



Transport and Mobility

BRINGING LONDON TOGETHER

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Transport is an urban obsession. From the iconic importance of subway systems via the brave new architecture of airports to the humble bus shelter, city governments find themselves locked in a permanent struggle to build, maintain and improve their transport systems. They need to be sure people can move within their cities and get to them. Civility, commerce and competitiveness all demand movement. Thus, London's Underground diagram, Charles de Gaulle airport and Los Angeles's freeways are each, respectively, a powerful expression of their city. Londoners understand their urban landscape in a particular way because of the false simplicity of Harry Beck's Tube map. London has in recent years spent much time and money attempting to improve its urban transport. After more than half a century of under-investment, the city's commuter rail and Underground systems had fallen into serious disrepair. The Tube, in particular, which had been the world's best urban transport system in the 1930s, has suffered years of breakdowns and failures. A low subsidy policy has also been pursued, which has given London some of the highest public transport fares in the world. Conservative governments in the 1980s and 1990s started a process of re-investment which Labour has continued since 1997. First, the Docklands Light Railway was constructed from the edge of the City of London to the Isle of Dogs in the former docklands. The same government gave the go-ahead for a major extension of the Jubilee Line, which ran from Green Park via Westminster and the South Bank to the new business district at Canary Wharf (on the Isle of Dogs). The extended Jubilee Line has significantly assisted the regeneration of inner south London and the East End. A new tramway was built in Croydon, a major sub-centre in the far south of the city. The Underground was extended to Heathrow Terminal 4, while BAA (the private airport utility) constructed the Heathrow Express.

The office of Mayor of London was inaugurated in 2000 and one of its key responsibilities is transport, including buses, the Underground, river services, major roads and taxi regulation. Having reduced fares and increased bus services in the period 2000 to 2004, Mr. Livingstone has now embarked on a different policy. Fares are being

increased in real terms to provide resources to allow the Mayor to invest in new infrastructure. To invest in new assets including the East London Line, the Thames Gateway Bridge, the West London Tram and the extension of the Dockland Light Railway, the Mayor's agency, Transport for London, has been given Treasury permission to borrow under newly introduced rules. Bonds have been issued to raise the necessary resources. Thus, London's bus system has been enhanced, its existing Underground is (albeit over a long time scale) being renewed and additional infrastructure is being built. Following many years of decline and underinvestment, significant resources are being devoted to improvements. It is not yet possible to judge how well rebuilt or new assets will perform. Congesting Charging was introduced in 2003 and has proved a successful example of demand management. Drivers entering a zone in the centre of the city during working hours must pay an £8 a day charge. Traffic reductions have been in the range 15 to 20%, with a greater cut in congestion. The Mayor has advanced plans in place to extend the zone westwards. London is a vast, polycentric city. The Greater London Authority (i.e. the Mayor and Assembly) is responsible for an area of 1,500 sq. km., though the commuter rail system embraces an area six times this size. The Underground is one of the world's most extensive urban rail systems, as is the bus network. Travel-to-work times in London are long by international standards – 56 minutes each way, on average.

Another key transport development is the final section of the high-speed rail-link from St. Pancras to Paris and Brussels. This line will provide a new link from Kent and Stratford to King's Cross. To the north of King's Cross and St. Pancras lies a vast tract of abandoned industrial land. These "railway lands" are currently in the process of being regenerated as part of a major scheme which will, in effect, extend central London northwards. The development will see substantial numbers of new homes, workspace, retail and public facilities within easy walking distance of the West End. Because of the available rail, underground and bus transport, the area is extremely accessible and will be redeveloped (as will Stratford City) at relatively high densities. London's

original expansion was actively encouraged by its Tube and rail systems. If it had not been for the imposition of the “Green Belt” around the Greater London area in 1939, the transport system would almost certainly have created the relentless sprawl found in many other contemporary cities. As it is, London’s growth has jumped over the Green Belt to places such as Reading, Milton Keynes, Crawley, Essex and Kent. In today’s London, public transport is increasingly seen as a means to encourage greater intensification of uses, particularly around interchanges and stations. King’s Cross, Stratford, Elephant & Castle and Cricklewood/Brent Cross each use transport capacity as the catalyst for major developments. Additional projects such as the eastwest Crossrail and improvements to the north-south Thameslink would make significantly larger developments possible around their stations. Without effective mass transit systems, cities – London among them – are unlikely to prosper, except as car-dominated, low intensity, polluted super-suburbs. For this reason, transport’s dominance of urban thinking is wholly justified.

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