

WHAT NEXT FOR LONDON'S TRANSPORT INFRASTRUCTURE?

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London TravelWatch (LTW) published a report with this title in October 2016, suggesting various improvements that could be made to public transport in London. These were intentionally smaller projects than the headline-grabbing Crossrail and Thameslink programmes. None have been costed, and the introduction is very candid in presenting them merely as ideas for consideration. A summary of those relating to the Underground and other TfL railway services is provided here. Text in italics is my own notes or commentary.

UNDERGROUND

West Hampstead: Metropolitan line and Chiltern Railways platforms. Improving interchange at a point where five (currently) separate railways are very close by has been mooted for some years, and at one point Chiltern Railways seemed to be making some progress. Rather than the grandiose ideas for linking the three separate stations here, the LTW suggestion is just to provide interchange between Chiltern and the Jubilee and Metropolitan lines. *The report does not comment on whether the present interchange at Finchley Road would be maintained; presumably, since it serves the O₂ shopping centre. Nothing is said about the practicalities of making space for an additional pair of island platforms, as the site is already somewhat constrained.*

Covent Garden: new entrance. To relieve overcrowding, a southern entrance to Covent Garden station is proposed. Pedestrian subways linking to Temple station and the disused Aldwych station building are suggested as being no longer than the Exhibition Subway at South Kensington, and would get more use from an under-used station and a disused building. *An interesting idea with reuse of infrastructure, but the cost of the necessary deep-level pedestrian tunnel and presumably escalators to either Aldwych or Temple would be high.*

Southwark/Waterloo East: new entrance. A new entrance, at the east end of Waterloo East station would improve access to both stations. It would be situated in either Hatfields or The Cut. *This would connect in where the current link between Southwark and Waterloo is at ground level. It seems to be a sensible idea that will increase the accessibility of both stations at low cost.*

St Paul's: low-level interchange to City Thameslink. These two stations are reasonably close, and this would provide Underground interchange to the Thameslink station for the first time, with a connection on the 'paid' side of both stations. *This link, if taken from the west end of the platforms at St. Paul's, would be fairly short as they lie beneath Newgate Street. Whether the authorities would be happy for the tunnel to pass beneath the Old Bailey, which lies directly above the shortest line between the stations, remains to be seen. However, this would be a very useful connection.*

Camden Town: interchange passage to Camden Road. Another proposed link between two stations that are nearby. There is a significant flow of passengers making use of the current 'out of station interchange' permitted here. *The report fails to note that any such connection would have to be at low-level in order to pass beneath the Regent's Canal. There would then be a large number of steps, as well as a lift (and perhaps escalators) required at Camden Road, where the platforms are on a viaduct.*

Edgware Road: interchange between stations. A connection between the Bakerloo and sub-surface lines stations has been suggested occasionally for many years. LTW suggest making it on the 'paid' side, and providing an additional entrance at some point along it through which step-free access can be provided. *Unfortunately, due to the platform configuration at both stations, at least five lifts would be required (one to each island platform at the sub-surface station; one to each platform at the Bakerloo station; one to the new entrance). It is also difficult to see where a new entrance could be made, given that much of the space between the two stations is occupied by the A40 Marylebone flyover and connecting roads. The utility of such a link is also questionable given that the same interchange is possible at Paddington and Baker Street (except for the District Line), and providing step-free access at either of these would benefit more passengers.*

Great Portland Street – Regent's Park link and step-free access. Similar to the proposal for the Edgware Road stations, this idea is for a low-level passageway between the two stations with a possible

new entrance in between providing step-free access. *Similar problems occur at this location, in that there is no obvious site for a new entrance in between the two existing stations. A low-level link between Euston Square and Warren Street would be around the same distance but would provide a more useful connection that is currently missing from the network, namely linking the north side of the Circle Line with the Charing Cross branch of the Northern Line.*

Mill Hill East to Edgware extension. A revival of the route that never quite became part of the Underground, this would apparently “simplify Northern Line operations” (it is unclear how), as well as relieving pressure on the Thameslink line at Mill Hill. This could be constructed as a cycle route, either alongside an Underground extension, or in place of one. *Plans for an extension along part of the route, to Cophall Stadium, emerged in the early 1990s, but came to nothing. A tunnel would be required beneath the M1, and a number of properties would have to be demolished.*

West Brompton step-free access. A lift should be provided to the westbound District Line platform, as this is the only platform without step-free access.

Open disused C&SLR tunnels as pedestrian route. Pedestrian traffic across London Bridge is high, and relief could be provided by opening the disused C&SLR tunnels beneath the river as a foot subway “based on the theme of a disused Underground railway”. *Whilst a great number of LURS members would be fascinated to be able to walk through these tunnels, the cost of providing access at each end is likely to be prohibitive. That said, the reuse of King William Street station to facilitate the reconstruction and enlargement of Bank station could conceivably allow the tunnels to act as a low-level interchange passageway between London Bridge and Bank tube stations. The small size of the tunnels is likely to be a disincentive to many people though.*

Finchley Central ticket barriers. Recommended for installation to reduce opportunities for fraudulent travel. *Presumably this is the western entrance, from Station Road.*

OVERGROUND

Gospel Oak to Barking line extensions. Following completion of electrification work, LTW suggest extending services westwards to West Hampstead, to provide better interchange. To the east, an extension to Dagenham Dock, Rainham, Purfleet, and Tilbury is proposed. *No mention is made of the Barking Riverside extension that is currently being promoted by TfL.*

Junction Road station. A new station on the site of one that closed in 1943, this would fill the long gap between Gospel Oak and Upper Holloway stations. *Interchange with the Northern Line at Tufnell Park would be quick, although LTW do not state whether this should be at street level or via a direct subway connection. An escalator connection to the north end of the tube platforms might be feasible, although this is complicated slightly as the two platforms are at different levels.*

Brixton station. High-level platforms on the “Atlantic lines” through Brixton would allow Overground trains to serve this busy part of London. *This has been considered previously, and although the interchange benefits are high, so too are both the tracks and the costs – the line is on a viaduct passing over another viaduct. This plan has previously been costed at over £50 million.*

Kilburn High Road and Crystal Palace step-free access. Provision for lifts has been made at both stations, and the lifts should now be provided.

Seven Sisters reconstruction. Rebuilding this busy station could improve interchange, as well as access to Tottenham town centre and the nearby stadium. The station is currently too small for the number of passengers using it.

DLR

Bow Church to Hackney extension. Between Poplar and Bow the DLR was built along the line of a disused section of the North London Railway. This continued north to join what is now the London Overground at Hackney. LTW is suggesting that the DLR be extended northwards to form a new branch, giving a link between Hackney and Docklands. *A quick check of the locality shows that much of the track bed has been built over, so such an extension would be expensive due to property acquisition and/or tunnelling costs.*

TRAMS

New Addington to Orpington via Biggin Hill. Rail links east of Croydon are poor, and Biggin Hill is growing fast. This suggestion would provide better connectivity along this corridor. *The extension as far as Biggin Hill would probably be suitable for a tram service, but the line would then need to curve northwards to get to Orpington. Biggin Hill and Orpington are over 8km apart, with just a few small hamlets in between, and one has the impression that trams on this route would appear an incongruously as the Central Line trains travelling through the fields on the Ongar branch. Unless there is significant untapped traffic potential between Orpington and Biggin Hill / Croydon, the latter section of this proposal is likely to be a non-starter.*

SELECTED OTHER IDEAS

Moorgate to London Bridge. LTW suggests making better use of the former Northern City Line by extending it southwards and then eastwards to serve underground stations at either Bank/Monument or Mansion House/Cannon Street, London Bridge, Bricklayers Arms, and then connecting with the national rail route to Tulse Hill (which currently terminates at London Bridge) in the vicinity of South Bermondsey station. *This scheme is likely to cost several billion, being in tunnels large enough for main-line trains, and longer than the Northern Line Extension to Battersea, which is costing around £1 billion for a far shorter length of tunnel.*

Finsbury Park to Muswell Hill. The route of the “northern heights”, which would have become part of the Northern Line had the New Works Programme of 1935-40 been completed, is suggested for either a rail or cycle route.

New platform at Epping for Epping-Ongar Railway. LTW recognises that seamless interchange between the Central Line and the EOR would increase traffic on the latter, and recommend the construction of a new adjacent platform (presumably end-on, rather than side by side).

CONCLUSION

LTW suggest a number of interesting projects. Some are revivals of older ideas, whilst others are completely new. Whilst none are at the Crossrail level of cost, some would still be very expensive to implement, particularly if the costs of the Croxley Rail Link and Northern Line Extension are now typical for London railway works. It would be interesting to know more of the rationale behind some of the schemes – e.g., why Great Portland Street to Regent’s Park was suggested, rather than Euston Square to Warren Street. Some of the schemes appear to be highly unfeasible, such as the DLR extension to Hackney and the link between the Edgware Road stations, and some detail on whether the difficulties identified here have been considered by LTW would have been useful.