

London TravelWatch

Report to the Secretary of State under Section 43 (3) (c) of the Railways Act 1993, as amended by Transport Act 2000 and 2005

Proposed closure of King's Cross Thameslink station and parts of the railway network at Blackfriars station and London Bridge station

1 Background

London TravelWatch (formally the London Transport Users Committee) has investigated these proposals in 1999 and 2000 and reported on them to the then Rail Regulator on 1 September 2000. In August 2005 we were asked by the Parliamentary Under Secretary of State to update these reports with a supplementary report. In doing this we have followed as closely as we can the 1993 Act. We have focussed, primarily, on new issues and changes since our last consideration taking account of the views of passengers who may not have taken part in our previous considerations. This report should be read in conjunction with the Committee's reports it submitted in 2000 as there are cross references to those.

2 The closure proposal

2.1 The closure proposals considered in this report are:

The closure of parts of railway network at Blackfriars station and London Bridge station after 31 December 2008.

The closure of King's Cross Thameslink station and the withdrawal of services to and from King's Cross Thameslink station both after 30 June 2007 or the date of the opening of St Pancras Midland Road station whichever is the later.

2.2 Please note the Committee has produced, separately, another report on the closure of the Moorgate to Farringdon branch railway.

2.3 The closure proposal is being promoted by Network Rail, the Department for Transport (in its successor role to the Strategic Rail Authority) and Thameslink Rail.

3 Procedural background

3.1 The Railways Act 1993, as amended by the Transport Acts 2000 establishes a procedure to be followed for closure proposals relating to the national rail network.

3.2 In respect of the proposals in question, the Committee is required (under section 43 (3) of the Railways Act 1993 as amended by the Transport Act 2000) to:

- a) consider whether or not the proposed closure will cause any hardship;
- b) identify any reasonable means of alleviating any such hardship; and

- c) prepare, and send to the Secretary of State, a report of the conclusions which it has reached in the discharge of its functions under paragraphs (a) and (b) above.

3.3 For the purposes of (b) above, the Committee is required not to conclude that any particular means of alleviating hardship is reasonable unless, balancing the cost to the public purse of employing those means against the benefit of any alleviation thereby secured, the Committee is of the opinion, on the basis of the information supplied to it, that the expenditure involved represents good value for money.

3.4 The Committee may, however, do more than is legally required of it. It may, for example, recommend conditions that the Secretary of State should attach to any closure consent; recommend steps that should be taken by operators, Network Rail, the Department for Transport or any other parties; or recommend steps that should be taken by any parties who are found likely to experience hardship.

4 Receipt of representations

4.1 Under the statutory closure procedures, objections to the closure proposals are to be sent to the Secretary of State, who must consider them. However, the Secretary of State must also send copies of the objections to the Committee. Because the Committee has a general duty to consider all the information it receives, it ought to consider the objections too.

4.2 A period of eight weeks was allowed for objections (extended to nine weeks to include the Christmas period). The Committee took into account all representations received, whether or not they were 'duly made' within the stated time limits.

4.3 Representations received up to 13 January 2006 were summarised, and the summary sent to Network Rail, the Department for Transport and Thameslink Rail. This summary and the Network Rail's responses were included in a report to members. We received no response from the Department for Transport, nor Thameslink Rail.

4.4 It should be noted that the Department for Transport has recognised that it is acting in a dual role as decision maker and promoter of the closures and has sought to separate its roles. A different section of the Department for Transport is dealing with each function.

4.5 The Secretariat has made no administrative distinction between 'duly made' objections and those which arrived after the deadline apart from being short of time to get a written response from Network Rail and the other promoters.

4.6 153 representations were made before the Committee report was written, however 18 have been simply requests for information. 35 directly mention King's Cross Thameslink station, however 27 appeared to the Secretariat to be from objectors who had not recognised that a new station, St Pancras Midland Road, had been proposed as part of the Thameslink 2000 project. We wrote to these objectors to try and clarify the situation and request any further response. No substantive responses to this have been received.

4.7 There were four representations that refer to London Bridge station.

4.8 There were two representations that refer to Blackfriars station.

4.9 All those making representation were invited to attend the Sub-committee's meeting.

4.10 The Committee is not bound to take *only* the objections into account when reaching its conclusions; indeed the Committee is under a general duty to take into account all the

relevant information it receives. The Committee also considered issues that it has identified for itself but have not been mentioned in the representations. Members also asked for further information at the Sub-committee meeting.

5 The Committee's consideration of the proposals

- 5.1 As allowed for in statute, and in accordance with the Committee's Rules of Procedure, a Sub-committee was appointed to deal with the proposed closure of King's Cross Thameslink station and parts of the railway network at Blackfriars station and London Bridge station on behalf of the Committee.
- 5.2 The Sub-committee met at 13:30hrs on 7 March 2006 at the Museum of London, London Wall, London EC2Y 5HN.
- 5.3 Members of the Sub-committee were supplied with copies of all the representations received.
- 5.4 The Secretariat produced an agenda including notes on how the Sub-committee would conduct the meeting.
- 5.5 The Secretariat produced three further substantive documents:
 - Document B detailing the background and the Sub-committee's procedure, duties, and the notices;
 - Document C reporting new issues raised by objectors and the Committee that the promoters were asked to address;
 - Document D providing a summary of the issues, conclusions and recommendations taken from the Committee's 2000 reports.
- 5.6 The Minutes of the meeting are attached as Annex 1. This report should be read in conjunction with the minutes and with the documents considered by members at the Sub-committee meeting. It should also be read in conjunction with the Committee's original 2000 reports.
- 5.7 The Committee has also forwarded to the Secretary of State correspondence that the Sub-committee received directly from objectors.
- 5.8 An audio recording and transcript of the meeting were made.

6 Consideration of the 2000 Committee report into the King's Cross Thameslink station closure

- 6.1 It should be noted that in the Committee's considerations in 1999 and 2000 two separate Sub-committees dealt with these closures and produced separate reports. One considered the King's Cross Thameslink station closure, the other considered the closure of parts of the network at Blackfriars and London Bridge stations.
- 6.2 Members considered each of the issues, conclusions and recommendations made in the 2000 reports and decided whether to vary, delete or retain them.
- 6.3 Please note: The numbers in the text in square [] brackets refer to the headings and paragraphs in the original 2000 reports that were discussed by members. Paragraphs and headings taken from the 2000 reports are inset, the recommendations taken from the 2000 reports are in italics, new recommendations in bold.

6.4 Importance of one or other station being available [5.2]

Previously the Committee had recommended:

Any closure consent should be made conditional upon St Pancras Midland Road station being opened simultaneously with (or before) the closure. [5.3]

The Committee wished to retain this recommendation.

6.5 Adequacy of the St Pancras Midland Road station box

In 2000 the Committee had commented upon the adequacy of the size of the St Pancras Midland Road station box although the Committee recognised that this had been enshrined in the Channel Tunnel Rail Link Act (1996) and there was therefore no prospect of change.

The Committee wished to retain the commentary in paragraphs 5.5 and 5.6.

6.6 Alternative schemes [5.7]

The Committee believes this commentary still applies.

6.7 Interchange: general comments [5.8]

In its 2000 report the Committee said:

The Committee accepted that their broad location had been approved by Parliament under the Channel Tunnel Rail Link Act, and hence that they should be taken as a given.[5.8]

The Committee believes this commentary still applies.

6.8 Interchange with other national rail network services [5.9]

In its 2000 report the Committee said:

There would be no hardship to these passengers. [5.9]

The Committee believes this commentary still applies.

6.9 Access from easterly areas; Ease of interchange with London Underground Limited; Interchange with Euston Road and buses [5.10 to 5.27]

The Committee had previously made a series of recommendations to address these three issues:

Some hardship would be caused to passengers who currently enter/leave King's Cross Thameslink station on foot to/from places north-east, east and south-east of the station. [5.11]

The hardship to passengers from easterly directions could be ameliorated by improvements to the ease, quality and perceived security of the street-level walk from Pentonville Road. This should include rephasing the traffic lights at the Euston Road/ Pentonville Road junction in favour of pedestrians, and suitable streetscape improvements. [To be funded by Railtrack and/or from

regeneration funds, and carried out by Transport for London, by the closure date.] [5.13]

Some hardship would be caused to passengers who currently interchange between King's Cross Thameslink station and the Victoria or Piccadilly lines; the Victoria line in particular. [5.16]

Limited hardship would be caused to passengers who currently interchange between Kings Cross Thameslink station and the buses that serve Pentonville Road. [5.22]

The hardship to bus passengers could be ameliorated if, when the bus arrangements in the area are replanned, buses were to stop as close to, and as conveniently for, St Pancras Midland Road station as possible. However, this should not be at the expense of the best overall service to bus passengers. [To be carried out by London Bus Services, assisted (as required) by the relevant highway authority, by the closure date.] [5.25]

The Committee considered recommendations [5.11,5.13,5.16,5.22 and 5.25], which all related to the hardship caused, to some of the users of the interchange, by the effective relocation of the Thameslink King's Cross station away from its present location. The Committee believes that these issues are still relevant and the suggested amelioration would lessen the impact of closure on those passengers disadvantaged.

6.10 The mall [5.28]

In 2000 the Committee recommended:

A secure, monitored, well-lit route (whether through the mall or along a street) between St Pancras Midland Road station and Euston Road should be available at all times. [To be procured, as necessary, by Railtrack, in partnership with Camden Council and Union Railways, by the closure date.] [5.32]

The Committee noted that access to the station mall would still be restricted at night and so agreed to retain this recommendation.

6.11 Utility of the Pentonville Road entrance to the Underground [5.33]

In 2000 the Committee said:

The Committee believes strongly that any closure consent should be made conditional upon the Pentonville Road access being retained as a secure, high-quality entrance and exit to/from the Underground for day-to-day use, and upon suitable ticket office and/or staff accommodation being made available to London Underground Limited for operating the entrance. [5.40]

London Underground Limited supported this recommendation, but emphasised that they did not have the funding to modify King's Cross Thameslink station to Underground-only use and that funding would be subject to Department for Transport agreement.

The Committee believes that the Pentonville Road subway entrance is very important for passengers as a route to enter the Underground. Subsequent to the public meeting London Underground Limited provided the Committee with passenger counts for the present usage of the subway. Below is a summary of peak hours

counts of passengers who use the subway to exit / enter the Underground to / from the street.

	Number of passengers
Exit flow from the Underground (AM Peak 0700-1000)	1987
Exit flow from the Underground (PM Peak 1600-1900)	962
Entry flow to the Underground (AM Peak 0700-1000)	620
Entry flow to the Underground (PM Peak 1600-1900)	1777

The Committee believes these are substantial numbers of passengers who would be inconvenienced and so would wish to retain the recommendation in the 2000 report.

6.12 Retention of King's Cross Thameslink station [5.41]

In 2000 the Committee recommended:

Any closure consent should be made conditional upon the station being mothballed for at least ten years after the closure date, and re-opening of the station being kept under review during that period, in the light of demand changes and other circumstances. [5.52]

The Committee notes that the St Pancras Midland Road station box has been built and the fitting out of the station is progressing. The Committee accepts that stopping trains at both St Pancras Midland Road station and King's Cross Thameslink station would not be sensible. This recommendation should be deleted.

6.13 Accessibility of St Pancras Midland Road station [5.54]

In 2000 the Committee said:

The Committee noted, and welcomed, the assurance given by Railtrack that St Pancras Midland Road station will be fully accessible. [5.54]

The Committee supported the retention of this commentary, but noted that Railtrack had now been succeeded by Network Rail.

6.14 Implications for other stations [5.55]

In its 2000 report the Committee said:

The Committee was concerned to ensure that London Underground Limited could handle any such extra traffic that might occur. London Underground Limited did not foresee capacity problems at any stations as a direct result solely of the closure of King's Cross Thameslink station [5.57]

The Committee believes this commentary still applies.

6.15 Disruption during the blockade [5.58]

In 2000 a blockade, required to build the St Pancras Midland Road station Box, was proposed. Now construction of the station box has happened and the Committee's recommendations [5.61, 5.63, 5.65, 5.68, 5.69, 5.71, 5.73, 5.76, 5.77, 5.78, 5.80, 5.81, 5.83, 5.84] have been overtaken by events.

The Committee has considered the further works to fit the station out and although it was not a Network Rail project, Network Rail advised that they did not think these further works would require any blockade.

The Committee therefore agreed that recommendations [5.61, 5.63, 5.65, 5.68, 5.69, 5.71,5.73, 5.76, 5.77, 5.78, 5.80, 5.81 5.83 5.84] be deleted.

6.16 Revised arrangements after closure [5.85]

The Committee's 2000 report recommended

Any closure consent should be made conditional on agreement being reached between London Underground Limited, Railtrack and the relevant train operator(s) regarding revised operational control arrangements and responsibilities. [5.86]

The Committee considered recommendation [5.86] regarding the operational responsibilities of London Underground Limited and Network Rail. The Committee believes this is still relevant, but that a new recommendation should be made combining this with the recommendation [5.40] regarding the Pentonville Road subway access to the Underground. The Committee recommends that:

Any closure consent should be made conditional upon the Pentonville Road access being retained as a secure, high-quality entrance and exit to/from the Underground and an agreement being reached between London Underground Limited, Railtrack and the relevant train operator(s) regarding revised operational control arrangements and responsibilities.

6.17 Ticketing arrangements [5.87]

In 2000 the Committee recommended:

Any closure consent should be made conditional upon the fare and ticket retailing requirements applying to KXT (and flows to/from KXT) immediately before the closure being transferred to SPMR thereafter, as if there had been no change of location. [5.88]

The Committee still believes that fares and ticketing arrangements should remain as if there had been no change of location of the station from Pentonville Road to Midland Road. This Recommendation should be retained.

6.18 Advertising of the closure proposals [6]

In the 2000 report the Committee recommended:

The current requirements for publicising closure proposals are inadequate. The industry and its regulators should consider how to improve on them – or, at least, improve on the steps taken in practice. [6.6]

The Committee believes that the notices regarding these closures were poor. The Committee is disappointed that the good work undertaken, following the suggestion of a previous Transport Minister, between the Committee, the Rail Passengers Council and the Strategic Rail Authority to make such notices more user friendly had been set aside by the Department for Transport.

The Committee believes the primary function of the notices is to raise the awareness of passengers who may suffer hardship following any decision to close a passenger

railway. The Committee believes this was confused with the wish of the Department for Transport to use the closure notices to promote the Thameslink 2000 project.

Although the statutory closure process is to be superseded following the enactment of the Transport Act 2005 there will still be the necessity to advertise such closures to passengers. As such the Committee would wish to retain recommendation [6.6], but also recommends:

That it be noted by promoters of railway closures that the primary function of closure notices is to raise the awareness of passengers who may suffer hardship following any decision to close a railway passenger service.

7 Consideration of the 2000 Committee report into the proposed closures of parts of the network at Blackfriars and London Bridge stations

7.1 The achievability of 24 trains per hour [5]

In its 2000 report the Committee decided it was unable to take a view on the issue of the practicability of operating a train service at a frequency of 24 trains per hour. It considered two scenarios. One where this was achievable and a second where a lesser frequency was operated. In 2000 the Committee agreed to accept the TWA Inspector's conclusion.

The Inspector has now reported and the Committee sees no reason to dispute his conclusions that the operation of 24 trains per hours through the central core is practicable.

7.2 Possible design changes [6.5]

The Committee's 2000 report recommended that:

Any consent to either closure proposal should be conditional on the TWA powers being granted, and on no changes to the proposal being required that were material to the possible effects of the closures. [6.8]

The Committee accepts that although the TWA powers have not yet formerly been granted the Inspector's initial report has been published and accepted by Government. Only three deficiencies were identified, none of which could reasonably be expected to lead to any significant design changes affecting this closure proposal. The Committee withdraws this recommendation.

7.3 Costs of extra platforms (at Blackfriars) [6.9]

The Committee believes this commentary still applies.

7.4 Ability of the remaining terminating platforms to cope with the proposed timetable [6.11]

The 2000 report noted:

The Committee concluded that the terminating capacity would be adequate, and thus no hardship would arise from this issue. [6.14]

The Committee believes this commentary still applies.

7.5 Ability of the remaining terminating platforms to cope with disruption [6.15]

The Committee believes this commentary still applies.

7.6 Potential benefits of running more trains to Blackfriars during disruption [6.19]

In 2000 the Committee recommended:

Under the 24 tph scenario, hardship would be caused (by the closure at Blackfriars) to passengers going to/from the London Bridge corridor who would benefit from trains running between Blackfriars and London Bridge during disruption. [6.22]

In some circumstances, this hardship would be ameliorated by having bi-directional signalling on the curve between Blackfriars Junction and Metropolitan Junction. [6.23]

The Committee accepts the view of Network Rail that the Committee's previous suggestion to implement bi-directional signalling between London Bridge and Blackfriars stations would not be good value for money and so now wish to delete recommendations [6.22, 6.23].

7.7 Potential future changes in the relative balance of services between the two routes south of Blackfriars [6.24]

The Committee believes this commentary still applies.

7.8 Potential extra train services into London Bridge station from the south [6.33]

The 2000 report noted:

The Committee concluded that there would be no hardship arising from this issue. [6.34]

The Committee believes this commentary still applies.

7.9 C Implications of arriving at different platforms at London Bridge station [6.50]

The 2000 report said:

The Committee accordingly felt that there would be no hardship arising from the effects of the platform closures there on interchange movements. [6.52]

Although the Committee felt that there would be no hardship arising from the effects of the platform closures at London Bridge station on interchange movements the Committee welcomes London Bridge 'Masterplan'. The Committee believes it will much improve passenger interchange between terminating and through platforms.

7.10 D Disruption during works [6.53]

The 2000 report recommended, with respect to the lengthy closure of Blackfriars station during the rebuilding of the station, that:

Hardship would be caused (by the closure at Blackfriars) to passengers whose trains could not call at Blackfriars during the works there. [6.57]

The hardship would be ameliorated by planning in order to mitigate the disruption as far as reasonably possible. The planning should take place before construction works begin, in order to avoid problems rather than treat them reactively once they happen. [To be carried out by Railtrack and the train and station operators concerned, at an early stage in the detailed planning of the works.] [6.58]

Any consent to the Blackfriars closure proposal should be made conditional on the Regulator being satisfied that an adequate strategy is in place for handling passengers who would be displaced from Blackfriars during the works. This strategy should particularly address passenger information, accessibility, personal security, staffing and ticketing issues, and should consider both the works period as a whole and the four-week total closure. [6.59]

Hardship would be caused (by the closure at Blackfriars) to passengers who could not travel through Blackfriars during the works. [6.61]

This hardship, particularly to passengers who require (or would be assisted by) step-free accessibility, would be ameliorated if replacement bus services were operated between appropriate fully accessible stations, using fully accessible buses and with adequate staff assistance available. The route(s) should take into account the terminating arrangements for the trains. [To be procured by the train operator(s) concerned, throughout the blockade.] [6.62]

The Committee believes these recommendations should be retained.

Katrina Hide
Chairman

Rufus Barnes
Chief Executive