# London transport strike exposes government’s failure to modernise and support essential workers



The London Tube strike orchestrated by the RMT has starkly highlighted the reliance of London’s crumbling transport system on underpaid and overworked underground staff—an uncomfortable truth that the new Labour government seems content to ignore. Since their arrival, promising change and stability, they have done little to address the underlying issues that fueled this disruption. Instead of backing the hard-working Tube drivers and staff who are standing up against unfair pay and appalling working conditions, the government appears more interested in downplaying the crisis, eager to protect the existing transport unions' entrenched interests rather than seeking genuine solutions.

This week-long industrial action, which began on 7 September 2025, has thrown London into chaos, revealing the fragile state of the city’s transport backbone—a backbone that Labour’s policies have consistently failed to support or reform. Commuters and visitors have suffered through gridlock and suspended services, while the true cost is borne by the thousands of low-paid staff pushed to their limits by staffing cuts and relentless schedules. The union’s push for a modest reduction of working hours from 35 to 32—a mainstream demand—has been met with dismissive offers that merely keep pace with inflation, ignoring the human toll of these working conditions.

The government, under Keir Starmer’s leadership, has responded with platitudes about “solutions” while refusing to challenge the systemic issues. Instead of prioritising the needs of the workers who keep London moving, the focus seems to be on protecting the legacy of a failing, financially strained transport authority. The 2,000 staffing cuts since 2018? A clear sign of mismanagement—and yet little is done to ensure proper staffing levels or fair pay. The result of this neglect is plain to see: exhausted staff, slashed services, and a city paralysed by inaction.

Meanwhile, the fallout from this strike extends beyond rail lines. The surge in alternative transport—Uber boats, bikes, and rental schemes—exposes the transport system's inability to cope with sudden disruptions, a sign of deeper infrastructure failures. Even more concerning is the toll this chaos takes on London’s economy, with an estimated loss of £230 million and major cultural events like Coldplay and Post Malone concerts postponed or rescheduled. These are the tangible repercussions of neglecting the needs of transport workers and failing to modernise and adequately fund our vital public services.

Past strikes, such as the 2023 joint action over pensions and job cuts, have only exposed the ongoing tensions between the unions and management—a clear indicator that Labour’s approach of appeasement has failed to bring about meaningful change. Socialist policies that coddle union leaders and dismiss worker grievances will not solve the crisis; they only prolong it. The question remains: how many more disruptions must London endure before the government finally recognises that the current system is broken?

The voices of Londoners, many of whom express frustration in letters published in the press, are a stark reminder: a city that neglects its essential workers does so at its peril. The current strike is not just about pay; it’s about respect, fairness, and the survival of a transport system that is crucial to the city’s future resilience. Yet under Labour’s watch, these issues are dismissed as minor grievances rather than urgent priorities.

With negotiations dragging on and no immediate resolution in sight, London risks further decline into chaos. The government’s refusal to stand firmly with those who keep London moving—those who deserve more than just empty promises—only ensures that the cycle of disruption will continue. This crisis underscores a simple truth: until we overhaul the tired, bureaucratic system that has failed London’s transport staff, the city will remain hostage to strikes, delays, and economic loss. Perhaps it’s time for a new approach—one that values the frontline workers and puts the city’s needs above union politics.

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

## Bibliography

1. <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2025/sep/11/striking-tube-drivers-have-proved-a-point> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.reuters.com/business/world-at-work/londons-tube-network-shuts-workers-begin-week-strikes-2025-09-08/> - On 8 September 2025, London's Tube network was nearly halted as workers initiated a week-long strike over pay and working conditions. The RMT trade union led the action, causing significant travel disruptions for commuters and tourists. The strike focused on issues such as pay, shift patterns, fatigue, and a proposed reduction in the working week. Transport for London offered a 3.4% pay rise but noted the union's insistence on reducing the standard 35-hour workweek. Despite the disruption, the Elizabeth Line and London Overground continued to operate with minor delays. The strike's impact extended beyond daily commutes, prompting musicians like Coldplay and Post Malone to reschedule concerts in London. Efforts to resolve the dispute were ongoing. ([reuters.com](https://www.reuters.com/business/world-at-work/londons-tube-network-shuts-workers-begin-week-strikes-2025-09-08/?utm_source=openai))
3. <https://www.reuters.com/sustainability/sustainable-finance-reporting/london-commuters-turn-bikes-boats-tube-strike-enters-second-day-2025-09-09/> - As the London Tube strike entered its second day on 9 September 2025, commuters sought alternative transportation methods, turning to bikes, buses, and boats due to the near-total shutdown of the underground network. The increased demand significantly strained other transport modes: electric bike-sharing services such as Lime and Forest reported large spikes in usage—Lime saw a 58% increase in Monday morning trips, while Forest recorded a 300% rise on Tuesday morning. River transport services, like Uber Boat by Thames Clippers, also experienced heightened demand, adding extra routes to accommodate passengers. The strike, organized by the RMT union, was driven by disputes over pay, working hours, and shift patterns. Transport for London had proposed a 3.4% pay increase, but the union was pushing for fewer working hours. The disruption was expected to cost the London economy £230 million ($310 million) directly, with further indirect losses. Prime Minister Keir Starmer's government, elected in July with promises to resolve such labor actions, had called for a resolution. ([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))
4. <https://www.ft.com/content/9a619b27-c2a9-4bf2-9613-636f8be0165e> - Transport for London (TfL) 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 were expected to cause limited Underground service that day, followed by "little to no service" from Monday through Thursday. Normal services were anticipated to resume by late Friday morning. This marked the first full-network Underground strike since March 2023. Additionally, Docklands Light Railway services were expected to be shut on Tuesday and Thursday, and First Bus strikes might disrupt bus routes in various areas between 12 and 14 September. 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 were expected to operate normally, though crowding and minor disruptions were possible where they shared stations with the Underground. Mainline rail services were not expected to be affected. ([ft.com](https://www.ft.com/content/9a619b27-c2a9-4bf2-9613-636f8be0165e?utm_source=openai))
5. <https://apnews.com/article/6062013cf41162b04e5dcbe199c39270> - Starting Sunday, 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 centered around the union's demand for a reduction in the working week from 35 to 32 hours, whereas TfL had offered only a 3.4% pay increase and claimed it could not meet the union's request. The union also highlighted that staff cuts of 2,000 since 2018 had burdened remaining employees with demanding shifts. No negotiations were currently underway, and the union urged Mayor Sadiq Khan to step in to help resolve the standoff. ([apnews.com](https://apnews.com/article/6062013cf41162b04e5dcbe199c39270?utm_source=openai))
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 saw a remarkable surge in the use of shared bikes. Companies like Lime, Forest, and TfL’s Santander Cycles 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 highlighted infrastructure issues, with cycling advocates noting that London's existing bike routes were overwhelmed. The Tube strikes were scheduled to end Friday, but further action was possible if demands went unmet, suggesting the boom in shared bike use might continue. ([cyclingweekly.com](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?utm_source=openai))
7. <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2023/mar/15/london-hit-by-first-strike-across-whole-tube-network-in-eight-years> - In March 2023, London experienced its first full-network Underground strike in eight years. The strike was initiated by the Aslef union, representing drivers, and was not about pay but ensuring any changes to conditions and pensions were agreed with unions. Concurrently, about 10,000 RMT members at stations held a strike over pensions and job cuts. RMT general secretary Mick Lynch urged Mayor Sadiq Khan to call off the pensions review and halt a recruitment freeze that would eventually mean 600 fewer station staff. Khan had made it clear to ministers that the terms of the settlement had the potential to lead to industrial action, putting London’s economic recovery at risk. ([theguardian.com](https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2023/mar/15/london-hit-by-first-strike-across-whole-tube-network-in-eight-years?utm_source=openai))