and distribution that this project would enable, and from the shorter journey times, timekeeping and reliability that would flow from converting the freight traffic on the line from diesel to electric traction.
- Freight traffic also benefits from the efficiency gain from reduced transit times between distribution centres, the connections to the strategically important High Speed 1 route for the Channel Tunnel, and the ports of Tilbury and London Gateway.
- The diesel passenger trains currently used on the route could be redeployed to other routes where there are problems of overcrowding at peak times, but where it would be uneconomic or impractical to purchase new diesel passenger trains.
- The potential to encourage and support regeneration of areas served by the route such as Tottenham, Waltham Forest and Barking which have significant problems with deprivation and poor access to jobs and services.

I would therefore urge the Treasury to facilitate this long overdue but extremely beneficial scheme through Network Rail via the Department for Transport in conjunction with Transport for London. I attach a more detailed summary of the potential benefits from this proposal.

Yours sincerely

**Stephen Locke**  
Chair

## **Appendix A – detailed summary of the benefits of electrification and other works on the Barking to Gospel Oak route.**

### **Local passenger services**

The Barking to Gospel Oak line is approximately 12 miles in length and is a double track route, with a capacity of eight train paths per hour. Of this about nine miles of railway is not electrified at present

The current fleet of London Overground trains comprises of 57 class 378 electric trains of four car length (to be five car from 2014) and eight class 172 diesel trains of two car length. The class 172's are dedicated to the Barking – Gospel Oak route. At peak times all eight units are required for service to cope with the passenger numbers now using the route. This is done by careful manipulation of the maintenance schedule for these units. If it is not possible to do this, either a peak hour train has to be cancelled or an alternative unit has to be borrowed from another operator. The 172's require a separate maintenance and fuelling facility.

Replacement of the class 172's with additional class 378's would allow a common fleet for the entire London Overground network and at the same time mean that the number of spare vehicles to cover maintenance and failures overall could be reduced. So for example the existing eight class 172 units could be replaced by six class 378 units. An early decision to agree this would have cost savings for procuring and building the units as it would mean that the manufacturers would not have to start a production line from scratch after the completion of the current order for the train lengthening project.

The longer length of the class 378's would reduce the current levels of overcrowding on the route (resulting from the above average growth in demand that this route has shown). The better acceleration and deceleration characteristics of the class 378 compared to the diesel 172 would also have a positive impact in terms of improved performance, and could reduce journey times on the route. Currently trains circulate in a 90 minute cycle to give a 15 minute interval service. Reducing journey times and the stand time at Gospel Oak to give a 84 minute cycle would enable a 12 minute interval service to be provided using the same resources in terms of units and crew as required now. This would make the service sufficiently attractive to enable it to be marketed as a 'turn up and go' service, attracting additional users either from private transport or from other rail or underground lines which also have significant congestion and overcrowding issues.

An increase in frequency of both passenger and freight trains would be possible as a result of the improvements in signalling, track layout and condition that electrification would necessitate. Much of the signalling and track on the route is either obsolescent or life expired, and so would be in need of replacement regardless.

### **Benefits to other passenger services**

All of the major routes to North, West and East of London are electrified, and with the exception of the North London Line are not connected to each other in terms of electricity supply and distribution. Each line has its own supply of electricity, although in some cases that supply source is being used to its maximum. In the event of a failure at the supply point, there is usually widespread disruption to train services on these major routes. However, electrification of the Barking – Gospel Oak route presents a unique opportunity to address this issue as it would link up all of these major routes, to provide alternative supply sources

in the event of a failure, and also provide additional capacity at supply points. As the train services on these routes serve a significant proportion of the United Kingdom, there would be a significant resilience benefit gain across a widespread area (e.g. services into Glasgow, Edinburgh, Manchester, Leeds and the West Midlands)

Passenger services on these routes would also gain from the greater reliability and speed of the current diesel hauled freight trains on the route being converted to electric traction. This would mean a better utilisation of train paths on routes such as the West and East Coast main lines now and the Midland and Great Western main lines in the future.

In addition some electrically hauled freight trains that currently travel from Barking to the West Coast main line via Stratford and the North London line could be diverted via the Gospel Oak route, thus freeing up capacity on the Great Eastern main line and the North London line for other services.

Displacement of the class 172 diesel trains from the Barking to Gospel Oak route would mean that they could be redeployed to meet the need for additional diesel trains elsewhere in the country. In the London area, there is a requirement for such trains on the Great Western, Chiltern or Uckfield and London Bridge routes, but for which there is no currently identified source of available units, and for which new units would not be justified economically.

Electrification would also eliminate the need for diesel haulage of electric passenger units to and from the current Hornsey depot and the adjacent new Thameslink depot currently under construction. This would reduce operating costs for such moves.

### **Benefits to freight services**

For freight to gain the full benefit of electrification of the Barking to Gospel Oak line, a number of short stretches of track (up to a couple of miles) elsewhere would need to be included in the project, so as to enable trains to be hauled by electric locomotives for the entire length of their journey.

These would include:-

- The London Gateway port branch.
- Ripple Lane sidings (for transfer to the HS1 Channel Tunnel route).
- The route between Birmingham and Nuneaton, including associated distribution terminals.
- The connection to the East Coast main line at Harringay Park Junction.
- The connection to the Midland main line (part of the 'electric spine') between Junction Road Junction and Carlton Road Junction.
- The Midland main line goods lines through West Hampstead and Cricklewood. (This latter would also have resilience benefits to Thameslink passenger services now and East Midlands trains in the future).
- The Acton Wells to Acton Main Line link to the Great Western main line.
- The Kew 'curves' connecting to the South West main line routes.

As noted above under passenger services, conversion of diesel freight trains to electric haulage, and upgrading of track and signalling on the route would have major benefits of reducing freight train journey times, better pathing both on the line and on connecting routes.

Most freight on this route is related to imports and exports there is likely to be a significant economic benefit to businesses across the United Kingdom, as a result of reduced transport costs (from reduced and more reliable journey times) and more competitive delivery schedules if electrification were to take place. This coupled with potential transfer from road transport would enable an expansion of rail freight on this route.

### **Local regeneration benefits**

Electrification and the increased frequency of trains that this would enable could also help stimulate and encourage local regeneration along the line of the route, particularly in areas of Barking, Waltham Forest and Tottenham which suffer from significant levels of deprivation, and poor access to jobs and services. These areas are also characterised by poor air quality, and the removal of diesel trains from the route would contribute to improving this.

Rebuilding of some road bridges along the route could also bring some benefits to road users locally, by for example removing height or weight restrictions. In the case of the A1 Holloway Road (and the A406 Gunnersbury Avenue bridge on the 'Kew Curves' route) overbridge TfL has identified that these bridges have serious structural defects that require rebuilding or replacing these bridges within the same timescales as any electrification project for the Barking to Gospel Oak route. There would therefore be likely to be significant cost savings if these three projects could be carried out concurrently.