# London Tube strikes spark cycling surge and safety concerns amid calls for automation



Striking London Underground drivers triggered a dramatic surge in cycling across the capital this week as commuters sought alternatives to the paralysed Tube network. With a Rail, Maritime and Transport (RMT) union walkout bringing Tube services to a near standstill from Sunday evening through to Friday morning, collisions involving bicycles spiked by 44 per cent according to statistics shared by the London Ambulance Service (LAS). The LAS warned of the increased risks posed by the crowded roads and urged cyclists and pedestrians to exercise extra caution amid the disruption.

Commuters swiftly turned to two wheels, significantly boosting rental bike usage. Transport for London's (TfL) Santander Cycles saw a 72 per cent jump in users, while e-bike operators such as Lime, Forest, and Voi reported massive demand spikes. Lime alone recorded a 58 per cent increase in trips on Monday morning compared to the previous week, with trip durations and distances rising by 37 per cent and 24 per cent respectively. This trend continued into Tuesday with a 50 per cent rise in trips, indicating many riders relied on the e-bikes for their entire commute rather than just the start or end segments. The company said it had intensified its operational efforts, including battery swaps and rebalancing bikes, to meet surging demand.

However, the rapid influx of cyclists also led to riskier behaviours including some riders using pavements, contributing to the rise in collisions. The LAS reported being "very busy" with the combination of increased road traffic and longer emergency response times caused by congestion. The City of London Corporation recently launched crackdowns on e-bikes obstructing pavements, having seized over 100 during a two-week operation earlier this year amid numerous complaints.

This wave of industrial action comes amid prolonged disputes between the RMT union and TfL over pay, working hours, and shift patterns. The union argues that frontline staff face severe fatigue under current arrangements, despite TfL proposing a 3.4 per cent pay increase. No talks are currently scheduled to resolve the disputes, and the RMT has hinted that strikes could extend to the Elizabeth Line.

Amid escalating disruption, experts and politicians have renewed calls for driverless trains to reduce the vulnerability of London’s transport system to strikes. The Docklands Light Railway, operating without drivers since 1987, is often cited as a model in these discussions. Former Prime Minister Boris Johnson and Transport Secretary Grant Shapps have previously advocated for automation, suggesting it should underpin future funding. Nevertheless, TfL contends that converting older lines to driverless technology would require multi-billion-pound investments, a project Mayor Sadiq Khan announced would not be progressed further last December.

The strike’s economic toll is substantial, with the Centre for Economics and Business Research estimating a direct cost of £230 million to the London economy, with much higher indirect costs. Jawad Iqbal, former visiting senior fellow at the London School of Economics, criticised the RMT as 'a union dinosaur' resistant to change, arguing automation would enhance productivity and prevent future disruptive disputes. He warned that union members risk job losses if they fail to adapt to evolving technologies.

As London grapples with these twin challenges of industrial unrest and transport innovation, the city's resilience continues to be tested. Millions of journeys on bicycles have been recorded in recent days—official figures mention two million trips on Monday alone. Campaigns and clever marketing by companies like Lime, which rolled out Tube-inspired adverts cheekily promoting their services as alternatives to closed lines, reflect how cycling has become the emblematic commuter choice during the strike crisis.

While cycling provides a nimble workaround, the underlying issues of workforce conditions and modernising transport infrastructure remain unresolved, leaving London to balance immediate mobility needs with long-term strategic planning.

### 📌 Reference Map:

* Paragraph 1 – [[1]](https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-15093973/Striking-tube-drivers-bike-accident-travel-cycling.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490), [[4]](https://www.reuters.com/business/world-at-work/londons-tube-network-shuts-workers-begin-week-strikes-2025-09-08/)
* Paragraph 2 – [[1]](https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-15093973/Striking-tube-drivers-bike-accident-travel-cycling.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490), [[2]](https://www.reuters.com/sustainability/sustainable-finance-reporting/london-commuters-turn-bikes-boats-tube-strike-enters-second-day-2025-09-09/), [[5]](https://www.moveelectric.com/e-bikes/rail-strikes-rental-e-scooter-and-e-bike-usage-set-surge), [[6]](https://www.standard.co.uk/news/transport/lime-bikes-tube-strike-london-b1247258.html)
* Paragraph 3 – [[1]](https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-15093973/Striking-tube-drivers-bike-accident-travel-cycling.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490), [[6]](https://www.standard.co.uk/news/transport/lime-bikes-tube-strike-london-b1247258.html)
* Paragraph 4 – [[1]](https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-15093973/Striking-tube-drivers-bike-accident-travel-cycling.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490), [[4]](https://www.reuters.com/business/world-at-work/londons-tube-network-shuts-workers-begin-week-strikes-2025-09-08/)
* Paragraph 5 – [[1]](https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-15093973/Striking-tube-drivers-bike-accident-travel-cycling.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490), [[4]](https://www.reuters.com/business/world-at-work/londons-tube-network-shuts-workers-begin-week-strikes-2025-09-08/)
* Paragraph 6 – [[1]](https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-15093973/Striking-tube-drivers-bike-accident-travel-cycling.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490), [[4]](https://www.reuters.com/business/world-at-work/londons-tube-network-shuts-workers-begin-week-strikes-2025-09-08/)
* Paragraph 7 – [[1]](https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-15093973/Striking-tube-drivers-bike-accident-travel-cycling.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490)
* Paragraph 8 – [[1]](https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-15093973/Striking-tube-drivers-bike-accident-travel-cycling.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490), [[2]](https://www.reuters.com/sustainability/sustainable-finance-reporting/london-commuters-turn-bikes-boats-tube-strike-enters-second-day-2025-09-09/), [[3]](https://www.ft.com/content/ffa16e07-b83f-40a6-af1d-b9b2902a67db), [[5]](https://www.moveelectric.com/e-bikes/rail-strikes-rental-e-scooter-and-e-bike-usage-set-surge), [[6]](https://www.standard.co.uk/news/transport/lime-bikes-tube-strike-london-b1247258.html)

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## Bibliography

1. <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-15093973/Striking-tube-drivers-bike-accident-travel-cycling.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.reuters.com/sustainability/sustainable-finance-reporting/london-commuters-turn-bikes-boats-tube-strike-enters-second-day-2025-09-09/> - As London's Tube strike entered its second day, commuters turned to alternative transportation methods, including bikes, buses, and boats. Electric bike-sharing services like Lime and Forest reported significant increases in usage, with Lime seeing a 58% rise in trips during Monday's morning peak compared to the previous week. The strike, organized by the RMT union, is driven by disputes over pay, working hours, and shift patterns. The disruption is expected to cost the London economy £230 million directly, with further indirect losses. ([reuters.com](https://www.reuters.com/sustainability/sustainable-finance-reporting/london-commuters-turn-bikes-boats-tube-strike-enters-second-day-2025-09-09/?utm_source=openai))
3. <https://www.ft.com/content/ffa16e07-b83f-40a6-af1d-b9b2902a67db> - During a major London Underground strike, dockless bicycles emerged as a key alternative transport solution, significantly mitigating the disruption. Unlike previous strikes, this one coincided with the widespread availability of app-based rental bikes, notably from Lime and Forest, which saw massive surges in demand—Forest experienced a tenfold increase in app downloads, while Lime reported nearly 50% more trips. Transport for London also saw notable increases in bus usage and Elizabeth Line ridership. However, chaotic scenes of scattered dockless bikes in central London raised logistical challenges for providers. ([ft.com](https://www.ft.com/content/ffa16e07-b83f-40a6-af1d-b9b2902a67db?utm_source=openai))
4. <https://www.reuters.com/business/world-at-work/londons-tube-network-shuts-workers-begin-week-strikes-2025-09-08/> - London's Tube network was brought to a near halt on Monday, September 8, 2025, as workers began a week-long strike over pay and working conditions. The strike, led by the RMT trade union, has caused significant travel disruptions for commuters and tourists, with almost no underground trains expected to run from Monday to Thursday. The industrial action centers on issues such as pay, shift patterns, fatigue, and a proposed reduction in the working week. The RMT argues staff face extreme fatigue due to current shift rotations, while Transport for London offered a 3.4% pay rise but noted the union insists on reducing the standard 35-hour workweek. Despite the disruption, the Elizabeth Line and London Overground continue to run with minor delays. ([reuters.com](https://www.reuters.com/business/world-at-work/londons-tube-network-shuts-workers-begin-week-strikes-2025-09-08/?utm_source=openai))
5. <https://www.moveelectric.com/e-bikes/rail-strikes-rental-e-scooter-and-e-bike-usage-set-surge> - Lime, the winner of this year’s Move Electric Innovation Award, experienced a sharp rise in demand for both its e-scooter and e-bike services in London during the strike that affected the London Underground on Monday June 6. Lime says that trips using its e-scooters and e-bikes were up a combined 44 per cent compared to the previous Monday, with the number of new accounts created up 144 per cent and the number of first trips taken rising 150 per cent. 'The last time there was a tube strike in London, we saw trips on that day increase by more than 95 per cent compared to the same day the previous week,' said Alan Clarke, Lime’s senior director of public policy. 'Everybody wants to see the tube functioning to its full extent but whenever there’s a strike or disruption it’s a great opportunity for people to try a new form of environmentally friendly transport.' ([moveelectric.com](https://www.moveelectric.com/e-bikes/rail-strikes-rental-e-scooter-and-e-bike-usage-set-surge?utm_source=openai))
6. <https://www.standard.co.uk/news/transport/lime-bikes-tube-strike-london-b1247258.html> - Millions of bicycle trips have been made this week as Londoners look to beat the week-long Tube strike. E-bike company Lime has put up tongue-in-cheek adverts around the city on the final day of the Tube strikes, joking that 'there is a good service on all Limes'. Signs taking inspiration from the Tube map have appeared across the city as 'strikelysts' who would normally take the Tube cycled into the city centre. Billboards in areas such as Waterloo, Brick Lane, Highbury and Deptford displayed the signs which joked about the 'Bakerloo Lime' or 'Central Lime' being easy options to move around the capital. An extraordinary two million trips were made by cyclists on Monday, according to London cycling commissioner Will Norman, with many Londoners hiring Lime’s electric bikes to quickly get to work. ([standard.co.uk](https://www.standard.co.uk/news/transport/lime-bikes-tube-strike-london-b1247258.html?utm_source=openai))