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Detrainment procedures

This morning's events on the Central line, following the recent late-night incident on the Victoria line about which we have already spoken, have prompted me to write to you about the adequacy of London Underground's contingency arrangements for ensuring that when trains fail in tunnels and cannot immediately be moved, passengers are not left aboard any longer than is absolutely unavoidable.

During my predecessor's term of office, there was a spate of occasions (near Bank on the Central line, near Waterloo on the Waterloo & City line, and near Highbury on the Victoria line) when these arrangements were found wanting and passengers were trapped on-board for very prolonged periods. In each case, the attention of the managers on the spot was directed primarily at efforts to move a failed train, with insufficient regard being paid – until a very late stage - to the comfort and convenience of the passengers held involuntarily on the trains concerned.

As is our usual practice following serious incidents of this nature, we studied the relevant Formal Inquiry Reports and discussed with appropriate Underground managers (usually Mike Strzelecki) the lessons that had been learned. We were told that the "Na100" procedure had been revised to ensure that 15 minutes after the start of any such incident (and every 15 minutes thereafter), the option of detrainment must be actively considered – and that if the decision is not to pursue it, the reason for this must be recorded.

Of course, we are well aware that detraining passengers onto tracks (especially in tunnels) is a complex and potentially hazardous task, and is initiated only as a last resort. And, in the nature of things, neither we nor the travelling public at large are aware of all the many occasions when the timely and effective actions of your colleagues have been successful in minimising delays and avoiding the need to consider this possibility.

Nevertheless, we believe that recent events have made it appropriate for us to seek your assurance that you share our concern, and that you are taking whatever steps appear appropriate to draw conclusions from the latest incidents which will enable the situation to be handled better if and when similar situations arise in future.

Of course, ideally, the primary objective must be to prevent such train failures occurring in the first place, or to ensure that - when they do – the trains concerned are removed with a minimum of delay. But London Underground operates in an imperfect world, and the possibility of trains becoming immobilised for long periods can never be wholly eliminated. So we are keen to know what more can be done to mitigate the consequences for passengers who have the misfortune to be on the wrong train in the wrong place at the wrong moment.

We would be happy to meet you and/or any of your relevant senior colleagues to explore these concerns further at an early opportunity.

Yours sincerely

Brian Cooke FInstTT
Chairman