LONDON TRANSPORT

A brief history

by Sim Harris

First edition

FULL EDITION

RAILHUB

London Transport

A brief history

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Sim Harris

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Contents


55 BROADWAY
LONDON TRANSPORT
UNDERGROUND
UNDERGROUND
ST. JAMES'S PARK STATION
55 BROADWAY
RVP

SENSATIONAL PLAN OF SOCIALIST CABINET.

TUBES,
TRAMWAYS,
AND
OMNIBUSES.

£113,000,000 INVOLVED

THE BIG THREE.

THE latest figures obtainable of the capital involved in London passenger transport are as follow:-

Railways - - **£79,344,086**
Tramways - **£27,003,114**
Omnibuses - **£6,930,105**
Total **£113,277,305**

IMMEDIATE "EXPLORATION" OF A SELF-SUPPORTING SCHEME.

A GOVERNMENT plan for the "complete consolidation" under public ownership of London's railways, omnibuses, and tramways was announced in the House of Commons yesterday.

Daily Express 3 December 1929, reporting the announcement of a new Passenger Board for London, and the new LPTB logo, which was soon replaced by the classic 'bullseye'

Chapter One

'Sensational plan'

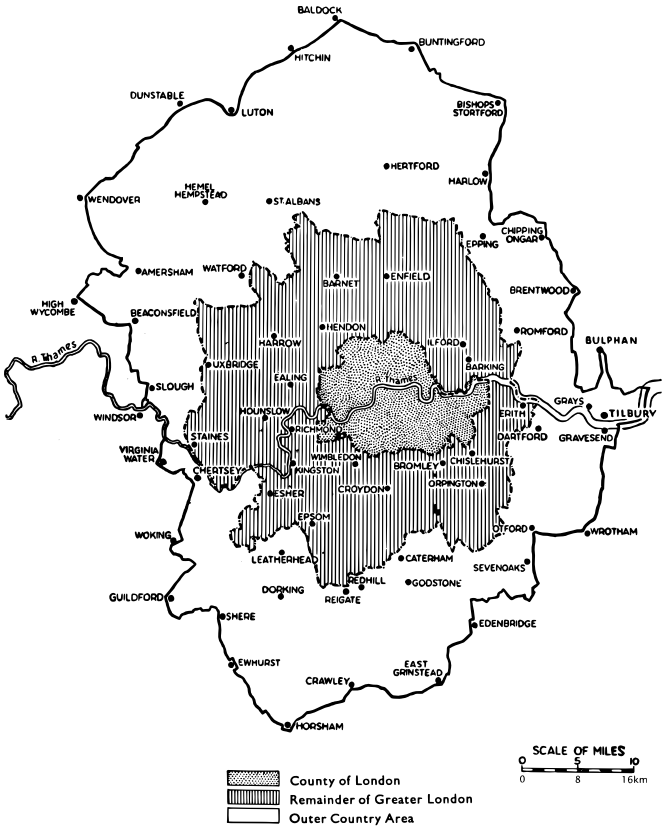
The problems caused by unrestricted competition by bus operators on the streets of London had become extreme by the early 1920s, when 'pirate' buses concentrated on peak hour flows, causing traffic disruption and neglecting passengers at quieter times.

Their presence led to calls for controls, which were largely achieved by the London Traffic Act in 1924. This allowed the authorities to 'designate' streets and so restrict the routes available to the pirates.

But further reforms were urged, particularly by Labour politicians, and in December 1929 the Minister of Transport Herbert Morrison published the Labour government's proposed London Passenger Transport Bill. He was supported by the Chairman of the London Underground Group, Lord Ashfield, who saw unification as the best way of securing capital for development of the capital's transport systems.

The London Passenger Transport Act was passed in 1933, and came into effect on 1 July. The Board was a public authority but funded independently, with a statutory duty to make ends meet without subsidy.

The new London Passenger Transport Board, which adopted the trading name 'London Transport', had absorbed the London Underground Group (which owned the tube railways and the London General Omnibus Company), the Metropolitan Railway and several tramway undertakings including London United, which had just introduced trolleybuses. The Board's area was large, reaching Bedford-



The London Passenger Transport Area remained essentially the same between 1933 and 1969, although there were some changes in Grays and Tilbury in 1951, when most Eastern National routes in the area were transferred to London Transport

shire in the north and Sussex in the south, and in its outer 'country' area it had inherited 66 smaller bus operators, working 246 routes.[1]

All the undertakings which had been taken over were 'bought' with interest-bearing stock, the issue of which was authorised by the Board's Act.

There were major developments in the rest of the 1930s. The LPTB announced in 1935 that its trams would be progressively replaced by trolleybuses. It continued with extending the Underground and designed new motor buses. A 'New Works' programme envisaged Underground lines to such places as Ruislip, Denham, New Barnet and Ongar.

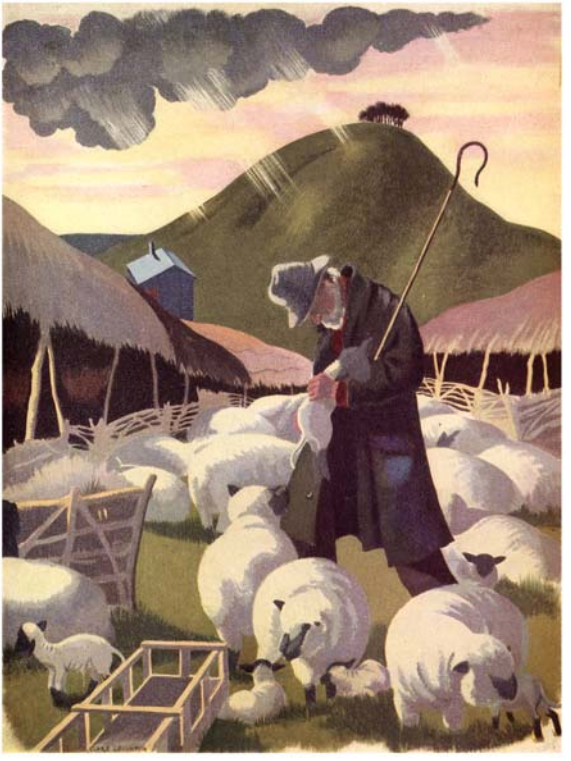
The outbreak of war in September 1939 naturally hindered these improvements. Some of the unfinished Underground projects, including extensions of the Central Line both east and west, had to wait until peace had been restored, while the withdrawal of the remaining trams was also postponed.

One minor development soon after the Board had taken over had been the speedy abandonment of the original LPTB logo (page 10) in favour of the bar and circle 'bullseye' which had been favoured by the London Underground Group and London General since before the First World War.

The Board also inherited the lettering designed by Edward Johnston for the Underground in 1916 and a recent innovation – a diagrammatic version of the Underground map – which had been successfully submitted by one of the Underground Group's draughtsmen, Harry Beck, in 1932.

The Board's systems were inevitably damaged during World War 2, once London had started to come under attack from bombs and later V1 and V2 missiles from the late summer of 1940 onwards.

Some of the worst incidents included the explosion of a bomb in the northbound running tunnel at Balham on the Northern Line on 14 October 1940. Water from burst mains deluged both tunnels, and 68 people died.



WEEK-END WALKS

800 miles of these in London's Country described in 3 books 'Country Walks' 1ST 2ND 3RD series · 3D at station bookstalls

London Transport published *Country Walks* for more than thirty years. The primary purpose of these booklets was to encourage passengers to use lightly loaded off-peak and weekend trains and coaches to reach 'London's country'. This 1938 poster featured artwork by Clare Leighton.

In January 1941, a bomb burst in the underground concourse at Bank, producing a vast crater. The blast even damaged two trains which were standing at the platforms 20 metres below ground. On this occasion 57 people were killed – as at Balham, many of the casualties had been sheltering from the raid above.

On 10-11 May 1941, which was among the worst nights of the war in London, a bomb plunged through the main line concourse at St Pancras station, damaging the subsurface tunnels below and interrupting Inner Circle and Metropolitan Line services for five months. It was later revealed that 300 enemy bombers had been over London, and no fewer than 20 direct hits were recorded at various points on the Underground.

Tram tracks were damaged in fourteen places, and the threat of unexploded bombs or unstable buildings caused blockages in many other streets, while 'great lengths' of trolleybus overhead wires were brought down at eighteen locations.

Seven of the Thames bridges were closed, and no buses could run through the City of London. Three bus garages were damaged, including a particularly bad incident at Croydon, and yet, apart from the Circle Line interruption at St Pancras, all the affected services had been 'substantially restored' within 10 days.

It was not to be hoped that the aspirations of the 1935 New Works Programme could be met in these circumstances, and longer-term projects were suspended while London Transport workshops were turned over largely to the production of wartime equipment, including complete aeroplanes.

An initial ban on the use of stations below ground as air raid shelters was lifted in the light of experience, particularly as there was no effective way of preventing it.

The Board's annual report for 1945, the first edition which was permitted to discuss the effects of the recent conflict, commented philosophically that after the first major raid on London, on 7 September 1940, 'the new situation was promptly accepted, and the Board took undertook responsibility for the

CLOSING OF STATIONS

ON AND FROM SEPTEMBER 7

In order that certain work may be carried out, it has become necessary to close until further notice, the following stations entirely, except that the interchange subways will be available at the stations marked thus*

Arsenal
Balham
‡Bank (NORTHERN LINE / CENTRAL LINE)
Bond Street
Chancery Lane
Charing Cross (BAKERLOO LINE / NORTHERN LINE)
Clapham Common
Green Park
Hyde Park Corner
Kings Cross (PICCADILLY LINE / NORTHERN LINE)
Knightsbridge
Maida Vale
Marble Arch
Old Street
Oval
*Oxford Circus
*Tottenham Ct. Rd.
Trinity Road
Waterloo NORTHERN LINE

‡ The ticket hall and lifts at Bank (Northern Line) station will remain open to provide access to Central Line trains and to the subway connection with Monument.

AVAILABILITY OF TICKETS. Holders of current season tickets available at stations closed may, if they wish, surrender their tickets at any Ticket Office (or by post to the Commercial Manager, London Transport, 55 Broadway, S.W.1), and they will in due course receive a full refund for the unused period as from the date of surrender. Owing to the exceptional circumstances, it will not be possible to ensure that accommodation for season ticket holders will be available on alternative road or rail services, but such passengers may use them if they can. Single and return journey tickets will not be available on alternative road or rail services. CLOAK ROOM deposits will be removed from the closed stations to the Lost Property Office at 200, Baker Street (adjoining Baker Street station), where they may be claimed on Mondays to Fridays only between 10 a.m. and 7 p.m.

In addition, the train service on the Northern Line will not run between Kennington and Strand or between London Bridge and Moorgate. The availability of tickets will be as above, except that between Kennington and Strand single and return journey tickets will be available by alternative rail services; between London Bridge and Moorgate such tickets will be available by alternative road services.

Wartime security considerations concealed the real reason for these station closures in September 1939: in fact, flood gates were being installed to protect the Underground from the consequences of a bomb breaching one of the tunnels under the Thames

shelter arrangements until they could be taken over by the appropriate Civil Defence authorities'.

Because of the risk to lines running under the Thames, a number of stations were closed during the first few weeks of the war while flood gates were installed – although the reason for the closures was kept under wraps.

Political changes after the war inevitably affected London Transport, even while the repairs of wartime damage were still under way. The 1947 Transport Act created a British Transport Commission, which was to take over the main line railways and many road haulage undertakings. The LPTB was also included in the acquisitions, and from 1 January 1948 LT became the London Transport Executive – one of several 'executives' which were the operational subsidiaries of the BTC.

Postwar improvements continued: the Central Line was extended to West Ruislip in the west and Ongar in the east – although the final section from Epping to Ongar was not electrified until 1957. Some prewar projects were re-evaluated and abandoned: among these abandonments were several extensions of the Northern Line – from Mill Hill East to Edgware and onwards to Bushey Heath, and also to Alexandra Palace – as well as the short section of the Central Line from West Ruislip to Denham. Most of these changes of heart were caused by the establishment of a 'Green Belt' around Greater London.

Other prewar plans did continue, particularly the withdrawal of trams, which was completed in 1952. However, diesel buses replaced the remaining trams, rather than trolleybuses, because it had been decided that the trolleybuses would also go, by 1968. The date of the last trolleybuses was later brought forward to 1962, while the 'last' trams proved to be nothing of the sort, because tram lines were to be relaid in the streets of Croydon and neighbouring centres in the later 1990s.

The last trolleybuses ran in May 1962, in what also proved to be the last months of the London Transport Executive. The perceived failure of the British Transport Commission led to its

Pre- and postwar rolling stock for London Transport
above 1938/1949 tube stock
below RT bus, first built 1938-1940, and then 1947-1954

replacement by a series of statutory Boards from 1 January 1963 as a consequence of the 1962 Transport Act. As part of these reforms LT became the London Transport Board, responsible directly to the Minister of Transport.

More changes would follow in less than a decade, again as a result of political upheaval.

The long-established London County Council and its piecemeal network of small boroughs was replaced in 1965 by a new Greater London Council and 32 new, larger London Boroughs. The opportunity was taken to abolish Middlesex County Council, and transfer its powers to the new GLC Boroughs in north and west London, such as Harrow, Brent and Enfield.

By the end of the 1960s it had been decided to pass control of London Transport from central government to the GLC, and from 1 January 1970 the former Board became an Executive once again – but now of the Greater London Council.

This was not the only change. The Country Bus department, which included Green Line coaches, was taken away from LT at the same time and given to the recently-established National Bus Company, which was the state-owned successor to the Transport Holding Company. (The THC had been created in 1963 to take over some of the non-rail interests of the British Transport Commission, including its bus companies.)

The area served by London Transport therefore shrank significantly from the start of 1970 – essentially to the borders of Greater London – although the Underground lines which penetrated the surrounding counties, mainly those to Amersham and Ongar, continued to be run by LT.

London Transport had been critical of the effect of traffic congestion on its services since the 1950s, but its problems were growing in the 1970s, not only because of heavy traffic, but because staff shortages further affected bus punctuality and made headways unpredictable. This, in turn, tended to depress ridership and reduce revenue, and to make matters even worse many of the buses bought at that time proved to be unreliable.

New buses
above Routemaster bus, in production 1958-1968
below 1970s 'off the shelf' driver-only bus, coded DMS by LT

The problems with new buses had come about because the government had introduced substantial grants for new vehicles, but only those from approved manufacturers, particularly British Leyland.

In response, London Transport began to buy buses 'off the shelf' in quantity for the first time, and soon discovered that equipment designed for provincial services was not up to coping with the heavier burdens imposed on engines, brakes and transmissions by the excessive 'stops and starts' of typical London traffic. This problem was exacerbated even more by the restless state of industrial relations in the engineering sector at this time, which caused shortages of spare parts.

Historically, LT had been able to achieve a working surplus because of the profits from its buses – the Underground had always carried far fewer people.

In 1946, for example, the London Passenger Transport Board had recorded 4.3 billion journeys, of which only 569 million had been made on the Underground.

The rest were provided by buses (2.5 billion), trolleybuses (889 million) and trams (297 million)[2].

No doubt the circumstances of the time – including stringent petrol rationing and heavy demands for transport from newly-demobbed troops – played their part, but such high figures were not to be seen again. Ironically, this was a side-effect of increasing post war prosperity.

Queue Questions

1

FREEDOM OR LICENCE?

For more than a hundred years the bus has served the Londoner and his visitors. It was contrived by Shillibeer in 1829 as a vehicle for all and has become as much an amenity as street lighting; it is inextricably a part of the pattern of London Life.

We of London Transport inherit this tradition. We are responsible for public transport on the streets of London. But this responsibility can never be absolute because of the just and essential needs of other road users. Streets, after all, are not private property. There can be no bus system comparable to that of a railway on which all movement can be controlled. We must, however, see that public transport is run as efficiently as possible and that *the buses on which the Londoner relies go through.*

Today, traffic on the city streets is strangling itself. There is a disastrous confusion between freedom and licence — or is it between too little freedom and too many licences? Is it freedom if private car owners convert public streets into private garages? Half-cluttered streets are half efficient and this means bunching buses, crawling, irregularity, longer queues. The truth is that London is not having as good a bus service as it should.

London Transport will use this space from time to time not to air our grievances but to share our problem. Street congestion is an evil that affects all of us and we believe that public discussion may help to find a cure.

One of a series of advertisements published by London Transport in 1955

Chapter Two

'Serious doubts'

By 1955, a trend had been starting to become clear. Underground travellers had increased to 676 million, but journeys by road had fallen to 3.4 billion, compared with 3.7 billion in 1946.[3]

It was in 1955 that London Transport took out press advertisements in which it went on the offensive: *'The Londoner who owns a car may try to solve his individual problem by driving to work. But his logic is at fault. His car is adding to the demand for road space until it is finally lodged in garage or park (if indeed he is not obliged to leave it on the street). In solving his own problem he is adding to the problems of others…'*

In its annual report for 1955, LT also warned that off-peak travel was falling particularly sharply.

It attributed this change partly to the growth in private transport, but also to the increasing popularity of television, which kept people at home in the evenings.

Londoners were able to choose between two television channels from September 1955, with the launch of 'independent' (i.e. commercial) television.

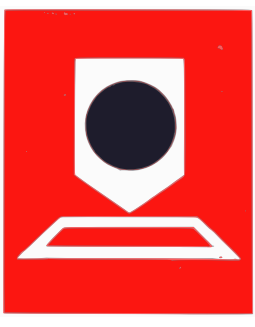
The trend continued: in 1960, there were 674 million Underground passengers (1955: 676 million) but only 2.6 billion on buses and coaches (1955: 3.4 billion). By 1965 these figures had become 657 million and 2.1 billion respectively.[4]

Although the Underground was holding up comparatively well, road services had now slumped so badly that 1965 saw LT's first deficit – of £1 million. This was only about 1 per cent of turnover, but it was a straw in the wind. Indeed, LT had warned in 1964 that the point had been reached where 'there

How to use bus H1

Publicity for new flat fare suburban buses, 1969

1. The fare will be 6d. (children 3d.) paid to a coin-in-the-slot machine—sixpences or threepenny pieces only. This is for any journey.
2. PLEASE HAVE YOUR FARE READY. THE DRIVER WILL GIVE YOU CHANGE IF NECESSARY.
3. Board the bus by the front entrance. Turn to your right and put your fare in the slot on the machine. This will release the gate, the ENTER sign will light up and you can easily push through. THERE IS NO TICKET.
4. Don't press the coin reject lever unnecessarily. It will only return your coin—it will *not* open the gate. Don't put money in while the ENTER sign is lit.
5. Children must press the button by the slot and THEN put in their coins.
6. You must leave the bus by the centre doors.



must be serious doubts as to London Transport's future ability to reconcile the two main duties laid upon it by Parliament—to provide an adequate service to the public in the London area and at the same to pay its way'.

Now this prediction had come true, and LT had to search for cost reductions. Major expenses which were out of line with many large cities in other countries were the payrolls for bus conductors and Underground guards. 'One man' operation, as it was then described, was limited by Ministry of Transport regulations to single deck buses and had yet to be tried on trains, but it had spread slowly in the Country Bus Area since the 1950s, helped by the fact that double deckers were less common on rural routes than in the Central Area, where they were almost universal.

The existing double decker fleet had not been designed for driver-only operation, and indeed LT would continue to build crew-operated Routemaster buses until 1968.

But the financial crisis of 1965 meant that reforms could no longer be put off. Although plans to abolish conductors would certainly trigger determined union opposition, LT unveiled its master plan in 1966, under the title 'Reshaping London's bus services'.

London Transport's vision was based on a network of shorter 'feeder' bus routes focused on interchanges – on which flat fares could be charged – many more single deckers and, ultimately, the end of bus conductors.

One hurdle which had to be overcome was improving the methods of fare collection, if drivers were to become responsible for it.

London Transport had already experimented with 'Pay As You Board' buses at the end of 1940s, without success, although these had included a conductor sitting at a desk.

Such methods would not, of course, reduce the size of the workforce, and by the mid-1960s hopes were being pinned on entry barriers, activated by the insertion of coins.

Unfortunately, such barriers were just about workable on flat fare routes, but those designed to handle graduated fares did not have a long life.

Indeed, the problem of achieving speedy boarding on driver-only buses would not really be solved until Transport for London introduced Oyster smartcards. Even so, by the time that Oyster appeared in 2003, following many years of toying with bus 'zones', a single flat fare had been introduced on all London buses, irrespective of the length of route.

The Underground, meanwhile, also began experimenting with automatic ticket gates in the mid-1960s.

The first installations, providing entrance gates only, had appeared at three stations in 1964, and then the first automatic exit gate was brought into use at Acton Town in May 1965. Not long afterwards, the experiment was extended to new entrance and exit gates at Turnham Green.

The magnetically-coded tickets issued for travel to these stations were coloured a distinctive yellow, so that passengers could be urged to use the gates if they had yellow tickets, but to pass through the manual barrier otherwise.

By now the Underground was also using automation in other ways, including train control. Four-car trains of tube stock retrofitted with special equipment were placed in traffic on the Hainault-Woodford section of the Central Line, and their performance was evaluated throughout 1965.

Both automatic ticket gates and automatically-driven trains were being developed in preparation for the new Victoria Line, which after several years of government procrastination was finally under construction and due to open towards the end of the 1960s between Walthamstow Central and Victoria.

The line itself had emerged as a serious proposal while the Second World War was still under way, as a consequence of the County of London Plan, which had appeared in 1943 as the work of J.H.Forshaw, architect to the London County Council, and Professor Sir Patrick Abercrombie.

This was followed in 1944 by Abercrombie's own Greater London Plan, when a special committee was then set up to investigate the implications of the Plan for the capital's railways.

This was the Railway (London Plan) Committee, chaired by Professor Sir Charles Inglis, which published an interim report in January 1945 and then a fuller version a year later.

It was here that an underground railway connecting the north east suburbs to Victoria was first sketched out, as 'Route 8'. This was a new underground line heading towards Victoria from Finsbury Park (where it would have been connected to the suburban services of what was then the LNER and would now be described as the East Coast Main Line), with intermediate stations at King's Cross, Euston, Bond Street and Hyde Park Corner. South of Victoria, the line was projected onwards to East Croydon, via Vauxhall, Stockwell, Brixton, Streatham and Norbury.

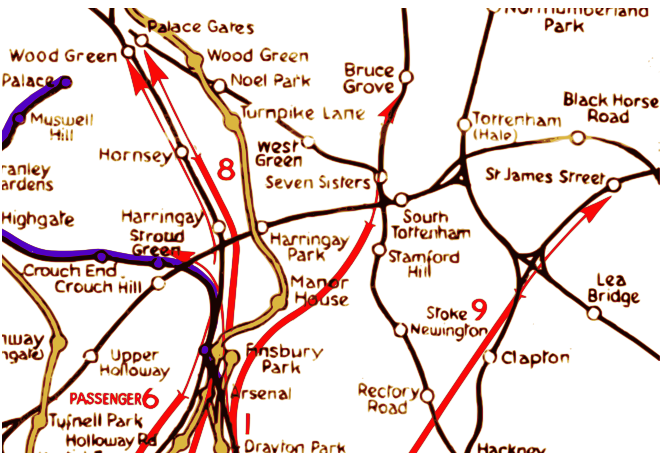
It will be seen that parts of Route 8 bore a close resemblance to the eventual Victoria Line, although the alignment through the West End would soon be adjusted, while the connection to the main line at Finsbury Park was to be abandoned in favour of continuing the route as a conventional tube line to Tottenham Hale, Seven Sisters and Walthamstow.

Route 8 and its colleagues (which were numbered from 1 to 12A/12B) came under scrutiny again after 1948, when the new British Transport Commission set up a working party which reported to the Minister of Transport on 1 February 1949.

High on its list was a proposed 'Route C' from the Tottenham/Edmonton area to East Croydon, which followed the earlier Route 8 except that the West End stations were now to be Oxford Circus and Green Park, and the route was envisaged as a self-contained tube railway, rather than a main line connection across London.

A few years later, the future Victoria Line nearly changed again, when a member of the London Transport Executive said that Route C would run south from Victoria to Fulham

Two that got away: **left** platform map showing the aborted extension of the Northern Line northwards from Edgware **below** Part of Route 8, as shown in the 1946 Inglis report. In the event, when it had become the Victoria Line, Route 8 was diverted east to Seven Sisters, Blackhorse Road and Walthamstow



Broadway, from where its trains could continue to Wimbledon via a new junction on the existing District Line.

This suggestion turned out to be a blind alley, but enabling powers were sought from Parliament by the BTC in 1955, although by then there had been yet more changes.

The earlier Route C had included a possible branch line from Seven Sisters to Walthamstow, and the BTC's Private Bill now diverted the north eastern section to Walthamstow Wood Street, where Route C would have come to the surface and provided cross-platform interchange with the trains of British Railways Eastern Region.

In December 1955, the chairman of London Transport Sir John Elliot gave a presentation to the Institute of Transport in which he gave Route C a name at last. Unless, as he modestly added, someone could think of something better, he proposed to call the new route the Victoria Line.

It was also clear that the line could not be built as a business proposition, but its benefits would be immense, relief to the Bakerloo Line south of Oxford Circus and the Piccadilly Line north of King's Cross being just two of them.

The line would also plug a wide area of north east London into the Underground, and provide a much-needed direct link between Victoria, the West End and King's Cross/St Pancras.

The case was made, but the capital was not available. It was not until 20 August 1962 that the government gave the go-ahead – partly, it was said, because the valuable contracts to provide the tunnel linings would provide a boost for jobs.

Progress in the 1970s: the Piccadilly Line was progressively extended to Heathrow Airport in the middle of the decade, while the Stanmore branch of the Bakerloo Line became the suburban section of the new Jubilee in 1979

Chapter Three

'Fares fair'

The first trial of a flat fare bus route in central London had been launched in April 1966, when 'Red Arrow' route 500 began working between Victoria station and Oxford Street, for a flat fare of 6d. At the time, the minimum graduated fare was 4d.

New single deck buses soon followed in quantity, mainly for suburban services, and this programme had only been partly completed when LT was divided in 1970 between the GLC and the National Bus Company.

But the large double decker crew-operated bus fleet proved to be one impediment: another was that many of the new single deckers had been unreliable.

As a result, by 1974 only two out of every five LT buses were driver-only operated, even though the regulations requiring a conductor on double deckers had been relaxed by this time.

Neither were passenger figures particularly encouraging. Annual Underground journeys had fallen to 636 million, although after years of decline the number of bus passengers had started to rise. The total for Central Area routes in 1965 had been 1.9 billion, but this fell year by year until 1972, when it declined to 1.4 billion. After that a modest recovery began, returning to almost 1.5 billion in 1974.

The Underground decline was surprising, considering that the Victoria Line had opened between Walthamstow Central and Victoria in 1969, and then on to Brixton in 1971. This was the first line to run with drivers only, and by 1974 LT was

actively preparing to abolish guards on the Circle Line and the Hammersith & City section of the Metropolitan Line. Research was also under way into train operation 'entirely automatically without any staff on board'.[5]

Also by 1974 work had started on building the Fleet Line (which would be renamed the Jubilee Line before it opened in 1979), and the running tunnels between Baker Street and the Strand had been completed. Also well under way was the extension of the Piccadilly Line from Hounslow West to Heathrow Airport. Its first section, as far as Hatton Cross, was on schedule to open in mid-1975.

At least some indication of future developments was provided by the first part of a Central London Rail Study, published in late 1974. This was a joint project of government, London Transport and British Rail.

Among its recommendations was the start of research into a Crossrail route, but much of its contents proved to be blind alleys. It envisaged Stage 2 of the Fleet Line being built from Charing Cross to Fenchurch Street, and then on through the 'Dockland Development area' to Woolwich and Thamesmead. In reality, the Jubilee Line extension of the 1990s did serve Docklands, including a station proposed in the Study on the Isle of Dogs and another at Canning Town, but other traffic objectives, such as Lewisham and Woolwich, have since been connected to the Docklands Light Railway rather than the Underground proper.

The Study also proved to be wide of the mark on future fares policy. It did reject a suggestion that fares should be abolished, but also maintained that 'no operationally practicable and worthwhile system of zonal fares could be found'. In fact, by this time the introduction of zonal fares was not far ahead, but for other reasons fares would soon prove to be a major cause of conflict.

The catalyst was the Greater London Council election in May 1981, in which Labour overturned the Conservative ad-

ministration by a narrow majority of 2%.

The Labour Group on the GLC had been led by a moderate, Andrew McIntosh, but shortly after the poll a group of left-wingers in the Labour Group voted for a new leader, whose name was Ken Livingstone.

He was (and is) a profound believer in the merits of public transport, and became leader of the GLC at a time when LT passengers had just experienced two fare rises which together had increased their travelling costs by about a third the year before.

The Labour manifesto had included an LT fares cut of 25% if the party came to power – the 'Fares Fair' policy – and this came to pass in October 1981, when fares were reduced by an average of 32%, which was even more than Labour had promised.

Travel on London Transport rose as a result from 5.5 million to 6 million passengers a day, but many London ratepayers were unhappy about the increased support they were now expected to provide to a transport system which was also used by thousands of commuters who lived safely outside Greater London, to say nothing of visitors from elsewhere in Britain or other countries.

Matters came to a head when the GLC fares policy was legally challenged by the London Borough of Bromley, which had no Underground services and was therefore among the Boroughs which benefited the least, as British Rail suburban fares had not fallen in line with those of London Transport, or indeed at all.

The GLC won the day in the lower court, but the matter went on appeal to Lord Denning, who reversed the earlier ruling in favour of the plaintiffs. This decision prompted a further appeal, this time by the GLC, to the House of Lords.

On 17 December 1981 five Law Lords ruled that the reduced fares were beyond London Transport's powers under the 1969 Transport (London) Act, partly because the

Executive had to operate commercially and balance its books, taking one year with another.

As a result of this ruling LT fares almost doubled again in March 1982, cutting travel by about a sixth, or one million journeys a day. However, the simplified fares structure based on zones was retained.

The story was not quite over. The GLC took up arms again and succeeded in reducing fares by 25% from May 1983. Although this was challenged by London Transport's own lawyers, who wanted any further changes to fares to rest on solid legal grounds, one result of this fresh reduction was a consolidation of the fare zones, including a single central London Zone 1 on the Underground for the first time, and also the creation of the highly successful Travelcard.

But although the GLC was forced to retreat to some extent, the LT fares debacle may have rankled in high places. What is certainly true is that the Conservative Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher resolved to remove the GLC, leaving London governed at local level only by its individual boroughs.

The result for London Transport was yet another reshuffle, following a change in the law in 1984, and a return to direct ownership by national government. But this particular reform would go further.

The Conservative government had been pursuing a policy of widespread privatisation, but in the field of public transport it succeeded only in returning provincial buscompanies to the private sector in the 1980s, apart from various 'hiving-off' sales of various British Rail-owned subsidiaries such as its hotels and shipping services.

However, the London Regional Transport Act of 1984, which was essentially required to give LT a place in the national fabric once its owner the GLC had been abolished, appeared to adopt some private sector principles.

The new London Transport was no longer to be known as a Board or Executive as such but London Regional Transport,

and reduced to the role of a holding group and co-ordinator.

The actual business of operating or providing transport services was delegated to three companies, wholly owned by LRT: these were London Underground Limited, London Buses Limited and LRT Bus Engineering Limited.

Although not legally called a Board, LRT nonetheless had a Board of Directors, which took control on the vesting day of 1 April 1985, as did its new subsidiaries.

One small confusion was soon evident. London Underground said it would continue to use the traditional bar and circle roundel (in its case red and blue) and that the roundel would also be used by LRT and its other subsidiaries.[6]

But in the event LRT soon dropped the roundel as a corporate symbol, replacing it with an uneasy pattern on which its initials were superimposed.

In some ways, the later 1980s were an uneasy time for the new London Regional Transport. A Tendered Bus Division was soon offering contracts to third party operators. In 1986/87 64 million passenger journeys were made on these routes, but within four years the total had risen to 346 million.

The tendering process was a little bizarre, because it involved London Buses Limited as a competing bidder.

As one annual report commented: 'London Buses continued its success in again winning 60% of the new routes put out to contract. Many of the initial contracts came up for retendering during the year. LBL lost a large part of the Harrow network, but this was more than compensated for by winning all of the work for Wandsworth's revised services …'[7]

The curious point about this comment is that an outside operator presumably won 'a large part' of the Harrow network because it had offered better terms, which would in turn give London passengers and ratepayers a better deal.

But the author of this section of LRT's own official report evidently still had a firm eye on the possibilities of empire-building.

The Docklands Light Railway opened for business on 31 August 1987, but much to LRT's chagrin its passenger figures started to fall back in 1990. Losing patience, the government announced the transfer of the DLR from LRT to the London Docklands Development Corporation in late 1991, a decision which LT Chairman Sir Wilfrid Newton branded 'both hasty and wrong'.[8]

Such an unstable structure could not last for too long, and indeed it did not. In March 1991 the Government had published its consultation paper 'A bus strategy for London', using this opportunity to make plain its commitment to both privatisation and deregulation of London bus services. However, privatisation of the Underground was not apparently on the Whitehall agenda.

LT therefore obediently prepared to surrender its bus monopoly under deregulation, but in the event the government backed away from such a courageous strategy in the capital, in spite of what had happened in the rest of the country. (The Transport Secretary Roger Freeman had admitted to the Commons on 25 July 1991 that approximately 60% of respondents to his Department's London bus strategy consultation had been opposed to deregulation.)

Although bus privatisation would go ahead, full control of the route network, along with fares, would remain with London Transport and its present-day successor.

Meanwhile, Sir Wilfrid Newton had decided in 1990 that the visual identity of LRT had taken a wrong direction. He abolished the uneasy LRT logo, returning the roundel to its traditional place as the symbol of London's public transport, and also announced that the trading name 'London Transport' was to be restored, with 'London Regional Transport' only to be used in future for legal and other inescapable purposes.

Even so, at the start of the 1990s London Transport had little more than a decade still to go before it was to be replaced by a successor with a significantly larger role.

Before this happened, a change of power in Westminster in 1997 ushered in one final conflict. This battle had echoes of the 'Fares Fair' episode at the start of the 1980s, because once again Ken Livingstone found himself ranged against the forces of national government.

Labour had returned to power in 1997, committed to restoring a London-wide organisation for the purposes of local government. This new organisation, the Greater London Authority, was in many ways a revival of the Greater London Council, except that it was headed not by the leader of the controlling group but by a directly-elected Mayor with novel executive powers – novel at least in London, although executive Mayors are common in many other countries.

The Act creating the GLA and its associated London Assembly was passed in 1999, and Ken Livingstone was elected as its first Mayor in March 2000. He had encountered opposition from the Prime Minister, and Tony Blair had even attempted to block his nomination via the Labour Party. Livingstone resigned from the Labour Party in response during the Mayoral election but took over, with the GLA fully established under him, on 3 July 2000.

This date was also notable as the first day of existence of Transport *for* London, which was to succeed London Regional Transport. (Unsurprisingly, the awkward italics in TfL's title did not survive for long.)

The official task of TfL was to 'implement the Mayor's transport strategy', but it also had a significantly wider brief than any of the various versions of London Transport which had existed since 1933, because in addition to public transport TfL was also set to assume responsibility for highways, taxis and river services.

It would also inherit the buses, Underground, the new trams in Croydon, the Docklands Light Railway and Victoria Coach station. (The last of these had been run by London Transport for some time.)

Although TfL was able to assume responsibility for most of London Transport's empire immediately, London Underground Limited was withheld from it, a move which required the continued existence of London Regional Transport for a little longer.

The reason for this was simple. The Chancellor of the Exchequer, Gordon Brown, was intent on letting 30-year contracts for the maintenance and renewal of London Underground's fleets and infrastructure – a virtual, if partial, privatisation.

These complex and heavily-criticised 'public-private partnerships' were bitterly opposed by the unions and also the new Mayor of London, and there was little doubt that Mr Livingstone would have used his executive powers to stop the letting process in its tracks had he gained control of London Underground Limited before the contracts had been signed.

The Board of TfL approved three PPP contracts in February 2002, and one of these contracts was signed with Tube Lines in December. Tube Lines was responsible for the Jubilee, Northern and Piccadilly Lines. The other contractor, Metronet, had won the two remaining contracts covering the other tube railways and also the subsurface network (the Metropolitan, District, Hammersmith & City and, at the time, East London Line).

Financial close for the Metronet contracts followed in April 2003, and the transfer of London Underground Limited to Transport for London took place at one minute after midnight on Tuesday 15 July 2003.

The Department for Transport said London Regional Transport would be wound up later the same day.

Appendices

Chronology
Notes on sources

Chronology

1929	*2 December*	Unification of London public transport announced in Parliament
1933	*13 April*	London Passenger Transport Act receives Royal Assent
	1 July	**London Passenger Transport Board** vesting day
	19 July	Piccadilly Line extension completed (Oakwood-Cockfosters)
1935		LPTB 'New Works Programme' published
		Abolition of trams announced, to be replaced by trolleybuses
1938		Major build of replacement tube rolling stock begins
1939	*13 July*	First 'RT' bus unveiled
	3 September	War declared with Germany
	20 November	Bakerloo Line extended to Stanmore via new tunnels, Baker Street-Finchley Road, and former Metropolitan Line branch
1945	*15 August*	Peace restored ('V-J Day'), following surrender of Japan
1947	*6 August*	Transport Act receives Royal Assent
1948	*1 January*	**London Transport Executive** [of BTC] vesting day
1952	*5 July*	'Last' trams run
1954	*28 April*	Most trolleybuses to be replaced by new *Routemaster* diesel bus
1959	*28 February*	Acton Town-South Acton section of District Line closes
1960	*12 September*	Last steam LT passenger service (Chesham-Chalfont & Latimer)
1962	*8 May*	Last trolleybuses run
	1 August	Transport Act receives Royal Assent [abolishing BTC]
1963	*1 January*	**London Transport Board** vesting day
	31 July	London Government Act [creating GLC] receives Royal Assent
1968	*1 September*	First section of Victoria Line opens (Walthamstow Central-Highbury & Islington)
1969	*25 July*	Transport (London) Act receives Royal Assent
1970	*1 January*	**London Transport Executive** [of GLC] vesting day
1971	*23 July*	Victoria Line completed to Brixton, exc. Pimlico (14.09.1972)
1975	*19 July*	First section of Piccadilly Line extension to Heathrow opens (Hounslow West (new station)-Hatton Cross)
1979	*1 May*	First section of Jubilee Line opens to traffic (Stanmore-Charing X)
1984	*26 June*	London Regional Transport Act receives Royal Assent
1985	*1 April*	**London Regional Transport** vesting day
	16 July	Local Government Act [dissolving GLC] receives Royal Assent
1994	*21 July*	Croydon Tramlink Act receives Royal Assent
1999	*14 May*	First section of Jubilee Line extension opens (Stratford-N.Greenwich)
	11 November	Greater London Authority Act receives Royal Assent
2000	*11 May*	Trams enter service in Croydon/Wimbledon/Beckenham areas
	3 July	**Greater London Authority** and **Transport for London** start work
2002	*February*	LRT Board approves Public-Private partnerships
	December	PPP contract signed with Tube Lines
2003	*April*	Two PPP contracts signed with Metrolink
2003	*15 July*	London Underground Ltd transfers to TfL (at 00.01hrs)
		London Regional Transport wound up

Notes on sources

1 London Passenger Transport Board: Fifth annual reports and accounts, June 1938
2 London Passenger Transport Board:
Thirteenth annual reports and accounts, December 1946
3 London Transport Executive: London Transport in 1955
4 London Transport Board: London Transport in 1965
5 London Transport Executive: London Transport 1974
6 London Underground press release, 1 April 1985
7 London Regional Transport: Annual report 1990/91
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