



TfL Corporate Archives Research Guides

Research Guide No 37: Aldwych Station

The beginning

Originally named Strand Station, Aldwych Station was envisaged as being the south terminal of the projected Great Northern & Strand Railway and its origins lie in a proposal to help ease congestion on the main line towards Kings Cross.

The line running from Wood Green Station into the centre of London via Kings Cross was initially incorporated in an 1899 Act of Parliament, a copy of which is held in the TfL Corporate Archives [LT000370/061]. The Act set out that the line would terminate *'in the parish of Saint Clement Danes in the county of London at a point about seventeen yards measured in a south-westerly direction from a point on the south western side of Stanhope Street opposite the north western side of Holles Street.'* However, the original planned location was altered to make way for the construction of a new central street.

A failure to raise the capital meant that in 1902 the line was merged with the Brompton and Piccadilly Circus Railway, which was planned to run between South Kensington and Piccadilly Circus. A connecting tunnel between Piccadilly Circus and Holborn was approved and the new railway became known as the Great Northern, Piccadilly & Brompton (GNP&BR).

This development left Strand Station as an offshoot from the main branch and affected its usage throughout its history. It has been said that had the station not already been built, it never would have been. Various alterations were proposed to make better use of the station, including a line from Piccadilly Circus to the City of London via Strand (1903) and an extension to Waterloo (1905). These were rejected but the Waterloo extension would be revisited many times during the next century as a means of making the line more viable.

The GNP&BR eventually opened in 1906, with the Holborn to Strand branch opening a year later, on 30th November 1907. Strand station, designed by Leslie Green, was again

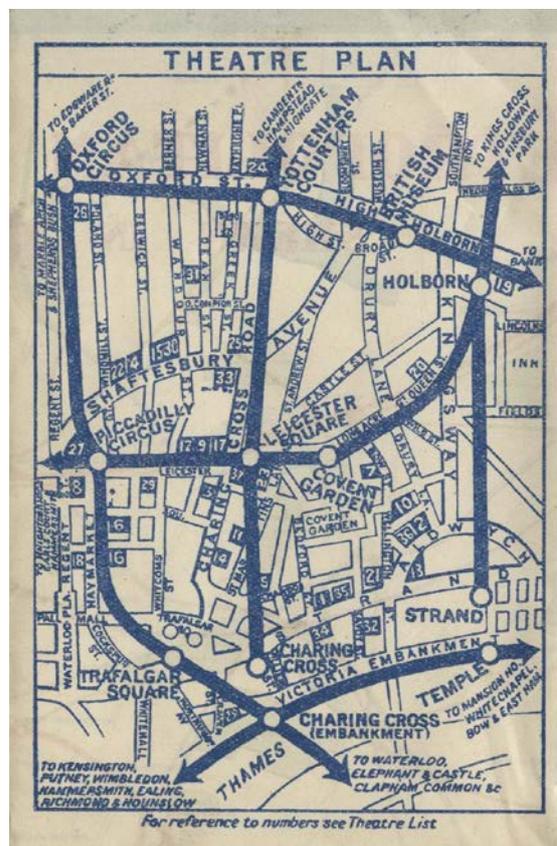
relocated, this time to the junction of the Strand and Surrey Street, on the site of the old Royal Strand Theatre.

On 9th May 1915 Strand Station was renamed Aldwych to avoid confusion with the renaming of the Northern Line station (which was part of the Charing Cross complex which became 'Strand' the same day).

Anticipation of future extensions meant that the station was built with additional lift shafts and routes to the platforms which were never brought into use.

Early operation

The line from Holborn to Strand was one third of a mile long, with north to south twin tunnels.



From early on, the line operated only as a shuttle service between the two stations. Cars 3282 and 3283 from 1906 stock ran on the line initially using both platforms in rush hour only. In 1914 the eastern platform was taken out of use due to low usage and thereafter only one car ran at a time, with coupling at peak time. By 1917 the Sunday service had stopped completely. Traffic on the branch was very light from the beginning, as the area was well served by buses and trams and the need to change at Holborn was something of a disincentive.

Low usage led to discussions about closure throughout the 1930s, and in 1939 an estimate of the *'financial effect of closing the Aldwych Branch Line to traffic'* was formally discussed. Usage continued to decline throughout Aldwych's life, with its yearly usage peaking at 1,819,184 people in 1937.

Aldwych Station was closed between 1940 and 1946 due to World War II, and its tunnels were made available as public air raid shelters.

Post war – A future for Aldwych?

There was substantial discussion about not reopening the station after its closure during World War II, but it was eventually reopened on 1st July 1946.

The service became more hazardous with overrunning incidents and minor failures of equipment. In May 1954 two experimental 2-Car Tube stock were introduced for the Aldwych branch service, after working successfully on the Central Line shuttle service between Loughton and Epping. One train was meant to be in service for the Aldwych-Holborn route, with the second train to stand spare at Northfields depot.

In the 1950s closure was considered again, with Aldwych being described as a 'historical accident' as there was only an average of 50 passengers per train during peak times. This potential closure was deferred again, as an attempt was made to see if adequate revenue could be found for Aldwych Station through adjusting fares amid declining use. In 1958 the station moved to a peak time only service in an attempt to remedy the revenue loss and decline in traffic.

Plans for Extension

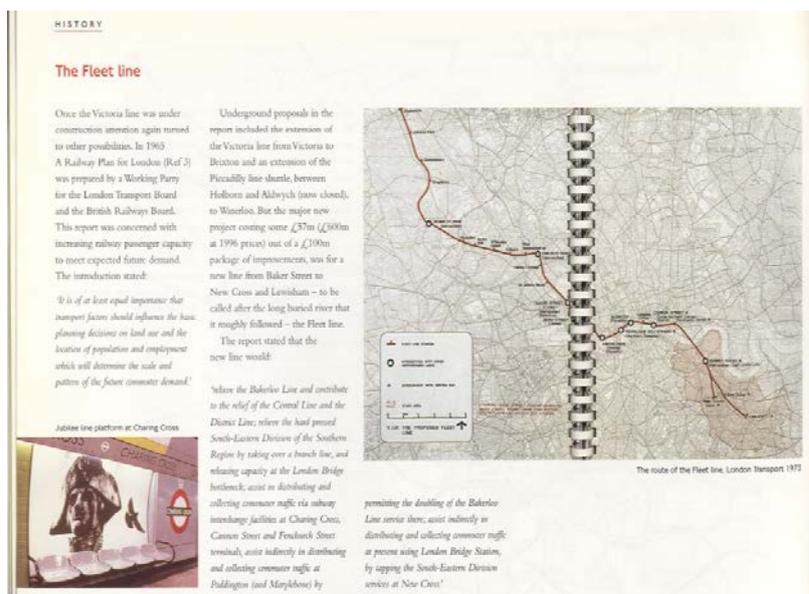
In addition to the closure attempts, considerations about the construction of an extension to Waterloo occurred throughout much of Aldwych Station's lifetime.

In 1949 an extension to Waterloo with an interchange with the District line at Temple was recommended by the London Plan Working Party. In 1958 the Waterloo extension plan was re-visited again as part of a tentative programme for further development of the underground system.

In 1964 a social benefit study was undertaken and a construction cost of £4.5m was given for the scheme. The motivation at this time was the estimated increase of passengers on the Bakerloo and Northern line as a result of increased travel into central London with the growth in offices on the Southbank. It appeared to be now or never for the extension to proceed as there was a desire to keep a continuous programme of construction in order to reduce costs with this project following the Victoria line extension. It was also proposed that the work could be carried out at the same time as the planned upgrade of the Waterloo escalators. However, neither proposal came to fruition.

In the 1970s, various redevelopment and extension plans were considered for Aldwych as part of the wider redevelopment of the underground network. Recommendations at this time involved an extension to Waterloo as part of the Chelsea Hackney line which

included Aldwych as a station.



The Fleet line (now the Jubilee line) was built almost as far as Aldwych as part of an eastward extension; however, the line eventually went south from Green Park instead due to the redevelopment of the docklands.

Closure

By 1982 the station was said to have the strongest case for closure of any station, with its low traffic numbers and high cost of operation. Aldwych was the least used Underground station in Central London and with so few residents in the area the station served only the nearby offices during peak times. Throughout its history, Aldwych was perceived as being limited in its value and use, and not an integral part of the London Underground network, criticism which followed the station throughout its lifespan.

Finally, the pressing need to refurbish the original lifts at a cost of £3m led to the decision to finally close the Grade II listed station on September 30th 1994.

After Closure – A new life for Aldwych

Aldwych Station has been used for many different purposes: it was used during World War II as an air raid shelter; for the safe storage of objects from the British Museum, and has been used as a test site. During considerations for closure, there were many alternative potential uses discussed, including letting the premises and using the tunnel as a store-house for equipment.

Filming of television series, films and commercials have occurred in Aldwych station, often seeing it pose as other stations. For example filming of *The Valkire* by Woodfall Films on 30th April 1966 involved alterations to station signs and notices to make the station appear as Covent Garden. Today, the station continues to be used for filming and operates occasional tours.



Material relating to closure of Aldwych, Aldwych Branch and line (General):

ArchiveRefNum	Content
LT000719/018	Memoranda and reports that include the estimated expenditure savings if Aldwych Station were to close, 1939-1961
LT000699/023	Proposal to close Aldwych Station, 1950-1959
LT001336/012	Proposal to close Aldwych Station, 1955-1959
LT000699/024	Proposal to close Aldwych Station on Saturday afternoons, 1955-1956
LT001061/011	Proposal to close Aldwych Station, 1958-1966
LT000294/290/003	Minutes of Meeting, including withdrawal of train services between Holborn and Aldwych, 1980

Material relating to installation, maintenance and replacement of lifts :

ArchiveRefNum	Content
LT000831/002	Lifts at Aldwych (overcrowding and public complaints), 1948
LT000790/028	Minutes and memoranda including lift replacement project at Aldwych Station, 1986-1987
LT001892/108/002	Paper on the lift replacement project at Aldwych Station, 1988
LT000261/213	Memorandum of the lift replacement project at Aldwych Station, 1988

Material relating to the proposed extensions of Aldwych Station:

ArchiveRefNum	Content
LT000079/003	Memoranda, correspondence, reports and extracts from minutes of meetings including Aldwych Line extension to Waterloo, the Aldwych to Temple interchange subway and closure proposals, 1963-1983
LT000130/111	Minutes of the Vice Chairman's Conference including the extension of Aldwych Line to Waterloo, 1963-1965
LT000294/122	Memoranda, correspondence and reports of Aldwych Line extension to Waterloo and its traffic estimates,

ArchiveRefNum	Content
	1965
LT000121/285	Memoranda, correspondence and extracts from minutes of meetings concerning the Aldwych Line extension to Waterloo, 1965-1971
LT000699/025	Memoranda and minutes of meetings which include track layout rearrangement of proposed line extension between Aldwych and Waterloo Stations, 1966
LT000586/429	Request form and cost sheets including Aldwych Line to Waterloo extension - preparation of contract drawings and documents, 1966-1968
LT001001/017	Fleet Line, with contract for construction of tunnels running from Admiralty Arch to Aldwych Station, 1971
LT000111/034/012	Jubilee Line planning including contract for Aldwych Station exploratory work, 1978
LT001119/022	Memoranda, reports, press statements and minutes of Finance Committee meetings which includes the extension of the Holborn-Aldwych Line, 1983-1985

Material relating to the creation of Aldwych Station:

ArchiveRefNum	Content
LT000370/061	Parliamentary Session including Brompton and Piccadilly Circus Railway (Extensions), 1899
LT001539/007	Correspondence, plans, maps and working papers of the Great Northern Railway Company, including proposed Strand Station, 1902-1906

All other related material of Aldwych Station:

ArchiveRefNum	Content
LT000254/406	Memoranda, notes and correspondence concerning the future and changes to Aldwych Station and its stock, 1925-1960
LT000831/006	Experimental tube stock 2-car shuttle on Aldwych-Holborn, instructions for operation, 1954
LT001701/003	Correspondence, memoranda, and minutes of meetings including agreements for filming at Aldwych Station, with details of the films made at the station, 1966-1984
LT000649/220	Noise of Pit Block Removal at Aldwych Station, 1980

ArchiveRefNum	Content
LT001701/002	Correspondence and a specimen form of agreement of conditions for filming and photographing London Underground Limited (LUL) property, and details of the use of a 1973 tube stock train at Aldwych Station by Lay & Partners Limited, 1986
LT000287/202	Correspondence and minutes of meetings concerning Open House Day, including access to Aldwych Station, 1994-1996