

FROM THE PAPERS

Items for “From the Papers” should be sent to John Wilson at 44 Pleydell Crescent, Sturrey, Canterbury, CT2 0LQ (or E-Mail wilsonja1954@gmail.com), and not to the Editor of this journal. Please ensure that contributions are identified by date and source publication.

28.11.21 MY LONDON – Warnings that a London Underground line, as well as over 100 of the city’s bus services, might have to be shut down have been issued by Transport for London amid a funding crisis. If the Government does not offer more financial support, the network predicted it will fall into “managed decline”, creating “significant customer disruption”. Andy Byford, London’s Transport Commissioner, said he was not being “hyperbolic” but believed there was “less than three weeks to save TfL”, adding: “If we do not get the help that we’re seeking, I believe that there would be far-reaching consequences for Transport for London and everyone that relies on it”. The network has received three government bailouts worth over £4bn since May 2020, but its current emergency funding deal expires on 11 December. On Wednesday, TfL finance chief Simon Kilonback told the TfL finance committee what the failure to secure funding would mean: “We would have to reduce tube network by 9% and the bus network by 18%. For the Tube network, we’re still analysing the impacts, for example of a full closure of a line or part of a line or smaller reductions across the whole [Underground] network”. The Bakerloo Line is reportedly in danger of being closed, although the specific lines a risk were not actually mentioned. The TfL finance chief added that there was a risk TfL would have to issue a ‘section 114 notice’, which would mean effectively declaring itself bankrupt. Therefore, it would only provide services required by law, such as school buses, taxi licensing, some road repairs and the Woolwich ferry.

29.11.21 EVENING STANDARD – Fining passengers who refuse to wear a facemask on the Underground will “greatly help with compliance”, Sadiq Khan has said. From Tuesday, anyone who refuses to wear a face covering on public transport or in shops could face a fine of £200 or more following a Government announcement over the weekend. The decision comes following the emergence of the Omicron variant of Covid-19 in the UK.

01.12.21 RAILWAY GAZETTE – UK: ‘Creative and holistic’ proposals are being sought from suppliers, operators and research organisations interested in partnering with Hertfordshire County Council to develop conceptual designs for ‘a new and future-ready transport system’ linking Watford Junction and Croxley using a disused rail alignment. The council plans to appoint a number of consortia early next year to independently develop ideas based on a wide range of potential options, including active travel, e-mobility, autonomous shared mobility such as pod vehicles or various forms of mass rapid transit. The council would oversee the development of design concepts in collaboration with Watford Borough and Three Rivers councils, Network Rail and Transport for London. The previous Croxley Rail Link project to divert London Underground’s Metropolitan Line over the disused railway was granted legal powers in 2013, with opening initially planned for 2016. However, costs increased and the scheme was eventually cancelled as being unaffordable. Earlier this year, Steer produced an updated report into strategic transport needs in the corridor.

02.12.21 EVENING STANDARD New Year partygoers will not get their traditional free Underground ride home thanks to Transport for London’s financial crisis, it was revealed today. TfL said it was having to charge for late-night travel on 31 December and early on 1 January due to the “catastrophic impact of the pandemic” on its finances. Normally the Underground is free from 23.45 until 04.30, a tradition dating back to 2000 with the cost often covered by a sponsor. It is the second year of no free travel, although last year’s celebrations were restricted due to the pandemic.

02.12.21 METRO – Rail workers could go on strike over lack of funds for Transport for London after warnings that drastic cuts to services may be needed. About 10,000 members of the Rail, Maritime and Transport union are to vote on whether to take industrial action to protect jobs, pay and conditions. RMT leader Mick Lynch said: ‘Attacks on pensions, pay freezes and threats to services and jobs is not an acceptable way to treat workers who have kept the city moving through the pandemic.’

04.12.21 THE TELEGRAPH – Tony Blair thought he had the answer for London’s perennial public transport funding problem. For decades before him, the Greater London Authority was dependent on an annual grant from Westminster to balance the books. As a result, long-term investment was nigh-on impossible meaning passengers on the world’s oldest Underground railway were regularly saddled with typical delays, cancellations and overrunning engineering works. Privatising the Underground was his predecessor John Major’s answer. But Blair had other ideas when he came to power in 1997. Public-

private partnerships were the solution. John Prescott, transport secretary at the time, told the Commons that the PPP model would “modernise the Underground” and “guarantee value for money” – neither of these assertions would come true. More than two decades on, and more than 10 years since New Labour’s experiment imploded – funding the capital’s public transport remains a conundrum. While decisions are yet to be made, Westminster is this week expected to offer London Mayor Sadiq Khan the bare minimum funding to keep public transport running across the capital, a £500m bailout to buoy Transport for London until March next year. It takes TfL to the brink of failure for the fifth time since the start of the pandemic. Until the pandemic, experts say one positive legacy remained from the Blairite reforms. Not beholden to handouts from the Government, TfL had the ability to raise capital independently – the devolved administration could plan for the long term. Coronavirus scuppered this, however. Lockdowns led to a sharp fall in fare revenue, forcing TfL to go to Boris Johnson’s administration for help. It has received £4.8bn in taxpayer funding since March 2020 across three deals. The latest grant runs out at midnight on Friday.

07.12.21 EVENING STANDARD – The number of daily journeys in London by the end of the decade could be far lower than expected due to long-term changes to travel patterns caused by Covid. TfL said the number of trips by public or private transport by 2031 could be 14 per cent below its previous prediction, according to a new “hybrid” working model that assumes Londoners work part of the week from home. This takes no account of feared cuts to public transport, with an 18 per cent reduction in bus services and nine per cent on the Underground – including the full closure of a line – which on the cards. TfL’s current bailout runs out on Saturday 11 December and it is seeking £500 million to keep running until April and about £1.2 billion for 2022-23.

The bailout was extended for one week, expiring on Friday 17 December. A Government spokesman said that progress had been made and was encouraging, but more details on proposals from the Mayor on revenue raising were required. It was subsequently announced on 18 December that the government will continue the terms of the current £1.6bn package until 4 February 2022 – the equivalent of about £113m.

09.12.21 EVENING STANDARD – Extra staff are to be deployed on the Night Tube after a woman fell onto the tracks at Tottenham Court Road station. The incident happened at around 00.45 last Saturday morning at a time when train frequencies on the Central Line had fallen to about one every 30 minutes due to strike action by the RMT union. Transport for London chiefs said the woman had suffered a “medical episode” and that initial media reports that the fall was linked to overcrowding were incorrect.

13.12.21 NEW CIVIL ENGINEER – There is little margin for error for engineers working on Transport for London’s 17-week Bank Station Capacity Upgrade blockade, with just a matter of days leeway to complete the work. The 17-week Bank Station blockade on the Northern Line begins in January and the contractor has now revealed that there are only “a matter of days” of float in the event of delays or complications. Bank is the third busiest station in London, with 120M users annually and up to 100,000 per hour during rush hour. The upgrade will increase the station’s capacity by 40% with a new ticket hall, concourses and an entirely new southbound tunnel and platform. Dragados commenced tunnelling on the project back in 2017 and has been progressing without major disruption to the station’s operation. The coming blockade will stop Northern Line services on the Bank branch between Moorgate and Kennington for almost four months, as the new tunnels are connected to the old tunnels, the new platform is made functional and a new concourse created. Once the blockade is complete in May 2022, the new southbound platform and tunnels will be in operation. A new ticket hall and banks of escalators will open later in the year. Details of the 119-day blockade are:

1. Already constructed are 1.3km of tunnels that weave around the existing station, as well as 18 connections to the existing tunnels. A temporary access shaft from Arthur Street down to the tunnels has also been constructed to allow workers, equipment and materials into the work site. There are more connections to be made, particularly at the ends of the tunnels. This will be the first phase of work during the blockade, which lasts for 44 days.
2. During this phase, 99m of new tunnels – 55m at the south end and 44m at the north end – will be created to tie in the new platform tunnel with the existing tunnels of the Northern Line. The work site with all the equipment will be based within the new southbound tunnel. The first step is to remove the rails from the old tunnel, install formwork and backfill it with foam concrete. The concrete is pumped down to the tunnels through a hollow pile. The 99m of connective tunnels between the new platform tunnel and the existing tunnels will then have to be excavated. Once opened up, a single

pass spray concrete lining (SCL) will be installed, followed by the casting of the first stage concrete and finished with a sprayed regulating layer.

3. Phase two spans 19 days and will see the installation of 712m of new track. The first stage of this is to complete the track bed through the tunnel up to where it connects to the existing Northern Line. The rails will be laid out with a tracked rail transporter and the blocks/baseplates put in place with a telehandler and mini digger. The rail will be placed on top of this and clipped in place. The track then has to be aligned to its final design position. Concrete from the Arthur Street shaft will be put in place to shore up the track. The final stages are to install conductor rail, signalling equipment, traction power and train radio.
4. The project then has 11 days to demobilise the tunnelling equipment. It will first backfill the hollow pile, and the portal to the tunnel will be waterproofed and have a second lining installed. The muck chamber is the next to go, as it will be emptied and filled with foam concrete. Finally, all plant will be removed through the 40m deep Arthur Street shaft. The shaft will then be in-filled, but a support structure has to be built and a framework erected before concrete can be poured. Once the concrete has cured, the former portal will be waterproofed.
5. With the construction of the tunnel then complete, the project moves on to the 39-day phase four: fitting out the platform tunnel and installing the systems. This involves removing the hoardings and protections, and putting in place the new coping stones and floor finish. Lights will also be installed in the new tunnel. The platform will then be furnished with CCTV, staff telephones, Wi-Fi, furniture, services speakers and advertising frames.
6. Concurrent to phases three and four is the 96-day conversion of the old southbound platform tunnel into a concourse. This first involves infilling the old southbound track bed to bring the floor up to the level of the concourse. Storage rooms for equipment will be created in part of the old tunnel. Mechanical, electrical, public health and comms installations will be completed before architectural finishes are applied and signage and furniture are installed.
7. Finally, 42 days are allotted for phase five, where Dragados hands over to TfL and third parties carry out all the testing, commissioning and systems integration. The station staff will also be given time to familiarise themselves with the new station.

With all running smoothly and the seven days of float being sufficient to sustain any delays, the new southbound tunnel and platform will open for operations in mid-May.

17.12.21 THE INDEPENDENT – Mariah Carey has taken over the London Underground’s announcements to bring some “festive cheer” to commuters this Christmas. In partnership with Amazon Music UK, the 52-year-old singer is promoting her festive classic “All I Want For Christmas Is You” in a unique way by taking over the intercom of London’s Underground stations. “Hi darlings, it’s Mariah,” the announcement begins. “Make my wish come true and please stand behind the yellow line at all times, proceed with caution, and don’t forget to ask Alexa to play ‘All I Want for Christmas is You’ on Amazon Music” the singer announces.

23.12.21 EVENING STANDARD – Transport chiefs have been forced to close the Waterloo & City Line from Thursday until early January to enable drivers to be switched onto the Central Line to keep that running. About 500 “non-office-based” Transport for London staff are currently absent due to Covid and there are staffing problems across all Underground lines. The two lines share the same pool of drivers but the Waterloo & City Line is only a shuttle between Waterloo and Bank stations, while the Central Line is one of the busiest lines on the entire Underground network and serves Oxford Street. The announcement from TfL on Wednesday is further evidence of how Omicron, which is estimated to be responsible for more 90 per cent of Covid cases in the capital, is forcing thousands of Londoners to isolate. The Waterloo & City Line only reopened in June after a 15-month shutdown since the start of the pandemic. It is seen by the Corporation of London and City businesses as a key commuter link to the Square Mile financial district. But the number of Londoners travelling to work in central London offices has plummeted since Boris Johnson advised people to work from home to help curb the spread of Omicron. Morning rush hour Underground journeys have fallen below 50 per cent of pre-pandemic levels, with further drop off expected in the approach to Christmas. A total of 103 TfL staff and contractors have died with Covid during the pandemic.