

FROM THE PAPERS

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01.09.21 METRO – Wimbledon Park Underground station has become the 86th step-free station on the Underground network, joining Wimbledon on the District Line and Morden on the Northern Line as being step-free stations in the London Borough of Merton. Wimbledon Park station is now served by one lift, which provides access to the central platform for both east and westbound District Line services. The District Line is accessible from street to platform, with boarding ramps available for use by station staff to help passengers who need them. Construction work continues at Osterley, as well as at Harrow-on-the-Hill and Sudbury Hill, all of which are scheduled to become step-free before the end of the year.

03.09.21 EVENING STANDARD – Sadiq Khan has failed in his bid to make the failure to wear a face mask on London’s public transport a criminal offence. The mayor asked the Government to allow TfL to bring in a by-law that would have restored the legal requirement to wear a face covering on the Underground, buses and Overground. The national rule on mask-wearing on public transport was ditched on 19 July. Since then, TfL has made it “a condition of carriage” for masks to be worn on the Underground and on buses but this cannot be enforced by police imposing fines and evictions. Mr. Khan said: “I’m incredibly disappointed the Government aren’t helping us with a by-law” and added that TfL staff were more likely to be abused than when they had the backing of police. TfL commissioner Andy Byford said there had been “a number of nasty incidents” when asking people to wear a mask.

03.09.21 EVENING STANDARD – The £700 million upgrade of Bank station is due to be completed by September or October next year. The Northern Line’s Bank branch will be closed for 17 weeks from 15 January until May next year between Kennington and Moorgate to enable a new platform and entrance to be integrated with the existing station.

03.09.21 EVENING STANDARD – The head of TfL has said that fare rises in January are not a “pre-determined outcome” despite it being a condition of the Government’s funding deal. As part of the deal agreed in June, TfL is required to increase fares in the new year in line with mainline rail fares at a rate of RPI (retail price index) plus one per cent. Fare increases of almost five per cent had been expected in London following the announcement that July’s RPI figure was 3.8 per cent. But speaking at City Hall on Thursday, TfL commissioner Andy Byford said that an increase in fares “has not yet been agreed”. Mr. Byford also warned that increasing fares could discourage Londoners from using public transport and result in a car-led recovery from the pandemic. He said: “If you make public transport unaffordable, people are less likely to use it. They are going to migrate to their cars which is, of course, self-defeating because we want people to use public transport. “So, [a fare increase] is in no shape or form a pre-determined outcome. I think there is a long way to go in those discussions yet”. Also speaking at City Hall on Thursday was Mayor of London Sadiq Khan, who told Assembly Members it was “unwise” to provide a “running commentary” on negotiations with the Government, though he did say he hoped ministers would “show some flex” with regards to fares. TfL fares rose for the first time under Sadiq Khan in March as part of the previous funding deal with the Government. The 2.6 per cent increase was the first since Mr Khan imposed a fare freeze in 2016. Passenger groups and thinktanks have also warned that significant fare increases could hamper London’s economic recovery from the Covid-19 pandemic.

06.09.21 CITYAM – This morning saw the busiest start to a day on the Underground since the beginning of the pandemic in March 2020, TfL said this morning. By 10.00, Underground usage was up 17% week-on-week, the network said, while bus passenger numbers jumped 39%. There were 831,000 “taps” into the Underground network and 860,000 taps on buses. The hike came as children returned to school after the summer holidays. Despite the jump, passenger numbers on the network still remain far behind pre-pandemic levels. At the moment the network is seeing just 45% of the passengers it did before the pandemic began, while bus numbers are closer to two-thirds. Numbers have continued to climb throughout the summer months since lockdown restrictions were lifted in July. Last week the Underground saw more than 2m passengers over a single day for the first time in nearly 18 months.

15.09.21 RAILWAY GAZETTE – Rhino Doors has successfully fire-tested bespoke self-closing doors designed for the cross passages of Transport for London’s Moorgate station. The doors are intended

to provide passengers with reduced mobility with a place of refuge during emergencies, and feature panic bars and vision panels. The double-leaf doors were tested for fire integrity from both sides for 60 minutes in accordance with EN1634-1. Rhino said the back-to-back tests 'far exceeded' the 60-minute testing expectations and successfully achieved a 2-hour rating. "We now have an established and verified door design that will find applications not only in rail projects, but also in other market sectors requiring high-performance, stainless steel fire doors", said Dr Chris Norris, Group Engineering Director of Rhino Engineering Group.

16.09.21 EVENING STANDARD – Passengers are falling down Underground station escalators because of a reluctance to hold the handrail for fear of catching Covid. London Underground chiefs have reported a spike in accidents – with "intoxicated" passengers celebrating the end of lockdown also to blame. Twelve deaths or serious injuries have been reported on the Underground between April and June and 23 on buses – up on the same three-month period last year. London Underground managing director Andy Lord said escalator falls were "our biggest risk from a passenger injury perspective". TfL plans to expand a trial, launched last year, that attaches Covid-busting ultraviolet light devices to handrails to eradicate traces of virus. Fear of contracting Covid from shared "touch points" on public transport was one of the biggest fears in the first wave of the pandemic last year. However, TfL introduced an intensive cleaning regime with anti-viral fluids. Repeated testing by Imperial College London experts has failed to find traces of Covid on the network. TfL chiefs believe "hesitancy holding the handrail" is behind many falls, some of which are suffered by passengers, often elderly, attempting to place suitcases onto an escalator. Mr. Lord said: "Two of the biggest risks we have are falls on escalators caused by people failing to hold the handrail. There is an issue with the perception that the handrail is not clean because of the pandemic. "We are spending a huge amount of time and money and resources cleaning the handrail, as well as the UV cleaners that are being steadily rolled out across the entire network. We are looking at what further communications we can do to raise awareness of that".

Mr. Lord added: "The other bigger issue is intoxication. We have seen a spike as the various stages of lockdown have been reduced with particular spikes initially on Thursday and Friday evenings and then weekends". TfL data shows that the number of injuries on stairs and escalators "remains relatively high" and the rate of is outpacing the swift return of passengers to the Underground. Stations such as Waterloo, which has 24 escalators, and busier stations in the West End are the most common locations for accidents. A report to TfL's safety committee said: "The number of people killed or injured has increased with the return of passengers to the network. The rate of injuries which happened on stairs and escalators have remained relatively high. There has also been a slight uplift in the rate of injuries with intoxication a factor".

23.09.21 CITY AM – TfL slapped six non-mask wearing commuters per day with fines in July in the run-up to "Freedom Day" as policing of COVID prevention measures on the capital's transport network waned. TfL imposed 123 fines on commuters for not wearing a mask in July, a 79% drop from June's 590 fines. Over the last year, TfL has imposed 4,231 fines on Londoners for not wearing a mask on the transport network, according to figures obtained through a Freedom of Information request. It is still compulsory to wear a face covering on TfL services, despite the rule being dropped in most parts of the UK after so-called "Freedom Day" on 19 July. The data shows there has been marked easing in policing rules to curb the spread of COVID on London Underground and buses. In August this year, TfL asked 1,599 to put on a mask. This compared with 28,724 in the same month last year. After Freedom Day, TfL pulled back sharply on enforcing mask wearing. The body asked 9,618 people to put on a mask in July, almost 50% lower than the 18,891 asked to do so in June. 145 Londoners were removed from TfL services, down from 375 over the same period. Siwan Hayward, Director of Policing and Compliance for TfL, said: "COVID is still with us and we all have a role to play in doing the right thing and keeping each other safe. Despite the Government removing the national requirement to wear a face-coverings on public transport, wearing a face covering on our services and in our stations is still required under TfL's condition of carriage".

24.09.21 EVENING STANDARD – Hopes of Crossrail opening early next year appear set to be dashed after inspectors raised new concerns about its trains and stations. They said it was now forecast to open next May, when Elizabeth Line trains will run under central London for the first time. The exact opening date in May has been withheld, but the report, by the Crossrail watchdog Jacobs, said it was at the latter part of the six-month "opening window" of the first six months of 2022 promised by Transport

for London. Caroline Pidgeon, a Lib-Dem member of the London Assembly, said: "Crossrail has been plagued with exaggerated claims about its progress and in the last three years opening dates have repeatedly turned out to be wildly over optimistic. Even at the beginning of the year it was being claimed that the central section would be open by this Christmas. Crossrail is now more than 1,000 days late, so it is time for some real honesty and transparency over the progress of the project and any difficulties it may be facing". The report, the latest in a series of monthly progress updates as the £20 billion line nears completion, reveals that testing of the £1 billion fleet of trains has hit problems. The aim is to run 12 trains an hour through the central tunnels but train reliability has been "poor". In one week, only eight trains an hour were run on five of the seven days. This has delayed a subsequent stage of testing, known as trial operations, which will involve hundreds of volunteer passengers recreating real-life conditions. This is unlikely to start before the target date of November. Crossrail bosses hope that a software upgrade to the signalling system will improve reliability. But the report said a "significant increase in train reliability" was needed before the line could open to passengers. The line was originally due to open in December 2018. Key parts of the report have been blacked out. Costs "continue to increase" and it is "improbable" that they will fail to exceed the additional £825m set aside to open Crossrail. Problems also remain completing Bond Street and Canary Wharf stations, the latter of which is now not likely to be handed over until late November. The covid "pingdemic" also caused problems during the summer, with many workers having to self-isolate. An increase in cases this winter is seen as a further risk to completing the project. Crossrail chief executive Mark Wild said the trial running phase had been "very busy and challenging" and described the reliability problems as "somewhat inevitable". He said: "This is all part of the learning process that is intrinsic in the trial running phase". A Crossrail spokesperson said: "The Elizabeth Line is on track to open in the first half of 2022. Trial running of trains through the central tunnels is well underway as part of the major railway trials taking place throughout this year, with 12 trains per hour in regular operation to build reliability and flush out any issues with our systems and signalling software. Seven of the ten new central section stations have now been transferred to Transport for London and we are now focussed on the final integration of Abbey Wood, handover of Canary Wharf this autumn and completion of the remaining work at Bond Street. The next phase of the programme will be trial operations which is forecast to commence later this year".

24.09.21 RAIL TECHNOLOGY MAGAZINE – South Western Railway (SWR) announced on Wednesday 22 September that the upgraded Island Line is due to reopen on 1 November, with final train safety tests currently underway, following a 10-month closure. Passengers will be returning to a completely renovated Island Line, with new trains – *London Underground trains* – running through upgraded stations and along improved infrastructure. With various upgrades ranging from better interiors to plug sockets, free Wi-Fi and wheelchair spaces, the new (replacement! – Ed.) trains are set to significantly improve passenger experience. Alongside the trialling of the new trains, SWR staff have been improving the rail infrastructure and stations on the line. The Island Line tracks have also been upgraded to guarantee passengers can enjoy a smoother journey. The Department for Transport, Isle of Wight Council and Solent Local Enterprise Partnership have all funded the £26m project, which has unfortunately taken longer to complete than initially anticipated. This is due to a series of complications surrounding train testing difficulties, the pandemic, and the flash flooding which affected the Isle of Wight earlier this summer. During testing, the Class 484 Island Line trains had been affected by software issues, which SWR and train supplier Vivarail have made good progress in solving through further testing, with the final phase of testing being crucial to delivering passengers a safe and reliable railway.