

# TfL faces fall in passenger numbers and financial strain

TRANSPORT for London is "clearly struggling to cope with the financial impact of its fares freeze", according to the organisation that examines its budget.

London Assembly's Budget and Performance Committee says income from fares is well below expectations, meaning that TfL faces tough decisions.

Chairman Gareth Bacon, a Conservative Assembly Member, said: "We are not convinced that TfL has a solid understanding of the reasons for a fall in passenger numbers.

"TfL has had to revise its fares forecast down for the fourth year in a row, and its capital spend (even after adjusting for the Elizabeth Line) is set to fall. The figures in the draft budget don't back up the Mayor's claim that he is investing 'record amounts in modernising our transport infrastructure'."

The number of rail journeys fell by 5% in 2017, there were 13 million fewer journeys on the Tube last year, and the number of bus passengers has reduced by 6% in three years.

The metropolitan authority



**Paul Clifton**  
Contributing Writer  
rail@bauermedia.co.uk

also no longer receives revenue support for transport from central government - a loss of £700 million. And London Mayor Sadiq Khan has partly frozen fares, with the cost of that put at £640m over four years.

The budget committee described this as "financial stress", noting that capacity upgrades on London Underground had been cancelled, with bus services also due to be cut by 7% over five years.

Last October, TfL cancelled plans to buy new trains that would have increased capacity on the Jubilee and Northern lines. It had previously described the Jubilee upgrade as one of London Underground's "lowest-risk and highest-benefit projects".

Khan told the committee: "We are the only major public transport body in Europe not subsidised by central government. It's astonishing. But we have made massive savings across the TfL organisation for the

first time since its inception."

He added: "But who would have predicted four terror attacks in one year in relation to the leisure visitors to London? I am confident TfL will do better next year."

Another sign of financial pressure was TfL's plan to enter its first rolling stock sale and leaseback agreement. It intends to sell some of its trains to fund capital investment on the Piccadilly Line, and then lease the trains back from the new owner (RAIL 844).

TfL's revised revenue forecast for the current financial year is £4.6 billion, £240m less than expected.

The budget committee commented: "We have repeatedly raised concerns around TfL's overly-optimistic forecasts in our 2015, 2016 and 2017 pre-budget reports. This is the fourth time in four years that TfL has had to revise down its forecasts.

"If the fall in passenger numbers is primarily down to short-term economic factors, then it may be reasonable to predict an upswing. But if it is down to lifestyle changes - with more people working from home, shopping online, and

using ride-hailing apps - then this upswing may not materialise. TfL may be facing a structural and permanent change to its fares revenue."

The committee points out that because of the fares freeze, the only way to increase revenue is to carry more passengers.

The Elizabeth Line (Crossrail) will bring increased income when it opens in December. The committee pointed out that it is hard to make forecasts for new services, or to model the impact they will have on existing journey patterns.

To cover the shortfall, TfL will cut the money it hands to individual boroughs aimed at promoting greater use of walking, cycling and public transport. It will also reduce spending on road maintenance.

TfL's business plan shows that capital investment, after stripping out Crossrail, will be lower in each of the next four years than in 2017-18.

"We are concerned that this will mean that the condition of London's roads, trains and stations will deteriorate," concludes the report. @PaulCliftonBBC

## Nine-day closure of Norfolk lines

A further nine-day closure on the Norwich-Great Yarmouth/Lowestoft branches begins on February 10, as part of £68 million resignalling.

Network Rail says 66 new LED colour light signals and 22 power-operated points will be installed. Manually controlled level crossings will be replaced by automatic barriers controlled by CCTV.

This follows similar work in October last year, when track remodelling carried out on the routes included the removal of a platform at Great Yarmouth.

## New Broxbourne footbridge in place

Network Rail has installed a footbridge at Slupe Lane (Broxbourne), to replace a level crossing where there were 25 near misses last year.

The crossing is used by 378 trains per day, at speeds up to 80mph. NR is still to finish pathways and remedial work ahead of the bridge's opening later this year. The pathway will then close.

## GWR to build new depot facility at Exeter

A new depot at Exeter will open in early summer next year.

Great Western Railway's new facility will be constructed on the site of the existing depot. It will house GWR's expanded diesel multiple unit fleet for the Devon and Cornwall area, while short-formed High Speed Trains and Intercity Express Trains will also

use the facility.

It will have improved servicing, cleaning and maintenance capabilities, while office and welfare facilities will also be enhanced. Hochtief (UK) will carry out the work.

GWR is due to cascade Class 150/2s and '158s' from the Bristol area to Exeter, to release Class

143 and '150/1s', while '153s' will move to Cornwall. Four-coach HSTs and IETs will also serve the area, as GWR plans a 52% capacity increase.

**An artist's impression of the new-look Exeter depot. Construction at the site began on January 23. GREAT WESTERN RAILWAY.**



## Spring start for Gospel Oak-Barking electric trains

London Overground's Gospel Oak-Barking line reopened in time for the start of service on January 15, following an eight-week closure by Network Rail to complete electrification of the route.

Possession was given up at approximately noon on January 14 for a ghost service to run, before the first timetabled train departed from Barking at 0633 the following morning.

Newly energised overhead line equipment (OLE) will now be fully tested in between normal services and at night, ahead of new four-car Class 710 electric multiple units entering traffic in the spring.

These trains will replace the current stock of two-car Class 172 diesel multiple units, which

will remain in service until driver training and route testing is completed. RAIL understands that they will be phased out until all '710s' become available, meaning that for a period EMUs and DMUs will run concurrently.

Meliha Duymaz, Network Rail's Anglia Route Managing Director, said: "Passengers travelling on the line are set to benefit from a transformational once-in-a-generation upgrade with a new fleet of longer, electric trains so that twice as many people can travel comfortably, once line testing is complete."

Network Rail has confirmed that passengers must endure a further full line closure over the weekend of April 7/8, in order to finish

raising the height of Crouch Hill Bridge.

Last year NR admitted that the work to electrify the 14-mile route had "not been without its difficulties", after incorrect designs and the late delivery of materials forced it to revise its schedule.

OLE had originally been due to be installed along the entire length of the route during a phased eight-month closure of the line that ended on February 27 2017.

However, further blockades were needed for outstanding work on weekends only between July 29 and September 10, and then for a full five weeks between September 17-October 22 prior to the most recent closure that commenced on November 18.



London Overground 172004 arrives at Upper Holloway with the late-running 1218 Barking-Gospel Oak on January 19. The route has been electrified ahead of the introduction of Class 710s from the spring. However, the wiring project has been delivered late. ANTONY GUPPY.

## Rail access "central" to Heathrow expansion

Improved rail access should be central to plans for an expanded Heathrow, according to the organisation proposing a new southern route into the airport.

Heathrow has launched a ten-week public consultation on its plans for a third runway. It includes a number of infrastructure proposals, such as tunnelling the M25 motorway below the new runway, the location of expanded terminal facilities, and three options for the length of the new runway (varying between 3,200 metres and 3,500 metres).

Graham Cross, director of Heathrow Southern Railway Ltd, said: "Even with the existing two-runway airport, there is an air quality emergency in west London to which road traffic around Heathrow contributes significantly. A third runway will make a southern rail link essential if passengers and airport workers are to access Heathrow without making this crisis even worse. The time for debate is over and the

need for action is imperative."

The southern scheme involves eight miles of new track leading into Terminal 5. It would enable trains from Waterloo via Clapham, Richmond and Staines, as well as a link to Woking and Guildford.

Unlike previous schemes, trains would continue beyond Heathrow, offering passengers from Surrey and Hampshire connections to Old Oak Common for HS2 and the Elizabeth Line, and into Paddington.

The Government's draft *Airports National Policy Statement* requires Heathrow to maximise the proportion of journeys made by public transport. The target is 50% by 2030 and at least 55% by 2040. It must also reduce staff car trips by 25% by 2030.

Emma Gilthorpe, Heathrow's executive director for expansion, said: "We need feedback to help deliver this opportunity responsibly and to create a long-term legacy both at a local and national level."

The third runway was due to cost £16.8 billion, but Heathrow now

claims it can complete the project for £14bn.

Airlines expressed concern that landing charges would be increased unacceptably to help fund the cost of the third runway. Heathrow said that landing charges would remain close to today's level of around £22 per passenger.

Rob Barnstone, co-ordinator of the No 3rd Runway Coalition, which represents MPs, local authorities and campaign groups opposed to expansion, said: "The consultation has major gaps in information, including the lack of robust plans relating to air quality and roads and rail around the airport. There is no evidence that Heathrow can deliver on promises made to local communities."

The Department for Transport will publish final proposals this year for a vote in Parliament. If approved, Heathrow would then submit a planning application. It hopes to begin construction in 2021, with the runway completed at the end of 2025.

## RMT suspends action on XC

The RMT union's industrial action planned on CrossCountry on January 20/21/28 was suspended, following talks between the union and operator.

RMT General Secretary Mick Cash said: "The union is able to confirm that a new rostering deal has been tabled by management following long and protracted negotiations. After careful consideration and noting this development, the union's National Executive Committee has decided to suspend the planned industrial action."

## Work starts on Felixstowe yard

Expansion at the Port of Felixstowe was marked by a ground-breaking ceremony on January 11, attended by Secretary of State for Transport Chris Grayling.

Approximately 13 hectares of new paved container yard will be built behind Berth 9 at the port, which includes 3.2 hectares of reclaimed seabed. It will be completed early next year and will enable storage for a further 18,000 containers.

The port handled more than one million containers travelling by rail last year.

## Bridge installed at Tottenham

A new 400-tonne bridge has been installed in Tottenham as part of a £170 million programme to introduce more capacity in the district.

A third track is being reinstated between Stratford and Angel Road, having been removed during the 1960s. The new bridge will carry the extra track over the River Lea as part of a scheme that's due to be complete next year. When open, an extra two trains per hour at peak periods can run.

A new station at Meridian Water is also part of the plan.

## Community boost

Community groups in greater Manchester can apply for larger grants for improvement projects. Transport for Greater Manchester (TfGM) has increased its Friends Groups fund from £250 to £500, while Community Rail Partnerships can apply for £1,500 (up from £1,000). The cash comes from TfGM's £20,000 Small Grants Fund.