# London Underground strike prompts shift to cycling as pay offer fails to halt protests



Sir Sadiq Khan has proposed a 3.4 percent unconditional pay increase for London Underground drivers and other staff amid persistent tube strike disruptions that have severely impacted the capital’s transport network. The offer, scheduled to be presented to trade unions at a Transport for London (TfL) board meeting, aims to utilise the available budget to provide the maximum pay rise possible without attaching any conditions. However, the move is unlikely to prevent further industrial action, with union representatives and political opponents expressing scepticism.

The RMT union, which has organised the week-long strikes, maintains that the core issue is not pay but the length of the working week and working conditions. Staff are demanding a reduction from the standard 35-hour workweek to 32 hours, citing extreme fatigue caused by current shift patterns exacerbated by significant staffing cuts over recent years. TfL has acknowledged these concerns but has so far rejected the demand to reduce hours, insisting the pay increase is the best offer they can make within existing financial constraints. Previous pay rises proposed by TfL have been conditional on changes to working conditions and pay band restructuring, which unions have resisted.

The strikes have brought London’s Underground network to a near halt, with minimal or no train service expected for much of the week. This has forced tens of thousands of commuters to seek alternative modes of transport, including taxis, walking, cycling, and riverboats. The surge in cycling has been particularly notable, with bike-sharing companies like Lime, Forest, and TfL’s Santander Cycles reporting extraordinary spikes in usage. For example, Forest saw a 300 percent increase in rides and 20,000 app downloads during the first day of strikes alone, while Lime experienced a 74 percent jump in peak-hour trips. Businesses in affected areas such as Canary Wharf and Westminster have reported a sharp decline in footfall, by as much as 31 percent, underscoring the economic toll of the disruptions.

Cycling advocates have praised the emergence of dockless and electric bikes as a vital urban mobility solution amid the crisis, though concerns have been raised about London's strained cycling infrastructure. Experts suggest some commuters may permanently shift away from the Tube towards more flexible cycling options, which could have long-term impacts on TfL’s revenue. Meanwhile, other transport options such as buses and the Elizabeth Line have experienced increased demand but face capacity challenges.

Political reactions to the pay offer have been sharply divided. London Conservatives have criticised the proposed unconditional pay rise as handing out "freebies" without securing commitments to end strikes, arguing it provides no assurances to Londoners suffering the disruptions. Keith Prince, a Tory spokesman at City Hall, said the approach does not constitute genuine negotiation and fails to protect commuters’ interests. The RMT union has so far remained firm on their demands for improved working conditions and reduced hours, signalling that further strikes could be possible if the dispute remains unresolved.

The strike not only disrupts daily life but also poses a significant economic cost, with estimates suggesting direct losses to London’s economy could reach £230 million. The government, led by Prime Minister Keir Starmer, elected earlier this year on a promise to tackle labour unrest, has called for a swift resolution, though no breakthroughs have yet been reported.

TfL’s chief operating officer Claire Mann has urged the union to reconsider and hold a vote on the pay offer, highlighting that the current industrial action is London’s most extensive since early 2023. Services such as the Elizabeth Line and London Overground continue to operate with minor delays, but the Docklands Light Railway and certain bus routes will also face disruptions from subsequent planned strikes.

In summary, Sir Sadiq Khan’s proposed 3.4 percent 'no strings' pay rise represents a significant gesture aimed at breaking the deadlock, yet it stops short of addressing the unions’ primary concerns over working hours and conditions. As the city grapples with the ongoing strikes, reliance on alternative transport modes, particularly shared cycling, continues to grow, marking a potential shift in urban commuting patterns that may endure beyond the immediate crisis.

### 📌 Reference Map:

* Paragraph 1 – [[1]](https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-15093913/Sir-Sadiq-Khan-gives-tube-drivers-plunged-London-chaos-3-4-pay-rise-doesnt-prevent-walkouts.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490), [[4]](https://apnews.com/article/6062013cf41162b04e5dcbe199c39270)
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* Paragraph 5 – [[1]](https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-15093913/Sir-Sadiq-Khan-gives-tube-drivers-plunged-London-chaos-3-4-pay-rise-doesnt-prevent-walkouts.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490), [[4]](https://apnews.com/article/6062013cf41162b04e5dcbe199c39270)
* Paragraph 6 – [[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.reuters.com/business/world-at-work/londons-tube-network-shuts-workers-begin-week-strikes-2025-09-08/), [[7]](https://www.ft.com/content/9a619b27-c2a9-4bf2-9613-636f8be0165e)
* Paragraph 7 – [[1]](https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-15093913/Sir-Sadiq-Khan-gives-tube-drivers-plunged-London-chaos-3-4-pay-rise-doesnt-prevent-walkouts.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490), [[3]](https://www.reuters.com/business/world-at-work/londons-tube-network-shuts-workers-begin-week-strikes-2025-09-08/), [[4]](https://apnews.com/article/6062013cf41162b04e5dcbe199c39270)

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## Bibliography

1. <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-15093913/Sir-Sadiq-Khan-gives-tube-drivers-plunged-London-chaos-3-4-pay-rise-doesnt-prevent-walkouts.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 sought alternative transportation methods, including bikes, buses, and boats, due to the near-total shutdown of the underground network. The increased demand significantly strained other transport modes, with electric bike-sharing services like Lime and Forest reporting large spikes in usage. River transport services, such as Uber Boat by Thames Clippers, also experienced heightened demand, adding extra routes to accommodate passengers. The strike, organized by the RMT union, is driven by disputes over pay, working hours, and shift patterns. Transport for London has proposed a 3.4% pay increase, but the union is pushing for fewer working hours. The disruption is expected to cost the London economy £230 million directly, with further indirect losses. Prime Minister Keir Starmer's government, elected in July with promises to resolve such labor actions, has called for a resolution.
3. <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 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.
4. <https://apnews.com/article/6062013cf41162b04e5dcbe199c39270> - Thousands of London Underground staff initiated a strike over pay and working conditions, significantly disrupting the city's subway system relied upon by millions daily. The Rail, Maritime and Transport Union stated that drivers, signalers, and maintenance workers would strike through Thursday. Transport for London (TfL) acknowledged that services were already heavily impacted, with minimal or no trains expected over the coming days. The dispute centers around the union's demand for a reduction in the working week from 35 to 32 hours, whereas TfL has offered only a 3.4% pay increase and claimed it cannot meet the union's request. The union also highlighted that staff cuts of 2,000 since 2018 have burdened remaining employees with demanding shifts. No negotiations are currently underway, and the union has urged Mayor Sadiq Khan to step in to help resolve the standoff.
5. <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. The popularity of these bikes, bolstered by the growth of cycling infrastructure and electrically assisted models, reflects a broader shift in urban mobility. Some commuters reportedly preferred bikes over congested and slow traditional modes like buses or taxis. Bike retailer Halfords even saw a 30% spike in sales, suggesting a potential long-term behavioral change. Businesses such as Pret a Manger noted less impact than expected, attributing recovery partly to determined commuters using alternatives like bikes. Experts warn that Transport for London could face lasting revenue impacts if more people permanently abandon the Tube in favor of cycling.
6. <https://www.cyclingweekly.com/news/moments-like-these-reinforce-how-vital-shared-bikes-have-become-lime-forest-and-santander-cycles-record-spike-in-use-amid-london-tube-strikes> - During the week of London Tube strikes organized by the RMT union over pay and working conditions, the city has seen a remarkable surge in the use of shared bikes. Companies like Lime, Forest, and TfL’s Santander Cycles have all reported significant increases in activity. Forest observed a 300% rise in rides and 20,000 app downloads during the morning rush on the first day alone. Lime experienced a 74% jump in peak-hour journeys, with users relying on their bikes for complete commutes rather than short segments. The company deployed extra resources to meet demand. Similarly, Santander Cycles reported a 72% increase in bike hires, totaling 45,898 on a single day. However, the spike in ridership has also highlighted infrastructure issues, with cycling advocates noting that London's existing bike routes are overwhelmed. The Tube strikes are scheduled to end Friday, but further action is possible if demands go unmet, suggesting the boom in shared bike use may continue.
7. <https://www.ft.com/content/9a619b27-c2a9-4bf2-9613-636f8be0165e> - Transport for London (TfL) has issued a warning of major transport disruptions in London due to strikes by the RMT union over pay and working conditions. The strikes began on Sunday and are expected to cause limited Underground service that day, followed by 'little to no service' from Monday through Thursday. Normal services are anticipated to resume by late Friday morning. This marks the first full-network Underground strike since March 2023. Additionally, Docklands Light Railway services are expected to be shut on Tuesday and Thursday, and First Bus strikes may disrupt bus routes in various areas between September 12 and 14. TfL had offered a 3.4% annual pay increase aligned with retail price inflation, but the RMT criticized management's reluctance to seriously engage in discussions on issues like fatigue, difficult shifts, and reducing the workweek. TfL’s COO Claire Mann urged the union to reconsider and hold a vote among members. Other services such as the Elizabeth Line, London Overground, and Croydon Tramlink are expected to operate normally, though crowding and minor disruptions are possible where they share stations with the Underground. Mainline rail services are not expected to be affected.