Threats to possible orbital light-rail in outer London from the current Brent Cross planning application...

(We need safeguarding in place, for better times!)

Boris now estimates an extra 1.1 to 1.5 million population by 2031.
WILL Brent Cross traffic levels add “29,100” extra vehicles every day to our roads, which is the 2004 figure (including West Hendon) or “9,000” as now stated by the developers? It depends who you ask.

Either way, there are environmental features in the Brent Cross transport plan — but not enough, and not of the right kind.

- The proposed Brent Cross Thameslink station will only be four train-lengths away from both Cricklewood and Hendon stations. That £220-million would be better spent upgrading the existing stations (1), and contributing to one phase of a “North and West London Light Railway”, mainly sharing existing, hardly-used freight corridors and abandoned trackbeds. Closure of Cricklewood station currently has “plausible deniability” — but no train that stops there, or at Hendon (or at Kentish Town) will ever be able to stop at the so-called “local town centre / transport hub” of Brent Cross.

- The planned branded-bus “Rapid Transit System”, virtually all within the Brent Cross site, is now considered “temporary”. But special bus routes, on reserved roads, could be converted into a wider light-rail system in the years ahead (instead of spending £50-million on the Staples Corner road junction).

The light railway could realistically include other development sites at Colindale, Mill Hill East, Wembley and Park Royal. It would interchange with every Underground and main-line railway in north and west London. Most of the routes are already there. We believe our plan will produce an attractive cost-to-benefit ratio for a new orbital light railway in outer London, to cope with the rising population.

Brent Cross will be the same size as Canary Wharf in 1999, when only light-rail (DLR) stations provided a decentralised transport system. That is a better choice here as well, and a way to connect to the surrounding area, instead of building one centralised main-line commuter station, plus only road access.

Notes:

(1) The government UDP inspector made comments about retaining Cricklewood Thameslink station, and the developers are therefore suggesting step-free access.

(2) The “RTS” at Brent Cross Northern Line station involves the demolition of housing, to provide a turning circle.

In both the above cases, we believe this is abortive investment, because both may be of only short-term benefit. Whether or not ‘private’ Section 106 expenditure pays for this is irrelevant — it is better to benefit the public realm with long-term infrastructure.
Brent Cross: now or never

THE REST of this document gives our views on how the Brent Cross planning application (C17559/08) will make future implementation of light-rail at Brent Cross effectively impossible. (In other words, the current planning application needs to be rejected, and resubmitted* only after modifications.)

The “Campaign for Better Transport - London Group” has held discussions with the Brent Cross developers. Unfortunately, we were only offered co-operation in considering a “Phase One” light-rail scheme if we signed an undertaking not to oppose the planning application. This “poisoned chalice” was rejected.

We made the point to the developers that, unlike the “Third Heathrow Runway” for instance, we were not totally against their scheme — we just wanted it modified. To no avail.

Barnet has always publicised plan C17559/08 as a “draft” application, but it is not — there are extensive “full” applications within it. They include the complete road system, and in particular, the demolition of Tempelhof Avenue road bridge across the North Circular Road, suitable for light-rail use in the future. (It is there already, at no cost!)

Read our submission, opposing the planning application, on: www.bettertransport.org.uk/london_local_group.

* Only by rejection can Barnet Planning charge another planning fee.
One of our (complicated) “Light Rail Options” slides...

A “Brent Cross Railway” (BCR)?

Two suggested light-rail services, shown in red and blue for clarity.

Only Hendon-to-Cricklewood section of this BCR route is shown on the redundant freight track(s).

Hendon and Cricklewood now served by different BCR lines (improves Thameslink interchange reliability).

Only these 2 options may include a Shopping Centre station in a “Phase One”.

This area of land only becomes available at a late stage. It may not be possible for “Phase One” to even skirt the north side of it, as in Option 3.

Build red BCR line, instead of inadequate bus “Rapid Transit”.

Station is underneath relocated “High Street” road bridge.

Build part red, part blue as the “Rapid Transit”.
FOR US to claim that the light-rail scheme cannot be added later, we need to say what the rail scheme actually is. Unfortunately, we are unable to fully do so. There are many uncertainties about the best Brent Cross route, and how a wider scheme should pass through the site. These could only be resolved in a co-operative planning regime!

Some possible routes are shown here. To the right are two separate light-rail services (coloured red and blue only for clarity).

The “blue” service might form a “Phase One” along a hardly-used freight line corridor across Brent, to North Acton (Central Line), partly shown below on an Underground map. Alternatively, part of the “red” and part of the “blue” service could be combined as “Phase One”.

A variation might be to take one line across the “Business Quarter” on viaduct, as an attractive “feature”, al la Canary Wharf.

The two lines might remain at different levels, with only a service track joining them. Light-rail platforms might be on both sides of the Midland Main Line, or at right-angles. Four light-rail platforms, instead of any main-line station?

Note: Brent Cross, Neasden and Harlesden stations above do not currently have step-free access.
ONE UNKNOWN in any light-rail scheme is the best way to cross the north-south Midland Thameslink main-line railway.

(Although it would be possible to reach south to Cricklewood station with light-rail on the eastern side of this main line, continuing further south towards West Hampstead has to be on the western-side freight line(s). Given that the Dudding Hill freight line from Brent and Ealing is also in the west, it is certain the main-line must be crossed somewhere.)

All the yellow and green lines (left) represent possible ways for light-rail (maybe only a single track) to pass under the very long railway viaduct, without the need to build an expensive bridge over the Midland Thameslink line further south.

The orange and purple lines are routes to allow light-rail to rejoin the Midland Main Line freight lines northwards (one of the two tracks is still needed for existing freight) for light-rail to reach Hendon Thameslink station, and on to Colindale.

These are, of course, highly speculative (some more so than others). However, light-rail can use curved track down to only fourteen-metres-radius, and also climb and descend steeply.

There is more discussion on crossing the Midland Main Line, and passing through other parts of the Brent Cross area, on our web site.
Downtown “Brent Cross Town Centre”

Continuing the colours from the last page, the purple line and the green line could become two routes. We believe **two services** may prove justified, and using completely separate tracks increases timetable resilience. (The short broken-yellow line might be a service track to join them.)

Much of the green line can be light-rail ballasted track on the **existing** asphalt service road, *if the route is safeguarded for the future.*

The orange line (up the existing ramp, and then to a Shopping Centre station) allows a “Phase One” line between Brent Cross Northern Line and **Hendon** station, rather than to Cricklewood (unless a sharp turn, *partly shown in yellow, very extreme left,* is used to go **south**).
A41 roundabout changes

(continuing possible light-rail track eastwards, and to Brent Cross Northern Line station ...)

Either this span, or more likely, the next span to the left, could be used for light-rail.

Only a single track is needed to the terminus at Brent Cross Northern Line station.

The road widening that wrecks our rail route — the new supports for a widened slip road would mean the railway route would become impossible — and permanently so.
Brent Cross tube station

New entrance to Shopping Centre — we do not object to enlarging the A41 roundabout, since it means closing the short (and dangerous) slip road off the North Circular, just to the east, on the line of the light railway (at point ✴).

Don’t blame us

It is not our fault that the developers need to change their plans — we must reduce climate change, road congestion and air pollution, and this application does none of those things. The “Development Framework” was drawn up without sufficient publicity, including in neighbouring Brent and other boroughs, and the developers have treated it as an approved planning application.

Public consultation sessions have often been staffed by PR people who have known virtually nothing about planning — “fill in a card,” they said, and real public debate for the last five years (people keep telling us) has been derisory.

Purchase of derelict land for the single track light-rail line is needed here. (A footpath route must still be determined.)

Northern Line

End of our line!
The light-rail station is at ground level, on TfL land.

Unnecessary house demolition for what would be a short-lived “rapid transit” bus service.

Light-rail route

Brent Cross tube station

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