

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.

19.03.21 WATFORD OBSERVER – New images have shown the progress made in one of Watford’s biggest and transformative housing developments. In 2017, planning permission was granted to build 485 homes in Ascot Road, including a “gateway” 24 storey 81-metre-tall tower. Despite hundreds of objections from the public, Watford Borough Council passed the scheme. Nearly four years on and building work is well underway despite the plug being pulled on the Metropolitan Line Extension (MLX).

26.03.21 WATFORD OBSERVER – *Letter by Ernie Mackenzie:* “A report in last week’s edition (see above) indicates the reporter’s attempts to raise the ugly head of the MLX above the parapet once again. The report says the Ascot Road development was supposed to capitalise on the potential of the new Met. Line station – Cassiobridge – but Mayor Sadiq Khan then scrapped the extension in 2018. The MLX would have been devastating for Watford Met. station if it had gone ahead. The MLX was an unwarranted burden on Watford for over seven years up to 2018, when Sadiq Khan “pulled the plug.” The Croxley Rail schemes (now MLX) date back as far as 1956, when it would have cost £500,000, and was sensibly stopped because it was too expensive. In 2011, when the MLX project first started to gain traction, the cost was to be £116M “and not a penny more”. The cost inevitably then escalated to £384M by 2018 and, at that figure, it was the most expensive five miles of track ever! The consequences of MLX raising its ugly head again would result in the closure of Watford Met. station, and Watford and the surrounding area will lose its second largest railway station. Too much of Watford’s history and heritage has already been lost, so I really would hate to see the curtains coming down on this wonderful old railway station that celebrates its 100th birthday on 31 October 2025, and a railway station that is still used by 1.86M passengers every year”. (*Actually 100 years old on 2 November 2025 – Ed.*).

06.04.21 CITY A.M. – Sadiq Khan has pledged to give individual names to the Overground lines if re-elected as mayor of London next month. Khan’s manifesto, released today, said the “The Overground network has grown considerably over recent years”, and “to reflect this, I’ll launch a programme to name individual routes, giving each its own identity”. The Overground now has 112 stations over six different lines. However, none of the lines are named like on the Underground. The policy announcement will see a programme launched by Khan to choose names for the six lines if he wins re-election on 6 May but no details were given on what the criteria will be. The mayor also announced his commitment to reduce TfL’s debt pile, which was around £12B before the impact of Covid-19. Since the coronavirus hit, TfL has forced to rely on government funding to stay afloat thanks to plummeting levels of passengers. Khan’s manifesto said: “As part of achieving long-term financial sustainability, I’ll ensure TfL continues to be lean and efficient, minimising expenditure on consultants and agency workers, which we have reduced by 72% in my first term, and considering insourcing when it can be proven to deliver better services and financial benefits”. The mayor said he would also continue to lobby for a long-term funding settlement for TfL if he is re-elected. TfL’s funding model relies principally on fare revenues, which Khan says will not recover for the foreseeable future. “I’ll continue campaigning for the restoration of sufficient Government grant funding and the devolution of new funds to London,” the manifesto read.

06.04.21 DAILY EXPRESS – “The Mayor of London has expressed his willingness to name each of the London Overground lines so that each has its own identity”. This then led to a response from political correspondent for GBNews, Tom Harwood. Mr. Harwood said: “Oh god, these are going to be so woke aren’t they. *“The Equality Line, The Inclusivity Line, The Diversity Line, The Humanity Line, The Intersectional Line”*. Responding to his own tweet, Mr. Harwood tweeted: “I think it’s a good idea to name the lines. I just hope I’m not giving Sadiq any ideas when it comes to picking the names”. (*He probably already has! Ed.*).

07.04.21 – 20.04.21 RAIL #928 – THALES has completed the overhaul of key elements of LU’s *Connect* radio system, which provides safety-critical communications. Over the past two years, the company has replaced ageing equipment and redirected base stations and control without interruption to services. Programme director Peter Gaylor likened the work to changing a car’s engine from petrol

to electric “while it is being driven”. *Connect* also supports *Airwave*, the national operator for emergency services radio communications, which provides emergency services with radio coverage underground.

07.04.21 EVENING STANDARD – Mayoral candidate Laurence Fox for the Reclaim Party launched his manifesto with a claim that he will end all lockdown rules if he wins control of City Hall. The actor and activist claimed he would make the capital “a Covid-passport-free city” with pubs open and masks not needed to be worn in schools or on transport. (*Mayors have no actual powers in all these areas!*). His manifesto contains promises for free bus and Underground travel for six months, paid for by TfL.

09.04.21 EVENING STANDARD – London’s *Night-Tube* services will not return before the end of the year at the earliest, in a blow to clubs, bars and restaurants hoping to rebuild their businesses. TfL Transport commissioner Andy Byford told this newspaper that the Friday and Saturday through-the-night services on the Victoria, Jubilee, Central, Northern and Piccadilly lines will be the last to revert to normal after the pandemic. He said; “We need the personnel to keep the day services going and frankly there isn’t the demand for it, so there are no immediate plans to restore the *Night Tube* within a year, and certainly not before 2022. Securing the whole network is more important than keeping the Night Tube going”. He said late-night drinkers, diners and clubbers should use the night buses instead. However, the lengthy delay in restoring 24-hour services seen as vital to London’s huge late-night economy when it fully reopens in June was met with dismay by industry leaders. Michael Kill, CEO of the Night-Time Industries Association, said the decision was “an absolute travesty”. He added; “You have huge venues like Printworks and Studio338 in Greenwich where the *Night Tube* is fundamental to the safe dispersal of crowds. Simon Thomas, CEO of the Hippodrome Casino on Leicester Square, said: “The *Night Tube* was brought in to support the progressive 24-hour ambitions of London, and it’s more essential now than ever before”.

12.04.21 CITY A.M. – Passenger numbers on TfL services jumped this morning as people rushed back to the capital’s shopping hotspots following the lifting of some lockdown restrictions. As of 10.00 this morning, there were around 670,000 taps in and out of Underground stations, about a third of pre-pandemic levels. TfL said that this was a jump of 18% since last week. The same story was the case for buses. The figures, although only reflecting the first few hours of the day, indicate levels of public transport use not seen since October. With footfall in London’s retail districts surging this morning, TfL data showed that Zone 1 stations – near destinations such as Oxford Street and the West End – had seen 19% more taps as of 10.00. For stations near shopping centres such as Stratford, Westfield, and Oxford Street, the increase was an even more marked 32%. The increase grew even more dramatic as the morning continued. According to TfL, between 10.00 and 11.00 there was a 97% increase compared to last Tuesday at those same shopping stations, and a 36% increase across the network. Between 11.00 and 12.00, there was a 125% increase compared to last Tuesday at shopping stations and a 41% increase across the network. After nearly four long months of lockdown, people have been making the most of their newfound freedoms, crowding into pubs, shops and hairdressers from opening time. The surge also seemed to spread to financial districts. A spokesperson for TfL told City A.M. that as of 16.00, taps in and out of City stations (including Canary Wharf), were up nearly a quarter – 23% – from last week.

13.04.21 EVENING STANDARD – In March 1882, Bishop Urquinaona of Barcelona laid the cornerstone of the Sagrada Familia. The basilica is yet to be completed. It is in this company that Crossrail now operates. Construction began in 2009, and was due to open in December 2018, then spring 2021, and now the first half of 2022. It is also £4B over budget. These delays and cost overruns have been an embarrassment to London. The project has been beset by issues. The arms-length manner that Crossrail was able to operate from both TfL and DfT led to a lack of direct reporting. Yet Sadiq Kahn should have been far more proactive in recognising the problems and getting on top of them. That is what directly elected mayors are for. Structural issues were compounded by financial blows, from the loss of TfL’s operating grant from central government, to the falls in revenue first from fare freezes and later the pandemic. There is reason for limited cheer. TfL commissioner Andy Byford was handed overall control of Crossrail in November 2020, which should give the project both proper lines of accountability and the impetus to finish. But the optimism that marked the first few years of the project, when countless tours were given showing off new stations, has long passed. Londoners simply want a train line that works. And when the capital fully reopens, commuters will not want to travel like sardines. Crossrail will provide that much-needed capacity boost. Finally, we must ensure that, despite its difficulties and cost overruns, Crossrail does not become London’s last major infrastructure project. When Sadiq Kahn came to power five years ago, the Underground was experiencing record passenger

numbers, increased traffic was causing bus delays and Crossrail was only two and a half years from opening. Such was the confidence in Crossrail that, a few months earlier, the Queen had been invited to Bond Street station to be told by the then mayor, Boris Johnson, that it would be renamed the Elizabeth Line in her honour. A picture of a delighted monarch clutching an image of the Elizabeth Line roundel, in regal purple, took pride of place in London's transport then commissioner Mike Brown's report to the TfL board in March 2016. "Construction remains on time and within the funding envelope of £14.8B", he reassured members. "Overall, the project is more than 72% complete". Crossrail, as Mr. Khan was to discover two years later, half-way into his mayoralty, was in fact in a catastrophic condition. A call had to be made to Buckingham Palace to cancel the opening ceremony, which the Queen should have performed on 9 December 2018. Several more have had to be made to the DfT for additional funds. The scheme's total bill is now about £4B higher than budgeted, and the delay has grown to three and a half years. The official opening date is the first half of 2022, despite the optimism of current TfL commissioner Andy Byford that the line under central London may yet open before the end of 2021 (see also 23.04.21, below). The delay has also deprived TfL of millions in fares. But according to transport expert Christian Wolmar, who has written a book about Crossrail, the failures were "not really down to the Mayor" who could not be expected to project manage it. However, the jury is out on whether Mr. Khan should have had someone on the scheme who would have flagged up the problems sooner. Mr. Wolmar said: "You don't expect the mayor to project-manage a scheme like this. On a day-to-day basis, clearly it's way beyond what the mayor can oversee. But, having said that, I spent much of 2018 talking to various Crossrail heads of department and what is strange is that, right up until June and July, they were convinced that it would open on 9 December 2018. I still don't understand how it was not conveyed to the mayor that this was not going to happen. It wasn't until August 2018, four months before the opening, that it was finally revealed that the 2018 date was impossible. Should the mayor have somebody who was particularly au fait with the project, asking questions? When I went visiting the sites, there were 500 people at Paddington and there were wires everywhere. You would have thought somebody in charge would have asked some sharper questions at the time. The long-term impact would be to worsen the chances of Crossrail 2 ever being built. It has already been shelved for a decade due to TfL's financial crisis. This began in 2018 when its operating grant from the Government ended. The problems were made £3B worse by the loss of fares due to the pandemic lockdowns. But the problems were partly of Mr Khan's own making, too. The most prominent of his 40 manifesto pledges on transport was to "freeze London's transport fares for four years". His 2016 manifesto vowed: "Londoners won't pay a penny more for their travel in 2020 than they do today". It helped win him City Hall, but was only partly true. The promise was quickly scaled back to relate only to TfL pay-as-you-go fares. The cost of Travelcards continued to rise – as did the annual cap on multiple single journeys – which meant that most frequent travellers in fact paid more. His partial fares "freeze" cost TfL an estimated £640M in lost income. Professor Stephen Glaister, of Imperial College London, said the fares freeze, fewer bus passengers than hoped and the extent of travel concessions, combined to deprive TfL of a sizeable chunk of income. The *Hopper Ticket*, which allows multiple journeys on the bus or tram within 60 minutes for a single fare, has also reduced TfL's fares revenue. When Covid struck, the TfL budget was under considerable stress. He said "Another fact was that revenues on the Underground and buses were not growing as fast as had been budgeted for. Bus patronage had been falling for some time. The other thing which was becoming a worry was that, systematically since the start of the GLA in 2000, TfL had been borrowing; its debts have risen from zero to about £13B". Before taking office, Mr. Khan described TfL as "inefficient and flabby". Under his administration, it has undergone repeated cuts – though an independent review by Professor Glaister and others said its generous pension scheme was "outdated and must be reformed". Looking ahead, Professor Glaister predicted the number one transport issue in the next mayoral term would be TfL's funding – starting with the need to conclude negotiations with the Government over a third Covid bail-out. Mr. Khan inherited plans for the *Night Tube*, which Mr. Johnson had been unable to open in September 2015 due to the Underground unions playing hardball over staff wages. Mr. Khan was all smiles when he rode the first *Night Tube* service, on the Victoria Line, in August 2016. But he avoided "vanity schemes" seen under Mr. Johnson, such as the Emirates cable car, the 1,000 "Boris bus" Routemasters or the proposed Garden Bridge, which he abandoned soon after taking office. Many pledges in Mr Khan's 2016 manifesto fell victim to the pandemic. These include the Bakerloo Line extension to Lewisham and beyond.

14.04.21 METRO – A new scheme has been completed at Debden station to provide step-free access for passengers. The facilities include two new lifts and a pedestrian bridge linking the platforms, giving passengers step-free access within the station. Manual boarding ramps are also available to help passengers who need level access from platform to train, in addition to tactile paving along both platforms. All Underground, Overground and TfL stations, including Debden, operate a turn-up-and-go service for passengers with accessibility needs to help them complete their journeys. LU staff can help wheelchair users by pushing their wheelchair, if required, and can guide visually impaired passengers by the arm while wearing a single-use disposable sleeve for additional protection. Staff can also remove their face covering to speak with passengers at two-metre social distance, if necessary.

20.04.21 METRO – After the recent lifting of lockdown restrictions, TfL is reminding people of the latest advice to stay safe while travelling. Passengers are encouraged to travel during the quieter times to help make social distancing easier. These are between 08.15 and 16.00 and after 17.30 in the week; and before 12.00 and after 18.00 at weekends. Hospital-grade cleaning substances are being used across the network, and independent testing by Imperial College London has been carried out monthly since September 2020, with no traces of coronavirus being found. The Underground is well ventilated, with doors opening frequently to allow the regular exchanges of air in carriages. Guidance from the Rail Safety and Standards Board recommends that the air inside a train carriage should change around 6 to 12 times per hour. Recent assessments indicate that the air changes more than 20 times every hour.

20.04.21 EVENING STANDARD – Two-thirds of London workers would be happy to return to their offices in time for the Government's June target for ending social distancing, an exclusive survey reveals today. The research found steadily growing confidence among commuters about going back to their desks in central London after, in many cases, more than a year of working remotely. However, it also flagged up the significant hurdles that still stand in the way of getting all workers back full-time, with the costs and health risks of commuting on busy trains and buses the main deterrent. Transport Commissioner Andy Byford told the Standard last week that he believed it would take up to 18 months for the numbers of commuters to climb back to even 80% of pre-pandemic levels. The polling by property company Land Securities found that 58% of workers were prepared to come back to the office now, rising to 67% by 21 June when all laws restricting contact are due to be lifted. But it also revealed that almost 90% would feel more relaxed about going back if a free, rapid Covid testing programme was available. Research from the Office for National Statistics yesterday found that 43% of London workers – many of them commuters working in sectors such as financial services – have worked from home at least some of the time since the start of the pandemic. That is the highest proportion of any region in the country. The unprecedented switch to working from home has crippled many central London businesses heavily reliant on the daily flow of commuters in and out of areas such as the West End and the City. Major office centres such as Canary Wharf are still seeing occupancy levels massively down on pre-pandemic levels. At the end of February, its Underground station was recording fewer than 20,000 passenger movements a day compared with more than 110,000 in 2019. Marcus Geddes, Land Securities' managing director for central London, said: "What office workers need now is greater clarity on how quickly they can embrace a more hybrid model. The Government needs to reassess the road map on guidance for working from home, which will allow landlords and employers to provide clearer communication and ensure people feel safe returning to cities on public transport and to their places of work. The sooner that we can get offices working again and people safely back in our cities, the better – the UK's economic recovery depends on it". The leader of Westminster City council, Rachael Robathan, said: "In normal times, 9 out of 10 people visiting Westminster on an average day come from outside the borough. The pandemic led to the collapse of our daily commuting population. It is slowly recovering, but there is a long way to go. The return of office workers when restrictions lift will be critical to driving London's recovery – all those purchases like coffees, lunches, after-work drinks and shopping are collectively incredibly important".

23.04.21 EVENING STANDARD – It is reported that London's Transport Commissioner, Andy Byford, has set himself the goal of getting Crossrail open by Christmas (2021). The official timeline is for Crossrail's central section linking Abbey Wood, Liverpool Street and Paddington to open in "the first half of next year". However, he is focussed used on the twin challenges of getting the long-delayed, over-budget line open slightly ahead of the latest estimate, while encouraging passengers back onto the Underground and buses. Trial running has begun with four trains an hour and 24 December 2021

is earmarked as a 'possible' opening date. However, testing has to increase to 24 trains per hour with the final integration of the software that allows trains to communicate with the signalling system.