# London’s reliance on dockless e-bikes surges amid transport chaos, exposing systemic failures



During the recent London Underground strikes from September 7 to 12, it became painfully clear that London’s reliance on inefficient and poorly managed public transport is pushing residents to desperate measures, such as turning to dockless e-bikes in droves. Data from Lime, a major player in the electric bike market, revealed a shocking spike in usage during the strikes, with trip volumes during Monday and Tuesday rush hours soaring more than 50 percent week-on-week—and reaching a staggering 74 percent increase by Wednesday. This ugly trend persisted through Thursday, with longer and further trips highlighting how the city’s public transport failures are forcing commuters to depend increasingly on unregulated, often chaotic dockless bikes to get around.

A poll conducted jointly by Lime and YouGov exposes the broader discontent among Londoners, showing 28 percent now more likely to consider cycling as a serious alternative in the future—an alarming indication of public frustration with TfL’s inability to deliver reliable services. Meanwhile, 21 percent admitted to cycling during the strikes, predominantly in central and east London, where residents seem to see cycling as a “necessary evil” rather than a well-planned transport solution. Alice Pleasant from Lime claims these figures reflect growing confidence in cycling—yet the truth is, this is driven by a lack of better options, not robust infrastructure. One dramatic example: Lime’s longest recorded trip during the disruption stretched an arduous 23 kilometers across nine boroughs, illustrating how dockless bikes are sprawling unchecked across the city—an accident waiting to happen.

Former Conservative MP Steve Brine voiced the frustration shared by many, criticizing the current state of transport options and urging TfL and city authorities to finally grasp the problem: dockless bikes are not a sustainable or safe solution. Instead of embracing them as a permanent fix, the focus should be on fixing the core issues at TfL—failing infrastructure, backlogs, and a lack of accountability. The growing use of dockless e-bikes, despite being celebrated in some circles, exposes a government that is neglecting its duty to ensure safe, accessible, and properly regulated urban transport.

The saga of dockless e-bikes in London is riddled with chaos. Authorities have responded with heavy-handed crackdowns—seizing over 100 Lime and Forest bikes from pavements in central London, fining operators around £25,000 for improper parking. Meanwhile, TfL’s enforcement efforts against abandoned bikes have intensified, with hundreds of penalties issued and a ban on leniency, yet these measures only scratch the surface of the systemic problems. Critics rightly point out that London is falling behind cities like Paris, which has implemented comprehensive, city-wide regulations to rein in the chaos caused by dockless operators. Here, chaos remains the order of the day, and the city’s streets are suffering as a result.

Despite the regulatory mess, cycling is undeniably becoming the default mode of transport in the city’s financial heart, with recent counts showing a 57 percent jump in bike journeys over just two years. During peak hours, bikes now outnumber cars two to one in the "Square Mile"—a clear sign that London’s transport infrastructure is failing to keep pace with demand, forcing residents into reliance on unregulated and often unsafe dockless e-bikes that pose safety, accessibility, and congestion issues. Unsurprisingly, this surge coincides with a 340 percent rise in dockless e-bike usage, revealing a city scrambling for answers but still stuck in its outdated approach to urban mobility.

In response, Transport for London is attempting to fend off the chaos by aggressively promoting its own cheaper alternative—the Santander-branded hire bikes, fondly dubbed "Boris bikes." Recently, they cut the price of a 30-minute e-bike hire by 30 pence, trying to lure users away from unregulated dockless alternatives. However, these efforts only highlight the government’s inability to provide a coherent, affordable, and safe cycling infrastructure. Instead of addressing systemic failures, TfL is resorting to superficial price cuts and quick fixes, at a time when London desperately needs substantive reforms.

In sum, the strikes have unveiled a deep-rooted crisis: London’s transport system is broken, and the reliance on chaotic dockless e-bikes is a symptom of government failure. It’s high time policymakers stop chasing feel-good green illusions and start prioritizing proper infrastructure, effective regulation, and responsible urban planning—before the city’s streets become even more hazardous and the daily commute more hopeless.

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

## Bibliography

1. <https://www.standard.co.uk/news/transport/london-cycling-lime-tube-strike-b1249502.html> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.standard.co.uk/news/transport/london-cycling-lime-tube-strike-b1249502.html> - A quarter of Londoners say they are more likely to cycle following Tube strike. A poll by Lime and YouGov found that 28 per cent of Londoners are more likely to consider cycling in the future due to the disruption. More than one in four Londoners say they would consider cycling to work in the future after Tube strikes brought severe disruption to the capital earlier this month. With much of the Underground network shut down between September 7 and 12, thousands of commuters turned to two wheels to get across the city. E-bike operator Lime reported a sharp rise in usage, with trips during Monday and Tuesday's rush hours up more than 50 per cent week-on-week — climbing to 74 per cent by Wednesday. By Thursday, Lime saw a 70 per cent increase in trips, a 39 per cent rise in trip duration and a 35 per cent increase in average trip distance — suggesting more Londoners were relying on e-bikes for longer, cross-city journeys. Now, new data from Lime and YouGov shows that 28 per cent of Londoners are more likely to consider cycling in the future due to the disruption, with 21 per cent saying they cycled during the strikes. A survey of 1,027 London adults found that Central and East London were the places where the highest number of people said they would consider cycling in the future with 36 and 34 per cent respectively. Alice Pleasant, Senior Public Affairs Manager at Lime said: "Last week’s travel disruption showed just how far London has come as a cycling city. One in five Londoners said they cycled during the strike, showing cycling is now a standard part of how we move around the city. During the strike, morning cycling trips rose by up to 74 per cent compared to early September. Average trip distance and duration also increased more as the week went on. This shift points to a growing level of confidence in cycling as a reliable, accessible, efficient way to get from A to B." The longest single Lime journey recorded during the four-day strike was 23km, passing through nine different boroughs, while one e-bike travelled more than 201 kilometres in just four days, a distance almost as far as the drive from London to Nottingham. Former Conservative MP Steve Brine has become a "Lime convert" since the Tube strikes. He said on X: "Can I just say… Haven’t been down on the tube since the strike and know many many who are in the same saddle now. TfL and the Mayor of London need to remember there are alternatives."
3. <https://www.standard.co.uk/news/transport/lime-forest-e-bikes-seized-pavements-release-fee-city-of-london-corporation-b1210227.html> - Lime and Forest e-bikes seized for blocking pavements - and released after firms pay £25,000 in fines. More than 100 Lime and Forest e-bikes that were blocking pavements in central London have been seized by council officials. The City of London Corporation, the local authority for the City’s “Square Mile” financial area, seized the bikes and charged the firms a fee of £235 per bike before allowing them to be recovered. It said more than 100 of the dockless bikes were removed from the streets over a two-week period because they had been left in areas where they caused an obstruction or presented an “immediate danger to others”. This means the dockless bikes firms will have been fined in the region of £25,000 to get their bikes back. It is the latest controversy to hit the dockless bike industry, which has seen a huge growth in the use of hired e-bikes in London amid calls for the introduction of Londonwide rules to curb their numbers and tackle anti-social parking.
4. <https://www.standard.co.uk/news/transport/lime-forest-fined-33000-tfl-crackdown-abandoned-ebikes-b1233117.html> - Lime and Forest fined £33,000 as TfL launches new crackdown on abandoned e-bikes. E-bike firm warns London has fallen behind Paris in setting rules for hire bikes. Lime and Forest have been sent more than £30,000 in penalty fines under the latest crackdown on abandoned e-bikes in London. Transport for London has issued hundreds of £100 penalty tickets to the two main operators of dockless e-bikes in the capital after ending a “grace period” when only warning letters were sent. By May 15, a total of 333 penalties had been issued – with a total “face value” of £33,300, though the cost is reduced to £50 if paid within a fortnight. This follows TfL’s decision in November last year to send out a new enforcement policy for dockless bikes parked or abandoned on the capital’s network of Red Routes – the main arterial routes through London. TfL uses CCTV to gather evidence of e-bikes obstructing the road or pavement. Photos are sent to the firms, urging them to move the offending bikes. Mr Lord, in an update to the TfL board, said TfL was seeking to “positively engage with operators about these matters”. The details of the TfL crackdown emerged as a third e-bike hire firm, Voi, said London should follow Paris and introduce a city-wide set of rules on dockless bikes. This has been promised for more than a year but TfL and the 33 boroughs have yet to announce details – meaning that each borough can set its own rules on the number of e-bikes on the streets, and what operators are required to do to tackle badly-parked bikes. London mayor Sir Sadiq Khan, in a written answer to London Assembly member Joanne McCartney last week, said: “Dockless rental e-bikes are an important part of London’s transport network, helping people get around sustainably and connecting them to other transport modes. However, poor parking of the vehicles can cause significant safety issues and impact the accessibility of our streets.” Sir Sadiq said 190 warning letters were issued before fines were sent out. “As of May 15, TfL has issued 333 FPNs (fixed penalty notices) to both Forest and Lime,” the mayor said. Last week, Lime and Voi both won contracts to provide 6,000 hire bikes in Paris. Voi, which recently has set up pilot e-bike schemes in west London, said the lack of regulations in London left the capital “falling behind in the micromobility revolution sweeping across Europe”. It called for a pan-London tender to be issued for three firms to operate in London under the same city-wide rules. “Through our London action plan, we’re already investing £5 million this year to create more than 2,500 dedicated parking spaces in support of the mayor's goal of delivering 40,000 new bike parking spaces by the next election. Building dedicated e-bike parking bays on TfL land is key to ensuring cycling demand and convenience is maintained in the long term, while also keeping streets tidy. We will continue to share data and contribute the funding needed to deliver them.” Will Jansen, Forest's chief operating officer, said: “Dockless e-bikes are transforming the way Londoners get around - offering an affordable, sustainable, and convenient way to travel across the capital. As demand continues to grow, we are working closely with TfL to improve parking compliance and ensure the benefits of dockless e-bikes reach every corner of London. We’ve introduced no parking zones in sensitive areas - including TfL-managed red routes – and continue to enhance our 24/7 operations and in-app AI, which reviews end-of-ride photos to reduce poorly parked bikes.
5. <https://www.standard.co.uk/news/transport/bikes-cars-city-of-london-square-mile-cyclists-b1224006.html> - Twice as many bikes as cars in City of London 'Square Mile' after 57% increase in cycle journeys. Change part-fuelled by massive rise in use of Lime and Forest e-bikes. The number of cycle journeys in the City of London has increased by 57 per cent in two years – with bikes outnumbering cars by two to one in the “square mile” financial district during the day. The huge rise – the biggest ever recorded by the City of London Corporation – has been fuelled in part by a 340 per cent increase in the use of dockless bikes, namely the Lime and Forest e-bikes that are widely available across central London. Dockless e-bikes now account for one in six bikes in the capital’s main financial district. According to the City Corporation’s official cycle count, which is carried out once every two years at 30 key locations, a total of 139,466 bike journeys were seen on October 9 last year – 57 per cent more than the 88,827 counted in November 2022. During the daytime – between 7am and 7pm – bikes accounted for 39 per cent of all journeys logged by the City, up from 27 per cent on two years earlier. By comparison, the proportion of trips made by car or minicab fell from 27 per cent to 22 per cent. The “City Streets 2025” report said there were four times as many dockless e-bikes seen in 2024 than in 2022, and they now make up 17 per cent of all bikes seen. There was also a 36 per cent increase in the number of “personal” bikes spotted. Four streets - Queen Street, Bevis Marks, Gresham Street and Mark Lane – saw more than twice as many people cycling last year than in 2022.
6. <https://www.standard.co.uk/news/transport/santander-bikes-hire-cost-cut-boris-bikes-lime-forest-tfl-b1219128.html> - Battle of the bikes: Cost of hiring electric Boris bikes is slashed in bid to win back riders from Lime and Forest. Cost of 30-minute e-bike hire falls to £3 while pedal bike frozen at £1.65. Transport for London is cutting the cost of hiring an electric “Boris bike” as it bids to fight back against the popularity of Lime e-bikes. From April 6, the cost of a 30-minute hire of a TfL hire bike will be £3 – 30p cheaper than at present. TfL, whose bikes are branded with Santander logos due to the sponsorship deal, claimed this would be cheaper than hiring a dockless e-bike from Lime or Forest – but Forest said its bikes