



Trade Union Briefing

London Underground Job Cuts Dispute

2008: Boris Johnson election manifesto: - “I will defend local ticket offices”. He publicly signs a petition against any such cuts.

2010: Now Mayor, *Johnson breaks his election promise* proposing 800 job losses at London Underground ticket offices and dramatic reductions in opening hours

28th September 2010: Passenger watchdog London Travel Watch expressed “severe concerns about London Underground’s proposals to reduce the hours of ticket offices”:

“...we know that passengers feel safer and more secure with a staff presence and many passengers - the elderly, those with physical impairments or learning difficulties, as well as those unfamiliar with the system – will still rely on help to buy tickets. We are very worried that their needs will be neglected.”

Why have Tube workers been forced to strike?

Front-line London Underground workers feel so strongly that these disastrous cuts will seriously undermine safety of staff and the travelling public cuts that they voted by a margin of 76% vote in favour of strike action and giving up pay.

Losing 2000 jobs would seriously affect any workplace and cuts of this magnitude will inevitably have a detrimental effect on the level of service afforded to the travelling public. Remaining staff will be placed under intolerable pressure, with an increase in unsafe lone working and many stations will be left unstaffed in the early mornings or evenings.

Why this is a bad deal for passengers

London Underground has sought to portray the slashing of jobs and ticket office opening times as a reasonable reaction to the increased use of oyster cards. Yet the majority of jobs are not from ticket offices but are gateline and station staff. With regards to oyster cards London Underground have spent years trying to run down ticket offices as the sales outlet for Oyster cards. It is obvious to Tube workers and their unions that these savage cuts are purely for financial not operational reasons and will seriously undermine the quality of service and safety on the network.

London Underground has not thought through the full consequences of its slashing of jobs and ticket office opening times. With fewer visible station staff, passengers will have to queue for longer to buy their tickets. Ticket machines alone are no replacement for the presence of trained Underground staff; they do not for instance, offer travel advice on ticket and fare options. Over reliance on ticket machines will disproportionately impact on those passengers who have a disability which makes it difficult or impossible to use a ticket machine.

Passengers will have more difficulty finding help in an emergency. Without the security of fully-staffed ticket offices, the public will feel that they are travelling in a less safe environment and this could result in lower usage of the network at early mornings and late evenings if passengers decide personal safety concerns are too high.

The cuts would inhibit London Underground's ability to respond effectively to a major security alert or function to an optimum level during the 2012 Olympics.

A warning from the present

Last month potential disasters at Oxford Circus and Euston were averted when both stations were evacuated safely by trained and experienced station staff after they spotted smoke. It is these staff that the Mayor wants to cut.

Broad opposition to the job cuts

RMT and TSSA have formed a broad coalition against the job cuts including unions, pensioner groups and transport campaigners. The following signed a joint letter with RMT and TSSA to London Travel Watch opposing the Mayor's cuts: -

Megan Dobney, Regional Secretary, SERTUC
Ian Leahair, Executive Member, FBU London Region
John Denton, Regional Secretary, CWU London Region
Steve Hart, Regional Secretary, UNITE London and Eastern Region
Peter Smith, Secretary, Newham Teachers Association (NUT)
Cities of London & Westminster Trades Council
Croydon Trades Council
Brent Trades Council
Ealing Trades Council
John McDonnell MP
Diane Abbott MP
Jeremy Corbyn MP
Faryal Velmi, Director, Transport for All
Stephen Joseph, Executive Director, Campaign for Better Transport
Dot Gibson, General Secretary, National Pensioners Convention

London MPs have tabled a series of Early Day Motions condemning the Mayor's proposed job cuts at London Underground, labelling them a seriously retrograde step.

At the London Assembly Labour's Val Shawcross and Lib Dem Caroline Pidgeon have twice introduced a cross-party motion and on tube safety, condemning the job cuts and called on Boris Johnson to review his plans. However, on both occasions (14th July and 8th September), Tory members on the GLA walked out of the meeting preventing the motion from being put to the vote. A copy of the Motion is attached.

Labour Mayoralty Candidate Ken Livingstone has called on Boris Johnson to explain why he broke his promise not to cut the opening hours of London's tube ticket offices: -

"Londoners are going to be inconvenienced as a direct consequence of Boris Johnson's big programme of staff cuts and his broken promise on ticket office closures. Boris Johnson gave a cast-iron commitment on protecting ticket office opening hours which he has spectacularly broken, hitting outer London hardest, where 90% of the stations affected are located.

Transport for All, London Visual Impairment Forum and Inclusion London wrote a joint open letter to the Mayor detailing their concern that the staffing cuts "could seriously undermine the mobility of older and disabled people in London".

TUC General Secretary Brendan Barber has said:

"Tube staff are right to say there can be no compromise on safety and we fully support their action. The Mayor should honour his election promises and put a halt to these cuts."

The trade unions' message to the Mayor

The unions are under no illusions that the job cuts form merely the start of the Mayor's reorganisation plans and further cuts and changes to working conditions are likely in future.

Rather than shedding crucial front-line staff, London Underground ought to make an investment in a ready and noticeable staff presence in every station. Government research published in July this year by Transport Minister Norman Baker MP, showed crimes on the various rail networks cost the taxpayer almost £1bn per year. The report also suggested that people were reassured when staff were visible on transport networks. (DfT Report: Estimated Cost to Society of Crime on Public Transport, July 2010).

Transport for London should be looking to maximise London Underground's customer service. We urge TfL to review this decision, re-affirm reasonable and safe staffing levels right across the London Underground network to ensure passengers continue to receive excellent service from their local ticket office.

Motion presented to the London Assembly condemning the Mayor's proposals

Date: 14 July 2010

1. *Recommendation*

1.1 *That the Assembly considers the motion set out below.*

2. *The following motion has been proposed in the name of Valerie Shawcross AM and will be seconded by Caroline Pidgeon AM:*

“The London Assembly is concerned about Transport for London’s proposals to shed up to 800 ticket office and gateline jobs on London Underground which will adversely affect the opening times of 245 ticket offices right across the Tube network. The number of stations which will be staffed by only one person working alone for some time will increase. This round of staff cuts will damage the level of customer service to passengers who will be forced to queue for longer to buy their tickets. Ticket machines alone are no replacement for the presence of trained Underground staff and the over reliance on ticket machines will disproportionately impact on those passengers who have a disability which makes it difficult to use a ticket machine. This Assembly believes that passengers will feel less safe particularly at early mornings and late evenings.

This Assembly urges Transport for London and its Chair, Mayor Boris Johnson, to review this decision and re-affirm reasonable and safe staffing levels right across the London Underground network to ensure passengers continue to receive excellent service from London Underground.”