

FROM THE PAPERS

Items for “From the Papers” should be sent to Ian McKenzie at 24 Thamespoint, Fairways, Teddington, TW11 9PP (or E-Mail secretary@lurs.org.uk), and not to the Editor of this journal. Please ensure that contributions are identified by date and source publication.

23.08.19 WATFORD OBSERVER – Overcrowding delays on the Underground have gone up 42% since Sadiq Khan became Mayor. There were more than 559 delays due to overcrowding at stations in 2018/19, up from 393 hold-ups three years before. Almost half of all stations impacted were in Zone 1, but there were also delays as far out as Zone 6. A London Assembly member, who requested the figures, said it was “quite clear” lack of investment was impacting service. He said: “Most people travelling in London have an appointment to get to, and they may miss it altogether because of delays. That could cost many thousands of pounds to their businesses. The Mayor needs to take a serious approach to funding TfL; his tokenistic fare freezes don’t benefit anyone in the long run”. TfL records any incident where overcrowding at a station causes delays of two minutes or more – but hold-ups can last far longer. Typically staff will close ticket barriers or prevent use of escalators to control the flow of passengers. In serious cases, the station may be shut entirely. Highbury & Islington was the worst with 104 delays; Finsbury Park was second worst with 49 hold-ups; Oxford Circus was third worst with 32 delays. Additional stations affected in Zone 4 were Barking, Hainault and Kingsbury; in Zone 5 were Rayners Lane, Ruislip Gardens and South Harrow; in Zone 6 was West Ruislip.

23.08.19 EVENING STANDARD – Passengers were stranded in Underground tunnels for up to two hours because of a broken-down train. One driver was seen “carrying a girl having a panic attack” during the Central Line chaos last night. Commuters were stuck between stations from 19.00 because of a faulty train at Stratford. At least one woman was treated on the platform after collapsing. An LBC Radio reporter had her service stopped in the tunnel after Mile End at 19.20 and did not arrive at Stratford until after 2100. She said: “It was the worst Underground journey I have ever had. It was over 30°C and several people around me started looking ill”. A TfL spokeswoman said: “The broken-down train caused four trains to be stuck for approximately two hours”.

23.08.19 EVENING STANDARD – A travel perk enjoyed by TfL staff costs a record £42M last year. The perk allows current and retired staff to nominate a member of their household – even a lodger – for free travel on the Underground, Overground, bus and DLR networks. Research by the City Hall Tory group shows TfL issued 52,015 “nominee passes” last year amounting to a claimed £41,612,000 in lost revenue. The GLA Tory transport spokesman called on the Mayor to scrap the “unfair” scheme. He said the money saved each year “could be spent in paying off a portion of TfL’s debt, investing in infrastructure upgrades or putting up to 700 additional police on the streets of London. Londoners shelling out hundreds of pounds a year on travelling around our city will rightly question why a handful of lucky people get to use the TfL network for free, just because they live with a TfL employee”. The perk has been in place for a number of years. Nominees are entitled to free travel in Zones 1-6, where an annual season ticket costs £2,568.

27.08.19 EVENING STANDARD – Homeowners living near Underground stations have enjoyed a far bigger surge in property value than those in other parts of London. Houses within 500 metres of a station – equivalent to a five to seven-minute walk – have experienced value growth of nearly 10% every year since the financial crash. The 9.7% annual growth since the final quarter of 2009 is well above the 6.9% rise seen across the wider borough that stations sit in. Homes next to the Metropolitan Line have seen the largest annual spike in prices – up 11%, and 6.3% above borough averages. Owner occupiers and landlords close to the Central, Circle, Piccadilly and Jubilee lines have also seen annual price gains of 10% or above. The CBRE study suggested some of the rises were linked to major regeneration in parts of the capital such as Stratford, on the Central and Jubilee lines. The east London area has benefited from new businesses opening offices and shops there since the 2012 Olympics. The study also pointed to living closer to the Underground becoming more desirable because it trims transport costs. It said the congestion charge, which was introduced in 2003, has made commuters even more reliant on the Underground, resulting in a 10% reduction in traffic volumes in the decade following its introduction.

27.08.19 EVENING STANDARD – Crossrail has entered its “critical and most challenging final phase” as constructors battle to open the delayed £17.6B line in less than two years. As new images of the project were released, CEO Mark Wild insisted “good progress” was being made and the revised plan to open the line between October 2020 and March 2021 “remains unchanged”. Bond Street station remains a concern and will not be open when the trains start running. But engineers must make it safe enough to use as an emergency evacuation route, otherwise the line will not be able to open. Testing of the new fleet of trains, which have been blighted by software problems, is due to start in Q1 of 2020.

27.08.19 EVENING STANDARD – The majority of London businesses favour banning strikes on the Underground during the morning and evening peak times to keep the capital moving, a major survey has revealed. 65% of nearly 600 businesses polled support the prevention of strikes on the Underground during rush hour. The survey, published by the London Chamber of Commerce and Industry (LCCI), comes as commuters learn today who will take charge of the RMT for the next five years, a leadership battle which threatens even more Underground and rail strikes. Current RMT general secretary Mick Cash is being challenged by Sean Hoyle, a former RMT president who has promised a more aggressive approach. (*Note: Mick Cash was re-elected*). The LCCI survey of 571 London businesses also found: 73% support the introduction of a minimum service guarantee from the unions during peak times; 51% support a blanket ban on all Underground strikes. The LCCI CEO said: “A strike on LU adversely impacts the capital’s economy, businesses and commuters. It is not surprising therefore that London businesses support mitigating the impact of strikes. The Underground is an essential service, and the right to strike needs to balance better against that significance”. Any strike ban, outright or in peak times, would mean a change in the law.

30.09.19 CITY AM – Strike action that was due to take place on the Central and Victoria lines next week has been called off. Members of the RMT were due to strike on the two busy lines from 20.00 on 3 September to 20.00 on 4 September.

02.09.19 EVENING STANDARD – A murder hunt was launched today after one of two young men who were stabbed at Elephant & Castle Underground station lost his fight for life. The 24-year-old was taken to hospital with critical injuries after being found in a street near the station shortly before 23.30 last night. He is the 97th person to be killed in the capital this year. A man aged 25 found with him was in a “critical” condition in hospital today. Two men arrested on suspicion of violent disorder were in custody today. The station remained closed this morning with police tents outside, as the search for evidence continued.

04.09.19 THE TIMES – *Letter by Ronel Lehmann* – “The news that Pope Francis recently got stuck in a lift reminds me of when as a schoolboy I found myself stuck in London’s deepest lift shaft at Hampstead station, packed like sardines with other passengers. No one other than me was prepared to press the alarm for fear of a fine, and a man started breathing very loudly indeed. I asked him what he thought he was doing and he responded that he was preserving air. This resulted in everyone bursting into fits of laughter, to the incredulity of the station guard, who manually pulled us back up to the top”.

05.09.19 ESSEX CHRONICLE – *Letter by Richard Enever* – “Crossrail CEO Howard Smith asserts that Crossrail will open between October 2020 and March 2021. Can he guarantee this? Meanwhile, will he look at the formation of the Class 345 trains? They are open trains with no doors between the carriages. These doors are essential. We have already experienced a near-disaster at Parsons Green on the District Line. Does Mr. Smith not share our concerns on this? Also, will Mr. Smith please look at station platforms on Crossrail stations with toilets closed, namely Ilford and Romford? Three months ago, I had an embarrassing situation at Ilford following closure of a toilet”.

12.09.19 THE TIMES – Train drivers are threatening to take industrial action because of concerns that noise on the Underground poses a health hazard. RMT members could work to rule on four of the busiest lines. The union accused LU managers of failure to tackle the problem. Drivers have already been given ear protectors to offset the risk of damage. Research at UCL last year found that the noise on some lines could be higher than that caused by a pneumatic drill or chainsaw at close range. The research said that the Central Line between Liverpool Street and Bethnal Green, and between Camden Town and Euston on the Northern Line were loudest, reaching almost 109dB. The researchers, working with the BBC, said it was loud enough to damage people’s hearing. TfL

said it was taking action, including grinding rails to remove corrugation – ridges or grooves that can increase noise. It has a programme to replace worn rails and use lubrication to reduce wheel noise. However, RMT said this fell short of measures needed to improve working conditions for drivers. It balloted 748 members and said that 95% voted in favour of industrial action. This action is likely to take the form of refusing to work overtime, potentially leading to driver shortages, although the RMT has only a fraction of LU drivers. ASLEF is not taking part.