



Relieving the bottleneck of trains will create a worse bottleneck for passengers

The central premise of the plan to close the Olympia branch is the belief that West Brompton is a viable alternative to Earl's Court as an interchange with the District line. There are many reasons why West Brompton simply is not up to this job.

During the rush-hour, inbound Wimbledon trains are completely full by the time they get to West Brompton. It is virtually impossible for even small numbers of passengers to board, let alone the additional numbers that would be coming from Olympia on the Overground instead of going into Earl's Court. Even with the extra trains, it would be a very long wait indeed for everyone to find sufficient space on trains to continue their journeys.

Throughout the evening rush-hour, large numbers join already very busy Wimbledon bound trains at Earl's Court, so re-routing Olympia bound passengers onto these trains for the short run to West Brompton would actually make it more difficult for everyone, Wimbledon passengers as well as Olympia passengers, to get on.

At Earl's Court the opportunities to disperse incoming Olympia passengers are many, however as only Wimbledon branch trains serve West Brompton, the added passenger congestion from Olympia has only one way to go - onto the very trains that are intended to benefit from the axing of the Olympia service.

Closure of the Olympia branch would inevitably create its own bottleneck of passengers on the Wimbledon branch between West Brompton and Earl's Court, making life more difficult, not less for all District line passengers.

Specific responses to points in the briefing are as follows:

1. "The primary reason for the change is to relieve a bottleneck in the Earl's Court area."

This is far from a new problem and over the past few years Olympia has already made sacrifices in train frequency to help ease congestion. The justification for tackling the problem now is based only on the increased availability of Overground trains, but as this is an incomplete solution to providing an alternative to the Olympia branch it is not reason enough.

2 "Passengers travelling to and from Kensington (Olympia) on weekdays will have to use alternative routes, but most alternatives involve little extra time."

On paper this might theoretically appear to be the case. However in reality for the reasons stated above it is simply untrue. West Brompton isn't up to the job as a replacement to Earl's Court as an interchange between Overground and Underground networks. From experience, it is actually more practical to travel all the way out to Clapham Junction and then by National Rail back into Victoria or Waterloo. A route that very much involves considerably more than a little extra time!

3. "...to boost peak services for busiest sections of the line"

The dividend from closing the Olympia branch is only 5 extra Wimbledon trains a day. A very small return for the loss of an entire service. However, as the entire 2,300 current daily Olympia passengers will now also be on Wimbledon branch trains (even if only for a short distance), passenger congestion will actually increase on the busiest section of the line, not decrease.

4. "...following an increase in Overground service to the Station"

The main justification for a change now is the increase in the London Overground service. However this is largely irrelevant as the problem is not getting to West Brompton, it is getting on a District line train at West Brompton.

5. "There are, on average under 30 people per weekday Kensington (Olympia) train."

Perhaps more than most lines, the average figure isn't as important as the peak passenger numbers, both in rush-hour and during busy exhibitions. After all it is this number of people (not the average) that need to be absorbed into the rest of the network - mostly through West Brompton.

Also, directly comparing the number of passengers with the total of those who use the entire Wimbledon branch is somewhat unfair as there are 8 stations beyond Earl's Court on the Wimbledon branch, each with their own set of locals and only one on the Olympia branch.

6. "Passengers from Kensington (Olympia) have an average platform wait time of 10 minutes"

This really is not surprising considering trains are at least 20 minutes apart. People who use the line regularly know the times of trains and have a considerably shorter wait. If the timetable was better publicised and delays and cancellations announced more effectively the wait time for everyone would be significantly reduced.

7. "...for virtually any destination it is faster to board either the Overground service at Kensington (Olympia) or other LU services at Earl's Court, High Street Kensington or Shepherd's Bush, all of which are within a mile of Kensington (Olympia)."

This is a most ridiculous assertion, it completely ignores wait times for Overground services, and even if it was possible to board the first overcrowded connecting train at West Brompton or Shepherd's Bush, the journey time is obviously going to be a lot longer.

8. Exhibition Traffic

It is perhaps best to leave an analysis of the impact of the line's closure on exhibition traffic to EC&O Venues, however it is clear that there is considerable use of the line throughout the day for weekday exhibitions. Most events do not have hard-finishes as suggested and even those that do frequently coincide with the rush-hour, so any special trains for major exhibitions would negate all of the bottleneck easing of abandoning the scheduled service in the first place.

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