

Service information

It is Tuesday 31st May 2022.

For the first time in over 40 years, London is celebrating a new Underground line.

The Elizabeth line (mostly) opened seven days ago, and is running as smoothly as can be expected.

This exciting event has been slightly marred by the apparent disappearance of three individuals over the last 10 days - all last seen in Tottenham Court Road Underground station.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

THE LONDON UNDERGROUND

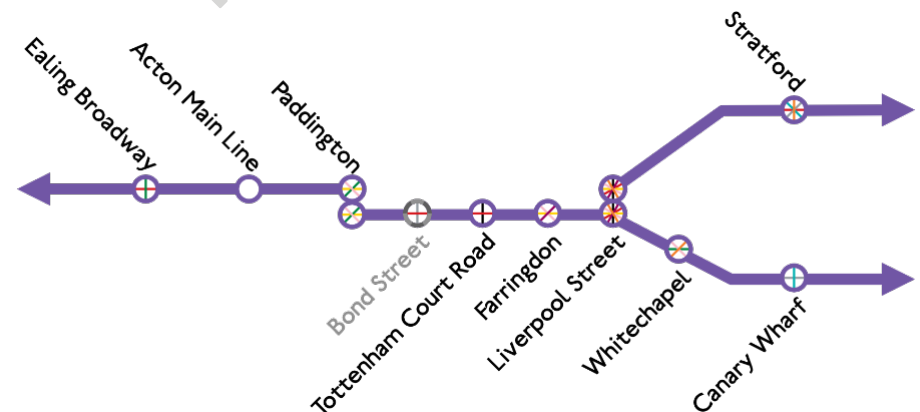
The London Underground is a network of 11 railway lines that run both below and above ground. The full network claims ~250 miles of track and extends out past the boundaries of London and into the surrounding countryside. More commonly referred to as 'the Underground' or 'the Tube', it facilitates over 3 million journeys every day, and serves over 270 stations.

The current network, particularly in central London, is a knot - don't let the simplified design of the well-known map fool you. Some stations are as little as 250 metres apart, yet it can also take five minutes to walk between two lines that are officially part of one station.

This is a legacy of the Tube's creation - when the first of the lines opened in 1863 it was not part of a wider plan. The early lines were all built by different companies in competition with one another, and only brought together under one organisation in the early 20th century. The network consequently contains some redundant sections of track, a handful of closed stations (sometimes used for filming movies in), and a number of closed platforms.

Prior to the Elizabeth line opening, the most recent substantial change to the central London portion of the network was the extension of the Jubilee line in 1999.

During its long years of planning and construction, the project to create the future Elizabeth line was known as 'Crossrail'.



TOTTENHAM COURT ROAD STATION

Tottenham Court Road station – station code TCR – is located below the crossroads (formally St Giles Circus) where Tottenham Court Road, Oxford Street, New Oxford Street, and Charing Cross Road meet. It has no proper aboveground station building – only a collection of covered entrances to stairs, escalators, and lifts.

TCR is one of the busiest stations in the country as it's close to the British Museum, Covent Garden, Oxford Street, Soho, and a number of West End theatres. It's busier than any other station that isn't also a mainline railway station, and acts as an interchange for the three lines; the Northern line, the Central line, and now the Elizabeth line.

Within a year of the Elizabeth opening, TCR will log over 40 million passenger entries and exits through its ticket gates.

The platforms that now form the Central line opened in 1900 and connected to the original ticket hall via lifts.

The platforms that now form the Northern line were opened in 1907 by an entirely different company, and a winding tunnel was opened in 1908 to provide an interchange between the two adjacent lines. The original stairwells and lift shafts for that station still exist today, although the latter are closed to the public and now used as storage space.

It wasn't until 1926 that a shaft was driven down from the (now extended) ticket hall to the Central line in order to provide new escalators. The old lifts were removed, their shafts transformed to provide much-needed ventilation, and the pedestrian-level sections retained as irregular, rotunda-like sections of corridor. Some additional escalators were also installed so that people could reach the Northern line more easily from the Central line's newly-created 'rotunda' area.

In the early 1980s, Scottish artist Eduardo Paolozzi was commissioned to decorate the station with mosaic artworks. These vast, frenetic pieces are a mix of abstract shapes and more recognisable motifs. Some sections are black and white, especially around the Northern line, but most are in colour.

Originally adorning the ticket hall, Northern, and Central line areas, some of the mosaics were relocated or removed during the Crossrail works. When the public became aware that some of the mosaics were being demolished,

over 50,000 people signed a petition to ensure that the removed sections were preserved (largely by the University of Edinburgh), while other sections were restored or moved to other locations in the station.

The construction phase of Crossrail took over a decade to complete. At TCR, the Elizabeth line was installed alongside a new ticket hall, connecting the westernmost end of the Elizabeth line platforms with an exit on Dean Street. A convenient pedestrian tunnel between that new western ticket hall and the Central line was cut from the plan in 2010 as a cost-saving measure, despite later plans still continuing to depict it.

The Elizabeth line platforms are over 200 metres long, passing under Soho Square. The eastbound platform is gently curved so that it can thread in between the Northern line tunnels and their escalators (with a mere ~60cm of clearance above and below).

The three lines have quite different atmospheres:

- The Central line is loud and somewhat lurid. It's always warm, but the breeze that's created on the platforms when a train pulls in on a hot day is like opening the door of an oven that's full of antique rubber.
- The Northern line is a little cooler, but grey-tinted and noisy. Its narrow platforms always feel crowded, seem to be permanently imbued with a century of dirt, and their mice aren't afraid to run past commuting feet.
- The Elizabeth line is clean, air-conditioned, cavernously spacious, and disconcertingly quiet compared to all other lines.

Crossrail also dug some new tunnels for better platform access to the older lines. At the same time, some older tunnels were redirected while others were closed off from the public (to become staff areas, mechanical equipment rooms, or emergency exits). Some new areas that serve similar functions are also hidden from public view.

The Elizabeth line opened on Tuesday 24th May 2022, although only the section between Paddington and Abbey Wood was initially operational, the central section wasn't seamlessly connected at Paddington or Liverpool Street, and the Bond Street stop was closed until 24th October 2022 due to earlier tunnelling issues.

This is the state of affairs when this scenario begins; the Elizabeth line opened one week ago and it's already clocked over one million passenger journeys.

CHARACTERS

DAVID LIGHT

Profession:

Architect, Miller & Light

Status at Beginning of Scenario:

Waiting in the catacombs; thought to be 'off sick' by colleagues.

MIHAI BUCUR

Profession:

Electrician, Metrelec

Status at Beginning of Scenario:

Deceased; in the Station Below.

ALICE MOORE

Profession:

Senior Risk Analyst, Credit Suisse

Status at Beginning of Scenario:

Lost in The City.

CASSANDRA 'CASSI' HOOPER

Profession:

Runner, re:Evolutions Film

Status at Beginning of Scenario:

Waiting to be discharged from hospital.

SAM FAWCETT

Profession:

Security & Access Compliance Manager, TfL

Status at Beginning of Scenario:

Trapped in the Station Below.

LUC ADDAMS

Profession:

Executive Assistant, Miller & Light

Status at Beginning of Scenario:

Alive and well.

FATHER ALAN NEWMAN

Profession:

Priest, St Patrick's Church, Soho

Status at Beginning of Scenario:

Alive and well.

ELIZABETH 'BETTY' MORGAN-PLATT

Profession:

Station Manager at Tottenham Court Road, TfL

Status at Beginning of Scenario:

Alive and well.

CHRIS SO

Profession:

Security Officer at Tottenham Court Road, TfL

Status at Beginning of Scenario:

Alive and well.

ALEX BROOKES

Profession:

Curator, Museum of London Docklands

Status at Beginning of Scenario:

Alive and well.

THE ARCHITECT

Over a decade ago, back in 2009, archaeologists excavated the intended sites of the new and expanded TCR ticket halls. Being over 2,000 years old, London is built on its own ruins – you can't dig anywhere in the city without deploying an archaeologist.

Beneath the rubble of the 1920s Astoria (at different times a theatre, cinema, and music venue, demolished to make way for the expanded eastern ticket hall), they uncovered the cellars of the 19th Century Crosse & Blackwell condiments warehouses. Once the archaeologists had removed over 13,000 well-preserved pickle pots, jam jars, and glass bottles, a small array of old brick floors and vaults remained.

David Light, lead architect for the new station, was keen to get a feeling for the history of the area, and visited the dig site.

As he walked the forgotten spaces, revealed the to world for the first time in over a century, he noticed long gouges in the blackened old brickwork – deep red cuts in the southwest corner, towards Soho Square. The archaeologists attributed it to wear and tear, or perhaps a long-dead animal that had once been trapped down there.

Light touched the scratches, and something touched his mind in return.

In dreams he walked endlessly through lost vaults, but the dreams were not his own. An imprisoned presence drew him in and – despite a course of sleeping tablets and other attempts to clear his mind – Light was captured by a compulsion to free the Dreamer.

He researched the 'anecdotal' references to catacombs – allegedly running deep beneath Soho Square – that archaeologists had dismissed. Light could find no proof of their existence either, but he knew they were there and was driven to find a way in.

Light began volunteering at St Patrick's Church on Soho Square, dedicating all of his spare time to helping out with the homelessness outreach programme, and then their (conveniently-timed) refurbishment works – all while seeking the entrance he was sure must lie within the church.

Eventually he found the bricked-up and forgotten doorway, and engineered a new hidden entrance. His charitable work gave him almost free reign of the

church, and nobody questioned the comings and goings of their tool-wielding, overqualified handyman.

When Light finally descended into the lost catacombs he found the remains – little more than dust – of the Dreamer who'd led him there. He couldn't break the strange metal thresholds that confined the entity, so he lay down on the stone beside it. There his dreams became more real than the waking world, and his mind was filled with understanding of impossible geometries – and a way to wake the Dreamer.

All that it would take were small changes to the station above. Previous architects and artists must also have brushed against the Dreamer's influence, to create a place already so very close to unfolding.

The work took years – over a decade – to come to fruition, but what's a decade in the realm of dreams?

The effort consumed Light's life, but he continued to keep up appearances, lest someone look too closely at his work. He tweaked acoustic projections, geological readings, and décor. He embellished structural calculations, revised preservation plans, and whispered about spiralling budgets to ensure that problem elements were axed.

By a thousand small steps he finally succeeded in manifesting a Doorway in the form of a ritual. Any unwitting traveller in TCR would need only to follow a particular path to complete the right movements, see particular signs to form the right shapes in their mind, and then they would find themselves somewhere else – the Station Below.

When enough people pass through the Doorway the Dreamer would awaken. And then...

All was going well, and the trickle of victims began with Mihai Bucur.

However, when Light heard that Cassi Hooper had escaped the Station Below, he panicked. Fleeing down into the catacombs, he offered himself to expedite the Dreamer's awakening – an awakening that may yet be interrupted.

Who can say what Light expected in return for his work, his commitment? Only the lost might find meaning in such dreams.