



**ASLEF Evidence Submission to London Assembly Transport Committee –
Overcrowding on Overground Rail Routes – November 2008**

1. The Associated Society of Locomotive Engineers and Firemen (ASLEF) is the UK's largest train driver's union representing approximately 18,000 members in train operating companies and freight companies as well as London Underground and Overground.
2. ASLEF represent drivers on all of the suburban overground routes into London and the union is encouraged by the increasing numbers of passengers who are choosing to travel by train rather than other less environmentally friendly means of transport. Providing incentives for more passengers on to the rail network is essential in combating both carbon emissions and congestion.
3. However, as we promote rail use and passenger numbers increase, it is essential that supply can meet demand and that increases in capacity are appropriately commensurate. A failure to do so will not only physically prevent people travelling by train, but will also deter many people who are not willing to suffer the cramped and uncomfortable conditions created by overcrowding. It also prevents passengers with disabilities and the elderly from being able to travel on many services.
4. ASLEF strongly believes that railways must be central to the future of travel. Around 30.1 billion passenger miles were generated in 2007 and the railway carried 1.2bn passengers, an increase of 7.8 per cent on the previous year. This is the highest ever recorded figure in peace time Britain. Notwithstanding these increases, little has been done to increase the amount of rolling stock. As increasingly volatile fuel prices in the face of greater demand from the developing economies of India and China and a reduction in supply as oil peak production becomes increasingly historic, the demand for rail is likely to grow at an accelerated pace.

5. ASLEF welcomes the Government's decision to introduce an extra 1,300 carriages however the union is concerned by the lack of actual orders made to manufacturers. Delivery of these carriages is essential and the government must consider increasing capacity by an even greater extent.
6. Infrastructure enhancements to the signalling network around the capital are essential to reducing bottlenecks thereby delivering the increases in capacity so necessary to reduce overcrowding. ASLEF does not believe that Network Rail is sufficiently ambitious in its signalling upgrade programme – rather than simply replacing like for like it should aspire to a system (like that on the London Underground) which will allow many more trains to run per hour.
7. Network Rail claim that the train network will be able to cope with a growth of 20 per cent by 2014 although such an estimate seems ambitious considering the cramped conditions that commuters are currently suffering. There is also the potential that considering the accelerated growth of rail usage, that this growth could be conservative in its estimations.
8. The Committee ought to be mindful of the fact that the percentage of passengers taking rail journeys to, from or within London since 1995/96 has increased by 69.1% and journeys within London have increased by 71.6%. The increase in journeys between 05/06 and 06/07 was 27.5% alone. This figure illustrates just how large the task is in meeting the growing demand for capacity. Current growth figures show that the number of journeys is not increasing at a steady rate, rather they are increasing at an accelerated pace.

Defining Overcrowding

9. ASLEF is concerned about the Department for Transport's new guidelines on rail overcrowding. The threshold for overcrowding had previously been 10 people standing for every 100 seats. However the Department for Transport has tripled the industry standard to 30 per 100 seats. This will mean that fewer trains will be considered overcrowded despite conditions becoming increasingly uncomfortable. The union very much regrets this step.

10. ASLEF also believes that changing this definition is simply distorting the true picture and massaging the statistics. Our view is that the focus should be on ensuring fewer passengers have to stand in cramped conditions rather than an acceptance of more doing so.

Potential Solutions

11. ASLEF welcomes the work to build rail capacity on rail lines in to London, in particular the Thameslink Programme. Throughout the network capacity enhancement work is required. We welcome the adaptations which will see stations able to take longer trains such as 12 cars. New rolling stock needs to be continually introduced while higher frequency services and opening of closed lines can also have a positive effect on capacity.

12. ASLEF is of the view that encouraging investment in rail is crucial to resolving the issue of overcrowding. The structure of rail franchises makes encouragement of long term investment difficult and the fragmented nature of the system means that the private companies that run the railway network cannot be relied upon to supply long term investment on a voluntarily basis. The appropriate bodies, whether the London Assembly, or central government must maintain pressure on the various organisations involved in running the railways ensure they play their part in ensuring capacity increases and that supply can meet the growing demand.

13. We would also draw attention to the recently announced cancellation of £3.7 billion worth of transport improvements including the cross river tram as well as extensions to the Docklands Light Railway and Croydon Tramlink. Cutting such planned infrastructure developments will only add to overcrowding on railways in London.

Conclusions

14. Throughout the network there are many stations and routes where overcrowding is increasingly a problem making it difficult to specify individual cases. Over the last year, journeys to, from or within London have increased by 27.5%. It is therefore logical to assume that unless rail capacity increases by the same percentage, overcrowding will become an increasing problem for passengers in London.

Therefore ASLEF believes a programme of platform lengthening and investment in rolling stock as well as potential re-opening of lines are essential to solving this problem and encouraging more people onto the rail network.

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