

Issues with New Year's Eve public transport organisation

Image of Caroline Russell AM

Key information

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New Year's Eve public transport organisation

Dear Sadiq and Andy,

New Year's Eve public transport organisation

I have no doubt you will be as distressed as I was reading this letter from 75-year-old Helen Chown (attached), describing her experience attempting to get home before midnight on New Year's Eve (NYE) using public transport in central London. Stymied by station closures, swept off her feet by crowds and corralled by cordons, she summed up the evening by saying:

"I had been on my feet for just over four hours. I made it onto the train and got home at about 3.25am on New Year's Day."

I forwarded Helen's letter to Transport for London (TfL) on 7 January 2025 to respond to, and after Helen chased it, she received a reply on 5 February 2025 (attached).

Again, like me, I am sure you will not be entirely satisfied with the answer. In particular, I am concerned to see a lack of responsibility for the actions of stewards contracted by the event management: *"The stewards Helen interacted with are managed by a third party contractor. These stewards are contracted by the production company, who produce the event on behalf of the Mayor of London and Greater London Authority."* The fireworks event on NYE is organised by the Greater London Authority (GLA) for the Mayor and therefore, you both hold responsibility for safety and accessibility of this event, as well as the impact on non-attendees attempting to use the transport system.

This is relevant because, when Helen arrived at the front entrance to Charing Cross station to catch her train home to Orpington, this was her experience:

“When I got back to the station at about 10.37, I was not allowed in at the front but told by CCs [stewards] that I must go along the Strand to Cafe Nero and turn right, right again and come into the station from below. I said there wasn't time for me to do that as the train was at 10.45. They suggested that I could do it if I ran. They had the grace to laugh a little at their suggestion.”

Could you tell me how the Charing Cross front entrance closure was communicated by Network Rail (NR) to passengers before the event?

It is clear from Helen's letter there was a more general failure to communicate minute-by-minute information to all TfL and NR staff, including the stewards, to keep people safe and enable them to get home safely. Stewards should have been kept up to date with station closures on the night, eg the delay to Charing Cross re-opening from 'after midnight' to 1.45am as mentioned in the TfL response. Stewards potentially should have had leaflets with all the station closures and service alterations to give to people on the night.

While I note the communication listed by TfL in its response about the station closures and service alterations in the run-up to NYE, it appears this wasn't shared widely enough throughout the NR network or by the Train Operating Companies (TOCs). With more comprehensive information, Helen might have made different plans for NYE, and potentially not made the journey at all.

Could you tell me what communications NR and the TOCs provided to their customers before NYE about planned service alterations and station closures?

Could you also respond to these points Helen raised in her letter:

- **“Why close the stations at 11pm so that we couldn't escape?**
- **There was too little information about transport.**
- **There was too little warning of station closures, the timing of which was ill-conceived.**
- **There was no visible, mapped pedestrian information about alternative routes where there were street closures.**
- **There was a serious information and communication deficit among crowd control personnel.”**

Further, Helen would like to ask TfL, in response to its answer to her original letter, the following:

1. **What is an extensive querying system, in relation to this paragraph: “Access to Charing Cross main station was managed by stewards, who are not managed by TfL. The Network Rail-managed station remained open throughout but an extensive querying system was implemented after the firework event.”?**
2. **Why stop people going home before the fireworks by closing the stations to homegoing passengers?**

Helen's description of her experience trying to travel in central London on NYE is really worrying and indicates that accessibility for groups travelling with young children and for older and disabled people had not been fully integrated into the event plan for the fireworks event.

I hope that TfL and the GLA teams working on the 2025 NYE fireworks event will reflect on Helen's experience and incorporate any lessons.

I look forward to hearing from you both.

Yours sincerely,

Caroline Russell AM

Encl.