

**Transport Committee  
9 September 2010**

**Transcript of Item 6: Update on Incident Involving an Engineering Train on the Northern Line**

**Valerie Shawcross (Chair):** I am very grateful to Richard Parry from London Underground for joining us this afternoon. We asked Richard if he would make some introductory comments on the incident concerning the engineering train which ran uncontrolled on the Northern line on 13 August 2010 because we are, of course, concerned about safety on the Tube but, of course, yesterday there was apparently an issue affecting a train and the track on the Hammersmith and City line (which was probably due to a signalling incident). So, I think it would be helpful if Richard could give us some basic facts around both of these incidents. I think Members would have some questions that we would like to ask you on these matters.

**Richard Parry (Strategy and Commercial Director, London Underground):** I'll talk about the Northern Line incident first. By way of introduction, of course this is a very serious incident on the Underground. As is the case with any such rare incident on the Underground there will be a very thorough investigation, both our own and by the Rail Accident Investigation Branch (RAIB). Our investigation is expected to run for around another two months or so to report in November 2010. Whilst I can give a kind of description of what we understand on the incident and a little bit about the scope of that investigation, I am not able today to say what that investigation will lead us to find. Obviously, it is vital, in learning lessons from incidents of this sort, that we do get to the root cause of the incident and ensure that we take the steps necessary to prevent its reoccurrence.

By way of giving you a description of the incident - and I know much of this has been in the public domain - but I will just make sure to put it all on the record. In the early morning of Friday, 13 August 2010 a rail grinding train had been undertaking maintenance on the track in the Archway area of the Northern line. The rail grinding process is whereby we profile the rail to improve the wheel/rail interface and improve the maintenance of the track; so that was the purpose of the work. That rail grinding train is a train that was provided by a subcontractor to Tube Lines, a company called Schweerbau; it is a train operating across the Underground network but also operates across Europe (Schweerbau being a German company).

Around four o'clock that rail grinding train suffered a power failure. The subcontractor and Tube Lines were unable to move the train. As the minutes passed it became important to move the train, obviously, off of the running line of the Northern line so we could resume service. As per the operational plan, arrangements were made to bring a Northern line passenger train to the location of the failed engineering train. That train was coupled to the passenger train to then pull it to a safe place away from the main running line so that we could resume service.

The coupling was successfully achieved at around 6.30 am on Friday. The two trains, coupled together, moved off and travelled, we think, something like a kilometre, perhaps a kilometre and a half, north on the Northern line going past Highgate Station. Around 6.45 am, perhaps something before that, the coupling failed and the rail grinding train then rolled southbound before coming to a stop at Warren Street Station. As has been reported elsewhere, very swift action by the Northern line service control team, observing what was happening, ensured that passenger trains ahead of the engineering train were routed out of the way. They non-stopped the one train immediately in front of the engineering train and diverted that down the Bank branch whilst then setting the points to send the engineering train down the Charing Cross branch, which had, prior to that, already been cleared of passenger trains. The train then came to a halt having past through a set of points at Mornington Crescent Station that were deliberately thrown against the train to slow it down and then came to a halt at Warren Street Station.

The incident was immediately reported to the RAIB, the accident investigators, and the Office of Rail Regulation (ORR), the safety regulator. They both attended the site along, of course, with London Underground and Tube Lines staff. Over the course of the rest of that day that investigation continued and services were eventually resumed across the entire Northern line around 6.00 pm.

The rail grinding train concerned was subject to an immediate prohibition notice served by London Underground preventing its use on the Underground until further notice. The ORR also issued a prohibition notice to Tube Lines preventing the use of the rail grinding train without either some form of effective braking system or a braking vehicle at either end, and that remains the position now. The specific train is effectively quarantined and prohibition notices are still in place.

The formal investigation that we are undertaking is now under way. That will be focusing on the original approvals process for both the coupler and the rail grinding train itself, their design and operation. This train has been in use on the Underground network since around 2002 when it was first approved but, as I say, it is in use across Europe on other railways. We will also be looking in the investigation at the suitability of the operational safety plan, the suitability of the emergency and recovery plans for the train, the immediate response by both the London Underground and Tube Lines, and looking at a structural engineering assessment regarding the strength of the coupler and the forces it was subjected to during its use. Of course, we will also be looking across the history of any such similar incidents on the Underground, or indeed on any other systems, where this machine is used or other similar machines.

Clearly, that investigation is involving all the relevant specialist engineering and other advisers. It will also use train investigators with the involvement of union health and safety representatives from London Underground and Tube Lines, drawing, of course, on interviews with those involved, any closed circuit television footage, any radio recordings, data from the train etc. That investigation is underway and we would expect to have, as I said, our findings by the end of November 2010. The RAIB never give a commitment for their timescale but we can be sure they will also be working diligently and meticulously to come up with their own findings.

**Valerie Shawcross (Chair):** Would you take a couple of questions, Richard, before we move on?

**Richard Parry (Strategy and Commercial Director, London Underground):** Yes, sure.

**Valerie Shawcross (Chair):** Firstly, can I clarify was it London Underground who was responsible for the operation of this engineering train? Whose responsibility was this procedure?

**Richard Parry (Strategy and Commercial Director, London Underground):** Ultimately, all activities on the railway are the responsibility of London Underground. The actual operation of this train was being done by the subcontractor as part of their subcontract to Tube Lines. It was Tube Lines' engineering work that was being undertaken but the overall responsibility for the operation on the Underground network would ultimately sit with London Underground. We were not directly doing the work that the train was doing when it failed.

**Valerie Shawcross (Chair):** Tube Lines were taken over by London Underground shortly before this.

**Richard Parry (Strategy and Commercial Director, London Underground):** Sorry, Tube Lines is part of Transport for London (TfL) of course. It is not part of London Underground. We still manage them separately.

**Valerie Shawcross (Chair):** Yes. You talked about that particular train being quarantined. Have there been any interim safety changes in procedures on similar activities and exercises? For example, there was not a safety chain, I gather, between the engineering train and its tow truck. Was that usual? Is that not something that you would normally do?

**Richard Parry (Strategy and Commercial Director, London Underground):** Well, that is very much part of the investigation. The operational safety plan was, I understand, followed and we will be looking to understand whether that operational safety plan did or did not state chains, whether chains should have been stated, etc. All passenger trains are designed with, what we call, rollback protection. This would mean in a scenario where, for some reason, the driver loses control of the train and it did start to roll back then the brakes would be applied under emergency. Again, what we are looking at is the design feature of this vehicle, and other vehicles that do not have that similar rollback protection. We have procedures in place to ensure that should very rare occasions such as this occur - when engineering trains fail in this situation - that we have got a brake vehicle in position to ensure there is no repeat of this incident.

**Valerie Shawcross (Chair):** So, you have got an interim mechanism in place?

**Richard Parry (Strategy and Commercial Director, London Underground):** Yes, we have.

**Caroline Pidgeon (Deputy Chair):** I just wanted to pick up a couple of questions. I think the real issue on any incident like this is about public confidence in the service that you are providing; and it is what assurances you can give to the public that the Underground network is safe, for them to use. People will be worried that if you have taken out some maintenance vehicles or you are having to operate them differently; whether the maintenance and health and safety of the Underground are being kept at the levels they should be? I think that is the first question I would like answered.

**Richard Parry (Strategy and Commercial Director, London Underground):** Sure, and I can understand that question. Just with regard to the very specific question, the non-operation of the rail grinder unit does not affect the safety of the railway. It is something that one would want to do as part of a maintenance regime to keep the track in good condition over the long-term, but not having that facility available for a period of time is not affecting the safety of the railway. It may mean that track replacement plans have to change because we are not grinding rails in the way that we would want. That specific issue does not affect safety in any way.

Of course, the wider issue is about public confidence in general. I point in this regard to the overall evidence for safety on the London Underground. All the statistics will demonstrate that across the whole network, London Underground and Tube Lines, the safety of the Underground is at the best levels it has been in terms of all the statistics we have around the occasions of incidents, the number of injuries on the railway, and all those measures are moving in the right direction. The reason for that is that we have this very thorough and meticulous process of following up on any incident no matter how small. Obviously, this was a significant incident, but we have a culture of learning and improving our safety all the time. This incident is serious, it is something that we have not seen on the railway for many, many, many years and we will ensure that we learn from this. I can assure you and assure the public that we have, still today, a very safe railway because of all the standards and best practice we have built in learning from the long history of operating this railway.

**Caroline Pidgeon (Deputy Chair):** I am sure passengers will be pleased to hear those assurances from you. You said that the impact of moving this maintenance train is that some of your track replacement plans have to move. Does that mean that removing these engineering trains from service may have an impact on the upgrade programme?

**Richard Parry (Strategy and Commercial Director, London Underground):** Not as such. Rail grinding is a very specific function and it is not the case that all engineering trains are embargoed from the railway as we are still using other engineering trains of a different design for which this particular prohibition does not apply. As I said to Val, it is about ensuring that we have interim arrangements should any of those trains suffer any kind of failure that would prevent any possibility of this incident being repeated. The upgrade programme is not affected. What is affected right now is our ability to grind the rails which is a small but, over the long-term, significant part of our track regime. If we were unable to grind rails for many, many, many months, we would then have to start thinking about whether that would affect our plans for track replacement. It is not something that in the short-term, over a period of weeks, is going to affect our plans significantly. We are obviously making an assessment of how we should change our plans. I can assure that it is not something that is going to have an affect in any core fundamental way our upgrade programme.

**Caroline Pidgeon (Deputy Chair):** Thank you.

**Jennette Arnold (AM):** I am going to go back to public confidence because it was a right Friday 13 event! I knew something had happened because my BlackBerry started jumping about and that is because, of course, Archway Station is at a junction between my constituency and that of Joanne [McCartney AM] I was surprised that more was not done to just give as much factual information about what had happened and the position over the weekend and in the following week which would have gone a little way to ensuring that it would have come from a reliable source; I mean, if you see

something that is a London Underground statement I would hope that people would think that that is much more informed than the Islington Tribune newspaper, wonderful as the Tribune is - but that is usually third hand information!

So, I was surprised that there was no statement, and still yet today no statement, just saying this incident happened - but not in any detail - that there is an investigation going on and a report will be produced in November 2010. You could just produce a small flyer that could be handed out. I would have thought that that is the minimum and that was not done. I think that you missed a trick there and I just wanted to feed that back and to say that you still have time. Will you think of looking to make some statement at the Archway Station in some way?

**Richard Parry (Strategy and Commercial Director, London Underground):** I am grateful for that and any feedback, Jennette. We did try in the aftermath to be very active in our communication. I did lots of media that day and we put out as much information as we felt we reasonably could. I have to say that when there has been an incident of this sort you do apply that degree of caution about what you say about it. You have accident investigators involved and people are being interviewed, sometimes not quite under caution but almost, so it is a very serious incident. It is important that we conduct a very thorough investigation to really get to the root cause of this incident.

**Jennette Arnold (AM):** That is all you would need to say in a statement. I am saying it need only be factual, so I could go in there now and tell people this is what is going on, and that did not take place. I just thought that was the minimum in terms of maintaining public confidence that was required.

**Richard Parry (Strategy and Commercial Director, London Underground):** OK, well I will take that feedback and reflect.

**Valerie Shawcross (Chair):** Yes, as I say, Richard, there have been three safety incidents on the Tube in three months, so I think maybe there does need to be a better procedure in terms of public information.

**Richard Tracey (AM):** Well, yes, I want to clarify two or three points because I see that the whole incident concluded by, I think, 6.57 am.

**Richard Parry (Strategy and Commercial Director, London Underground):** That is when it came to a halt.

**Richard Tracey (AM):** When it came to a halt. Yes, how many trains would it have been likely or possibly likely to crash into one another at that early hour? I mean, it is an early time on the Underground, isn't it? That is not going to prejudice your enquiry to tell us that, is it?

**Richard Parry (Strategy and Commercial Director, London Underground):** Well, I suppose just being careful with the language you have used, Richard. We had a failure. We did not start up properly because we had lost this entire section of railway. We were already in, if you like, a kind of degraded service pattern because of the interruption to service so we would have had fewer trains running on the line than normal. We had, as I think you are aware, one train in the area that was running on the line between Archway Station and Camden Town Station ahead of this train that we took steps to move out of the way. All other trains were held where they were, if they were, away from the incident.

All those trains that were some way ahead of the train but were on the Charing Cross branch were also accelerated out of the way.

So actually, there was only one train within any distance of this train and we think the closest they got was around 550 metres approximately from one to the other at the closest point. The very effective, professional and quick response of our service control team ensured that, actually, we were able to clear the area quickly. Effectively, it meant that there was actually, once the incident had happened, thereafter, no risk of there being a further collision because we had stopped trains and moved them to places where they were well out of the way of this train.

**Richard Tracey (AM):** Right, the other general point I wanted to make is this really does highlight, for the Government to take note of, the absolute essential need of keeping up the funding of the upgrade programme does it not? It needs all part of the same piece.

**Richard Parry (Strategy and Commercial Director, London Underground):** I am not sure of a very direct link but I would absolutely echo your sentiment. It is vital that we continue to make the investment in the Underground. This is what these programmes are about: to raise the standard of the assets on the railway, their fitness for purpose so we can operate the service that London expects with the capacity and the reliability that the city needs. So, yes absolutely, the message should go out loud and clear that the investment must continue.

**Victoria Borwick (AM):** You have got only one of these particular grinding machines. It is now being repaired presumably or is it still not as the investigation has to take priority? I am trying to get some sort of timescale.

**Richard Parry (Strategy and Commercial Director, London Underground):** Yes, well I am afraid it is impossible to give you a timescale because it depends really on the investigation but the train is not so much being repaired as just being held.

**Victoria Borwick (AM):** For the moment it is being held and then it will be repaired. So, by Christmas?

**Richard Parry (Strategy and Commercial Director, London Underground):** Well, the repair actually probably is not actually the issue because the immediate failure will already have been dealt with on the train, possibly, or if it has not it can be dealt with relatively quickly. This incident was originally, of course, caused by the failure of the train to move but actually that is not part of the investigation.

**Valerie Shawcross (Chair):** A coupling failed so it could well be the --

**Victoria Borwick (AM):** Originally it was a failure on the train.

**Richard Parry (Strategy and Commercial Director, London Underground):** There was.

**Valerie Shawcross (Chair):** I wonder if we are getting into a bit too much detail now and Richard will probably write back to us with more information.

**Richard Parry (Strategy and Commercial Director, London Underground):** I am happy to. I cannot give you a timescale, Victoria, about when the train --

**Victoria Borwick (AM):** If it was months you would have a problem, you did just make that comment so ...

**Richard Parry (Strategy and Commercial Director, London Underground):** Just to reassure you, when I talk about problem it is not a problem that this meeting needs to be concerned about. We will need to look again at our overall track maintenance regime if we are unable to recommence rail grinding at some point in the future, but it is very much in the technical detail of how one manages the railway. We will do whatever we need to do to keep the track in the right condition.

**Victoria Borwick (AM):** Do you hope it will be back by Christmas?

**Richard Parry (Strategy and Commercial Director, London Underground):** I would have it back shortly after that.

**Valerie Shawcross (Chair):** I think safety is our urgent concern here.

**Joanne McCartney (AM):** I note from some of the information that you have provided that there were crew on board the engineering train and they jumped off the train at Highgate Station; were there any injuries at all?

**Richard Parry (Strategy and Commercial Director, London Underground):** No, no one was injured in this incident.

**Valerie Shawcross (Chair):** Richard, do you want to say anything to us now about the incident that happened yesterday on the Hammersmith and City line with the train that went down the wrong section of track? I know it is very early days; it has caused alarm because that was during peak rush hour, I think in the morning.

**Richard Parry (Strategy and Commercial Director, London Underground):** Sure, I can give you a very short statement, Val; again this incident will be subject to an investigation, of course, just by way of the facts of what happened.

A train in the sidings at Plaistow Station was signalled to come from the sidings to head west back into London. The driver followed the procedure, followed the signal, accepted the green signal and proceeded, but instead of ending up on the westbound line ended up heading for the eastbound line and immediately realised that she had been diverted onto the wrong line and stopped the train. There was not a train directly in front on the eastbound. The nearest train around a mile away eastbound also at that point stopped and then the arrangements were followed exactly right to then move that train subsequently to get the railway back to as it should be. This signalling irregularity, again, is very rare; we are, of course, trying to make sure the investigation will inform us as to how the signal irregularity occurred. All the operational staff did, it seems, as they should. It is about us now understanding what happened to the signalling in this area that has allowed this to happen.

**Valerie Shawcross (Chair):** OK, it would be helpful again if you could write to us with some more details. I think people would be really concerned about that one because the signalling irregularity does not sound as though it was something quite as explicable as what happened in the other incident.

**Richard Parry (Strategy and Commercial Director, London Underground):** Well, it would require, as I say, investigation to truly understand the root cause. It would be a very technical investigation, of course, given that it was about a signal.

**Valerie Shawcross (Chair):** Presumably you cannot quarantine that signal...

**Richard Parry (Strategy and Commercial Director, London Underground):** The sidings are out of use at this time until we have done enough work to establish exactly what we think happened so we can ensure that we can safely restore that part of the railway. Of course, the trains are still able to run through that area safely because they are not affected by this particular signal. This signal is that which controls the movement out of the sidings at Plaistow Station, so it is just the sidings out of use.

**Valerie Shawcross (Chair):** Thank you very much for that Richard, we are sorry to give you that extra grilling but I think it is our responsibility to question the Underground on safety issues.