

THE GREAT OYSTER CARD FIASCO

Many readers of *Underground News* will be aware of the collapse of the Oyster Card system on Saturday 12 July 2008. The following summary is from contemporary sources and members' own observations.

Your reporter boarded a bus at about 09.00 to be greeted by the driver saying that it was a free travel day on bus, tube and DLR. The Bus Controller then broadcast a message to drivers to remove the modules from their ticket machines "at once" and to take no fares, do not issue emergency tickets, free travel until told otherwise. Arrival at an Underground station had the unbelievable announcement "DO NOT TOUCH IN OR OUT". Apparently the Oyster system is down which means that all the gates on the London Underground are currently open and bus drivers can't take fares either.

11.00 – It's working again but some gates are still open and buses appear to be taking a little longer to get back to normal. Here's the statement from Transport for London:

"Due to a technical problem with the Oyster card computer system, card readers across the network were not accepting cards from around 05.30 until 10.30 on Saturday 12 July.

"The problem has been rectified and cards are now being accepted across London Underground, DLR, London Overground and on those First Great Western, First Capital Connect and CTC that accept Oyster. A number of buses may still be affected but all passengers are being accepted to travel.

"All passengers who incur a maximum fare on Saturday 12 July will be given an automatic refund on Tuesday. They do not need to take any action.

"We are investigating the cause of the problem, will ensure that any necessary refunds are honoured and apologise to our passengers for any inconvenience caused this morning".

Later in the day hand written notices at stations were referring to code 30 errors (see below).

SUNDAY 13 JULY

Just had an interesting update in the comments as it appears things might not be as rosy as the TfL statement above makes out: "Anyone who touched in or out yesterday morning has probably had their Oyster card disabled (code 30) and will need to change their Oyster card at a ticket office using the failed Oyster card procedure. If it is a student, child card etc., then they will need to contact Oyster for a replacement. Even our staff have had their passes disabled.

"A number of cards used on London Underground before 09.30 yesterday may not be working as a result of yesterday's technical problem. Customers who topped up their cards at Oyster Ticket Stops during the day may also have been affected. Customers whose cards are not working are advised to go to their nearest London Underground ticket office where they will be able to exchange their card for a replacement.

"A small number of Freedom Pass and Young Persons Oyster card holders may also have been affected. They will be required to apply for replacement cards through their relevant local authority and through the young persons travel card helpline

respectively. Our staff will be instructed to allow these card holders to continue to travel whilst replacements are issued.

“We are investigating the cause of the problem and apologise to our passengers for the inconvenience caused”.

Printed code 30 notices appeared during the day.

MONDAY 14 JULY

An investigation has been launched into how 60,000 Oyster smartcards were made inoperable over the weekend. The travel smartcards were corrupted when swiped at ticket gates in the London Underground, causing major ongoing disruption to the capital's transport system. The authority responsible for the cards, Transport for London (TfL), is working in conjunction with supplier TranSys to find out how the cards could have been affected by the gates.

“We're currently investigating the cause of the incident with TranSys”, said a TfL spokesperson. “It's an ongoing investigation”.

Cards started to be affected at 05.30 BST on Saturday, and the system was rectified by approximately 09.30 according to the spokesperson. TfL said in a statement that approximately 60,000 Oyster card users required replacement cards after the incident on Saturday morning while, as of Monday, 35,000 cards still needed to be replaced.

“Ticket offices are well stocked and we advise those passengers who have not yet replaced their cards to go to their nearest London Underground ticket office throughout today”.

Third parties who supply Oyster card top-up services, the ‘Ticket Stops’, were also affected. TfL warned customers that their cards might not have been topped up over the weekend if they had been swiped past ticket gates between 05.30 and 09.30 on Saturday. Ticket Stop retailers had also been affected, but were “coming back on-line”, according to a TfL statement. Barclaycard One Pulse users were referred to Barclaycard for replacements. As to Nokia 6131 O₂ Wallet enabled phone Oyster users, silence!

Printed notices from Mike Brown (LU's Chief Operating Officer) updated the situation but these had gone by Wednesday evening. The situation seemed to blow over by Thursday with reference on the front page of the TfL website being removed.

It is still unclear exactly what happened but seemed to be a problem with the overnight upload of new data. What was the loss of revenue?

FRIDAY 25 JULY

It's happened again! Well not exactly – Pay As You Go is not working on the Underground and the gates are open. Situation seemed to be OK by 10.00. In due course a Transport for London spokesperson said:

“There was a technical problem with Oyster card readers at London Underground stations this morning which affected Oyster pay as you go cards only. Oyster card readers on the bus and tram network were unaffected.

“The problem has now been resolved and card readers are progressively coming back on-line at London Underground stations.

“Cards have not been disabled and so can continue to be used as normal. We will automatically refund any passengers who may have been charged the maximum £4

fare as a result of not being able to touch in and out at the beginning and end of their journeys this morning. Oyster card holders need take no further action.

“This problem, like the recent issue, resulted from incorrect data tables being sent out by our contractor, TranSys (a consortium of the firms EDS and Cubic). TranSys has also issued a statement today confirming that they are taking steps to ensure that this does not happen again, that they will undertake a root cause analysis and, like us, apologising for any inconvenience caused to our customers”.

Peter Hendy, Transport Commissioner for London, said the technical fault left him “incandescent with rage”. Mr. Hendy said: “We are determined that neither TfL nor Londoners lose a penny from either of these system failures”. TfL said the disruption will cost hundreds of thousands of pounds.

A succession of notices appeared during the day, culminating in a robust criticism of TranSys by Tim O’Toole, LU’s Managing Director.

SATURDAY 16 JULY

Transport for London is maintaining a grim silence about the future of its relationship with TranSys, its Oyster travelcard provider, after the system yesterday failed a second time in two weeks, depriving TfL of millions in Tube fares. A TfL spokesman said last night that the 17-year contract, which pays TranSys £100m annually for supplying, running and marketing the swipecard ticket system, had a number of break clauses that allowed for early termination