

FROM THE PAPERS

Items for “From the Papers” should be sent to Ian McKenzie at 24 Thamespoint, Fairways, Teddington, TW11 9PP (E-Mail fromthepapers@lurs.org.uk), and not to the Editor of this journal. Please ensure that contributions are identified by date and source publication.

06.02.25 SECRET LONDON – Four London Underground stations are home to nine “Tiny Parks”, which have been created in partnership with design studio, the Edible Bus Stop. They have transformed disused station ticket offices since 2016. The four stations are St. James’s Park (where two parks can be found), Belsize Park (which is home to one), while Wood Green and Kilburn Park both boast three tiny parks). Each former ticket office has been filled with tropical, low-maintenance plants.

Right: The three Tiny Parks in the ticket hall at Kilburn Park

Photo: Courtesy Secret London



19.02.25 – 05.03.25 RAIL #1029 – A second, step-free entrance to the Camden Town station may be delayed by five years to 2031, because the present occupier of the site is reluctant to relocate. TfL secured the land two years ago.

19.02.25 – 05.03.25 RAIL #1029 – TfL is working on proposals for step-free access for four Underground stations in this financial year, at Alperton, Arnos Grove, Eastcote and West Hampstead. Designs for North Acton, Colliers Wood and Tooting Broadway are advanced, and five more are in the pipeline, at Croyley, East Finchley, Neasden, Northwood and Turnham Green.

23.02.25 MYLONDON – Two Underground stations have been confirmed by TfL as having asbestos present. TfL have said that asbestos was present across a number of locations on its network, but maintained that no risk was posed to passengers or staff. In a response to a FoI request, TfL said this week that asbestos was present in both Pimlico and Stockwell stations. Reports into both stations stated there was asbestos present in the cement of several areas. An inspection from May last year for Pimlico station found asbestos was present in the cement of the lobby and both platforms. TfL said stations are inspected periodically to ensure no damage has been caused to affect safety risks to the general public. An FoI case officer for TfL said: “Due to the age of the Underground, asbestos is found in a number of locations on the network. However, in public areas, the vast majority of Asbestos Containing Materials (ACMs) are contained behind station finishes and cannot be accessed by the general public. Where ACMs are found in public areas, they are located where they cause no risk to the general public or staff”. The case officer added that it is very rare for the safety status of asbestos in stations to change. They added that when a situation like this occurs, a risk assessment is undertaken and the asbestos is either encapsulated, encased or removed. TfL has a number of procedures in place to ensure the management of asbestos is compliant with national regulations. This includes maintaining a register of known or presumed asbestos locations and inspecting such instances. Airborne fibre monitoring for asbestos is also carried out during work on or near asbestos containing minerals.

26.02.25 THE TELEGRAPH – Extra-high ticket-barriers that use artificial intelligence to trap offenders could be installed at Underground stations to crack down on up to 100,000 fare dodgers a day. The technology is designed to identify tailgating cheats who push through barriers behind paying passengers, according to developer Cubic Transportation Systems. The gates use AI-aided scanning software to detect instances of fare-dodging and immediately alert nearby guards while providing a record of the offence. Stretching from the floor to shoulder height, US company Cubic has designed the gates to stop wrongdoers from sliding beneath or jumping over them. Fare avoiders who manage to get into a station and take a free ride face getting stuck on the wrong side of the barrier as they seek to escape. TfL lost an estimated £130M in revenue to fare dodgers in 2023, leading to the Mayor to raise ticketing fines to £100. TfL declined to say if it would order the equipment, which will go on display at the Transport Ticketing Global 2025 trade fair in London next week. However, its technology and data teams are understood to be exploring the use of AI in the battle against fare evasion. TfL, which also runs buses, Overground trains, the DLR and trams, said around 3.8% of passengers were estimated to be guilty of fare evasion last year. While the rate of offending is well below the 13% seen on the New York subway, it says the trend deprives Londoners of “investment in a safe, frequent and reliable transport service” and has pledged to reduce the rate to 1.5%. TfL already deploys in-house intelligence software to identify suspicious patterns of travel, though the effort focusses on offences involving contactless payments. Some 414 Underground passengers were investigated in 2024, leading to the recovery of £363,000 in lost fares. For more physical forms of fare evasion, however, TfL is generally reliant on staff detecting offences and informing enforcement officers who may seek to catch the culprit at a later date, often with the help of the BT Police. Cubic said that the FEnX Fare Gate, by contrast, “can accurately detect, record and flag fare evasion as it’s happening, distinguishing between different types of fare evasion, such as pushing through or climbing under the paddles or tailgating”. In its pitch to companies, the US firm said that the gate’s “advanced technology stops fare evasion in its tracks, protecting

your revenue while maintaining smooth passenger flow". It added: "Our intelligent systems ensure authorised access only, giving you complete peace of mind." Cubic has also developed technology that can alter the force required to push through gates, meaning that barriers at stations where fare dodging is a major issue can be set to prevent miscreant travellers from forcing them open through brute force. The company said there was no danger of innocent commuters being wrongly identified as offenders, with the gates able to distinguish between tailgaters and slower-moving passengers who may be laden with shopping or accompanied by a child. The barriers also feature touch-free access and recognise when people need more time, Cubic said, making it easier for passengers with disabilities or pushing prams to move through stations. The gates will not capture or disclose personally identifiable information or biometric data such as facial features or fingerprints, it said. Cubic has been involved in London's transport since the 1970s and has already played a significant role in upgrading the Underground, having been part of the consortium that won a contract to introduce the Oyster Card in 1998. That system was introduced partly to curb fare evasion, with a substantial portion of the Underground network gated for the first time. It was followed by contactless bank card swiping on buses in 2012, which was extended to the Underground two years later.

05.03.25 MYLONDON – TfL has said it will investigate repairing the wall of the southbound Victoria Line platform at Oxford Circus, which has been in a continued state of deterioration for the past two years. The passenger who submitted the request asked TfL what the underlying issue was that caused the deterioration of the wall, as well as if there were any plans to repair it. They also made reference to a post on X (formerly Twitter) from Mike Parry, who described the station as 'disgusting' and said it looked like a 'sewer'. An FoI case officer for TfL responded by saying that the body acknowledged water issues were present at the station's platform and that remedial works were required. However, they added that jobs across the capital's network were prioritised accordingly. The case officer said: "To minimise the impact of water ingress, TfL sometimes removes cladding or tiles, resulting in the current wall appearance shown in the images referenced". He added: "While an interim solution would be to make good the wall, we need to address the root cause of the water ingress as part of a broader programme. TfL is working through priority locations to schedule remedial works and improve the ambience".

06.03.25 MYLONDON – Plans for a 15-storey student tower on top of Southwark Underground station and 44 council homes in a block next door have been approved by councillors. The 429 student rooms in the proposed building above the Jubilee Line station will bankroll a nine-storey social housing block and new community hall on the Styles House estate. The 44 council homes will be built by TfL in partnership with developer *Helical plc*, but owned and managed by Southwark Council. Of the planned 44 council homes, 15 will be one-bed, 13 two-bed, 15 three-bed and one four-bed.

11.03.25 CHISWICK CALENDAR - Network Rail have confirmed they are investigating cracks in Kew Railway Bridge, which crosses the River Thames at Strand-on-the-Green, carrying District Line and London Overground trains between Gunnersbury and Kew Gardens stations. The *Chiswick Calendar* has been told that the bridge is showing signs of age in similar ways to Hammersmith Bridge – cracks in the stone structure, signs of stress in the ironwork, and that it is visibly sagging. A Network Rail spokesperson told us: "We are aware that some cracks have appeared in the brick abutments of the 155-year-old Kew Railway Bridge. Our structural engineers are investigating the cause and checking for further cracks. Temporary works are being put in place to protect the Grade II listed structure while these investigations continue. Once the investigations are completed, we will speak with relevant stakeholders to develop and implement a more permanent solution to repair this historic structure". We asked TfL about it, who operate the District Line train services. They said they have not yet been informed of any problems that might affect their services. District Line and London Overground services were suspended for four weekends at the end of last year while engineers worked to replace the wheel timbers on the bridge, which hold the rails in place. Kew Railway Bridge supports the Richmond–Stratford Overground route and the District line branch from Richmond to Gunnersbury. It was designed by W.R. Galbraith and opened in 1869.

14.03.25 VARIOUS SOURCES – A number of London Underground stations featured small book collections, where passers-by and passengers were invited to take a free book, leave one for somebody else to enjoy, or do both at the same time. It enabled passengers to get a little reading time into their commute. But due to Fire Safety Regulations from the London Fire Brigade, LU were forced to close all Book Exchange Libraries at all London Underground stations with immediate effect. Quite what prompted this action isn't clear, as the fire safety regulations apparently date back to 2009, but the LFB has stated: "*It is Transport for London's responsibility to ensure its premises are compliant under the statutory fire safety regulations that apply*" and "*It is TfL's responsibility to keep stations clear of 'combustible materials'*". The Evening Standard reports that. "*book lovers have hit out at the change, saying 'meddling' bureaucrats were removing 'the one bit of joy in a commute'*". Book lovers who have used the libraries said the measure was heavy-handed, with one telling the Standard: "*It's unclear why a few second hand books pose such a great and imminent fire risk, one much more serious than that of the dust and debris on the platforms, tracks and escalators. Or even why the paper in the books shelved at street level far away from the tracks is a fire hazard, but the paper used for billboard posters just feet from the tracks is not*". Acton Town, Ravenscourt Park, Oval and Clapham North were four of several Underground stations that took part in the scheme.

15.03.25 MYLONDON – Unions have asked for e-bikes to be banned on the Underground after one exploded on a platform at Rayners Lane station last month (see page 280 this issue). Underground union members walked out of a meeting with TfL earlier this week over calls to ban e-bikes on the transport network. The incident took place at around 11.30 on 27 February, with an LFB spokesperson saying that three fire engines attended the scene to extinguish the fire and nobody was injured. The TSSA union said that its health and safety representatives 'stormed out' of a meeting with TfL on 11 March after the transport authority 'refused' to issue an immediate ban on the bikes. TSSA's Maryam Eslamdoust said: "We are appalled that TfL won't ban e-bikes given the fire at Rayners Lane. It's simple common sense to protect staff and passengers on the underground from the fire risk that e-bikes pose". She added: "We are discussing the next steps with our members. Nothing is off the table at this point". Other unions have expressed their desires for e-bikes to be banned following the incident last month. ASLEF's Finn Brennan, said the union would be instituting a ballot for industrial action unless TfL banned e-bikes from its network. The union claimed that an internal Underground investigation concluded the e-bike at Rayners Lane was 'only moments away from boarding a train'. It stated that the bike exploded and sent flames 'shooting' into the air, with debris being 'scattered' across the platform. Mr Brennan said: "An explosion onboard a train would almost certainly have led to

serious casualties or deaths and if it led to a derailment, there was a real risk of a mass casualty event". The RMT union has also since reinforced its calls for a ban on e-bikes across the network. RMT's Eddie Dempsey said the union had been calling on TfL to ban the bikes for over a year. A TfL spokesperson said, "... we regularly review our risk assessments and the controls we have in place to ensure our passengers can travel safely". They added: "Following the recent incident at Rayners Lane station, we are reviewing our risk assessment and continue to talk to the LFB about this incident".

Points to consider –

- *Maybe someone ought to take a look at stations and see the mess often left by the Metro newspapers, not only at their distribution point but inside trains and stations as well ...*
- *If e-bikes were not going to be banned (which they now **are** at the time of typing this – see page 286) despite a number of incidents in the past (the previous being at Parsons Green), what is the problem with small book exchange libraries – have these ever caught fire ...?*