



Bakerloo news



Jan-Feb 2017: Trains Special

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Can we trust LU with safety?



On 9 January, station staff across the combine put on their most solid ever strike, shutting down large parts of the system for 24 hours; so much for the often repeated claim that “stations don’t go out”.

The strike represented a fightback by staff who have had enough of being kicked around by the company and being forced to do more work at more locations and for no reward. LU’s changes have also made the Underground a much less safe place for passengers and staff, so safety was an important theme of the strike.

The Train Service – Was it Safe?

During the strike, LU decided to run trains through the central area, mainly empty but also some in service, even though the vast majority of stations were closed.

Some drivers refused to drive on grounds of safety and asked to see LU’s risk assessment for this unusual event. It was not forthcoming, probably because it does not exist.

Instead, drivers were given two

brief letters, one from COO Steve Griffiths and the other from HSE director Jill Collis, saying that their plans had been assessed by HMRI and the ORR and were considered to be safe. The attitude seems to have been one of, “we are senior managers, we are telling you it’s safe, so we expect you to believe us”. So, in the absence of any detailed plans for dealing with the various problems which could occur in the tunnel, they were asking you just to trust them.

So can these people be trusted to tell you the truth? Judge for yourself.

Dodgy Tripcocks

In 2005, a Northern line train passed a danger signal but the tripcock failed to stop the train.

Upon investigation, the maintainers, Alstom, said they knew what had happened and it was agreed to adjust the tripcocks on the whole fleet.

The unions accepted this in good faith and the work went ahead. However, within a few weeks of the adjustments, four trains on the line had experienced a similar problem –

tripcocks resetting themselves after being operated.

After the fourth case, drivers refused to drive the trains until the problem was properly fixed. At this point, LU management actually tried to pressure drivers into picking up and working normally on the grounds that, well, it’s only happened four times, so the tripcocks are still pretty safe! But drivers were not moved by this false argument, and no-one would pick up. Because of this, and only because of this, LU were forced to go to Alstom and make them fix the problem. The tripcocks were readjusted with no further problems and made safe, no thanks to LU senior management.

Runaway Train

On Friday 13th (an appropriate date, indeed) August 2010, a grinder train broke down on the Northern line.

It was decided to move it by using a passenger train to pull it up a steep gradient between Highgate and East Finchley. This hitherto unknown procedure went wrong when the incompatible couplers of the two trains and the chains holding them broke apart. The grinder, whose brakes had had to be released in order for the unit to be pulled, began to roll down the gradient, gathering speed all the while. The driver of a passenger train ahead was told to go as fast as possible and not to stop, as he was being chased

by the runaway grinder. His train was routed down the Bank branch, the points thrown, and the grinder routed down the Charing Cross branch where it came to rest at Warren Street. A serious calamity was only narrowly avoided.

So where did the “pull-out” procedure come from? This was revealed a short time later at a meeting which included top managers and union safety reps. Apparently, the same train had broken down a few weeks earlier on the Jubilee line and it was pushed out to the depot. However, because there had been some problems with the push out, senior LU managers had decided that, with no union consultation, if the unit broke down again, they would use a train to pull instead of push it out. The rest is history. This case ended up in court where LU and Tubelines were each fined £100,000 for endangering public safety.

Flash and Dash

Nearer to home, we all know about the Bakerloo “Flash and Dash” dispute. Again, this was an attempt by management to cut station staff and save money. To hell with safety.

The new procedure started in 2012 and, in the first year, there were 3,362 passengers overcarried



into sidings on the line compared to 94 on all the other Underground lines put together. There was even the case of the 12-year old boy who managed to get off a train in the Queen’s Park sheds and was saved by an alert driver. Apparently, it’s not possible to get off a train in these circumstances, according to our safety expert managers!

Following successful action short of a strike by Bakerloo drivers of both unions, flash and dash was replaced by flash and peep which, though a big improvement, is still not as satisfactory as a proper detrainment. Oh, and while we’re on the subject of trust, management couldn’t even tell the public the truth about why the service was so slow during the flash and dash industrial action. Passengers were merely told that the Bakerloo delays were due to “operational issues” – nothing to do with staff fighting for a safe detrainment system in the face of a cost-cutting management!

Make Your Mind Up

There will be further strikes by station staff, as this important struggle is set to continue for the foreseeable future.

So the next time you turn up for work and discover that you’re expected to drive through nine or ten consecutive closed stations (remember when a line would shut if there were three?), ask to see what plans are in place should you get a problem on the road. Ask if there are any staff at the closed stations for the purpose of evacuation. Are they regular staff or are they “ambassadors” (office and other staff who’ve had two days’ training and have no safety-critical licences). If none of this is in black and white, then you are left in the position of deciding whether you trust the company’s letters of reassurance. Well that’s for you to decide.

If you’re not happy, you have the right not to drive on grounds of safety.

If you do this and feel that management are exerting undue pressure on you to work, or if you merely need further advice, contact your local industrial or health and safety rep.

RMT raises concerns with ORR

The strike on 9 January highlighted the contempt with which drivers’ concerns are treated.

Information about the “Marylebone Express” service was only posted in the depot late on Sunday night, despite management having taken the decision two days previously. There was ample time to consult with reps, review risk assessments, and to brief drivers. Legislation states that risk assessments must be reviewed if there is significant change to how we normally run our service. Despite no-one in the mess room able to recall us ever running an

express service like this before, Bakerloo management contended that it was business as usual and there was no need to review the risk to drivers. This is nonsense and disrespectful.

Despite your safety reps emailing management prior to the strike raising concerns regarding how rules for PEAs, Code Ambers, radio failures, etc., would work, no reply was received for seven days!

The RMT has no choice but to raise these matters with the ORR.

A strike on stations does not give management authority to play fast and lose with our safety!

Your branch meets on the FIRST TUESDAY of every month, 16.00, upstairs at The Royal Exchange, 26 Sale Place, W2 1PU (Edgware Road H&C).

The Regional Council meets on the LAST THURSDAY of every month, 16.30, at the Twelve Pins, 263 Seven Sisters Road, N4 2DE (Finsbury Park). All members welcome. Speak to your local rep for more info.

Bakerloo News is a monthly newsletter from the Bakerloo branch of the RMT union. This is a special edition aimed at our driver members, discussing safety issues.

To submit a story for *Bakerloo News*, or to contact the branch, please email jimmcdaid36@gmail.com, or ring Branch Secretary Jim McDaid on 07917 131692