

London Transport Region 2.5.20

Government & LUL want to abandon Social distancing to increase tube capacity



A story in the Telegraph (Sat 2 May) says the government is looking to abandon the advice to maintain 2m social distancing.

This came as no surprise to RMT as we had seen a presentation by LUL to the International Union of Public Transport (UITP) in which they argue that social distancing must be reduced to 0.5m in order to meet the expected demands for capacity under a “soft lockdown”.

Having chased people walking in the peak district with drones, fined people picnicking in the Yorkshire Moors and chased people out of London Parks, we’re now told it will be OK to stuff people into tube trains.

It is difficult to avoid the conclusion that the so-called science can be changed according to whatever the government wants to do at any given time.

No Trust in government or bosses

For all the fancy talk about working in the national interest and co-operation between industry and unions we are seeing the same old disregard for workers as the bosses try to get the economy moving again.

Let’s be clear. We all understand the need to be able to produce the stuff we need. Our public services and day-to-day needs cannot be met if the whole economy is shut down. But getting it moving cannot be left in the hands of the same government and bosses that have made such a mess of the crisis so far.

The fact that the UK did not have and cannot manufacture sufficient PPE or tests is not a natural and unavoidable consequence of the emergence of coronavirus. The government modelled a pandemic just like this back in 2016. It concluded that the NHS would not have enough critical care beds or ventilators. It did nothing.

The run down over years, even decades, of our public infrastructure and the development of a ‘just in time economy’, that refuses to carry the costs of planning for emergencies, has led us to a situation where the UK is likely to finish up with a higher per capita mortality rate than any other wealthy nation.

Maintain 2m social distance

Workers on the tube and across public transport services must be able to maintain 2m social distancing unless and until it is clearly safe to move away from this. The only mitigation for working without social distancing is PPE and that doesn’t mean wrapping a scarf around your face. With proper PPE unavailable we have no mitigations in place on LUL.

London bus drivers have mortality rate 15x that of NHS staff

There are 20K London bus drivers and there are at least 22 known coronavirus deaths among them. That’s a rate of more than one per 1000. Far higher than the rate for NHS staff. Many bus drivers believe this tragedy was avoidable and was

Train Operator duties imposed but actual duties will continue to follow current emergency arrangements for now

RMT went into dispute with LUL over the imposition of new rosters that would facilitate a service level of around 75%. Following talks at ACAS management has said that duties will continue to be assigned according to the current emergency arrangements in place. However, the imposition stands, so at any moment the company may simply state that train operators are to work them.

RMT remains in dispute over the imposition, as does ASLEF. This is just a foretaste of what lies in store for all grades as LUL seeks to carry out government diktat and run whatever service the bosses demand with no attempt made to reach agreement with unions about safety.

Non-Essential engineering re-starts with no consultation whatsoever

Members in LU Engineering branch have been told that some non-essential work streams are now restarting. Members were called back in to work with just hours of notice and with no consultation with RMT safety reps or IR reps.

CSA1 Conversion training re-starts next week—No agreement sought with TUs

RMT wants members to be able to get promotion to CSA1 but it cannot be done without proper application of social distancing and attention to the safety of all involved.

made worse than it could have been by the refusal of TFL and the bus companies to seal the front doors and limit boarding to the middle doors. Eventually this has been done, but too late for many.

Tube workers want to provide an essential service but not with a reckless disregard for our safety

We have not looked to shut down the tube in this crisis. RMT members have demonstrated a commitment to provide a service to those who really need to travel around London. We will also get that service back up to a more intensive service when we can do so safely and without gambling with our lives. We will not have a near full service imposed on us by politicians and bosses who only care about themselves.