

FROM THE PAPERS

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

19.12.23 MYLONDON – TfL’s commissioner has admitted that a publicity stunt caused confusion for passengers at a major Underground station earlier this year. Andy Lord told members of the London Assembly that he thought there would be regular reminders from train drivers that, even though roundels said *Burberry Street*, they were still arriving at *Bond Street*. But, he added, this ‘wasn’t consistently done’. During London Fashion Week in September, Bond Street station was temporarily named after the luxury brand headquartered in London. Mr Lord said to members of the budget and performance committee: “Often, we get approached by a number of brands and organisations who would be keen to partner with us. TfL, and particularly the Underground, is an iconic brand that they’d like to be associated with the Burberry sponsorship was, I think, the longest activation that we’ve done. There are a number of operational mitigations that were put in place that weren’t consistently delivered. We’ve learned from that, done a review, and they will be fed into any further equivalent scheme should we have the right commercial opportunity going forward. But we don’t just agree to anything. We need to make sure we have better signage and awareness ahead of the launch”.

09.01.23 MYLONDON – Sadiq Khan has refused to say how much money City Hall has given to TfL so it can carry on pay negotiations with unions after a strike was averted on 7 January. Reports have suggested that £30-million was provided from the Mayor of London’s budget so that TfL’s offer of a 5% wage boost offered to workers could be increased. Mr Khan hinted that all of the cash may not be used, as he told the London Assembly that the pot is ‘potentially available, hypothetically speaking’ to Underground staff. It is to be used at the discretion of TfL, which says it will negotiate with all unions representing Underground workers this week. It comes as the Evening Standard reports that members of the ASLEF union – which represents most drivers on the Underground – are to be balloted to enable it to retain the power to call a strike at a fortnight’s notice. This comes after they accepted TfL’s ‘full and final’ offer of a 5% increase to wages. It is thought that this was ‘overwhelming’ as members voted by a margin of 1,301 (88.56%) to 168 (11.44%) for the deal. But now, more cash is available, and negotiations have resumed.

10.01.23 EVENING STANDARD – Underground fares could rise and fall in line with post-pandemic demand in a bid to get more Londoners travelling, Sadiq Khan has suggested. The mayor confirmed that so-called “dynamic pricing” was under consideration by TfL – but said there may be insufficient time to introduce it as part of the annual fares rise. Mr Khan is due to announce next week whether Underground and bus fares will rise in line with national rail fares, which will increase by 4.9% on 3 March. TfL’s “working assumption” is a 4% rise. But TfL fares have to increase by at least by the same amount as commuter rail fares to prevent TfL losing money on Travelcard tickets, which can be used on trains, buses and the Underground. Passenger numbers on the network are highest on Thursdays, at about 87% of pre-pandemic levels, but are lower on Mondays and Fridays – reflecting hybrid working patterns. Underground passengers currently pay peak fares between 06.30 and 09.30, and 16.00 to 19.00 on Mondays to Fridays, with all other times charged at lower off-peak rates. Last year, TfL fares rose by an average of 5.9%. TfL does not expect passenger numbers to return to pre-pandemic levels for another three years. It predicts that it will take until 2026/27 for there to be 4-billion trips a year, despite the success of the Elizabeth Line in attracting new journeys. At present, demand for TfL services is about 90% of pre-pandemic levels. Prior to the pandemic, the Underground carried the highest number of passengers on record in December 2018 when 5,031,000 journeys were made in a day. TfL expects to make its first-ever “operating surplus” of £144-million, in the current financial year, rising to almost £500m a year by 2026/27, due to higher fares revenue, property income and savings. This money is reinvested in transport schemes. TfL’s fares income is expected to increase by 11% in 2024/25 to £5.6-billion, driven by a 6% increase in demand and a 5% rise in the amount paid by passengers, including a crackdown on fare evasion.

12.01.24 EVENING STANDARD – Londoners will soon be able to buy shares in a venture aimed at reopening abandoned WW2 tunnels in Holborn after the firm behind the project confirmed it plans to float on the stock market. London Tunnels plc is seeking to raise £30-million on the London Stock Exchange. Construction of the Kingsway Exchange tunnels, an expanse of 8,000m² of passageways, began during the Blitz in WW2 to serve as a shelter, before being used by the Special Operations

Executive, Winston Churchill's forerunners of MI6. It is hoped that as many as 2-million visitors a year will visit the site after it is converted.

13.01.24 MYLONDON – TfL has slowed down some of its Underground trains as engineers aim to curb noise on the network. Passengers traveling on a section of the Northern Line 'should not notice any difference' as the timetable has already been adjusted. (*Comment – we wonder how, as the current Northern Line timetable dates back to 27 June 2022*). Mayor Sadiq Khan, revealed the measure to the London Assembly when listing what officials are doing to guard against wear on tracks. Responding to a question from Caroline Pidgeon, Mayor Sadiq Khan said: "Tackling Underground noise for staff, passengers and neighbours is a priority for both TfL and me. As part of TfL's commitment to tackling the issue, the TfL Open Innovation team is putting out a market research questionnaire targeting global innovators to help manage noise on the network. The problem statement is being drafted, with an aim of going to the market in early 2024. TfL is also planning other trials which could reduce noise levels. This includes the use of Tuned Mass Dampers (absorptive materials which would be fixed to a tunnel wall), which it hopes will reduce the levels of airborne noise and slow the rate of corrugation on rails. TfL is also undertaking a Variable Speed Trial on the Northern Line between Tufnell Park and Kentish Town, to determine if this slows down corrugation without negatively impacting service levels. TfL will keep Assembly Members updated on the progress of these trials." It comes after Mr Khan suggested that a speed reduction near Canning Town station would have a "negative impact" on services. He said in October "TfL's trial found that that the implementation of a speed reduction did reduce noise levels in this area. However, a permanent speed reduction in this location would have a negative impact on service frequency, which would significantly disbenefit Jubilee Line passengers, and as such, TfL cannot take it forward at this time".

18.01.24 EVENING STANDARD – *By Melanie McDonagh* – "Well done the Greens. If credit is due anywhere for the inclusion of £3-million in the Mayor's budget for public lavatories at Underground stations, it should go to Caroline Russell. She is the leader of the Greens in the London Assembly, and she has been banging on about this for years. In fact, she was hoping for £20-million, but you have to start somewhere. However, a sizeable chunk of that budget should be allowed for maintenance because lavatories are only as good as their cleanliness – I would pay cleaners a premium for keeping them clean, and for mopping up regularly. In fact, I would really like those at the big interchanges manned by actual people. On Japan's underground, nice clean lavatories are a given. The reality is that we need to spend more (I am avoiding the obvious joke) on what are not just public conveniences, but public necessities. But for now, loos on the Underground are a good start.."

19.01.24 EVENING STANDARD – Sadiq Khan today announced a freeze on most bus and Underground fares as he sought to pave his way to re-election. The Mayor said pay-as-you-go fares – which account for about 80% of Underground journeys and 74% of bus trips – would remain unchanged until March 2025. They had been expected to rise in line with national rail fares, which the Government has decided to increase by 4.9% in March. While most fares will be unchanged, however there was a sting in the tail. The weekly and daily "cap" on the amount paid by passengers making multiple pay-as-you-go journeys will rise by between 4.1% and 5.1%, meaning many travellers will still pay more overall despite the fares freeze. The cost of Travelcards will go up by between the same percentages. The Mayor will also increase the penalty for fare dodging from £80 to £100 in a bid to recoup more of the £130-million a year lost to TfL as a result of people failing to pay. The fares freeze is being funded with £123-million from City Hall's budget after Mr Khan was the beneficiary of a £512-million "windfall" funded by extra business rates and reserves.

21.01.24 MYLONDON – An Underground driver has made what she calls a 'public service announcement' to warn passengers their conversations are not always private on Underground trains. The TfL worker, posting to TikTok, has revealed that if you sit in certain seats in the first carriage she can hear everything you're saying. She says in her video, which features a train arriving at West Finchley, "This is a public service announcement to let you know that, as a train driver, if you sit in either of these seats I can actually hear your conversations". The seats she is referring to are the two that sit opposite one another and butt up against the wall panel where the door to the driver's cab is. Underground trains are made from thin sheets of aluminium, so they aren't exactly sound proofed. She added: "But don't worry, I will keep your secrets. I remember once I had these girls on my train gossiping and one of them stopped to say: "I wonder if the train driver can hear us". I responded: 'Yeah, I can hear you' and they burst out laughing".