

LONDON ASSEMBLY

The passenger experience of overcrowding and planned closures on the London Underground

Qualitative Research

Final Report

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1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1.1 Key Findings

1.1.1 Context

- Many commuters are experienced Tube users, used to the hustle and bustle of peak hour travel on the London Underground. The majority see the Tube as an unavoidable necessity.
- Leisure users in our sample are mostly travelling off peak, and thus less subject than commuters to overcrowding. The leisure users are, however, likely to experience the impact of planned closures, in particular weekend and evening closures on key lines such as the Jubilee and Victoria lines.
- London Underground's enduring appeal rests on four key factors:
 - **Speed of journey:** largely seen as the fastest means of transport across town;
 - **Reliability of service:** the Tube can *generally* be relied upon;
 - **Familiarity:** there is far more ingrained knowledge about the extent of the service compared to alternatives; and
 - **Less expensive than some alternatives:** in particular the need to use multiple buses and/or overground trains which are usually less cost efficient than using the Tube.
- However, the Tube does have a number of key 'problem issues' that appear to impact on the experience of nearly all users. These issues include overcrowding and, to a slightly lesser extent, planned closures.

1.1.2 Overcrowding

- Overcrowding is widely identified as one of the main problems with Tube travel. It impacts on Tube users in the following key ways:
 - directly - if they have no alternative but to suffer it;
 - making them adapt their travel plans and/or working life to avoid it, *if* they have the discretion (e.g. flexible working); or
 - opting out and deciding not to use the Tube for peak time commuting – apparent amongst leisure users who have given up peak time commuting.
- There is a clear and accepted recognition of what overcrowding is: the loss of immediate personal space resulting in degrees of physical or emotional discomfort and related stress. There are more and less acceptable variations of this.
- The overwhelming majority perceived the experience of overcrowding as a highly unpleasant and abnormal situation. That said, it was apparent that regular commuters and hardened travellers had become resigned to overcrowding on the Tube and accepted it as an uncomfortable aspect of their regular journey.

"I kind of accepted it as 'that's the way it's going to be' so, you know, there's nothing you can do about it, unless you leave a lot earlier...but because I'm going to work I always have to be there at a certain time but I've just accepted that it's going to be busy and there's not a lot I can do about it, so let's just get on with it."

(Bank Group, Commuters)

- Many have adopted methods of 'coping' with overcrowding. These include:
 - 'switching off' and 'shutting down' to the experience (e.g. shutting eyes, listening to music, turning backs, etc.);
 - developing strategies to avoid or reduce the impact (e.g. by going the wrong way on the Tube for one or two stops in order to get a seat); and
 - adopting a 'Tube personality' – more aggressive, single-minded, and determined than in 'normal life'.
- But for many commuters the Tube remains the only practical option for fast and reliable travel to and from work and they feel they have no option but to accept the degree of overcrowding that prevails. Overall, it is felt by hardened travellers that the benefits of Tube travel outweigh the negatives. As a result, many commuters are willing to make sacrifices that they would not usually consider (e.g. the loss of personal space and comfort in order to be at a meeting on time).

"If you had the option of driving into town or getting a Tube and you had to be there for 8.30-9.00am, you would always get the Tube."

(Green Park Group, Commuters)

- Ideas for alleviating the impact of overcrowding range from providing more trains and a more regular service to better ventilation and more sophisticated methods of providing updates on travel problems and overcrowding 'hotspots'. However, on a practical level, there is also an appreciation that some of these measures would be extremely difficult to implement.
- It is also widely suggested that given the services all come under the TfL banner, more could be done to help service users understand the alternative modes of transport available to them. Better information and interconnectivity between transport modes could help avoid some of the daily crush and potentially alleviate overcrowding for others.

"In situations where the platforms are ridiculously crowded, the guards in the Tube stations should come into play. You could say 'what bus can I get ... what alternatives are there?' and they should be fully versed in the bus routes."

(Bank Group, Commuters)

- Some speculate as to what impact less overcrowding would have on the productivity of working Londoners, who can claim to require an hour or two to recover from the stress of their journey to work.

“London would probably be a lot more productive overall if the system was better.”

(Bank Group, Commuters)

1.1.3 Planned closures

- Those who use the Tube less regularly or whose use is more varied and unpredictable, appear more vulnerable to being ‘caught out’ by planned closures. An inconsistent pattern of usage appears to increase the chances of not expecting or anticipating problems.
- In contrast, many commuters gain awareness of planned closures via announcements at stations or via various early warning systems (e.g. text alerts, Metro newspaper, TfL website) and plan their journeys accordingly.
- That said, some admit that they are still caught out because the frequency of announcements and warnings dilute uptake and can lead to them becoming background noise.
- Closures are seen as more acceptable when:
 - the benefits (tangible improvements in service) are better communicated, and
 - the pattern is more predictable, enabling travellers to adapt more easily to cope with the impact.
- Nonetheless, there is some puzzlement (and irritation) as to why ‘newer’ and seemingly more efficient lines such as the Jubilee and the Victoria seem to have suffered from considerable disruption. Learning about impending future disruption on the Piccadilly line compounds this sense of bewilderment.
- The impact of closures is seen as more irritating and onerous when there are:
 - simultaneous closures on immediately adjacent or overlapping lines, or
 - closures of key stations when big events are happening (perceived as poor and irresponsible planning).
- The effect of planned closures is to prompt travellers either to ‘give up’ and rearrange plans (especially where multiple line closures limit travel options available) or to ‘fight it’ and try to find some alternative route (this response is more likely when the closure is encountered en route).
- Alternative modes of transport during periods of planned disruption are not widely criticised, although all have their pros and cons:

- *Rail replacement buses*: positively, they are free and largely reliable (not usually requiring an arduous wait); negatively, they are seen as slow, with only limited coverage of the line and those less familiar with the service can be confused as to where to access it;
- *Overground*: positively, a fast and fairly reliable service to and from Central London but potentially inconvenient and infrequent (especially waiting in the cold in winter months); in addition, National Rail Services (which are not consistently distinguished from TfL Overground by the public) sometimes lack compatibility with Oyster
- *Other buses*: positively, potentially a revelation if not used in years, and perceived as a friendly, more relaxing and inexpensive experience; negatively, slow and perceived as somewhat less safe at night. There was a clear lack of awareness and knowledge about bus options exacerbated by a perceived lack of decent and interconnected signposting from the Tube;
- *Walking*: positively, a good way of understanding the layout of London for the more intrepid; negatively, a lot of effort (both physically and in terms of navigating routes) and potentially unsafe at night;
- *Taxis (evenings)*: positively, cost effective in a group and easy/door-to-door; negatively, an expensive option for single person travel and there were some queries about safety for females;
- *Cars (weekends)*: positively, door-to-door, no congestion charge and cost effective in a group; negatively, often hard to park and generally stressful in central London.

1.1.4 Block closures

- Given their predictability, travellers tend to adapt to block closures relatively quickly. Alternative travel arrangements are made and travellers gradually become accustomed to them.
- The reasons and justifications for block closures are likely to be more well-known than for planned closures.
- Opinions are mixed regarding a preference for block closures for short periods or the regular weekend and evening closures that impact over a longer period. Some are keen for a short, sharp period of disruption if this helps to achieve a fully functioning system more rapidly. However, block closures are seen as a less appealing alternative for closures longer than 2 weeks to a month.

1.1.5 Justifications for closures

- There are mixed feelings about the justifications for disruptions. Although many understand the continual need to improve an ageing system, the extent of disruption is seen as somewhat bemusing and irritating.
- In addition, there are a number of key questions about the closures:
 - why are more efficient lines most affected (both in terms of the frequency and extent of disruption)?
 - why does more engineering work not happen at night (some unaware that engineering work was on-going out of hours)?
 - how big a factor is the London Olympics in the level of disruption?
 - why are services not cheaper during periods of planned disruption to reflect the lower standard of service?
- It is also hard for a relatively transient population such as London's commuters to appreciate and accept a nebulous idea that work is for 'the long-term good of the transport system', particularly if it is over a twenty year timescale.

1.2 Key Headlines

1. *Pros of Tube travel largely outweigh the cons*

- the speed and largely reliable service over such a widespread area make it the "preferred" choice of frequent Tube users, for relatively inexpensive travel across London.

2. *Day to day acceptance of overcrowding is inversely related to the frequency of using the Tube at peak hours*

- those facing overcrowded Tubes on a daily basis at peak travel times appear most accepting (or resigned) to the experience; many comment on how the irregular users (e.g. tourists) are most uncomfortable with the peak hour experience.

3. *Service users cope with overcrowding through adopting a 'Tube personality'*

- for many, a subconscious way of coping with peak time travel is adopting a single-minded, ruthless and determined persona often at odds with their everyday disposition. (This can help to produce a greater sense of 'immunity' to the unpleasantness of peak time Tube travel.)

4. *Line closures mostly feel unpredictable (especially weekend closures); the more predictable closures are, the more comfortable people are in dealing with them*

- for most weekend Tube users the line closures do not appear to have a discernible pattern and this unpredictability can make journeys more stressful or restrict some people from using the service at all

- in contrast, the more predictable nature of evening closures and block closures entail that travellers are better able to plan ahead and develop ways of coping with the disruption (e.g. adopting new regular modal choices such as buses or bicycles). They can more easily ‘adapt’ to these circumstances.

5. More effective information about alternative modes of transport and evidence of a truly joined up TfL service might help alleviate some of the problems caused by overcrowding and line closures

- experiences of ‘alternative’ modes of transport *can* be a revelation (e.g. some bus routes), but most claim their familiarity with the Tube system does not translate to other services. There is some feeling that more ought to be done to signpost and direct people to alternative services in ticket halls of Tube stations - ideally via ‘personalised’ text alerts or web-based services (e.g. ‘an alternative service from Waterloo to Elephant and Castle would be the number 63 bus, which only takes an additional 4 minutes’). This would enhance perceptions of a joined up transport system for London.

“Sometimes I can’t get about because they’ve closed Whitechapel and Shadwell at the same time. I think DLR and the tube don’t care what each other are doing.”

(Green Park Group, Leisure Users)

“The TfL and lines and all this stuff and the TfL website are all fragmented, disconnected.”

(Bank Group, Commuters)

2. INTRODUCTION

2.1 Background and Purpose

- The London Assembly Transport Committee is a cross-party committee of Assembly Members that examines and reports on matters of importance to Londoners as they relate to transport. It also considers the strategies, policies and actions of the Mayor of London, Transport for London (TfL) and the other members of the GLA Group where appropriate.
- In July 2009 the Committee began an investigation into overcrowding on the London Underground network and the management of overcrowding, as well as the impact of the upgrade programme on passengers. As part of this, this research report was commissioned to provide a robust and in-depth picture of how overcrowding and planned closures on the London Underground affect the passenger experience and travel behaviours.
- Tube passengers have long experience of overcrowding at peak times. Therefore, in addition to requesting peak train overcrowding and station congestion data from London Underground, the Committee is seeking to understand passengers' views on the effects of overcrowding on the network and to gather suggestions from stakeholders to better manage the situation in the short term.
- The Committee's investigation is also looking at the ongoing programme of line and station closures (for example, the current weekend suspensions of the Jubilee line) to inform plans for the future. It is intended to highlight good practice (including from other metros around the world) and, where possible, make recommendations to ensure that the forthcoming upgrades of the other lines and stations, in particular the Piccadilly line upgrade, are undertaken with minimum disruption. The implications of Underground closures for other modes of transport (for example, the DLR when the Jubilee line is suspended), and the coordination of Underground works with works on other modes (for example, Network Rail engineering), are also being explored.
- Planned closures relate to ongoing periodic closures or suspensions of part or all of the relevant London Underground line or a London Underground station to enable works to take place to upgrade the network.
- **Part A** of the research described in this report covered the viewpoints of three specific types of London Underground traveller:
 - users of **particularly overcrowded parts of the network** and very congested stations;
 - users of **lines currently undergoing night time and weekend closures** because of the upgrade programme (for example, the Jubilee line); and
 - users of **lines that are to be subject to night time and weekend closures in the future** (for example, the Piccadilly line).

- In addition, **Part B** of the research examined the views and experiences of **those affected by longer-term, block period closures** of the London Underground, such as the East London line.
- The findings from both the Part A and Part B studies will inform an investigation into overcrowding and the upgrade programme on the London Underground by the London Assembly's Transport Committee.

2.2 Research Objectives

- The research had the following objectives :

Primary Objectives

1. To identify how overcrowding and planned closures have affected passenger journeys and travel planning.
2. To explore rational (physical) and emotional responses to the impact of overcrowding/planned closures on travel experience and daily living.
3. To explore and understand people's expectations in relation to overcrowding and planned closures and the criteria by which these expectations are set.
4. To explore what factors are considered in whether people feel overcrowding levels to be acceptable or not (e.g. length of journey, speed, cost, convenience, etc.) – and how this affects usage (and why).
5. To explore views about patterns of closure and whether this is acceptable, including:
 - periods chosen (nights, weekends, larger blocks)
 - impact of time of year
 - impact of key sporting or cultural events.

Secondary objectives

6. To understand what information sources passengers use (and trust) about overcrowding and planned closures, and how useful and reliable this is, including:
 - directions to alternative forms of transports (and where and when they run); and
 - length of notice given about closures.
7. To explore attitudes towards measures taken to reduce or avoid impact of overcrowding and how acceptable these are.
8. To ascertain how well alternative modes of travel cater for passenger journeys during planned Underground closures, and to assess the travel experience in terms of:
 - cost effectiveness
 - crowding
 - convenience
 - frequency
 - reliability and predictability.

2.3 Method and Sample

- A qualitative research approach was adopted, involving 6 group discussions with regular users of the London Underground, including:
 - 4 groups with commuters (two evening and two ‘breakfast’ sessions)
 - 2 groups with leisure users (two evening sessions).
- In addition to the group discussions, the research was supplemented by ‘**travel diaries**’ which were completed by most participants in the week prior to attending the group discussions.
- Fieldwork took place in central London locations in the week commencing 14 September. Locations were selected to represent potential ‘hotspots’ for experiencing overcrowding and/or line closures:
 - **Green Park** – hotspot for Victoria Line overcrowding and line closures on Victoria and Jubilee Lines (and future line closure on Piccadilly Line)
 - **Bank** – overcrowding hotspot for Northern and Central Line usage
 - **Canada Water** – heavy congestion on Jubilee Line and weekend closures [and location affected by block closure of the East London Line]
 - **Wapping** – station and location affected by block closure of the East London Line.
- The sample structure was as follows:

USER PROFILE	TOTAL	Green Park	Bank	Canada Water	Wapping
Commuters: peak time users (mix of pre- family and family ages)	4	1	1	1	1
Leisure Users (mix of pre- family and family ages)	2	1	1	-	-
TOTAL FOCUS GROUPS	6	2	2	1	1

- The total number of participants was 57 with between 8 and 10 people attending each group. Group discussions lasted approximately 1½ hours.
- Across the sample we sought to include representation of:
 - roughly 50:50 male:female gender split
 - a spread of ages; ‘pre-family’ and ‘with family’ life stages (broad spread of ages ranging from 18-60)
 - regular users of the Tube – all using at least 4 days a week:
 - travellers regularly experiencing overcrowding
 - travellers regularly experiencing line or station closures
 - a mix of residents from different zones (1-6)
 - a minority of respondents with disabilities/impairments likely to affect Tube experience
 - a mix of ethnicity.
- The findings of the research were delivered in a report to the Greater London Authority on 2 October 2009.

3. FINDINGS

3.1 Background Observations on Sample

3.1.1 Regular journeys

- Participants usually made a range of 'regular' journeys on the Tube.
- Commuters tended to have more consistent journey destinations, although a few self-employed respondents and freelancers had more varied journey destinations. These were as follows:
 - Green Park Commuter group:
 - **Starting points:** Newbury Park, Finsbury Park, Brixton (x2), Victoria, Clapham South, Queens Park, Kensal Green, Edgware, Canada Water
 - **Destinations:** Holborn, Walthamstow, St James's Park, Warwick Avenue, South Kensington, London Bridge, Oxford Circus, Victoria, White City, Euston.
 - Bank Commuter group:
 - **Starting points:** Caledonian Road, Elephant & Castle (x3), Balham, Angel, Archway (x2), Victoria, South Kenton
 - **Destinations:** Russell Square, St Paul's, Bank, Warren Street, Ealing Broadway, Aldgate, Borough, Oxford Circus, Embankment, Edgware Road
 - Canada Water Commuter group:
 - **Starting points:** New Cross Gate (x2), Queensbury, East Ham, West Ferry, Bermondsey, Cannon Street, Wembley Park, Gants Hill, Wanstead
 - **Destinations:** Canary Wharf (x2), Charing Cross, Stratford, Old Street, Bethnal Green, Brixton, Oxford Circus, Liverpool Street, (various)
 - Wapping Commuter group:
 - **Starting points:** Stratford, New Cross, Whitechapel, Dalston, Shadwell, Bethnal Green, West Ham, Leytonstone, Holloway Road, Canada Water
 - **Destinations:** Shadwell, Mile End, Leyton, Baker Street, London Bridge (x2), Kew Gardens, Deptford Bridge, (various) x 2
- Leisure users had more varied journey times and destinations, although many were able to identify more regular journeys made for work and non-work reasons. These were as follows:
 - Green Park Leisure group:
 - **Starting points:** Clapham South, Edgware (x2), Wimbledon, Seven Sisters, Hammersmith, Kilburn Park, Canary Wharf, Whitechapel (x2)
 - **Destinations:** Oxford Circus (x2), Tottenham Court Road, Bond Street, King's Cross, Hammersmith, London Bridge, Golders Green, (various) x 2

- Bank Leisure group:
 - **Starting points:** Wimbledon (x2), Archway, Elephant & Castle, East Finchley, Bethnal Green, Walthamstow, Tottenham Hale, Lewisham, Whitechapel
 - **Destinations:** Westminster (x2), Oxford Circus, Leicester Square, Blackfriars, King's Cross, Kilburn Park, High Street Kensington, (various) x 2.
- A minority of respondents had disabilities ranging from back injuries to those recovering from major operations (and who had been travelling recently with a walking stick).
- Those with physical disabilities claimed to have found getting about the Tube system to be a problem. The lack of 'at a glance' information about escalator and lift access was frustrating.
- One respondent also commented that due to his limited movement post-operation, the speed of the ticket barriers could be problematic and result in them closing on him (sometimes causing considerable pain and discomfort to operation scars).

3.1.2 Pen portrait: Commuters

- We recruited a range of working ages, from approximately 25 to 60 years old.
- Most commuters were using the Tube every day during the working week. The majority were using it at similar times both morning and evening to get to and from work. A requirement to be at work between 8.30 and 10.00am meant most were experienced at dealing with the hustle and bustle of peak hour travel – widely seen as the 'crush' time for overcrowded travel.
- Many commuters were required to be at work at specific times. They were more or less compelled to catch the Tube at peak times when it was often impossible to get a seat and overcrowding was the norm.

"I think you're expected just to deal with it because employers wouldn't understand if you were late because it was a bit busy on the trains...you really have to push your way on .. and I think that's maybe what makes people a bit more aggressive, it's just that we accept it really."

(Wapping Group, Commuters)

- However, some had more control over their working hours and were travelling at off-peak times where possible. For example, senior managers had greater control over their times of travel. Ways to achieve greater control included:
 - arranging meetings and appointments outside the 'crush period' e.g. from 10.00am when they had some control over timings

- working for organisations that operated some form of flexi-time. This allowed them greater control over getting to work early or late and deciding when they left for home
- attending the gym (before and after work)
- staying late or going for drinks to delay evening rush hour travel.

"I stay at work late because I won't get the 5.00pm trains because I just think it's easier. I'd rather just stay at work and do something than leave at 5.00pm and be really annoyed and cheesed off with my journey."

(Bank Group, Commuters)

"I run a theatre company...if we're rehearsing with the company we normally actually start at 10.00am or later, just to avoid rush hour."

(Wapping Group, Commuters)

- There were indications that the pressure of overcrowding was worse in the morning than in the evening because more commuters felt that they needed to be in work "first thing" or "on time". In the evening many felt that they had more discretion to leave a bit later, or a bit earlier, or make alternative arrangements, to miss the worst of the evening rush hour (variously seen as between 4.00 and 7.00pm).

"There's a bus from Baker Street to where I live in Hackney and because it goes through Euston then Kings Cross there's a lot of traffic, so I only do it on the way back home because there's no set time that I need to be back, but on the way to uni there's a set time I need to be there."

(Wapping Group, Commuters)

- For most commuters Tube travel was seen as an unavoidable necessity. It provided the quickest, most predictable and most direct method of getting to work.
- That said, the conditions of Tube travel were frequently seen as very unsatisfactory. It was frequently suggested by way of comparison that it would be illegal to transport animals in such cramped, overcrowded and stuffy conditions.

"There is a reason why they have cattle carriage conditions because even cattle have to have a small amount of space around them, because it's not very good for the health of the animals."

(Bank Group, Commuters)

- There were some indications that commuters were less regular users of the Underground at weekends, especially as they got older and had families. Reasons for more limited weekend travel included:
 - a desire to ‘avoid’ (central) London during the weekend, particularly as they had to travel there almost everyday during the working week; and
 - it was too much effort, based on the lack of perceived access at the weekend due to increased levels of engineering works.
- A few of the most experienced users noted that the mood on the Tube had deteriorated over the years, and that people were more business-like and unfriendly than before.

“I’m sure people are less relaxed nowadays on the Tube, they’ve definitely changed. It used to be a more spirited environment. Now it feels less carefree, somehow.”

(Green Park Group, Commuters)

- One or two hypothesised that the effect of disasters such as the King’s Cross fire and the London bombings had made Tube travel a more downbeat and functional experience than formerly.

“The mood has definitely changed over the years....now you don’t get talking, it’s really strange.”

(Green Park Group, Commuters)

3.1.3 Pen portrait: Leisure users

- Leisure users included students and people of working age who are currently using the Tube mainly off-peak and thus were less subject to overcrowding.
- All were still using the Tube four or more times a week, although times of travel and reasons for travel were less predictable than for commuters. Their key travel tended to be up to town or across town to:
 - go shopping
 - visit and meet friends and family
 - attend events and entertainment
 - attend college/evening work/business meetings.

“I live in Kilburn and I use the Bakerloo line. I don’t commute because I work from home so I use it mainly in the evening to go and meet friends, go to the cinema and do all that sort of stuff. You can’t really use it at the weekends much now, but when it’s open, I’ll use it then”.

(Green Park Group, Leisure Users)

"It's always disappointing when I have a meeting at, like, 9.30 in the morning, and it's central; it's the time of day. I changed jobs to avoid having to travel in. Thankfully, it's not that often."

(Bank Group, Leisure Users)

- For most, their perceptions of overcrowding tended to relate to past experiences when they were working in central London. Indeed, there were indications some had given up working in town because they found the experience of rush hour Tube travel so gruelling.

"That's why I stopped. Overcrowding gets you in the end. I decided it was time to enjoy London, so I work more locally and go in now in my own time."

(Bank Group, Leisure Users)

"It's so much nicer going into London at about 10.00am or so. Such a difference that half hour makes to the whole experience. I get a seat, a paper and I'm relatively comfortable. ... I used to hate the 9.00am peak."

(Green Park Group, Leisure Users)

- That said, a few did experience 'peak hour' overcrowding on occasions which tended to be out of their control, including:
 - attending college; and
 - specific business meetings.
- There were some indications that leisure users were more likely to be subjected to planned closures on the Underground because they were rather more likely to be travelling at weekends and late night. It was also apparent that they were more likely to be 'caught out' by disruption due to their less frequent usage of the service and lower exposure to announcements and notices.

3.1.4 Summary of views from areas of London

- In our sample, overall perceptions of the Tube reflected where people live, the lines they used regularly and how overcrowding and line closures impacted on their travel.
 - **East London perspective:** East London passengers are currently more reliant on, and well versed in, alternative travel means (especially buses and DLR), particularly at weekends when Metropolitan, District and Hammersmith & City and Jubilee lines have been down. They were also most affected by East London line closures.
 - **South London perspective:** South London passengers are currently most affected by the closure of Jubilee and Victoria lines at weekends (and for a few the District line), and Northern and Victoria lines during the week (10.00pm). Most seemed able to find alternative transport links relatively easily, although widespread overground line closures have compounded the problem on occasions.
 - **North London perspective:** affected by closure of High Barnet to Finchley Central on the Northern line and closures on the Victoria line. Most are also affected by the future closure of Piccadilly line as a key travel option into town (and to Heathrow)
 - **(North) West London perspective:** users of Bakerloo, Metropolitan, and Jubilee lines could be affected by closures – they also tended to have longer journeys into work (but more chance of getting a seat if starting from Zone 3 or further out).

3.2 Overall Appeal of Tube Travel

3.2.1 Key positives of Tube travel

- Overall, the Tube was undeniably the default means of transport to and from work, especially for those with a deadline to meet.

“There’s something that’s prioritised about a Tube journey. You use it always because you’re going to be late, because you’re going to work, because it’s an important meeting or somewhere else you’re not going to be able to get to otherwise. You end up having to use it.”

(Bank Group, Commuters)

- The main sources of Tube travel’s appeal for both Commuter and Leisure travellers were:
 - **speed of journey:** the Tube compared favourably with other means of transport. It was seen as, especially at peak times, the fastest means of transport into town and across town.
 - **reliability of service:** when the service was running smoothly it was regarded as a very reliable service and regular travellers knew more or less how long it took to get from A to B.

“There used to be bigger gaps in the service, now they’re every 2 or 3 minutes, they’re generally pretty good.”

(Green Park Group, Commuters)

- **less expensive than some alternatives:** it was noted that the overground rail network, which was an alternative where it overlapped with the Tube, was more expensive. In addition, where rail operators currently do not accept Pay As You Go Oyster (e.g. Southern Rail) this caused more perceived ‘hassle’ (need to buy tickets, not being able to use certain stations even in Zone 2, eg Herne Hill). Similarly, multiple buses often had to be used in order to compensate for Tube travel and this proved to be an expensive option for those passengers who used the Pay As You Go Oyster. It should be noted that users did not always distinguish between National Rail and TfL’s Overground services.
- Likewise using a car was not a competitive option because of the congestion charge (except at weekends), the cost of petrol and parking.

“On some occasions the Tube is cheaper. Say you’re in the middle of the holidays and you’re not going to renew your fare and you’re doing pay-as-you-go, doing two bus journeys can be more expensive than one Tube.”

(Bank Group, Commuters)

- **familiarity:** for many, the underground system was well known and easy to navigate (when running smoothly). Some regular Tube users felt less confident about using other forms of transport, which often entailed navigating unfamiliar routes.

“You always know where you’re going when you’re on the Tube. You generally know enough about how to get there.”

(Green Park Group, Leisure Users)

- In addition, the warmth of the Tube acted as a double-edged sword: a source of some relief from the cold for some in the winter months, but also a major source of discomfort in the heat of the summer.
- On occasions, the London Underground was spontaneously compared with systems in other countries. Whilst not all comparisons were complimentary, it was believed to be superior to some other networks including Paris (and even, for a few, Madrid).

“I don’t think the London underground is too bad. I don’t know if you’ve been to Paris. It’s really unpleasant.”

(Wapping Group, Commuters)

“Places like Sydney haven’t got any form of transport up to the North of the city.”

(Bank Group, Commuters)

3.2.2 Main problems with Tube travel

- When invited to list the problems with Tube travel, the ‘top three issues’ were fairly constant, namely:
 - **overcrowding** which was consistently identified as one of the major problems especially by the commuter sample.

“Often I can’t take the train because by the time I get to Victoria it’s so crowded I can’t actually get on the Tube! Now I take the bus, but often the bus is late.”

(Green Park Group, Commuters)

“It just makes me want to scream! It just drives me absolutely insane ... you know, I just want to explode!”

(Bank Group, Commuters)

- **lack of adequate ventilation and poor air quality** also emerged fairly consistently as a key problem. It affected some lines more than others with the Bakerloo, Central and Northern lines being seen as particularly stuffy. There were fairly frequent references to Tube lines in other parts of the world being better ventilated and having air conditioning. However, there was relatively widespread recognition that the London Underground was not able to install air conditioning due to the size of tunnels and lack of available space.

“It always feels like you’re breathing in dirty recycled air.”

(Green Park Group, Leisure Users)

- **unreliability of the service, delays and closures** were also identified as a main problem, with many claims that these occurrences could have a considerable impact on journey time and overall experience.
- **Planned closures** were a particular problem for those travelling at weekends or late at night – and appeared to impact particularly on those who regularly used the Victoria and Jubilee lines.

“Surely there’s something wrong if to maintain a system you have to shut it down every weekend? It’s madness.”

(Green Park Group, Commuters)

“I hate being caught out [at night]. Then having to use the ghost bus or whatever. It just takes ages to get home.”

(Canada Water Group, Commuters)

- Users of the District, Hammersmith & City and East London lines appeared less inconvenienced by planned disruptions to their journey and tended to place planned closures lower down their list of main issues. There was some acceptance that ‘older’ lines needed to undergo engineering work in order to improve the lines’ infrastructure. In contrast, there was confusion as to why the seemingly more modern and efficient lines were so frequently disrupted.

“The Jubilee’s the newest line and that’s the worst one of the lot; it’s pretty quick or whatever, but it’s always down.”

(Wapping Group, Commuters)

“Why is the Victoria line the one that consistently suffers? The Central line’s massive, why don’t they shut bits of that down rather than the whole of the fastest line. I just think it’s dumb.”

(Green Park Group, Leisure Users)

“The trouble is, the line [Victoria] is so old, they’ve got to. It’s a Catch 22 situation, you’ve got to do it but it’s really so disruptive to all the passengers. But how do they get around it?”

(Bank Group, Leisure Users)

- Other key problems included:

- **‘other users’** – particularly tourists and those less familiar with the system who were seen as getting in the way and not knowing the rules (e.g. standing on the left on escalators, blocking walk-throughs, getting onto carriages before others could disembark).

“My biggest bugbear is that people get on the train and they just don’t move, they just stand there, they have a fascination with standing in the doors.”

(Green Park, Commuters)

- **closing too early** - there was some feeling that the Tube should operate later into the night and perhaps even provide a 24 hour service. Younger users in particular commented that the Tube could at least remain open later on Friday and Saturday nights.

“I think it should run 24 hours as far as I’m concerned ... London is one of the most important cities on the planet and it shuts down about 12.30am or something like that, it’s ridiculous!”

(Wapping Group, Commuters)

- **cost** – seen as rising and for a markedly poorer level of running service than a few years ago

“I’ve already paid for the travel card, so I’ve already paid for the service I’ve been denied which is very infuriating.”

(Bank Group, Commuters)

“It should be cheaper, it’s far too expensive...I’ve been told it’s the most expensive in the world.”

(Wapping Group, Commuters)

- **safety** e.g. packed stations, especially on narrow, open platforms such as at Clapham North and Clapham Common; being ‘thrown around’ on trains; barriers closing too quickly (problematic for those with mobility issues)

"I think some stations are really dangerous; on the Northern line, you know where you get the ones with the central platforms and no barriers."

(Bank Group, Leisure Users)

- **access** e.g. getting around with a pram/heavy case, lack of disabled access, poor lift systems and broken escalators

"It's not very accessible in terms of you have to go up and down loads of steps and if you're carrying big bags that can be a real problem sometimes."

(Bank Group, Commuters)

"We've got a new baby and getting around with the pram is a nightmare; it made me think of people in wheelchairs as well."

(Bank Group, Leisure Users)

- **crime** e.g. pickpockets, perceived lack of policing, poorly lit

"When it's really crowded I get really, really nervous that people are going to rob my purse because my mum was in a really tight Tube and when she came out, someone had attempted to slash her handbag and then rob her purse."

(Green Park Group, Leisure Users)

- **poor communication/service** - lack of electronic updates or, when stuck on a train, the delays in drivers providing an explanation as to what is causing the hold up
- **cleanliness** - food and newspaper debris in carriages. A couple of female respondents also commented that they felt it necessary to carry sanitising wipes.

"It's filthy, it's horrible and it's just unpleasant in every way – when I used to travel on the Tube I had really bad skin and when I stopped commuting it just cleared up."

(Green Park Group, Leisure Users)

"It's dirty sometimes, unclean, and you've got all them free newspapers, you know, sometimes you get in there early in the morning and the papers are still there and they're from the day before and you think 'can't they tidy them up or something?'"

(Wapping Group, Commuters)

"It's smelly and disgusting. Why are people allowed to eat food on there? Alcohol was less of a problem in my opinion."

Canada Water, Group (Commuters)

- **noise pollution** – the noise of the train itself or other people's music.

"I don't know if you've heard it, but techno music at 8.00am in an over-crowded train is a problem! At one stage, I must admit, I looked into this guy's eyes for more than 3 seconds, like 'you like techno, I don't' and he just said 'I don't care if you don't like it, this is my music.'"

(Bank Group, Leisure Users)

3.3 Perceived Strengths & Weaknesses of Other Travel Options

- Unsurprisingly, given the sampling method, the Tube was the default means of transport to and from work for most commuters and leisure travellers. In rush hour it offered a relatively fast and efficient means of getting into and out of town.

“I like it because it’s quick, compared to say, getting the bus as an alternative. Tubes are just so much quicker in a lot of instances here. So when you take it away, like the East London line, then you to struggle to match it up using other modes of transport. I think it’s good for speed when it works.”

(Wapping Group, Commuters)

- Compared with:
 - the bus**, the Tube was, for most journeys, quicker and simpler
 - the car**, the Tube was quicker and cheaper
 - cycling**, the Tube was seen as more acceptable, easier and safer
 - walking**, the Tube was quicker, more practical.
- Service users compared the key strengths and weaknesses of each of the alternative travel options to the London Underground.

3.3.1 Bus

Key Strengths	Weaknesses
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A “friendlier” way of travelling 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Relatively slow
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Easy to get off if busy or if there are problems 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Often a long waiting time for bus to arrive
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Calmer/less stressful journey 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Some drivers a bit scary
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Safety (at least in the daytime – driver ‘in charge’) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Routes less well known
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Less claustrophobic; not underground/can see around 	

“I’ve always found people are friendlier on the buses for some reason or other, on the underground I very rarely talk to anybody but on the bus, I’m happy to chat.”

(Green Park, Leisure Users)

3.3.2 Overground and National Rail

Key Strengths	Weaknesses
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Less claustrophobic 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Lack of Oyster compatibility
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Fast and direct (if timed right) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Delays (often perceived as having a greater impact than on Tube)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ‘Feels’ less packed (carriages were perceived to be larger and less full) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Irregularity of service and therefore having to time plan travel carefully

“The overground doesn’t actually cover the majority of London, it only covers certain areas; whereas the Underground actually pretty much connects most of London and you can pretty much get everywhere by underground now. Near where I live, there’s no overground.”

(Green Park Group, Leisure Users)

3.3.3 Taxi

Key Strengths	Weaknesses
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Personal 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Expensive (if alone)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Door to door 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Slow in rush hour or late at night in Central areas (e.g. Soho)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Cost effective in a group 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Safety concerns (for women)

“Cabs are great, but only if you’ve got people going in the same direction as you. Too expensive otherwise. Well, I say that, but the other good thing I guess is that you’re only going to get them when you’re half-cut so you don’t mind the cost so much!”

(Green Park Group, Commuters)

3.3.4 Car

Key Strengths	Weaknesses
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Personal 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Congestion charge
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Door to door 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Parking
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Available when you want it 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Petrol
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Easier to transport passengers and luggage (which makes it more cost effective) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Traffic (can be very slow)

“Driving’s only a realistic option at the weekend, and even then only if I’m feeling particularly lazy and the kids are coming with me. ... Even then, it’s toss of coin if I can park.”

(Bank Group, Commuters)

3.3.5 DLR

Key Strengths	Weaknesses
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reliable 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Suffered closures
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Open-air and more room (less congested) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Frustratingly frequent stops if in a rush (felt very regular)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Cost effective in a group (Note: this relates to group discount tickets which are no longer available) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Safety (for women)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Open later at night than the underground 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Poor communication about closures

“DLR give you no notice, no communications and you get off on the platform and on the weekend you find out ‘DLR’s not running’, so you transfer to Bank.”

(Wapping Group, Commuters)

3.3.6 Bicycle

Key Strengths	Weaknesses
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Door to door 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Not for everyone!
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fairly quick and reliable 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Weather dependent
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Economical 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Safety and security
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Breathing in pollution

“I don’t cycle because I just don’t feel it’s very safe.”

(Green Park Group, Leisure Users)

“A girl in our office has had 3 of her bicycles nicked so far!”

(Green Park Group, Commuters)

3.3.7 Walking

Key Strengths	Weaknesses
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Free! 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Only for short distances
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Healthy 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Safety (at night)

“I enjoy walking along the river, and it gives you a sense of where the stations are, how far you have to go between them. It’s good for general understanding of where things are in relation to each other in London.”

(Bank Group, Leisure Users)

3.3.8 Boat

Key Strengths	Weaknesses
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fun/novel 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cost (very expensive)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Scenic 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of regularity and coverage
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No traffic and reliable 	

“They need to make the river boats cheaper as well because it’s actually quite expensive, but if they made that a more reasonable price I think a lot more people would use it.”

(Green Park Group, Leisure Users)

3.4 Perceptions of Overcrowding

3.4.1 What is overcrowding?

- Across the sample overcrowding was related to loss of personal space, and the resultant discomfort experienced.
- Travellers felt that a carriage was overcrowded when they were so tightly packed that:
 - their personal body space was invaded and they could not move or turn around;
 - other peoples' bodies were involuntarily pressed into theirs in an uncomfortable, unpleasant and sometimes inappropriate manner; and
 - their bodies were contorted and forced into awkward positions in order to fit into the space available.

"Overcrowding to me is when you have to ask someone else to scratch your nose!"

(Canada Water Group, Commuters)

"It's overcrowded when somebody's under your armpit, I mean, what a ridiculous way to go to work."

(Bank Group, Commuters)

"Bad breath in your face. Too much knowledge about what that person had for dinner last night."

(Green Park Group, Commuters)

- **Extreme overcrowding** occurred when:
 - platforms were lined several people deep;
 - passengers forced their way onto already overcrowded trains increasing the level of crush for those already in the carriage;
 - people were unable to embark or disembark from carriages.

"If it was packed and you literally couldn't get on there, I'd see that as being overcrowded."

(Bank Group, Commuters)

"I've seen people trying to get on the train and it amazes me how they can like squeeze and push everyone like a sardine, do you know what I mean? ... like in a can ... It's amazing, amazing what I've seen."

(Green Park, Leisure Users)

"I once fainted standing up on the train, I was so packed in, I didn't fall! And that was really scary."

(Bank Group, Leisure Users)

- For most, **acceptably crowded trains** would allow those passengers who were standing:
 - to have their personal body space and not have others pressing up against them, and
 - to be able move about and enter and exit the carriage without difficulty.

"It's acceptable when you can stand up reasonably and you can swivel."

(Green Park Group, Leisure Users)

"Being able to read my paper. That's space."

(Bank Group, Commuters)

- There were indications that levels of tolerance of overcrowding varied. Some hardened rush hour travellers seemed capable of switching off and accepting the conditions on overcrowded Tubes with faces pressed into other people's armpits, bodies pressed up against them, unpleasant smells, etc.

"It's not pleasant, but I guess it's just part of commuting in London. I don't love it, it's not something I look forward to. But, it is something you just... I don't know... put up with. I don't really question it anymore."

(Green Park Group, Commuters)

"I've accepted the fact that because of the times I use it, it's always going to be crowded and I symbolise over-crowding by me not being able to get on at all."

(Bank Group, Commuters)

- At the other end of the spectrum some leisure travellers indicated that they had given up rush hour Tube travel, in part, because of the unpleasantness of overcrowding. Indeed, their definition of overcrowding nowadays tended to be an inability to get a seat or have sufficient room to read.

"When I did work in Westminster then I used to go into Pimlico and walk. I used to find it so overcrowded on the Central Line, it shocked me actually, it shocked me and it used to make me very anxious if I had to go that way, so I would actually go on the District line and add on 15/20 minutes because I just thought 'if this train gets stuck I might have a panic attack.'"

(Bank Group, Leisure Users)

“‘Standing comfortably’ is the ability for enough space to read your paper...yes, the ability to read your paper is probably the best example.”

(Green Park Group, Commuters)

“I would say that overcrowding is standing room only because when I get on the Tube I like to get a seat and if I can’t get a seat ... it makes it all together a much less enjoyable journey.”

(Green Park Group, Leisure Users)

- A segment of regular Tube commuters had some degree of control as to when they travelled and sought to avoid travelling at peak times if at all possible. They used their “flexi time” options to travel earlier or later and thus avoid the peak morning and evening rush hour.

*“Oh God, I’ll always go in early if I can, to avoid the crush!
There’s another benefit of being able to work from home!”*

(Canada Water Group, Commuters)

- Others simply had no alternative but to travel at peak times and had no option but to put up with and endure the conditions that prevailed on the way to and from work.

“You just have to use the Tube. There’s just no choice, there is no option .. well, there is an option; just don’t go to work but that’s not really an option!”

(Green Park Group, Commuters)

3.4.2 Impact of (overcrowded) Tube travel on passengers

- Tube travellers recognised that the experience of travelling on an overcrowded Tube was abnormal and involved sacrificing their personal space and allowing strangers to get close in a way that would not be acceptable in other circumstances.
- There was some suggestion that stepping onto a crowded Tube needed a degree of mental preparation; people “psyched themselves up” for the journey and in anticipation of a struggle to clamber on board.

“It really does build up rage because of the stress...especially if you are four deep on the platform and the train’s a minute away and you see everyone getting really tense and you know it’s just going to be a fight to get on.”

(Green Park Group, Leisure Users)

- Amongst some regular commuters there was open acknowledgement that the experience of travelling on overcrowded Tubes left them feeling tired and stressed out. It was suggested that for some it took an hour or two to calm down after commuter journeys.

"If we are saying the busiest part is in the morning then it's setting you up for the day in the wrong frame of mind...I mean it has a knock-on effect for the rest of your day."

(Bank Group, Commuters)

- There was also some acknowledgement that the pressure of Tube travel encouraged a "dog eat dog", "survival of the fittest" attitude. Some respondents openly acknowledged that they themselves suspended normal codes of behaviour when travelling on the Tube; if there was a seat they went after it regardless of who else might want it.

"It brings out my worst part. I don't care if you're young or you're old, whether you've got one leg or you've got no legs."

(Green Park Group, Leisure Users)

"It's survival of the fittest, 'if I catch this then I'll be just on time, if I catch the next one, I'm going to be late.'"

(Green Park Group, Leisure Users)

- There was also fairly regular recall of pregnant women and people carrying babies being ignored and not being given seats in crowded carriages.

"On the Central line, this evening coming here, there was a lady who was pregnant and I felt really sorry for her because it was a crowded train and she came on and she stood next to the glass thing because she couldn't really get into the carriageway and even if she did, I don't think anyone would have said 'have my seat'."

(Bank Group, Commuters)

- This research suggested that, at some level, regular rush hour travellers adapted to putting up with the stress of the journey by shutting down, going into an automatic pilot routine and also adopting a more ruthless and selfish approach to the travel task in hand and the world about them.

"I'm a different animal on the Tube to normal life. I'm not me. I'm a bit less interested in others."

(Green Park Group, Commuters)

- When on an overcrowded carriage, a variety of devices were used to make the “ordeal” more bearable:
 - going into a trance like state and shutting down – there was nothing that could be done about the situation, it just has to be endured;
 - closing eyes and imagining an empty carriage;
 - seeking to occupy particular parts of the carriage that gave some protection from others and access to fresh air;
 - using their arms and/or handbag to protect themselves/sensitive areas of their body;
 - facing away from other passengers (where possible);
 - using music (e.g. mp3 player) to block out and escape from the immediate noise and unpleasantness; and
 - reminding themselves that the journey would be over soon!

“The Tube is a place where you close down...most of the time you’re in your little bubble with the newspaper being used as a guard.”

(Bank Group, Commuters)

“When I get on the train, I stand, if it’s really overcrowded, I’ll stand facing the door in the crack and I’ve got my back to everyone else.”

(Bank Group, Commuters)

“You remind yourself, ‘it’ll be over soon...it’ll be over soon’...4 more stops...3 more stops.”

(Green Park Group, Commuters)

- There were signs that regular commuters acclimatised themselves to the stress of enforced “intimacy with strangers” that occurred more or less daily on the Tube. On the whole, travellers accept that the person pressing into their space on an overcrowded train was doing this involuntarily and against his or her will.
- Inevitably there are times when, rightly or not, people felt that the borderline of what was tolerable had been crossed. One young girl claimed that on occasions she had had men’s private parts pressed up against her. Conversely, men recalled being accused of taking liberties when they were in fact being involuntarily pressed up against a woman in the crush.

“I think men probably feel as embarrassed about it as you do when you’re rubbing up next to them.”

(Green Park Group, Commuters)

“You do get the impression that the woman you are accidentally pressed against thinks you want to do it, yet you’re actually trying to pull away! I can’t speak for the others but personally, you’re almost trying to look away, anywhere else!”

(Green Park Group, Commuters)

- Significantly, regular rush hour travellers had a routine way of getting through their journey to and from work and they were disproportionately irritated by others who did not know the rules and got in the way.
 - Tourists and travellers with cases and rucksacks were a particular source of irritation. Unlike the commuters, they did not know their routes and were less aware of etiquette. In general, tourists appeared to regular Tube users to be more flustered by rush hour Tube travel. A particular source of irritation to regular travellers was people wearing rucksacks in crowded Most commuters were using the Tube every day during the working week. The majority were using it at similar times both morning and evening to get to and from work. A requirement to be at work between 8.30 and 10.00am meant most were experienced at dealing with the hustle and bustle of peak hour travel – widely seen as the ‘crush’ time for overcrowded travel.
- Tubes and inadvertently bashing other passengers around.

“Everyone’s just rushing and obviously no one’s considerate enough to turn around and say ‘I’m sorry I hit you with my rucksack’, people aren’t very nice.”

(Green Park Group, Commuters)

- A potential source of tension in the overcrowded scenario were the unpleasant mouth odour and unwashed smells that were particularly nauseous when pressed up close to a stranger in a crowded carriage.
- Another potential flashpoint was passengers playing music too loudly (e.g. on an mp3 player). This could set off conflict especially when it was impossible to move away or the person refused to turn down the music.

“I always just like to mime ‘excuse me, can you turn that down?’ because I know they’re not going to hear me and they scream ‘what?!’, ‘can you turn it down?’ ”

(Green Park, Commuters)

- Sometimes passengers snapped when jostled or asked to move down the carriage. Incidents were recalled of people being quite unreasonable and aggressive in a way that added to the stress of travel.

“People are just rude; you say, ‘would you just mind moving down the train please’ and they look at you like you’re just mental and I know it’s a strange request but ‘can you move down?’ and the abuse that you get for just asking people to move down the carriage is unbelievable!”

(Green Park Group, Commuters)

- Interestingly, leisure travellers who had given up regular commuting said that they felt a lot more calm and relaxed now that they did not have to face the daily grind on the Tube. Although it was recognised that the two key rush hour periods had extended, overcrowding did not typically occur at off-peak times.

“In the 80s I knew when rush hour was, it was about 2 hours in the morning and about 2.5 hours in the evening and yes, people were very different but now rush hour seems to go on for about 20 hours!”

(Bank Group, Commuters)

- There were occasions when sports matches and other big events were taking place and trains were very packed, but in general it seemed that crowds attending such events were fairly good-natured. Other travellers living in the vicinity of major venues were aware of match days, and other big events, and timed their journeys to avoid the big crush.
- A few concerns were raised about the impact of overcrowding on passenger safety.

“It’s like when the buses are over-crowded, you’ve got the capacity there, how many standing, how many sitting – we’re such a health and safety driven nation, why aren’t they involved in Tubes?”

(Green Park Group, Leisure Users)

“I was on the Tube once, going to work, and it was very, very crowded and it was in the height of summer, so obviously it was very hot, and somebody had collapsed but because it was so crowded, they hadn’t actually fallen, they were kind of wedged in between two people and when it pulled into a station and the doors open, they kind of fell out (but not all the way!) and so what somebody did was kind of push them off onto the platform so that the Tube could get going ...”

(Bank Group, Commuters)

3.4.3 When and where does overcrowding occur?

- Some lines, such as the Central, Victoria, Jubilee and Northern were identified as being particularly prone to overcrowding. But overcrowding seemed to occur on most lines during rush hour.
- The morning rush hour seemed to be worse than the evening rush hour. Requirements to get to work by 9.00am or 9.30am meant that most opted to take the underground, which was seen as the fastest and most efficient mode of transport. However, this in turn created pressure points and bottlenecks, prompting overcrowding.

"My journey is hell both ways because obviously I go in peak times and I leave in the evening when everyone's going home, about 5.00 or 6.00pm. Sometimes, when I get to London Bridge in the mornings you have to queue up on the platform for like 3 or 4 trains to go by before you can get on a train. I have to leave really early because of that."

(Green Park Group, Commuters)

"Earls Court always seems to be the bottleneck, you get past Fulham Broadway and you're stopped and once you get into Earls Court you've got to wait for another train to leave the platform [and] cross your line before you go."

(Bank Group, Leisure Users)

- In contrast, the evening rush hour was more spread out, with people enjoying a greater degree of flexibility in terms of what time to be home or meet friends. Consequently there was less likelihood of Tube trains becoming packed quite as tightly as during morning rush hour.
- Some also speculated that after a day's work, tired and heading for home, commuters may be just more accepting of the pressure of overcrowding than in the morning when they were still half asleep and more resentful of indignities imposed by the crush of overcrowding.
- Other occasions when overcrowding might occur were:
 - Friday and Saturday nights on the last few Tubes;

"If it ran 24 hours then the problem of overcrowding would really be eased, there's so much of 'I've got to catch the last train' and there's only a few minutes to go and there's suddenly a mad rush."

(Green Park Group, Leisure Users)

- when services had been disrupted for some reason and the number of travellers had built up or passengers were using alternative routes;

"I remember in early 2003 there was the derailment on the Central line and it caused them to close half the Central line for about 4 weeks and you realised just how fragile the infrastructure is because suddenly every other Tube line was packed, even if it was nowhere near the Central line - that's all it needs, there are that many people using it."

(Bank Group, Commuters)

- special events such as football matches, concerts, festivals and other entertainments when large numbers of people were heading for particular destinations at a particular time.
- In general the Zone 1 area was perceived as more prone to overcrowding than elsewhere but the expectation was that particular lines were habitually overcrowded at peak times - Northern, Victoria, Jubilee and Central.
- Beyond this, overcrowding tended to be seen as worst in the vicinity of key interchange stations and where the Tube service connected with mainline services. The following stations were mentioned as particular 'black spots':
 - Bank
 - King's Cross
 - London Bridge
 - Oxford Circus
 - Liverpool Street
 - Victoria
 - Waterloo
 - Euston.

"I think wherever there's loads of other lines coming through that station, then loads of people are going to come in from other lines and change, that's when the overcrowding happens."

(Green Park Group, Commuters)

- In addition, key stations in the commuter suburb areas nearer the centre of London, such as Bethnal Green and Clapham, were seen as particularly challenging for accessing a Tube in the morning rush hour. As key stations prior to an interchange, (Liverpool Street and Stockwell, respectively) the trains tended to be at their most packed. People complained of having to let 4 or 5 trains go past before being able to squeeze into a carriage.

"I used to live in Bethnal Green and go to university in Holborn and it was really bad not knowing exactly what time you're going to be in every day. It's a 12 minute journey but I'd always allow 25 minutes because of the amount of trains that I'm likely to miss before I could actually get on one that'll take me."

(Green Park Group, Leisure Users)

“Clapham’s terrible. I have to accept it’ll be about 5 trains until I’ll squeeze on. Even then, I’ll probably be really uncomfortable or the door will shut on me or something.”

(Bank Group, Commuters)

3.4.4 Impact of overcrowding on travel planning and passenger journeys

- The Tube was recognised as the fastest, most reliable and efficient means of transport into the centre of and across London. Its benefits largely outweighed its drawbacks. Perhaps unsurprisingly, this was especially true for regular Tube commuters who regarded the Tube as a more or less essential means of getting to and from their place of work.
- Many of these respondents felt that they had no choice but to use the Tube if they wanted to get to work. Consequently, in order to get to work they had to accept the conditions that prevailed on the Tube.

“If I’m on and I’m squashed; well, at least I’m on.”

(Bank Group, Commuters)

- Amongst leisure users there were signs that the unpleasantness of Tube travel had been a factor in their deciding not to work in the city centre. They sought wherever possible to avoid travelling at peak times and when they anticipated that the trains would be overcrowded.

“I try to avoid certain times. It’s funny, I used to think overcrowding was being squashed like sardines, but now I’d see it as not getting a seat as long as I’m not travelling at certain times. I can’t believe I used to do that everyday. It feels strange to think about that now.”

(Green Park Group, Leisure Users)

“I recently decided that I’m going to avoid taking the Tube temporarily and just switch to buses, even if it means that I have to get up an hour and a half earlier just to get to where I want to because at least I know that if I get stuck in traffic I can just hop off and walk and I’ll have the fresh air and have that luxury.”

(Green Park Group, Leisure Users)

- Amongst those who could not avoid travelling at peak times, aside from strategies to make overcrowded carriages more bearable (section 3.4.2) some had adopted strategies to avoid the impact of the crush altogether. These included:
 - boarding the train at an earlier station in order to have a better chance of getting a seat (e.g. one person who lived between Stockwell and Brixton claimed to go ‘further out’ to Brixton to ensure she got a seat into Central London);

- taking the train in the opposite direction and then boarding one or two stops down the line in order to get a seat;
- recalling from experience where the doors to the carriages arrive and standing at the corresponding point on the platform;
- using alternative means of transport for part of their commute e.g. bus to work in the morning, Tube back in the evening;
- standing near seats (where possible) prior to popular interchange stations to try to get a seat; and
- positioning themselves in a manner that maximised personal space and ability to get off the train.

"Sometimes, if I'm up early enough, I'll choose to get the bus rather than take the Tube, just to avoid the crowds."

(Canada Water Group, Commuters)

"The really seasoned traveller, in a rush to get off, always tries to manoeuvre so they're against the glass, backs to the end of the seat, so that they're in a place where they can't be pushed up any further and as soon as the doors open they can get out without getting in everyone's way."

(Bank Group, Commuters)

"I'd get the Tube back two stops, to like Balham or Tooting - and then jump on. For me to get onto the Northern line that was the only way you could do it."

(Green Park Group, Leisure Users)

- Across the sample, there was anecdotal evidence of friends and colleagues who had completely given up using the Tube during the week and turned to other forms of transport such as walking, bike, bus and car. As discussed, frequently leisure users had also taken measures to avoid peak time travel.

"My friend just won't get the Tube if she can help it. Particularly, at rush hour, she'll do anything to avoid it, I think she just usually catches the bus instead."

(Canada Water Group, Commuters)

3.4.5 Perceptions of current actions by LU and staff to reduce impact of overcrowding

- The predominant view amongst these Tube travellers was that LU did not appear to do much to reduce overcrowding.

"Instead of just standing there, shouting, 'let the passengers off the train please', you know, 'mind the doors', they could actually be more proactive and actually be by the doors and say 'this carriage is full' or something like that – they're

monitoring it on CCTV anyway, I don't know why they can't just say."

(Green Park Group, Leisure Users)

- That said, a small minority had noticed measures that LU had taken to help alleviate the problem.

"When there's football or concerts they do lay on extra Metropolitan line trains but the whole of the area, the whole surrounding area, within about a 10 mile radius, in a circular fashion, all comes to a standstill and they have to lay on extra Jubilee line trains and loads of police, but they do try."

(Green Park, Leisure Users)

- It was appreciated that there was no easy solution to the problem and that the underground was always likely to be busy at rush hour.

"In truth, I don't think there is that much they can do because of the volume of people."

(Green Park Group, Commuters)

- It was observed that overcrowding was exacerbated by occurrences such as signal failures and shortage of drivers. Planned closures were also seen to exacerbate crowding on functioning lines:

"I think a lot of London revolves around a Tube station, so where people live and where people work tends to be around Tube stations or transport links, so then if you close them for any reason, you've got loads of people with problems; how do you get home or get to work? ... I think it definitely has an impact."

(Wapping Group, Commuters)

- Further, there was a general feeling that overcrowding would continue to occur in the longer term regardless of closures and upgrade work.

"I think they probably have been improving things but we don't notice it because there are so many people now in London that I don't think they can cope with the amount of people."

(Bank, Leisure Users)

- The key problem was seen as insufficient trains at peak times, allied to delays or unplanned irregularity of the service (e.g. signal problems). As a result of this, large numbers of passengers built up on platforms, ensuring that trains, when they came in, would become overcrowded.

- LU's apparent inability to deal with the central problem of providing a sufficient number of trains at peak times meant that other actions taken to alleviate overcrowding were, to a large extent, discounted and seen as insufficient.

"I don't think they actually care! I honestly don't think the people who run the underground give a toss about the passengers - they know we've got no other choice."

(Green Park, Commuters)

- LU's attempts to manage the overcrowding situation by announcements and platform staff made little impression and attracted little positive comment.

"A huge queue will form before the barriers regardless [of any measures to help]."

(Green Park, Commuters)

"London Underground does those things where it holds people in the ticket hall, they do that at London Bridge quite often and they say 'you've got to wait' and then they let you go but I don't know really what that does."

(Wapping Group, Commuters)

- There was some feeling that announcements about overcrowding on particular lines were inaccurate and could not be relied on.

"I think sometimes they're intentionally irritating on the Victoria line because they close the platform but you can see on the monitors outside the station that the platform's actually completely empty. They're just slightly delayed and dealing with it, so you could just walk straight up, go down the other entrance and walk for another 5 minutes but get down to the platform just as easily. There's some slight gap in communication - if you can see on the monitor what's going on better than the staff know, it's a problem!"

(Bank Group, Commuters)

- In addition, use of automated announcements about events contributing to or exacerbating overcrowding - such as delays caused by a person under a train on the line, were seen as a bit insensitive and inappropriate.
- Other criticisms were too many staff 'hanging around' at barriers and too few staff guiding passengers on the platforms or at key bottlenecks.

"At Whitechapel, you've got maybe four staff all gathering around the gates and then just one on the platform actually providing any useful information."

(Bank Group, Leisure Users)

3.4.6 Ideas for improving services: Overcrowding

- The central demand to overcome overcrowding was for more trains and a more regular service.

"I think the only solution that is viable is more trains and a more regular service, maybe literally every minute or every two."

(Green Park Group, Commuters)

- In addition, there were widespread requests for more information on alternative modes of transport and how and where these interconnected with the Tube. Users believed that as all services were TfL run, they ought to encourage use of alternative services to relieve pressure on the Tube and help people 'discover' and learn more about the alternative travel options available.

"I'd like them to be able to direct you to different services to avoid overcrowding. Like, if they told us 'get this bus and it'll take about 10 minutes longer, but they are usually less crowded.' I'd probably use that service then. But I just don't have the information."

(Canada Water Group, Commuters)

- Ideally, users wanted to see a reduction of unforeseen restrictions on service prompted by staff shortages and technical failures such as signal failures.

"'Signal failure' is a blanket excuse for a lot of things!"

(Bank Group, Leisure Users)

"How come most days they still have these problems. Maybe I'm an idealist, but I'd have thought all these engineering works would stop [signal failures] happening so much. Clearly not."

(Green Park Group, Commuters)

- The feeling was that LU should be able to give commuters more accurate and reliable information about the service, including better information about 'hotspots' for overcrowding at key points in the day to enable users to make an informed choice about whether to alter travel plans.

"I'd like text alerts saying 'overcrowding hotspots in last 20 minutes' or something. Just give me some warning. If it could also say, 'try this route instead' and give a timeline, then that would be ace."

(Bank Group, Commuters)

- There was some feeling that some of the announcements were muffled or hard to follow and delivered in a downbeat tone of voice.

"It might be crucial information, but if you can't understand a bloody word he's saying then it's not much good, is it?"

(Bank Group, Leisure Users)

- There was some recall of certain drivers and announcers who had an upbeat and sometimes mildly humorous approach to making announcements. Some felt this upbeat tone helped to lighten the travel experience and make passengers smile, even in packed rush-hour trains.

"I think it really helps when the voiceover, the person who's speaking, is lively and cracks a joke or something and everyone starts laughing and smiling – because I've heard train drivers say 'I've got to get home too, my wife's getting angry' or something like that. If he makes a joke it really does lighten up the mood in the carriage, even if it's packed."

(Green Park Group, Leisure Users)

- Other ideas for improving overcrowding and reducing its unpleasantness included:
 - improved air quality and ventilation,
 - access to phone and/or internet whilst travelling on the Tube,
 - being directed to emptier carriages,
 - carriages which were better designed for standing passengers (flip down seats), and
 - music in stations (to encourage calm).

"Southern Trains have these flip trains. I think it's Southern. Anyway, it means a seat when it's more empty and stand when it's more busy. Seems to work, makes more space, but most of the Tube system doesn't bother with it."

(Green Park Group, Commuters)

3.5 Perceptions of Planned Closures

3.5.1 Overall impact

- Overall, there was fairly widespread puzzlement that, as London is one of the world's busiest cities, financial centres and tourist destinations, the Tube network suffered from such frequent and multitudinous disruptions to its service.
- Most felt planned disruptions had got worse recently both in terms of the frequency and extent of disruption to travel plans caused by line closures, particularly at weekends.

"I've been in London about 9 years and I don't ever remember it being as bad 8 or 9 years ago, as it is now, like you're saying, every weekend there's something down and I don't really remember it ever being that bad."

(Wapping Group, Commuters)

- There was an impression that the impact of service disruption was made worse by multiple, simultaneous line closures, which many felt were happening more often nowadays.

"Just recently it feels like most of the network isn't running at the weekends. It's probably an exaggeration, but it feels like that."

(Green Park Group, Leisure Users)

"I've given up trying to get a Tube at the weekends. As far as I can tell, the Jubilee Line's never working anyway."

(Canada Water Group, Commuters)

"'Engineering works'; I've got to the stage where I know most weekends it's going to happen, that there's going to be something and I won't be able to use it."

(Bank Group, Commuters)

- It was interesting to note that many of those most regularly affected by planned disruption had either signed up for TfL travel alerts/emails or checked the Metro newspaper to see if their lines were affected by closures each weekend. There was fairly extensive positive comment about the text alert services advising travellers about the service on routes they used regularly. This gave them the opportunity to adapt their travel plans in the light of possible delays and problems with their journey. Likewise some travellers went online to check the service before setting out on their journey.

"It's become habit really, to check the internet before heading out [at the weekend]. The TfL website."

(Green Park Group, Leisure Users)

- More generally, due to the extent of closures, many now simply expected some kind of disruption at weekends and therefore tended to allow more time for journeys.
- Nonetheless, many admitted to being caught out by closures i.e. turning up to a station to find it shut. This was more likely to occur if they were:
 - travelling on a line used infrequently (they were only likely to seek regular alerts/emails related to lines they use regularly)
 - not in receipt of travel alerts
 - less regular users of Tubes either:
 - during the week – e.g. leisure users not exposed to announcements and board warnings, or
 - at weekends – if patterns of weekend leisure usage were more sporadic they increased their chances of being caught out. Indeed, some noted that closures seemed unpredictable.

"I usually use the Northern and Piccadilly lines, but I went to places on the Victoria line a few times last year in the evening and couldn't get it. You don't get warnings about other lines, just the ones you usually use."

(Bank Group, Commuters)

"I've been caught out before [by closures], where I've gone somewhere and okay, the poster's there but I haven't heard about it beforehand."

(Bank Group, Commuters)

- The key irritations about planned closures were:
 - **Longer travel time:** although most were able to cope with this at the weekend, when they were less likely to have time-critical appointments, slowing peoples' journeys home through weekday evening disruption caused more immediate upset
 - **'Broken' journeys:** the stop-start nature of using different modes of transport to get from A to B could add to the stress of travel; interestingly, there was more desire for a stress-free journey at the weekend ('in my time') than during the week.
 - **Paying for a substandard service:** many queried why they should be paying full fares (or sometimes more if travelling by alternative modes) for a part-functioning service.

"I fail to see why we should pay for the service at the same, and in some cases more expensive levels. If you have to get overground services it costs more. I think weekend prices should just be lower, full-stop, at the moment."

(Green Park Group, Leisure Users)

3.5.2 Impact of weekend closures

- Those regularly using the Jubilee and Victoria lines (and to a lesser extent those using the District, Hammersmith and City and Bakerloo lines) were more likely spontaneously to raise the issue of regular weekend disruption.
- Respondents felt that two particular issues compounded the impact of planned disruptions:
 - **multiple line closures** which could make some journeys particularly taxing and might make 'non-essential' travel seem like too much hassle
 - **closures coinciding with big events** including sporting events (access to particular stadiums becoming trickier due to line closures e.g. Victoria line for Tottenham Hotspur) and concerts. In particular, the closures affecting travel to the O₂ Arena were regarded as particularly disruptive given the perceived lack of satisfactory alternative travel options. One or two claimed to have got rid of tickets for concerts at the O₂ Arena rather than face the travel to and from the venue with no Jubilee line service.

"The O₂ is one of the biggest arenas in the world and they can't even provide a public transport system to it, which is pathetic!"

(Bank Group, Commuters)

"They [LU] could think 'if someone lives there and they're getting to there, how are they going to do that if 3 lines are down?'"

(Green Park Group, Commuters)

- A further issue was the impact of closures on local businesses. Line closures unduly affected the flow of people in some areas, with the result that some local businesses were losing customers.

"My husband told me that his sales are significantly down when the District line has weekend engineering works. I have suggested that he and fellow retailers take the matter up with their MP."

(Green Park Group, Leisure Users)

- Those living in areas where there were few 'alternative' travel options in the event of line closures felt the impact of weekend closures most keenly. In our sample this included:
 - East London: Hammersmith & City and District line closures (Whitechapel); Victoria Line (Walthamstow)
 - South East London: Jubilee line closures (in particular, North Greenwich and Canada Water)
 - South London: Victoria line closures (especially Brixton, also Vauxhall).
- Closures tended to elicit two contrasting responses from travellers:
 - 'fight it': exploring the alternative options and allowing more time for travel in any plans made or adjusting the time of their rendezvous. Such reactions were more likely if confronted by disruptions en route.
 - 'give up': rearrange plans or simply cancel. This response was more likely where multiple line closures were likely to impact on travel plans (e.g. getting to St Johns Wood from Brixton when both Victoria and Jubilee lines were down)

"I was staying over at my friend's in Elephant and Castle and I wanted to meet somebody at Regents Park. I looked at the Tube closures and I had to say 'sorry, I can't do it' and that's the first time I've ever had to cancel what I'd planned on doing because I couldn't think of a feasible way to get there and back".

(Green Park Group, Leisure Users)

"I got off [the overground] at Vauxhall and found the Victoria line wasn't working. I wish they'd say on the trains, the overground trains. But they don't. So I just got a bus to Waterloo. But it's just a pain. Lost time, and lots of forms of transport. I guess what really gets me is that it's all the bloody time now and I still didn't plan ahead!"

(Bank Group, Leisure Users)

3.5.3 Impact of evening closures

- Interestingly, although spontaneously raised in all groups, the 10.00pm closures appeared to have had less impact on travel plans than weekend closures.
- That said, many leisure and commuter Tube users admitted to having been 'caught out' by evening closures, usually after an evening out in Central London.

*"You get to the Tube and think 's*it'. It's worse if there's loads of other people around that have done the same thing. Then the buses get unbearable too."*

(Bank Group, Leisure Users)

- In particular, the 10.00pm service closures could catch out service users if they were not regular users of the affected lines.
- However, the impact was often lessened when travelling in Zone 1 compared with outer Zones because most people felt there were usually other station options within walking distance (or a short other bus/cab ride).

"I do think that you tend to get caught out in town and that's not so bad, you just wander off to the next nearest working Tube. Get as far as you can before you get the bus."

(Green Park Group, Commuters)

- Another factor which helped to reduce the adverse impact of 10.00pm closures was their predictability (at least for those who regularly experienced closures on their key line).

"At least I get used to the 10.00pm thing. You know it's going to happen, you get used to it and you plan around it."

(Green Park Group, Commuters)

- Some indicated that they had adapted their social lives during the week to avoid going out in Central London at night and tried to socialise nearer to home as much as possible.
- Those most affected by 10.00pm closures were those who had no other obvious 'alternative' line options to get them to their destinations e.g. closure of Clapham stations on the Northern line.

3.5.4 Alternative methods of transport in the event of planned closures

- In the cases of both weekend and evening closures, the impact of the disruption tended to depend on the ease of accessing alternative means of travel.
- The performance of alternative service options was seen as acceptable, with fairly widespread acknowledgement that both the rail replacement buses and the regular bus network offered fairly regular and inexpensive options. However, they were perceived as slow, time-inefficient options, particularly over longer distances and for people feeling stranded when multiple lines were down.
- The most frequently used 'alternative' travel options were:
 - **Rail replacement buses:** a possible alternative to get them to the nearest 'working' station, or if no other options were imminent. However, most users claimed to use the service for only one or two station stops until they could connect to a working Tube line or station. The replacement buses were considered a much slower compensatory method of travel. Moreover, it was also commented that it could be difficult to reach a desired destination by replacement

bus alone; often the service did not cover the whole of the affected line. This resulted in disconnected, fragmented journeys as people switched to other methods of transport. However, a few respondents, particularly students appreciated that the services was free.

“I like that fact it’s free. It’s a little victory for us poor suffering Londoners! But it’s not always clear where you get them from.”

(Green Park Group, Leisure Users)

“I’d rather just get on a bus that takes me to Warren Street, to be honest, but it only goes to Victoria. So I can’t be bothered, and I might as well get the Tube where I can. That whole chopping and changing transport makes it all an effort.”

(Green Park Group, Commuters)

- **Buses:** tended to be perceived as less ‘busy’ than rail replacement buses. They were sometimes a revelation for those who had been forced to use the bus service for the first time in years. In this case, most were impressed with the efficiency of the service, although willingness to accept the usually longer journey time of buses was greater at weekends when most did not have urgent or pressing appointments. However, there was some unease about using later services due to safety concerns and, in particular, there were a number of anecdotes about unsavoury characters using the night bus service.

“During the night, if I get the 30 bus it goes down Kings Cross and Euston and there are loads of hobos and crazy people. On the Tube there’s rarely any of that and I feel safer than walking on the street.”

(Wapping Group, Commuters)

“I think it is slower but I think the perception is that it’s a lot slower than it actually is ... it is longer but there’s not as much in it as people think.”

(Bank Group, Commuters)

“I discovered the 133 bus due to these closures. It’s great. It’s hardly any different to the Tube to be honest. I feel lucky it’s there.”

(Bank Group, Leisure Users)

- **Taxi cabs:** used most typically in the evenings or at weekends. Taxis were considered a more viable alternative when travelling in a group, otherwise it was seen as potentially too expensive. A few females also had concerns about mini-cab safety if travelling alone.

"I think it's getting better, but I just worry about cabs sometimes. It's all right if you're in a group."

(Bank Group, Commuters)

- **Walking to the nearest Tube:** an option exercised by surprisingly few, and usually those more confident about the layout of central London. It was suggested that there was very little guidance or indication of how close Tube stations were to each other. In the evenings, there were some safety concerns about walking in the dark.

"Funnily enough, walking is quite a good alternative and the one thing I don't like about the Tube is that whilst it has one of the best designed maps in the world, it doesn't necessarily reflect the fact that several Tube stations are 100 yards away from each other!"

(Bank Group, Commuters)

- Where available, the **overground** service represented a fast and satisfactory alternative to get to and from central areas. Although, for Pay As You Go Oyster users, the service seemed more expensive than the Tube and the 'rules' of usage could catch them out (e.g. walking through the barriers at Herne Hill with Oyster and getting stuck trying to exit the barriers at Victoria)
- A minority of respondents, and particularly those with family, were inclined to use the **car** at weekends to get around. The roads were perceived to be less crowded and there was no congestion charge.

3.5.4 Expectations with regard to planned closures

- In terms of people's expectations of planned closures, most service users claimed to accept a degree of disruption if it was for the greater benefit of long term improvement of the network.
- However, when disruption occurred they expected the following:
 - **Sufficient and widespread notice:** although announcements and notice boards did a job, there were many instances of warnings being missed indicating that such communications were by no means a perfect solution. Other suggestions for more widespread notice included 'forecast' bulletins on local TV news (for less regular travellers); regular electronic warnings throughout the network (e.g. on electronic advertising screens); paper warnings (ads throughout carriages in designated ad spaces, outer 'wrap' adverts on free newspapers); and announcement throughout overground and bus services too.

“At my DLR station they’ve actually got a list of all the closures up until the end of November, so I’ve got that in my phone, so now my question is ‘when will the Jubilee line be open?’. So if they just had a list of all the dates until the end of the year then you can plan.”

(Green Park Group, Leisure Users)

- **Logical planning:** particularly better planning around big events, and ensuring that multiple line closures will not heavily impact on travel planning. It was also suggested that LU’s idea of planning around ‘big events’ was too subjective, with people having suffered from lack of service to premiership football grounds and international cricket matches as well as popular concerts.

“Honestly, they just don’t prepare for big events at all, do they? How ridiculous is it, to close lines around the O2 and offer no suitable alternatives?”

(Canada Water Group, Commuters)

- **More clearly ‘patterned’ closures:** some believed that closures to their lines were not predictable and therefore found it hard ‘mentally’ to plan for disruption e.g. ‘is it Saturday or Sunday service closure this week, or is it both?’. A few acknowledged this was more difficult to achieve when trying to be more flexible about closures around big events.
- **Effective alternatives:** although the reliability of alternative transport was largely acceptable, some wanted better directions to alternative services from the station (including leaflets and maps) and a more comprehensive guide to aid travel to specific destinations e.g. ‘the quickest alternative route to xxx is...’

“They used to have local maps, I don’t think they do them any more- they used to be on the wall, ‘continuing your journey’, I think it was called.”

(Bank Group, Commuters)

- **Sticking to timetables:** Victoria line users were particularly keen to point out their frustration at ‘changing’ timetables for closures, citing the perceived ‘sudden’ announcement of further disruption to services early in 2008 following extensive closure to services throughout 2007; more honesty about slipping timetables and future plans would be appreciated to enable people to consider their options e.g. renewing leases on rental contracts.

“A friend of mine used to live in West Hampstead, on the Jubilee line ... she’d want to come to London Bridge and she actually moved because every Saturday the Jubilee line was down, so she was taking like an hour and a half to get there when it normally took half an hour and she actually moved because of that, because she was just so sick of it.”

(Wapping Group, Commuters)

“I haven’t heard anything about the Piccadilly Line! That will affect Heathrow! The airport is just so important, that is really the main airport, you can’t just say ‘oh sorry, we’ve got to do the Piccadilly line’ and forget about it.”

(Green Park, Group, Commuters)

“You can’t trust that it will be closed for two weeks because it always overruns”.

(Green Park Group, Leisure Users)

3.6 Perceptions of Block Closures

3.6.1 Overview

- Those living, working or travelling through East London had suffered particularly from service disruption, specifically the long-term block closure of the East London line.
- Although widely regarded as a nuisance, reaction to the closure was relatively passive and accepting. Most people affected by the closure took a fairly accepting view of this disruption as 'one of those things'. Many took a long term view expecting that the service would be improved by extending the line south and providing better links in the north to areas such as Islington.

"It's not ideal, but if the benefits are there to be seen, you accept it. I think it should be a really good thing, and now it's only a year away it doesn't feel like it's a long way off."

(Wapping Group, Commuters)

- All those affected by the East London line closures expressed eagerness to return to using the system when it opened assuming it was quicker (and not a lot more expensive) than the alternatives they were now using.

"I would have moved if it wasn't re-opening. I'm looking forward to being able to go to places like Crystal Palace. ... I'm assuming it'll be normal Underground prices."

(Wapping Group, Commuters)

3.6.2 Impact of block closures

- The main impact of block closures included:
 - Positively, greater 'discovery' of, and investment in, alternative means of travel. These methods included using the London Bus service more extensively whilst a select few had discovered the River Boat service. A few had bought a bicycle for travel to and from work

"I love the boat service. It's just too expensive. ... I've also bought a bike to get across the bridge, and that's generally good unless you decide to go out in the evening. Then I worry it won't be there the next day."

(Wapping Group, Commuters)

- But more negatively:
 - Lengthening most, if not all travel times – although initially frustrating, most appeared to have adjusted to longer travel time expectations and adapted to this.
 - More ‘broken’ journeys – i.e. the increased use of multiple forms of transport to complete journeys previously achievable via one Tube line alone. The added stress of travel meant that some respondents had subsequently made changes to where they worked or lived.

“It was a bit of a nightmare to get here this morning because otherwise I’d have to go to London Bridge, then cross the river and then come east again, so I just came on my bicycle (through the tunnel), which wasn’t really very nice but it was very quick because it’s just a nightmare to cross the river with public transport. There’s nothing now, now we don’t have the East London line and there’s no rail replacement that goes through the tunnel.”

(Wapping Group, Commuters)

“I worked over in the East End (E16) and where I am is about as far on the other side of London as you could get and the journey sometimes took me up to 2 hours, sometimes 3, so that was 6 hours travel a day. So I couldn’t take it any more, I had to leave my job and get a new client that was nearer, so I could cope.”

(Green Park Group, Commuters)

- Less inclination to travel to East and South London because it took too long, especially if compounded by Jubilee line or DLR closures.

“I was slightly frustrated because it takes so much longer to travel to uni since the East London line closed.”

(Wapping Group, Commuters)

“The East End of London is particularly hard to get to ... I tend to use the boat a lot at weekends now because it’s the only way of getting to and from, but they’re even more expensive than the Tube.”

(Bank Group, Commuters)

“I think that’s the thing with the East London line, is they did do some replacement bus services, although they’re phasing some out now. But they didn’t actually replace the entire line, so it’s not possible to get from Rotherhithe to Wapping because you’ve got to go into London Bridge, then over, then round, or some other way. It’s not exactly seamless!”

(Wapping Group, Commuters)

- Acceptability of block closures increased if there was provision of efficient, affordable and convenient alternatives. For most in our sample, the alternative options for travel to and from areas covered by the East London line included the DLR and local bus services. Only when the Jubilee line was closed were interchange links seriously disrupted.
- Local bus services were perceived as having increased in frequency as a result of East London line closures, although one or two expressed irritation at the perceived inefficiency of the replacement bus service because it could not go through the Rotherhithe Tunnel, further delaying travel times.

"It's just a nightmare to cross the river with public transport, there's nothing now, now we don't have the East London line and there's no rail replacement that goes through the Rotherhithe tunnel."

(Wapping Group, Commuters)

- There was also a clear distinction between disruptions caused by what was regarded as potentially 'useful' improvements and more 'frustrating' disruptions caused by general infrastructure upgrades e.g. minor repairs to station escalators, etc.
- Most had adjusted fairly well to life without the East London line, and due to the length of time it had been closed had become accustomed to using alternative travel options (mostly DLR but ranging from using more buses to cycling or even using the River Boat to get to and from South London).

"You have to adapt - what are you going to do, you're not going to just not go to work."

(Bank Group, Commuters)

- The consistent lack of service meant there was far higher awareness of the closure and the reasons for the disruption. As a result, the closure became more bearable since the disruption was predictable and alternative routes became more familiar.
- That said, when faced hypothetically with the idea of the East London line never re-opening, many claimed they would re-think their working or living options. Most were very keen for the service to re-open and looked forward to the re-introduction of the service, widely expected to start next year.
- Blackfriars station was the other 'block' closure widely mentioned. Those who had used the overground station as a link to the Underground were likely to 'divert' their journey where possible to London Bridge to re-establish a link to the Underground. There were indications that a few at the Wapping group were positive about developments at Blackfriars, and that the station refurbishments were welcomed.

“To be honest, closing Blackfriars hasn’t affected me too much. There are other stations close by that you can walk to.”

(Canada Water Group, Commuters)

3.6.3 Expectations with regard to block closures

- Most expectations with regard to block closures came from the Wapping Group, although a few affected by closures to Blackfriars (and historically Mornington Crescent) were also able to offer ideas.
- Expectations of block closures included:
 - *Clear justification for closures:* long term block closures appeared to be better received when the reasons for closure and depiction of likely changes were well advertised.
 - *Sufficient notice of closure dates:* to allow people to plan alternative routes and necessary adjustments to travel.
 - *Regular updates on progress:* there were a few calls for periodic ‘where we’ve got to’ updates to reassure users that works were progressing as expected.
 - *Early warning of delays to completion of work:* allowing people to adjust expectations and avoiding cynicism caused by continual delays (i.e. the ‘Wembley stadium’ effect).

Interestingly, there was a fairly widespread feeling that one shorter period of block closure was more manageable and easier to cope with than months or even years of periodic planned disruption. This was largely due to the frustration and stress caused by the seemingly unpredictable nature of periodic closures, and high numbers of people ‘caught out’ by weekend and evening line closures.

- Many claimed to find it easier to find a way round a consistent problem (i.e. adapt) than to have to continually change and adjust travel plans.

“It’s like we’re kind of used to it. We expect it, so you work your way round it. It’s kind of worse when it surprises you. This has been years, so it’s easier. If that makes sense?!”

(Wapping Group, Commuters)

- That said, there was perceived to be a limit to the length of an acceptable block closure (usually ranging from two weeks to a month).

“I wouldn’t want a permanent closure to last months and months, but a short sharp closure is something I think people would accept. It’s somehow less disruptive.”

(Green Park Group, Leisure Users)

“You know, the East London line has been closed for ages now, hasn’t it? You do work around it, but you do wonder how long they need to make these improvements.”

(Canada Water Group, Commuters)

- It was also widely acknowledged that block closures of many months would have a far more detrimental effect on travel in areas where there were limited alternative Tube line options (e.g. Northern line and parts of the Victoria line). For example, one or two service users living in areas further out such as Wimbledon or Clapham felt that block closures would be more difficult to handle than those living in, or on, the cusp of Zone 1.

“If you’re in a dense area where there’s loads of other different Tube stations like within a mile radius, that would be fine but closures can be really difficult to manage if you’re somewhere where there’s one Tube station and the next Tube station’s 10 miles away.”

(Green Park Group, Leisure Users)

3.7 Perceptions of Likely Impact of Piccadilly Line Closures

- At least one or two service users at all groups (and a few more at Green Park groups) are to be affected by the proposed future closures to the Piccadilly line.
- No one was aware of these future closures. As a result there was some consternation at the lack of information about these plans, and the fact that announcements about these closures had so far not been forthcoming from London Underground.
- Primary concerns about the closures centered on two issues:
 - travel to and from home (especially if there was no other direct station options e.g. Caledonian Road), and
 - getting to Heathrow airport (for many, it was claimed that the Piccadilly line was the default method of travel to and from the airport). Alternative methods of travel such as the Heathrow Express were seen as prohibitively expensive and less accessible.

*“So they’re forcing us to use a more expensive alternative that’s a pain in the a*se to get to? They ought to subsidise the cost (of the Heathrow Express) on weekends the line’s shut.”*

(Green Park, Leisure Users)

“That will look great for people visiting the UK, won’t it. Get off the plane at Heathrow and you can’t get the world famous Tube into London ... London, next Olympic city. We’re an embarrassment.”

(Bank Group, Commuters)

- In addition, there were concerns about the potentially ‘unpredictable’ nature of closures, e.g. when booking airline tickets for a long-haul flight several months ahead, it was not clear whether closures would affect a journey to and from the airport.
- More generally, there was some concern that yet another underground line largely seen as reliable and fast was going to be subject to frequent closures.

“I can’t ever get my head round this, but the good lines, the fast lines are the ones that seem to suffer most. Why is that? I wish I understood why. This is more evidence of it.”

(Wapping Group, Commuters)

- Several service users in each group voiced minor concerns about disruptions to regular line usage, although for travel to and from Central London many claimed there were usually alternative options available (e.g. the District line in South/West London; Victoria line in North/East London).

- A small minority was rather more concerned about the possible disruption that Piccadilly line closures may cause, and claimed they would avoid moving to property in areas close to Piccadilly line stations.

"I'm going to seriously have to consider whether or not I move to Caledonian Road now. I was planning to, to be with my boyfriend, but I may suggest we both have a re-think about where we live."

(Bank Group, Commuters)

- A few also claimed they may try to alter future travel plans in order to avoid travelling via Heathrow.

3.8 Reaction to Reasons and Justifications Offered for Closures

3.8.1 Overview

- Most were bemused by the extent of line and station closures and found the situation irritating.
- Most learned about closures through information relayed on station notice boards, free papers, announcements, experience and the TfL website/email alerts.
- There was a general feeling that the London Underground did not provide sufficient information about why stations and/or lines were closed. It was felt that terms such as “engineering works” were too generic and did not relay enough meaningful detail about the developments that were taking place.

“I think when they use the terms like ‘maintenance work’ or ‘engineering work’, I don’t really know what that means, other than making it better, it’s never explicit what they’re actually doing”

(Wapping Group, Commuters)

“I see little posters saying ‘we are trying to upgrade this by then’, but it doesn’t really mean anything to me.”

(Bank Group, Commuters)

- There was a call for more open and honest information. It was felt that timetables should be abided by; irritation was caused by promising to open a station or line and failing to meet such targets.
- Pertinently, there was some suggestion that a greater level of information could help to placate passengers’ irritation.

3.8.2 Reactions to reasons and justifications for closures

- However, when information was sufficiently relayed, some explanations were seen as more valid and acceptable than others.
- Explanations tended to be more “acceptable” when it was understood that developments and engineering processes were unavoidable and that the system would be greatly improved once completed.

“I can’t stand the [East London] lines being shut but the plans look amazing, I think it’s going to look so good, it’s going to be absolutely amazing when it’s done”

(Wapping Group, Commuters)

- There was a general understanding that there is a need to improve an ageing system.
- Some commented spontaneously that they thought the forthcoming London Olympic and Paralympic Games were the principal reason behind the line closures. Others, however, were less sure about its influence on the disruptions. As a possible explanation, this prompted a mixed response. Those who were more interested in 2012 tended to accept this argument as a realistic justification, whilst others were less convinced.

“Sometimes in interviews they say that their doing the works for the Olympics but it doesn’t really sink in...it depends how interested you are in London 2012...I’m not!”

(Bank Group, Commuters)

“If they’ve got all this extra money from central Government to invest in transport they should invest in the day to day stuff, not just for the Olympics. London’s got like 30 million people or something like that and there’s going to be like 20,000 tourists that’s going to come to 2012; why should they be worth so much more than us who live and work here and pay our taxes here?”

(Green Park Group, Leisure Users)

- It was widely felt that the least acceptable explanations for line and station closures were seemingly minor engineering developments. Lift and escalator improvements were not seen as justifiable reasons for closing a station (particularly for extended periods). It was unclear why entire stations had to be closed in order to carry out such works.
- Although there was some appreciation that works were necessary, those most affected by the ongoing closures found it hard to accept that disruptions were for the “long term good.” This was felt particularly by those working in London temporarily who were suffering the short-term pain of closures and unlikely to benefit from the long term, future improvements.

“They could at least say ‘your sacrifice for future generations’ and give you some discount on travel.”

(Wapping Group, Commuters)

“We just have to put up with it, unless the line is completely upgraded, by which time we’ll probably all be dead!”

(Green Park Group, Leisure Users)

- There was some feeling by those living in East London that the region was generally less catered for and received less funding than other areas of London. The apparent lack of information about the prolonged closure of the East London line was seen to compound this belief.

“I’m sure it will be great when it’s finished but for a line to be closed for like years!? And I’m sure if it was on the Northern line people would be doing a petition or complaining or something but, you know, South East London, they just don’t really seem to care about us and they just think ‘oh, they don’t really need their Tube, we’ll just close it for like 3 years!’”

(Wapping Group, Commuters)

3.8.3 Key concerns and queries

- It was not generally understood why the newest and seemingly “most efficient” lines were seen to be most affected by closures (both in terms of frequency and duration). The consistent closure of the Jubilee line at weekends and the early evening closures of the Victoria line prompted degrees of bewilderment.
- Similarly, it was not only a shock to many to learn about the planned closures on the Piccadilly line next year, but there was also puzzlement as to why such extensive engineering works would need to take place.
- There was also widespread speculation as to why more engineering works could not take place at night. Although some were aware that engineering works did take place at night, others were not. Those unaware demanded that works should take place at night whilst others commented that the frequency of daytime closures suggested the night-time works were ineffective.
- It was questioned why alternative services were not subsidised at weekends or after 10.00pm during periods of disruption. This was felt particularly by those who bought periodic travel cards and those who felt their travel was severely hampered during the weekends.