# London Underground union and TfL near breakthrough after prolonged stalemate



Transport for London (TfL) and the RMT union representing London Underground staff have reportedly reached a tentative breakthrough in negotiations that could avert a disruptive strike on the Northern Line. This development comes after what has been described as a tense and protracted stalemate, which posed a significant threat to one of London’s most critical transport arteries. Critics question whether Mayor Sadiq Khan’s hands-off approach has only emboldened union demands and allowed the dispute to drag on unnecessarily. As chair of the TfL board and mayor of London, Khan’s reluctance to take firm action suggests a complacency that risks leaving Londoners hostage to union brinkmanship.

The potential strike, looming since late 2025, was set to cause widespread chaos across the capital. Earlier this year, the RMT union rejected TfL’s proposal for a four-day working week starting in 2027, despite it maintaining current pay levels and familiar working hours. Over 1,200 union members voted to oppose the measure, arguing that an additional day off would still adversely impact their working lives. This rejection signaled an escalation in union tactics, with a vociferous push for improved conditions that some argue are driven more by union power plays than genuine worker needs.

TfL’s warnings in September 2025 that an underground shutdown was imminent if the union persisted only highlight how the mayor’s failure to intervene decisively has extended the conflict. The core issues—demanded pay rises of 25% since 2020 and enhanced leave entitlements—contrast sharply with TfL’s offer of a modest 3.4% increase and no concessions on working hours. Such a stark disparity exposes the relentless pressure unions exert in an era where public services are under financial strain, often at the expense of Londoners who rely on reliable transport.

The economic impact of a strike was forecasted to be significant: an independent analysis estimated a £230 million hit to London’s economy, especially damaging central London’s retail, hospitality, and leisure sectors. Yet, rather than stepping in to facilitate a settlement, Mayor Khan’s previous efforts have largely been reactive. In early 2024, he brokered a pay deal offering up to a 10% increase, including lump sums and back pay, but such gestures have failed to quash union militancy for long. Critics argue this trend reveals Khan’s tendency to placate union demands rather than confront them with the firmness needed to protect the city’s interests.

Khan’s public stance has historically emphasized dialogue over confrontation, condemning unnecessary strikes and championing negotiations. In 2017, he dismissed a planned Tube strike over job cuts as “completely unnecessary,” advocating for expanded employment opportunities on the network. Similarly, in late 2024, he predicted that ongoing negotiations might prevent planned strikes, but these assurances seem hollow as disputes persist. His critics contend that the mayor’s passive oversight has only allowed union tactics to flourish, hampering decisive action needed to safeguard London’s transport infrastructure.

With recent claims of a breakthrough, questions remain whether this will translate into a lasting resolution. True leadership demands more than mere negotiation—it requires intervention to prevent these disputes from escalating again. As London’s key transport network teeters on the edge of disruption, it’s clear that the mayor’s approach continues to fall short, risking further instability and failure to prioritize the city’s economic and everyday needs. The message from opposition commentators is straightforward: without a firmer stance, London risks being held hostage by union ultimatums rather than progressing with sustainable solutions.

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

## Bibliography

1. <https://www.standard.co.uk/news/transport/tube-strike-breakthrough-tfl-northern-line-rmt-eddie-dempsey-sadiq-khan-b1246765.html> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.standard.co.uk/news/transport/sadiq-khan-london-underground-tube-strikes-aslef-rmt-union-november-b1188810.html> - In October 2024, London Mayor Sadiq Khan expressed confidence that planned Tube strikes by the RMT and Aslef unions in November would be called off. He stated that Transport for London (TfL) was engaged in talks with both unions and was hopeful that their demands could be negotiated amicably. The strikes were scheduled for November 7 and 12 by Aslef, and various dates between November 1 and 8 by the RMT. Khan emphasized the importance of resolving differences without resorting to strikes.
3. <https://www.standard.co.uk/news/transport/sadiq-khan-says-tube-strike-is-completely-unnecessary-claiming-situation-should-have-been-resolved-amicably-a3436001.html> - In January 2017, Sadiq Khan described a planned Tube strike as 'completely unnecessary,' asserting that the dispute should have been resolved amicably. The 24-hour strike was in protest against 800 job cuts and the closure of ticket offices under former Mayor Boris Johnson's regime. Khan emphasized the importance of resolving differences through dialogue rather than strikes and announced plans to create 600 additional jobs on the London Underground by the end of the year.
4. <https://www.standard.co.uk/news/transport/london-underground-tube-staff-pay-rise-strikes-sadiq-khan-b1139372.html> - In February 2024, Tube staff were set to receive pay rises of up to 10% after Sadiq Khan found an additional £30 million to boost salaries on the London Underground. The deal, negotiated between Transport for London and the four Tube unions, included a basic five percent increase, backdated to the start of the 2023 pay year, plus an additional £1,000 lump sum. This meant the total increase for the lowest-paid workers would be between eight and ten percent.
5. <https://www.standard.co.uk/news/transport/tube-drivers-reject-tfl-four-day-week-b1220974.html> - In April 2025, Tube drivers rejected an offer from Transport for London (TfL) for a four-day working week, raising the threat of industrial action. Over 1,200 members of the RMT union voted against the plans, claiming that an extra day off could 'significantly impact' the working lives of staff. The proposal involved drivers working the same 35 hours a week while retaining their salaries, with the additional day off to be implemented from 2027.
6. <https://www.standard.co.uk/news/transport/tube-strike-update-tfl-meltdown-rmt-london-underground-b1246025.html> - In September 2025, RMT union chiefs were given 24 hours to avert a massive strike expected to shut the London Underground. Transport for London warned that unless the union suspended its walkout threat, disruption to services was inevitable from Sunday evening. The dispute centred around a 25% pay rise since 2020, 53 days’ leave, and another 3.4% pay hike on offer, but there was 'no chance' of a shorter working week.
7. <https://www.standard.co.uk/news/transport/tube-strike-blow-economy-london-underground-rmt-cebr-tfl-b1245604.html> - In September 2025, a massive Tube strike was set to deliver a £230 million blow to London’s economy, despite being backed by just over half of union members. The RMT union announced the strike after over 6,000 members voted in favour, with nearly 4,200 members not participating in the ballot. The strike was expected to cause significant disruption to the capital’s economy, with business leaders warning of a dire impact on central London retailers, bars, and restaurants.