

WAS IT REALLY FIVE YEARS AGO? THE DESERTED UNDERGROUND

The new decade began on 1 January 2020 with nobody even thinking about how things would drastically change in less than three months and then how it would pan out. The Coronavirus was just starting to take a hold in parts foreign, but it wasn't long before it hit the UK, with the whole country being affected. The net effect was that the country almost shut down, apart from very essential services, and people were told to stay at home and work from there if at all possible. All this culminated in a nationwide lockdown being implemented from 23 March 2020 which became 'legal' three days later.

There were in fact three lockdowns of note, which lasted well into 2021. A good summary of the lockdown stages may be found by googling –

timeline-coronavirus-lockdown-december-2021

It goes without saying that the effect on public transport was horrendous. Not only was there little revenue coming in because of the drastic cut in passenger numbers using the system, but staff were also affected by Covid-19, in that train services were reduced, ad-hoc timetables implemented and 38 stations in the central area closed so that their staff could be utilised to keep the busier stations open. Sadly, some members of TfL staff lost their lives because of Covid.

All of that affecting the Underground has been documented in many previous issues of *Underground News*, beginning with the May 2020 issue.

Such was the situation that your writer didn't venture out on the Underground for four and a half months, which is when the (first) lockdown was eased. Things did begin to improve, but even this didn't prevent two further lockdowns coming into force and public transport being again declared for essential travel only. Between lockdowns, passenger numbers remained low and only in the last couple of years has life on the Underground returned to normal – of sorts – the "new" normal.

This selection of photos show just how deserted the Underground had changed and become during a very difficult time. But we'll begin with a pair of photos taken just before lockdown and one taken two days before lockdown officially became law.

All photos: Brian Hardy or LURS Collection, unless stated otherwise

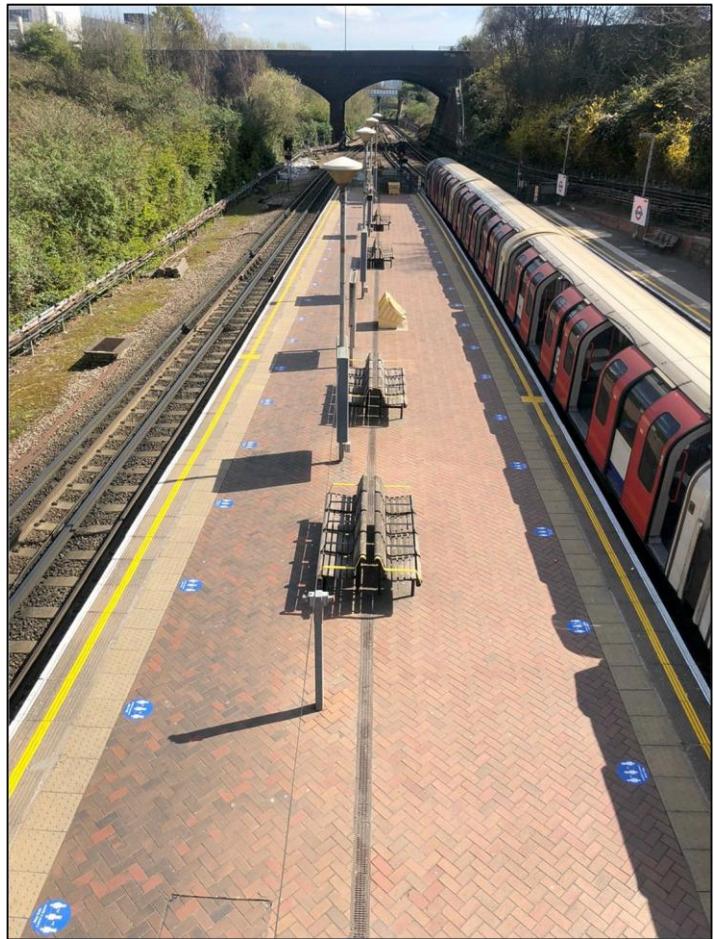


Above: (Left and Right) On 4 March 2020 the then all-over-liveried 1992 Tube Stock on the Waterloo & City Line was photographed in platform 7 at Bank. Note on the right the 'ramp' for level boarding. The all-over-advert was for Freshworks software, and although the service ended on 20 March because of Covid and wasn't restored on a limited basis until 4 June 2021, the advert wrap was removed during the closure.

Left: Waterloo on the Bakerloo Line on 20 March 2020 with just two passengers waiting on the platform. Lockdown was expected, in that non-essential travel was announced on 16 March, which took effect from 23 March, with the Coronavirus Act 2020 receiving Royal Assent on 25 March and becoming law on 26 March.



Below: A plethora of signage was hastily produced with passengers urged to keep 2 metres apart, in the form of posters, platform stickers or painted on the platform surface.



Previous Page: The 2-metre rule also applied to lifts and one-way systems were set up wherever possible at stations (Left, second from bottom and bottom). Aseptic was also installed on some escalator handrails (Lower Right) and used UV light to kill any microorganisms.

Below: A variety of signage also appeared on trains, such as 'let passengers off the train first' (which should be a given anyway!) and the 2-metre distance rule.

Right: It was also mandatory to wear face masks unless people fell into the exemption category as seen on a 1973 Stock train. There was, of course, little way of enforcing this, other than on-the-spot checks.

Below: (Right) The saloon section nearest the cabs of 1972 Stock were out of bounds to the public, to afford some protection for drivers.



Below: Both the 2 metre rule (on the left) and face masks signs (on the right) are seen on this 1973 Tube Stock on the Piccadilly Line.





Above: 'The Lawn' entrance to Paddington Underground station with additional Covid-19 signage – keeping your distance on escalators and advice to regularly wash hands.

Below: (Left) Many projects were put on hold during the pandemic, including the installation of MIP lifts at Harrow-on-the-Hill, which actually entered service on 8 March 2022.

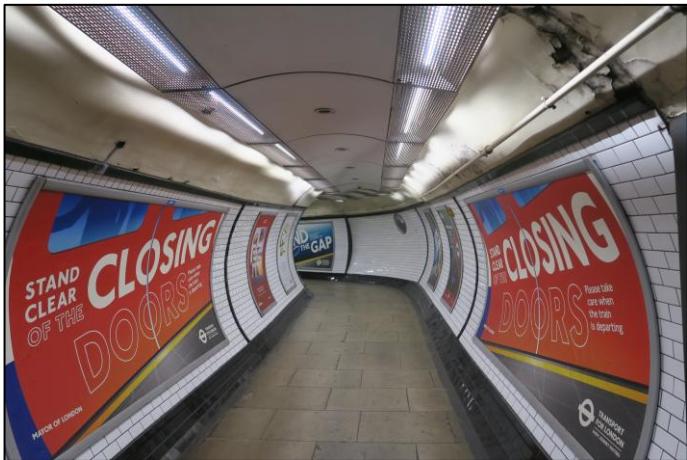
Below: (Right) The installation of lifts at Hanger Lane and Northolt had also begun at the outbreak of the pandemic, this being the site at the east end of Hanger Lane looking west after the first lockdown had ended, with work having stopped for some time. Both stations had their step-free access lifts projects cancelled and it is only Northolt that has been resurrected for recommencement this year.



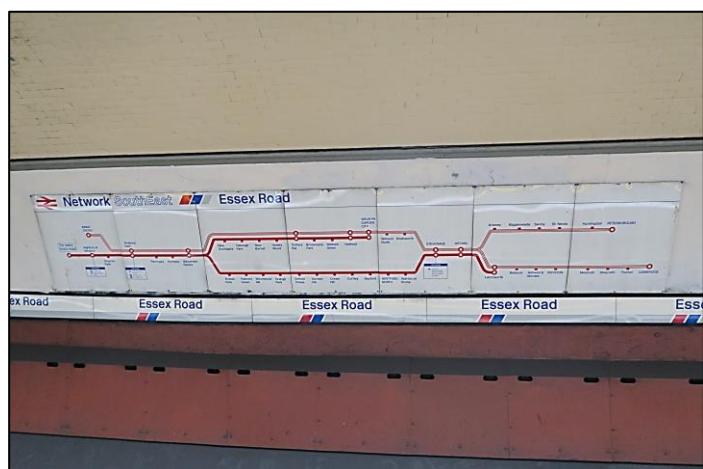
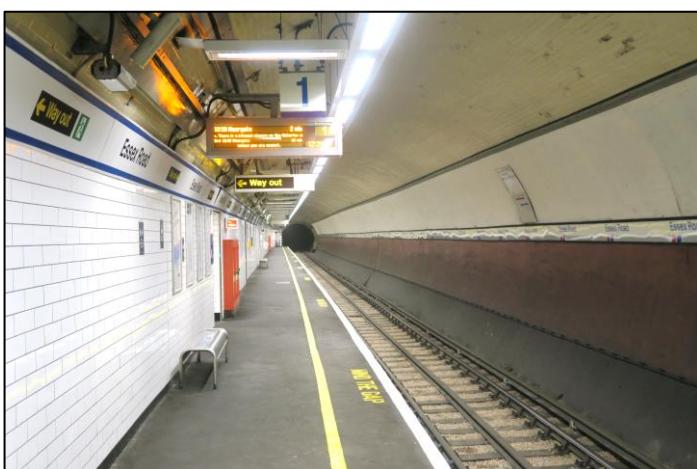
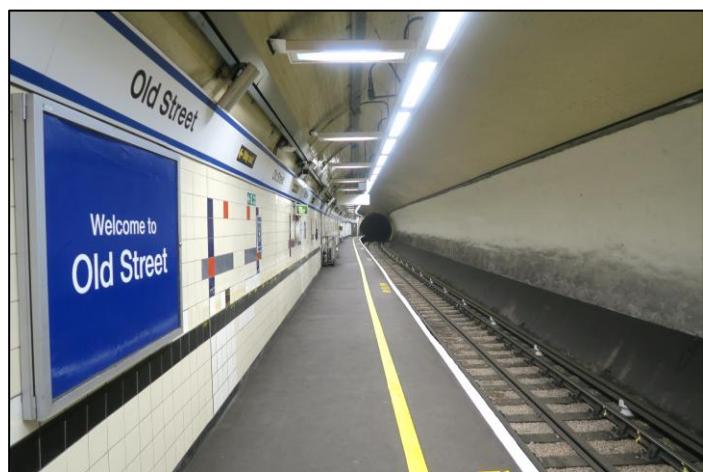
The following photographs were taken between 17 July 2020 and 24 August 2021 and show how quiet the Underground was during that period. They are arranged in date order in preference to line or station order. In none of the photos did the photographer wait for people to move out of the way!

Overleaf: (Top Left) On 17 July 2020, a westbound Piccadilly Line train of 1973 Tube Stock arrives at Ickenham heading for Uxbridge. Work had been stopped on the lift installation and they finally entered service on 22 June 2021.

Overleaf: (Top Right and second row) Three views of the Northern Line side of Elephant & Castle station on 27 July 2020 showing the (almost) deserted northbound City branch platform and the deserted passageways from the lower lift landing leading to the southbound platform.



Below: Under the auspices of Great Northern, the former Northern City Line was undoubtedly more deserted than it normally is, as all the following photos taken on 27 July 2020 show. An empty Great Northern class 717 train at Moorgate (Left) and the southbound (Up) platform at Old Street (Right). Essex Road (Both Bottom) had received a makeover by then, although the long extinct Network SouthEast signage remained in place opposite the platforms.



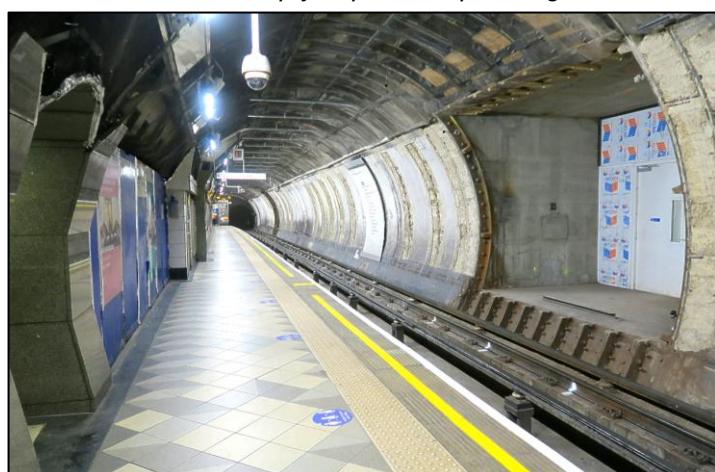
Below: The Down (northbound) platform at Highbury & Islington (Left). It was then under (paused) upgrade – has it been completed? The Up (southbound) platform (Right) with a train that has let off no passengers! At that stage, no refurbishment work had started on the Up platform. Note the considerable step/gap between platform and train.



Above: Sudbury Hill on 27 July 2020 looking east from the westbound platform (Left). Work had come to a halt on the installation of lifts which came into use 17 months later on 23 December 2021. The storage for lift work on the westbound platform may be seen in the distance. Also from the westbound platform (Right) the large building is Sudbury Hill substation which opened on 29 January 1933, replacing that at Sudbury Town. At far left is a temporary storage compound for work associated with the lift installation on that platform.

Below: (Left) Work was still going on behind the scenes on the Bank southbound Northern Line diversion on 27 July 2020, which opened later on 15 May 2022. This is on the southbound platform looking south with one of the future access points to the new platform to the right. In the diversion, this platform would be widened and become a much widened northbound platform.

Below: (Right) A northbound train of 1972 Tube Stock departs northbound from Kensal Green while the stairs for the southbound remain empty of potential passengers.





Above and Top Right: A deserted Osterley station on 30 July 2020 with lift installation work at a standstill. They entered service on 6 October 2021.

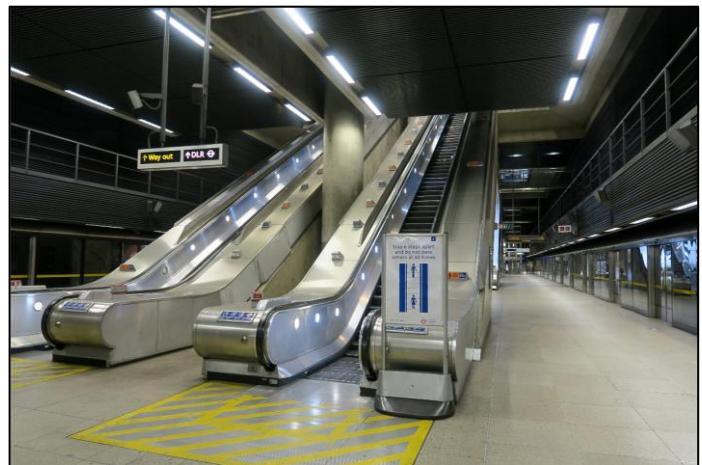
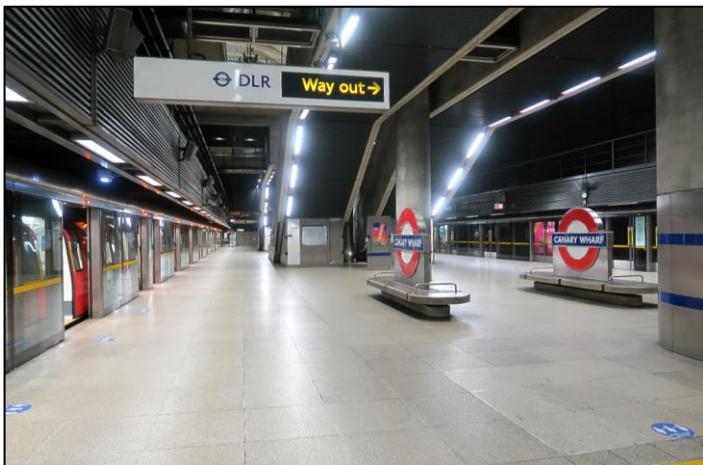
Above: (Right) Earl's Court station is usually thronging with passengers throughout the day, but not on 30 July 2020, with just three passengers in view.



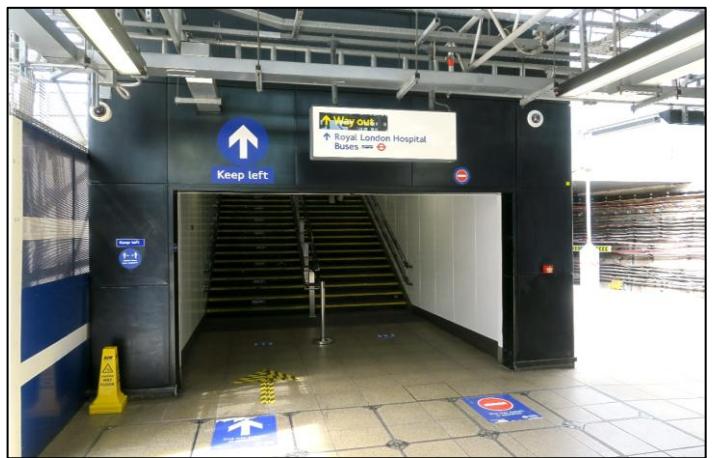
Above: On 30 July 2020, Mile End, looking west, showed a little more passenger activity with an eastbound Central Line train in the distance. The lack of train staff because of the pandemic caused some lines to operate reduced ad-hoc services and Upminster – Olympia was one of those.

Right: Two views of Rotherhithe on London Overground's East London Line on 6 August 2020 with no passengers in evidence.





Above: Canary Wharf Jubilee Line on 6 August 2020 – a train has arrived in the eastbound platform (Left) with nobody alighting or boarding. Empty escalators (Right) with another 'Covid' sign advising passengers to keep six steps apart and not to pass others on them.



Whitechapel District and Hammersmith & City Line station was still very much a building site for Crossrail work when visited on 6 August 2020. The east end of the westbound platform is seen (Above, Left) with many blue hoardings in place and the temporary entrance at the west end of the station (Above) which opened on 18 January 2016. Originally a four-platform station of two island platforms and five tracks, the siding and centre two tracks were abolished in June and September 2011 to enable Crossrail construction work to begin and create a wide island platform (Left) for District and Hammersmith & City trains.



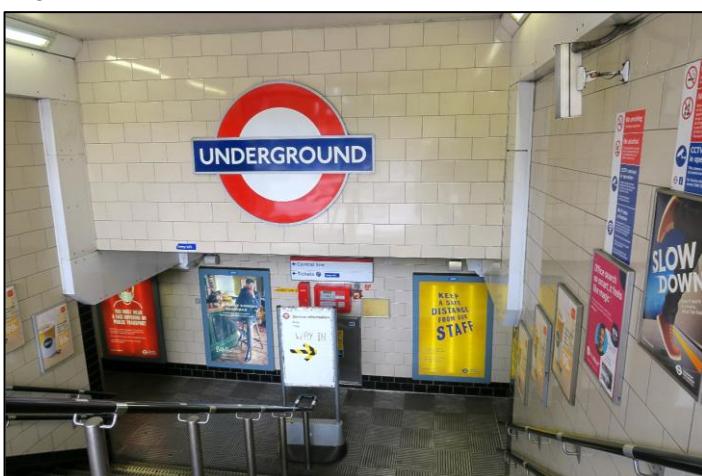
Sudbury Town (Left) looking east and Acton Town (Right) looking west, both on 6 August 2020.



Above: Embankment northbound Bakerloo Line on 6 August 2020.

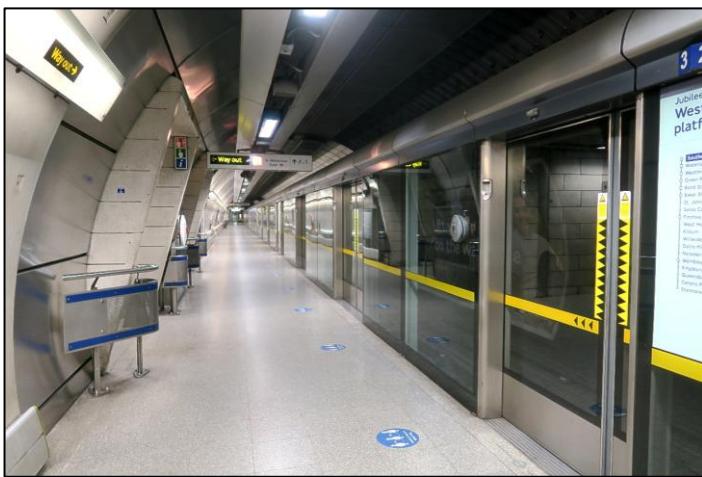
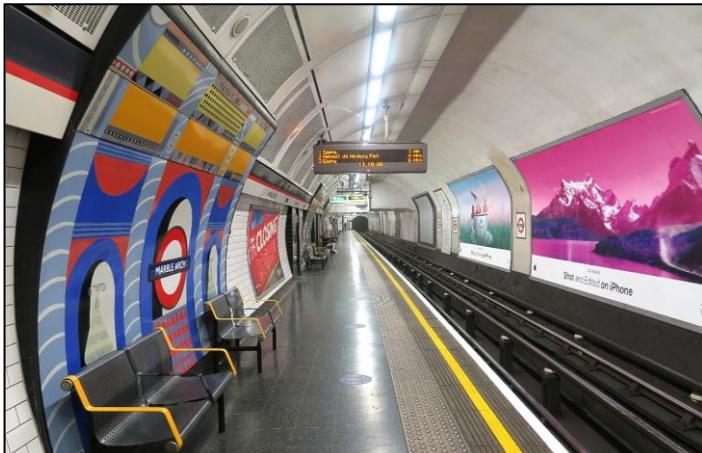


Above: Victoria eastbound platform on 6 August 2020 showing a little more passenger activity.



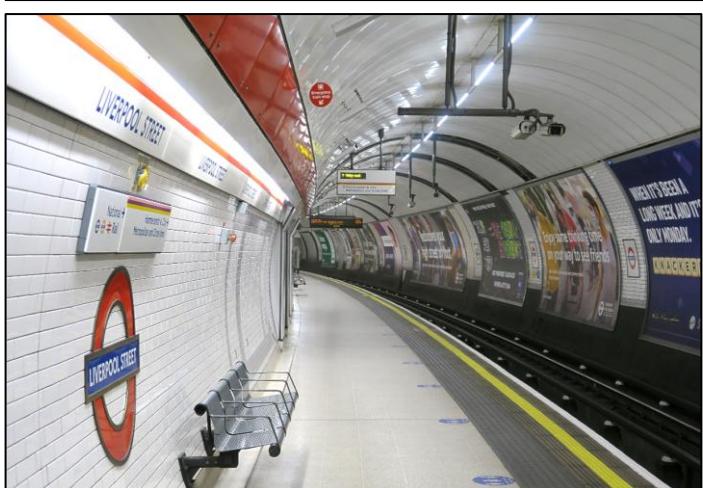
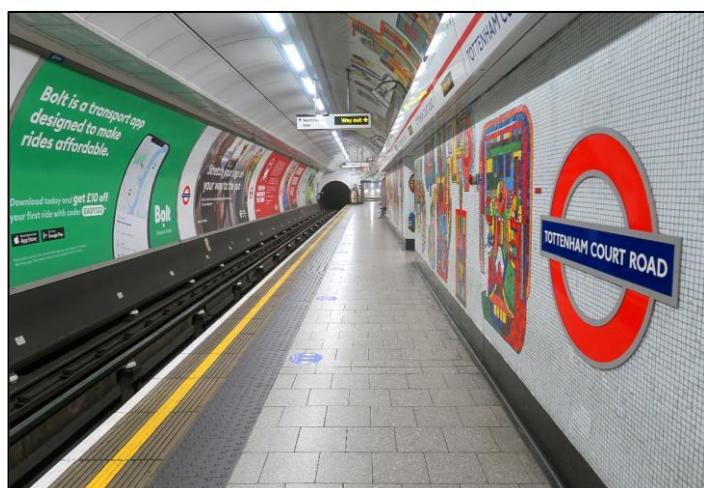
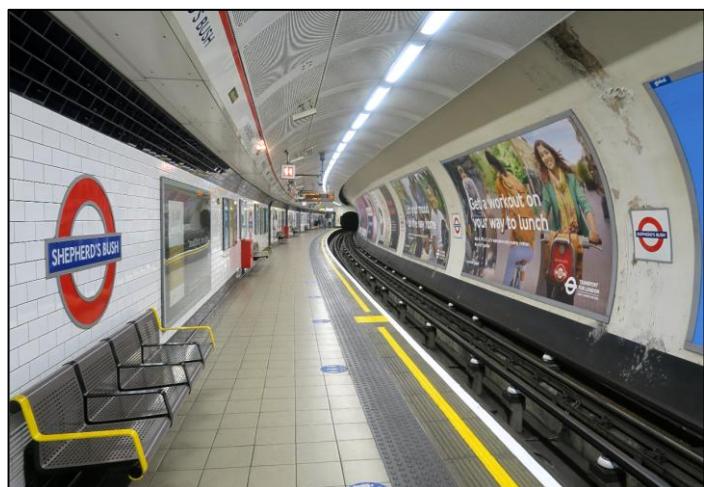
Left: The stairwell of the entrance to Marble Arch station on 26 August 2020 with a large modern roundel provided after the station was refurbished. The permanent sign at the bottom of the stairs points to the left for station access but the whiteboard points to the right. Also in evidence are posters for people to wear masks on the left and on the right, to keep a safe distance from staff.

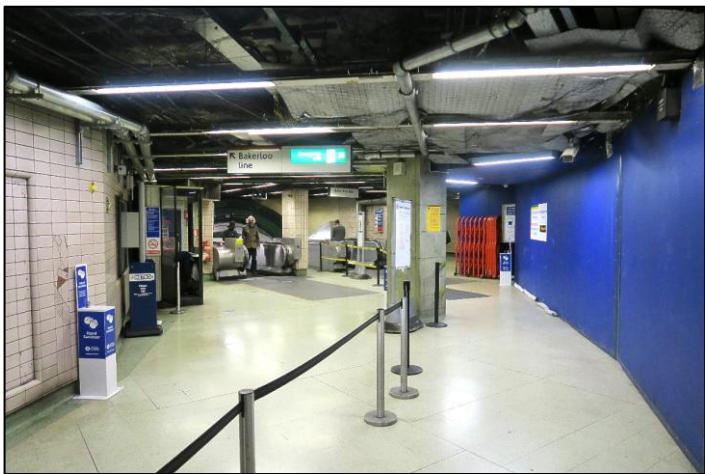
Below: Platform level at Marble Arch with just one person on the seat of the eastbound platform (Left) looking west, and looking east on the same platform (Right).



Above: Platform level at Southwark (Left) and two of the three single escalator shafts to the upper level (Right), where access is to either the main entrance or to Waterloo East Network Rail station.

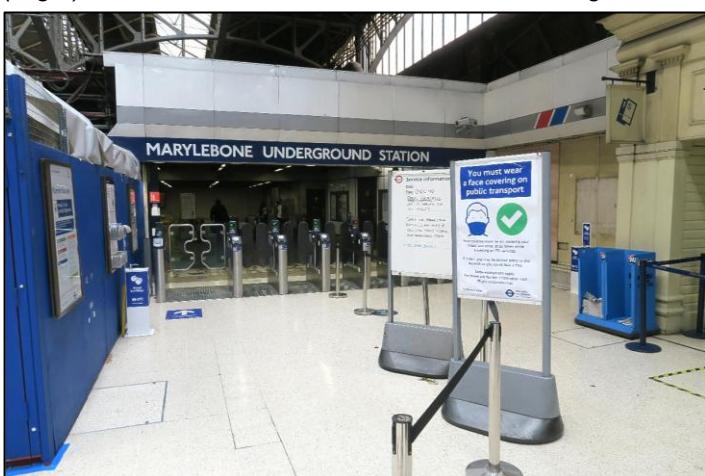
Below: A selection of Central Line stations, all taken on 3 September 2020, all of which are readily identifiable, except maybe for White City (Below, Right). The lack of people about, despite being after the first lockdown, highlights just how serious the situation was.





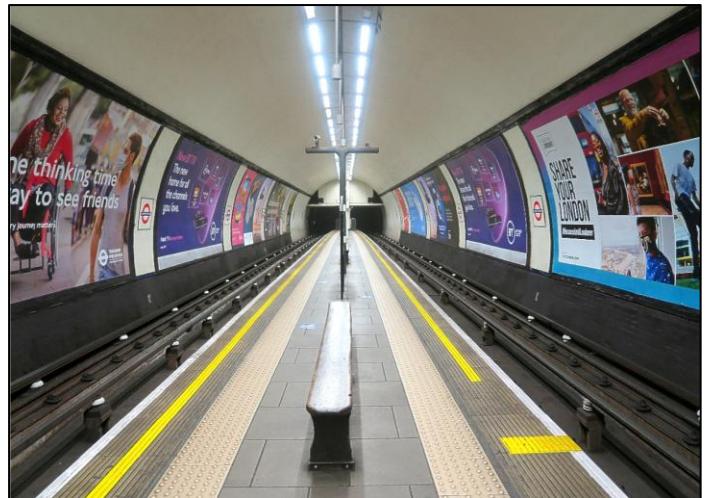
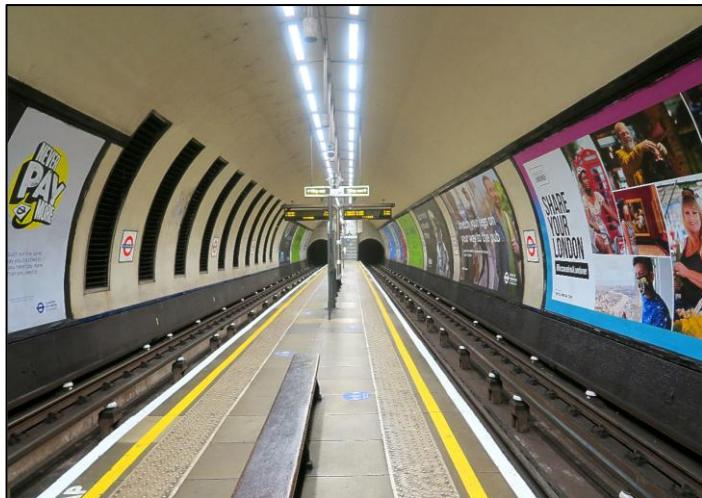
Above: Paddington Bakerloo Line 'ticket hall' (Left) on 10 September 2020 with work progressing on the future Paddington Basin access, and on the same day, the southbound platform looking south.

Below: A similar situation at Marylebone on the same date looking towards the gateline (Left) and the LU ticket machines (Right) which still had Network SouthEast branding above.

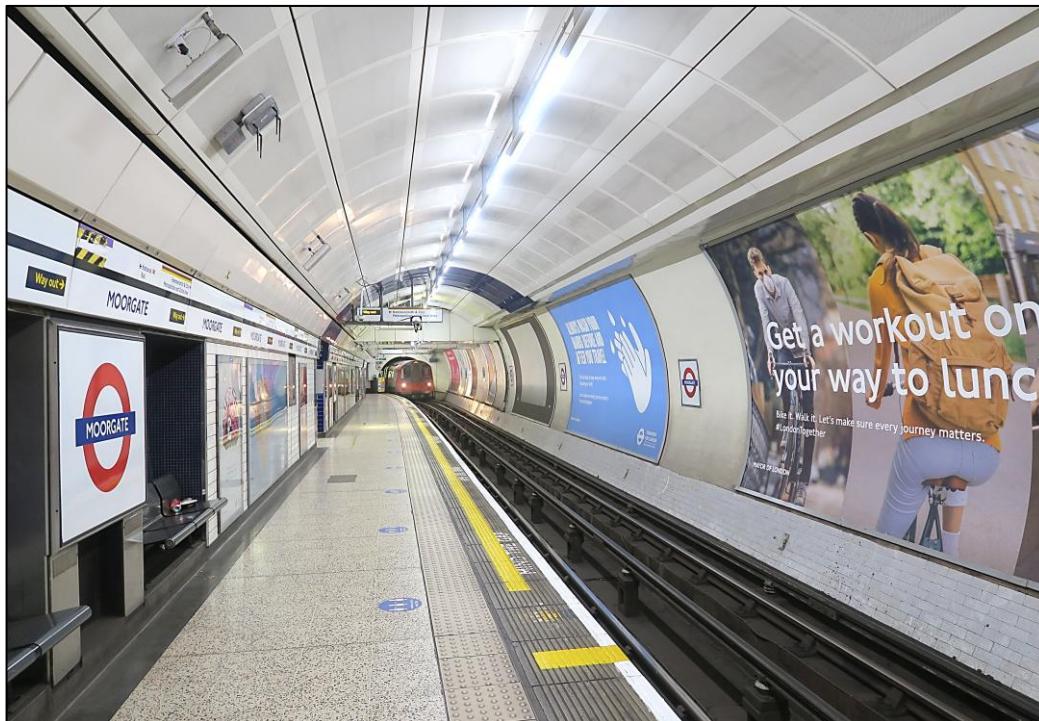


Opposite: (Lower Left) The southbound Bakerloo Line platforms at Oxford Circus and Piccadilly Circus with one person on each. Despite the situation, although some lines had a shortage of train crew, others maintained their timetables, as can be seen at Piccadilly Circus with the next three trains at regular intervals.

Opposite: (Lower Right) Harrow-on-the-Hill, looking across to southbound platforms 5 and 6 with the installation of the lift tower progressing.



Above: Clapham North looking south (Left) and Clapham Common looking north (Right). Note the different tunnel profile at the latter, which is because there used to be a crossover just beyond the station and the signal cabin in the gallery above.



Above: Kennington northbound City platform looking south (Left) with an almost empty train, and at Oval on the southbound looking north (Right).

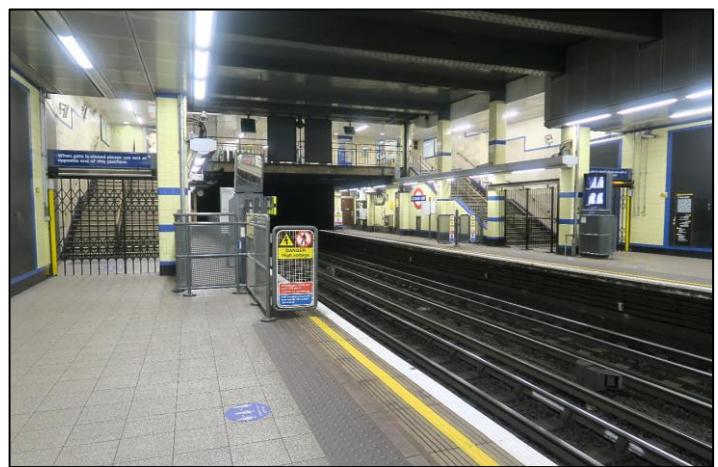
Left: The southbound Northern Line at Moorgate looking north, with a southbound train arriving at a deserted platform. Work was going on behind the scenes on Crossrail, which would link Moorgate station with Liverpool Street.



Above: (Left) King's Cross SSR concourse (westbound left and eastbound right). In years past, it was intended that the section between the two platforms would have contained a bay platform.

Above: The Northern ticket hall at King's Cross with retail outlets waiting to be occupied.

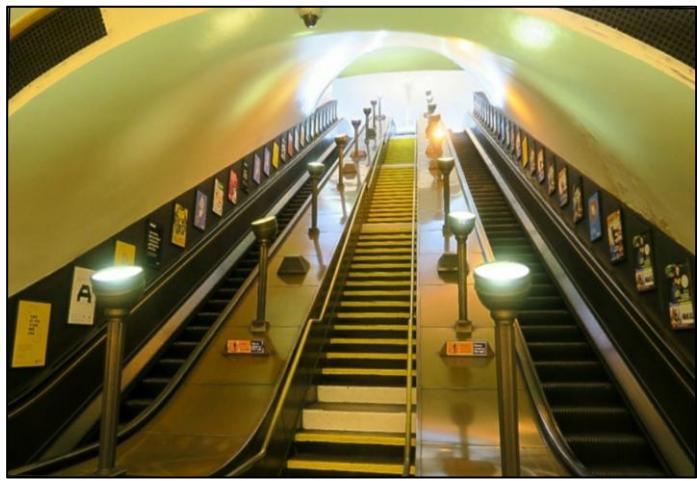
Left: One of the biggest surprises was the emptiness of the 'tube' ticket hall in the bullring at King's Cross, with not a person in sight at lunch time.



Above: (Left) A deserted Highbury & Islington on the Victoria Line. The adjacent Great Northern platforms were equally deserted.

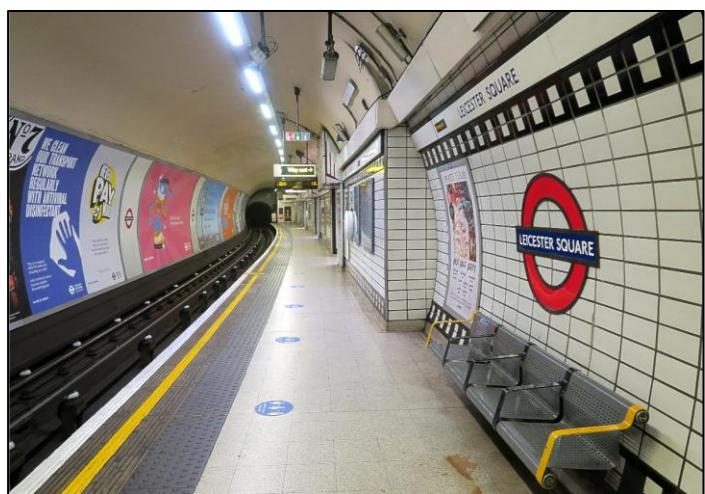
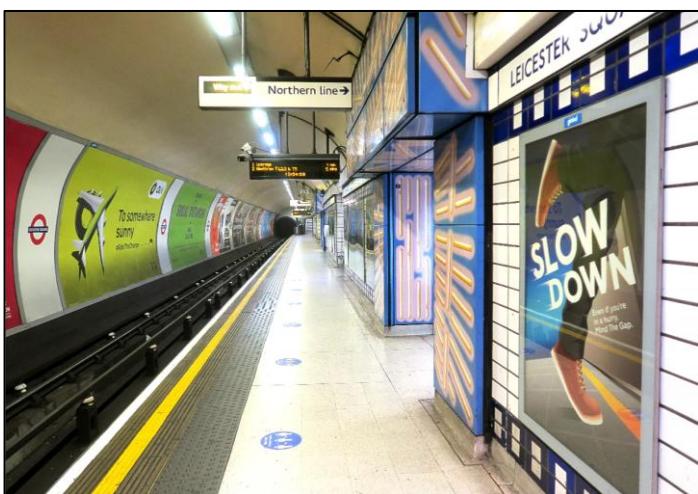
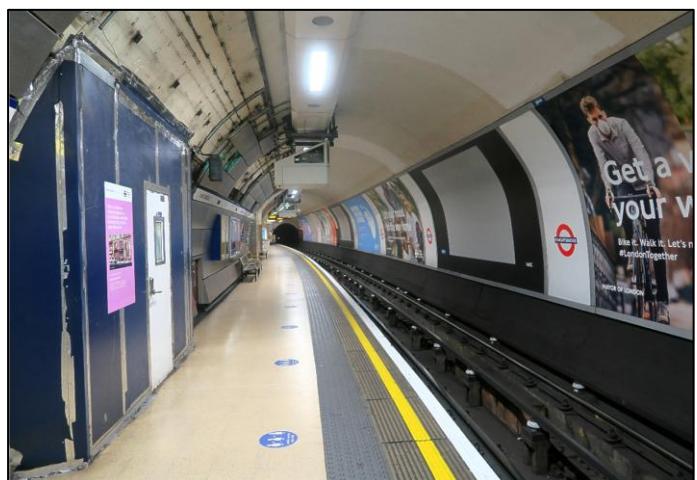
Above: The east end of Aldgate East, whose entrance was closed during the pandemic.

Left: The lower escalator landing at Swiss Cottage on the Jubilee Line, with the classic 1930s uplighters in place, being one of only three stations now to retain this feature (see also opposite). Swiss Cottage was originally a Metropolitan Railway station, the (then) Bakerloo opening on 20 November 1939.



Above: Southgate, at the east end of the Piccadilly Line, looking west from the westbound platform (Left) and the escalator shaft (Right) with its classic art deco uplighters – only St. John's Wood and Swiss Cottage (see opposite) are the other stations to retain these, although there are stainless steel imitations at some other stations.

Below: A deserted westbound platform at Knightsbridge (Left), looking east and the eastbound platform looking west. Note the blue hoardings for the delayed step-free access scheme. The poster at the time stated “completion summer 2021” (then a year late) but actually opened on 28 April 2025.



Above: Leicester Square Piccadilly Line (Left) looking west on the westbound platform and the northbound Northern Line platform (Right) looking north. The tiles under the frieze and at floor level represent film sprockets, blue on the Piccadilly Line and black on the Northern. Note the panelling by the exit which depicts neon lighting.

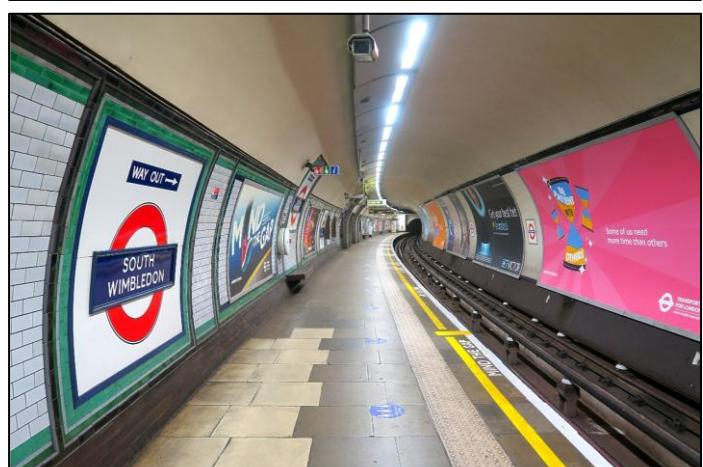
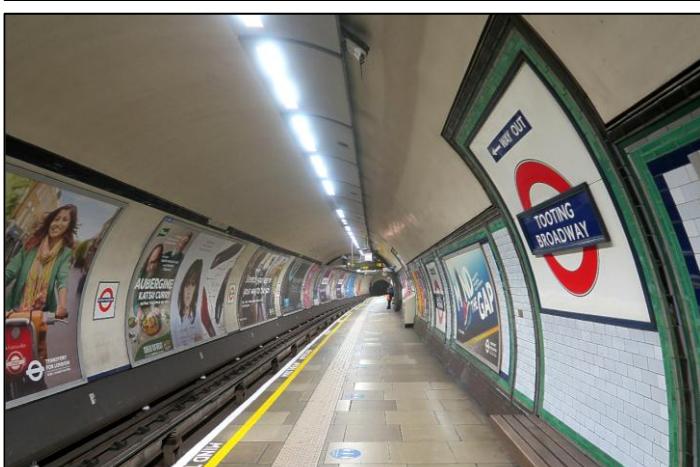
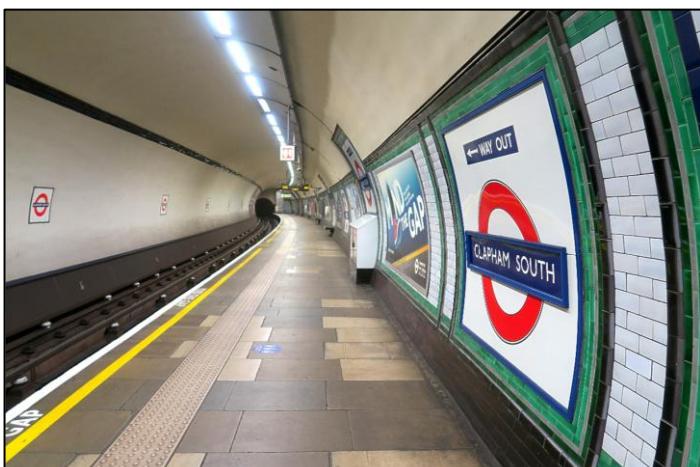
Overleaf: (Top) Two views at Green Park, the southbound Jubilee Line (Left) and the westbound Piccadilly Line (Right). Whilst service levels had recovered reasonably well since the pandemic, passengers then in the midday off-peak were still hard to come by. When the station was refurbished in 2012, the Jubilee Line platforms remained largely in their original 1979 décor, which had exit areas highlighted in yellow.



Above: (Left) The southbound Northern Line platform at Charing Cross, looking south.

Above: (Right) Just 0.16 miles away from Charing Cross on the Northern Line is Embankment, this the southbound platform looking south. Above centre are the remains of the floodgate equipment.

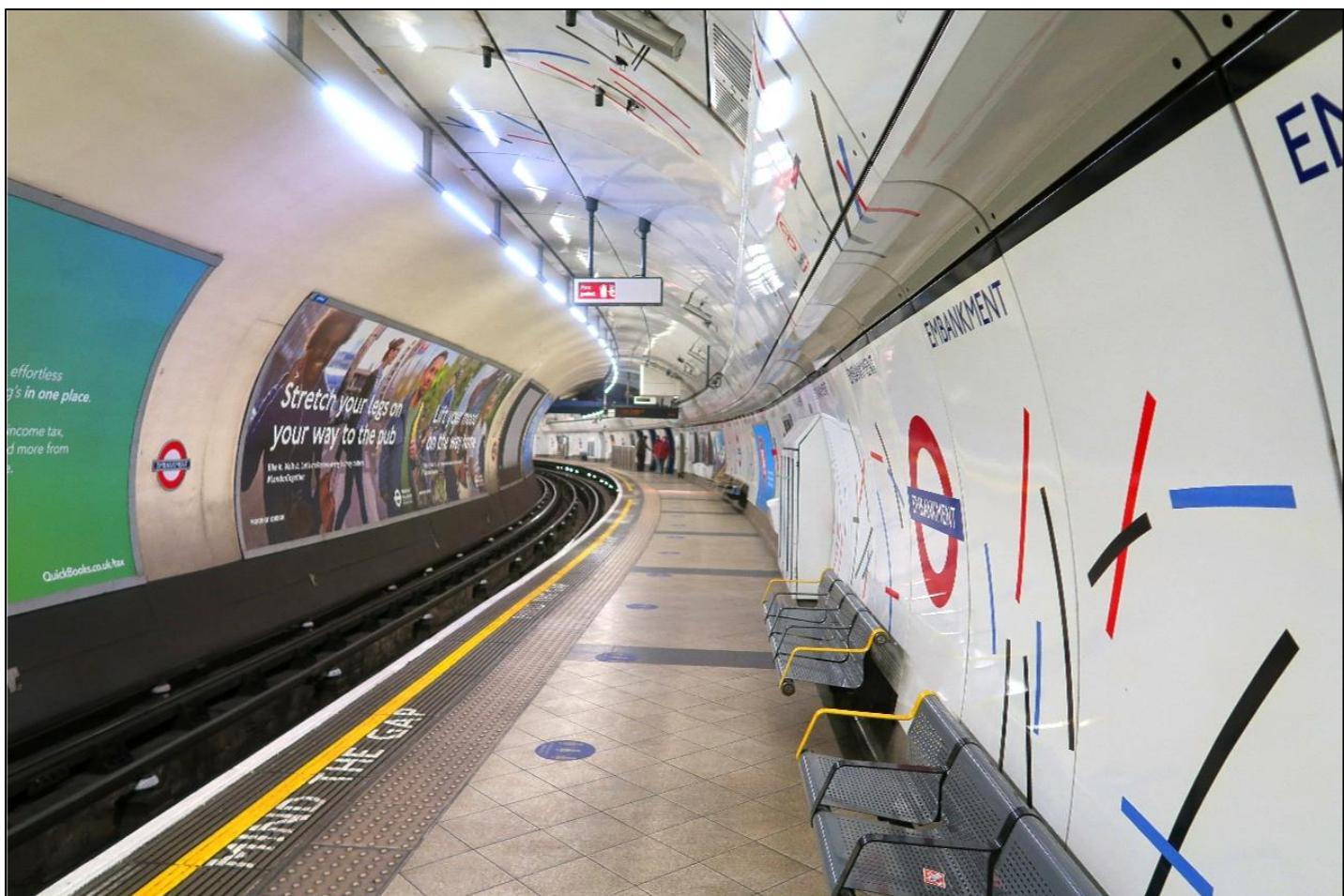
Below: Four examples of stations at the south end of the Northern Line.





Three views taken at Morden on 15 October 2020. The photo (Above, Left) looks down from the bridge at the south end of the station. The lifts in the middle of the platforms are accessed by a gantry above the disused platform 1. Looking south on platform 5 (Above). The blue spot platform 'distancing' notices are still in evidence and would remain so for some time to come. At the entrance to the ticket hall at Morden (Left), the 'London Underground History' board has been over-posted by notices related to Covid, mask wearing continuing to be mandatory.

Below: The northbound Northern Line platform at Embankment looking south, showing the 1980s décor, which represents fireworks over the nearby River Thames. When the then Hampstead Railway was extended to Charing Cross (as it was then) in 1914, it was the only platform, as the line ended on a terminal loop.



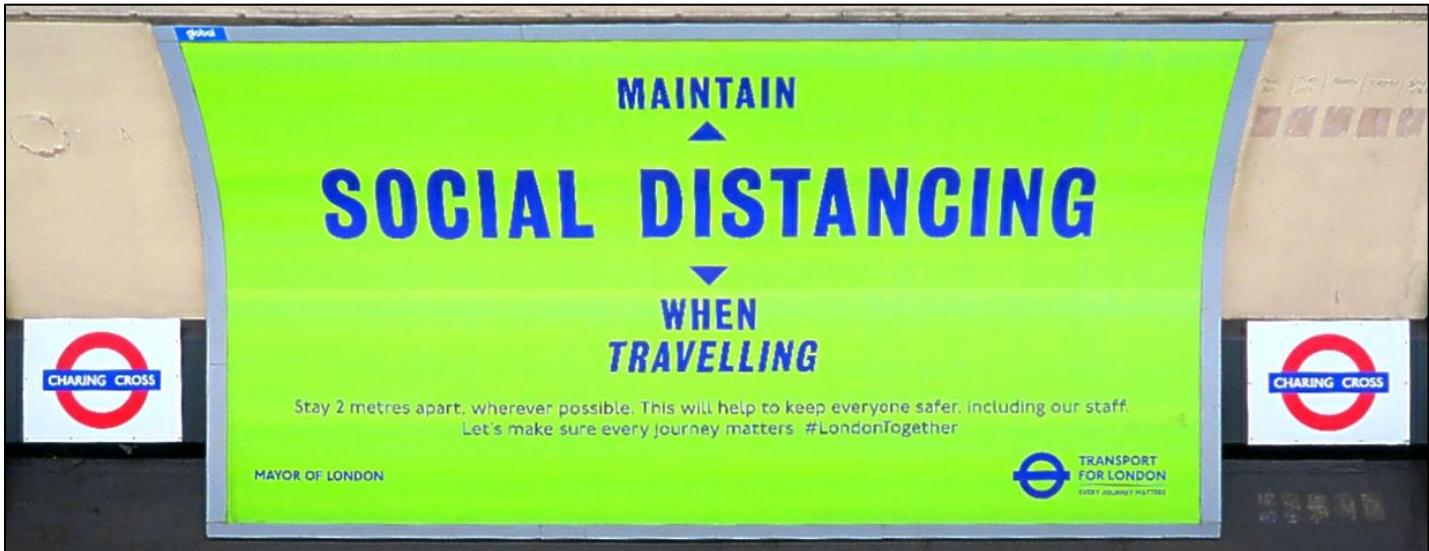


Four views at Westminster on 3 December 2020 with the threat of another lockdown looming over Christmas and the New Year.

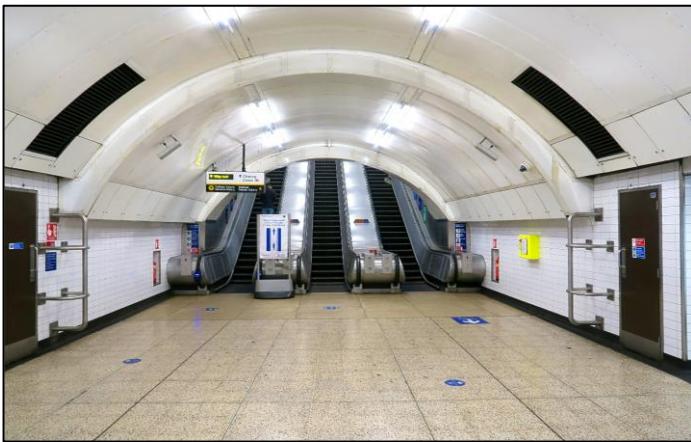
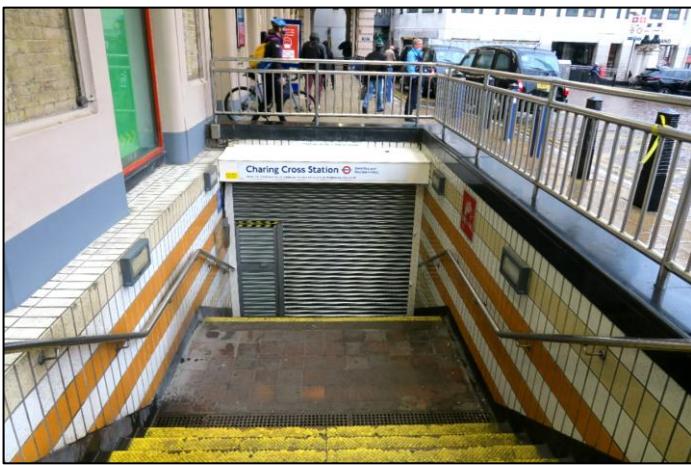
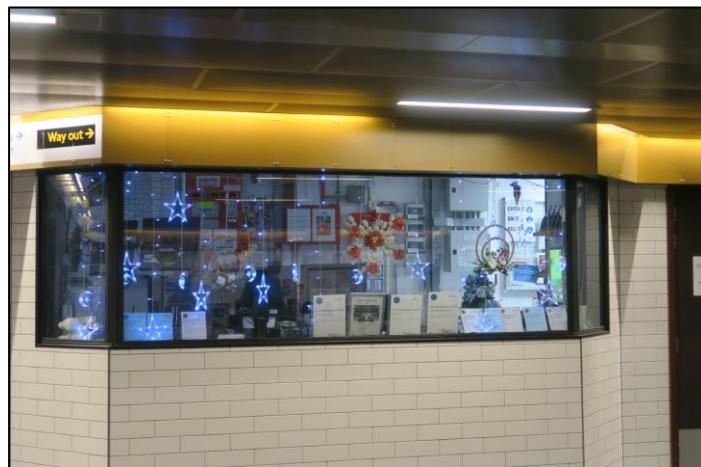
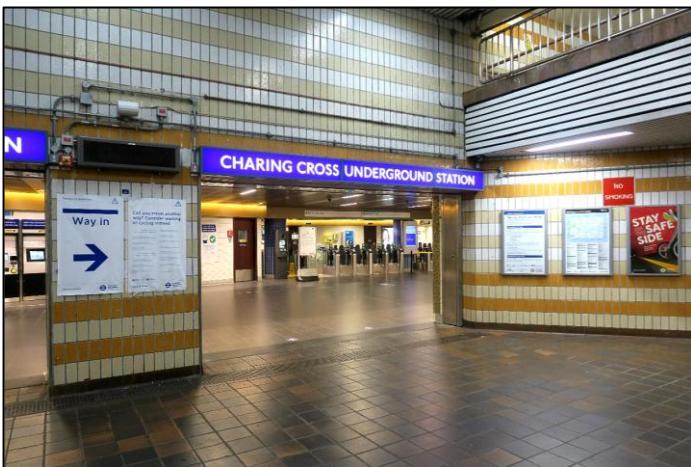
Above: Two views of the escalator banks at the intermediate level.

Left: The eastbound Jubilee Line platform looking west which was built over the westbound because of the proximity of Big Ben above.

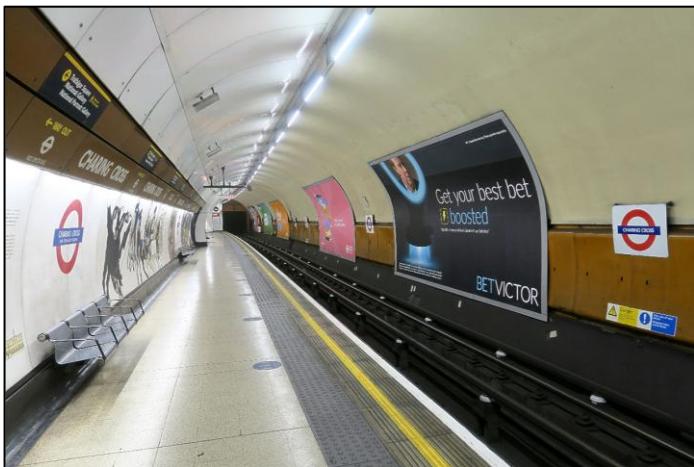
Below: An almost empty eastbound District and Circle Line platform at Westminster with an equally deserted westbound District Line S7 train on the right.



Above: This poster at Charing Cross needs no explanation under the then prevailing circumstances.

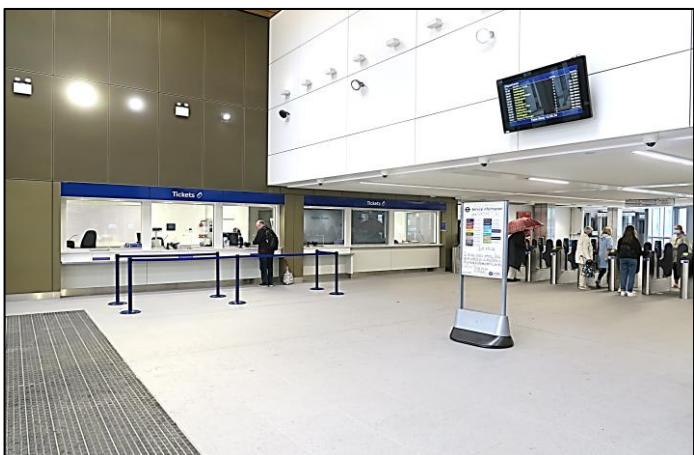
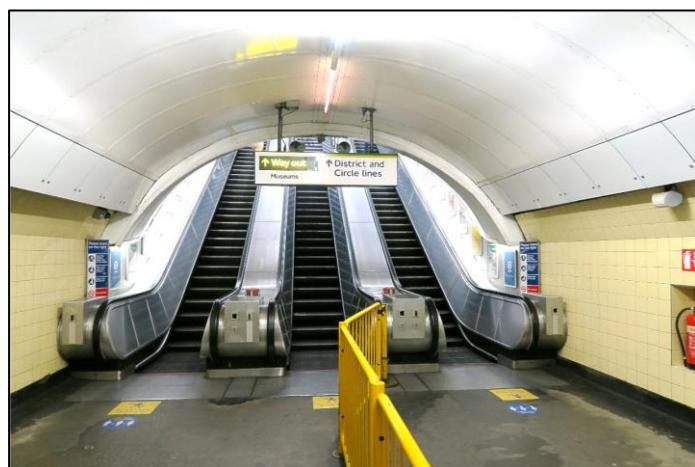


Above: Escalators at Charing Cross leading up to the main entrance (Left) and the long interchange subway (Right) leading to the Bakerloo Line (formerly Trafalgar Square).



Above: One more at Charing Cross Bakerloo Line looking north on the southbound platform on 10 December 2020 (Left) and the northbound Bakerloo Line platform at Baker Street on the same date.

Below: South Kensington Piccadilly Line on 10 December 2020 (Left) with the escalators leading to the District Line (Right). The escalators were to be replaced and this area of the station closed from the end of February 2021 until June 2022.



Rebuilt for the future Crossrail services, a much expanded station at Ealing Broadway was opened on 27 May 2021 with step-free access. However, the exterior was still very much a building site as seen (Above, Left). The entrance is seen (Above) and the much enlarged ticket hall with an operational ticket office (Left). These photos were taken one week after opening. Although some of the local services into Paddington operated from 20 May 2018, it was to be 6 November 2022 that Crossrail services were extended through the new tunnels from Reading and Heathrow.



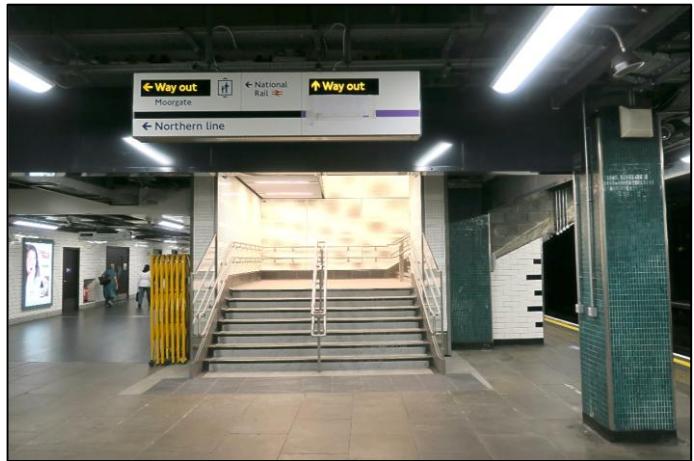
Left: At last – it's all over by the shouting! With the last restrictions lifted on 19 July 2021, there had been a gradual and staged easing from February 2021. This led to many of the blue spot notices about keeping 2 metres apart becoming weather worn and not being replaced.

Below: On 1 June 2021, a westbound S8 arrives at Barbican. With the pandemic almost at an end, all that is needed is for passenger numbers to recover.



Below: Four views of Alperton station taken on 3 June 2021. The first view (Below, Left) looks over to the westbound platform with the substation behind the fencing. To the right, from the same platform looking east showing that many high-rise buildings are already in evidence. Today, the scene is more akin to 'skyscraper city'. The two bottom photos are of the station exterior and a deserted ticket hall.





Above: A new ticket hall at Moorgate was opened in July 2021 ready for the opening of Crossrail, this view (Left) looking towards the Operations Room on the right, just to the left the lift to the eastbound platform and to the left of that, stairs down to the eastbound platform. On the eastbound platform and looking east (Right) is the exit towards the former Metropolitan Line ticket hall, now with the greatly enlarged ticket hall in readiness for Crossrail. To the left is the other way out and also to the Northern Line and Great Northern platforms (via escalators).



Left: Even after the lockdowns had ended, it took some time for passengers to return to the system, as working at home wherever possible had become the norm. This is the westbound Piccadilly Line platform at Earl's Court looking east on 6 August 2021 with just four waiting passengers (three of them wearing masks).

Below: On 23 August 2021, the reconstructed station at Whitechapel opened, it being handed over to London Underground from Crossrail, although passengers had to

wait another nine months before the first stage opened. The Whitechapel station reconstruction project was delivered by a joint venture consisting of Balfour Beatty, Morgan Sindall and VINCI Construction (BBMV) and work included a new station bridge concourse and ticket hall, all behind a retained Victorian façade. The view looking west (Left) shows the wide spacious platform area for the District and Hammersmith & City lines with a new lift just right of centre. Wide stairs connect the SSR platforms to the ticket hall level (Right).

