



TfL Corporate Archives Subject Guides

Subject Guide No 7: Royalty and London Transport

Transport for London and its predecessors has always benefitted from royal interest: on 15 May 1939, Princess Elizabeth and Princess Margaret made their first journey on the Underground, travelling from St James's Park to Tottenham Court Road; Queen Elizabeth II opened the Victoria Line in 1969, and the Heathrow extension of the Piccadilly Line in 1977; and Prince Charles officially opened the Jubilee Line on 30 April 1972, and he and his then wife, Princess Diana, officially opened the Heathrow Terminal 4 station in April 1986.

And royal events staged in the capital have traditionally led to some of the biggest logistical challenges posed to transport in London. From weddings, to jubilees, and even funerals, these huge occasions have involved, in the words of Boris Johnson,

“London's transport workers, who ensured that the throngs of people wishing to participate...could travel swiftly and safely...and thus enjoy to the fullest extent the wonderful spectacle “.



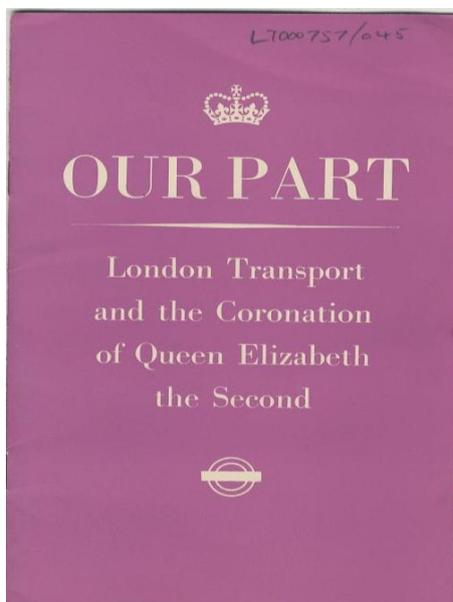
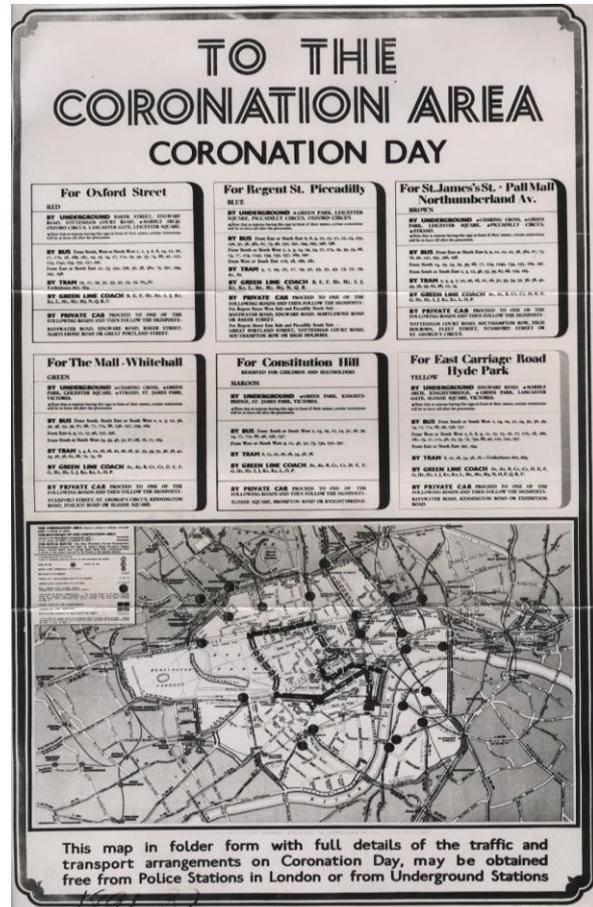
The Transport for London Corporate Archives has material relating to the royal weddings of the Duke of York and Lady Elizabeth Bowes-Lyon in 1923, Princess Elizabeth and Philip Mountbatten in 1947, and the Prince of Wales and Lady Diana Spencer in 1981. There is also material on the Silver Jubilees of 1935 and 1977. Information on this material can be obtained by contacting the Corporate Archives. But the bulk of our 'royal collection' is concerned with arguably that most important royal event of them all – the coronation, of which London Transport (LT) has played a key role in two.

London Transport's role in the Coronations of 1937 and 1953

Since before the Norman Conquest, Royal occasions have often been London-centred, and, as the city has grown, so has the need for some central organisation to manage the crowds of people wishing to see, or pay their respects to, the Monarch.

With the formation of the London Passenger Transport Board (LPTB) in 1933, the capital had for the first time a central authority able to deal with the complexities of moving people around and about central and suburban London by road and rail. This central authority and its successor companies would therefore be essential to the smooth running of important Royal occasions in the capital.

The first major test was the Coronation of George VI and Queen Elizabeth on 12 May 1937. Lessons learned during the Jubilee of 1935 were applied, but the scope of the operation was much larger. Security considerations meant that there was close co-operation with the Metropolitan Police, including the installation of special telephones at strategic points, and there was special movement of police and military personnel by a large number of buses recently withdrawn from regular service (LT000553/065, LT001607/048). LT also became responsible, together with the four main-line railway companies, for the punctual transport to and from the Embankment, of 37,000 schoolchildren (LT000831/127, 137). An enormous amount of work was involved in preparing special timetables, deciding on route closures and curtailments, staffing of stations and trains, and of course working out pay scales for Coronation Day working. On the whole, the Board had coped very well, and Lord Ashfield's personal letter to employees after the event reflected the satisfaction felt by all involved (LT000474/002).



By the time of the Coronation of 1953, the LPTB had become the London Transport Executive (LTE), but it had a similar monopoly in its provision of public transport within the capital. Experience gained in 1937 helped in the efficient running of a more complex operation. Agreement with Unions on Staff pay was achieved beforehand, and as before, there was close co-operation between LT, the London County Council and the Metropolitan Police (LT000799/215). There were timetables, routeings and diversions to be prepared, availability and rostering of Staff to consider, and of course publicity, which had been a feature of the 1937 Coronation, had to be produced in good time. LT has always been

a leader in its production of information for the travelling public, and its designs for maps and information leaflets were well received (LT000553/067). As in 1937, troops, schoolchildren, tourists and Londoners all had to be in their places at the right times, and transported away again just as efficiently. A feature of this Coronation was the large number of Commonwealth troops in attendance, all of whom had to be brought in from their temporary barracks outside London. Again, the organisation of all this was a complicated and difficult task, (LT001660/015, 016), and at the end of it all, LT could again feel that it had acquitted itself well. The Staff magazine for July 1953 (which printed Lord Latham's letter of thanks to all Staff), captures some of the cheerful atmosphere that was the keynote of the Day (LT000030/033).

Organising transport for regular royal occasions, such as the State Opening of Parliament and Trooping the Colour is a regular part of Transport for London's work. Larger, less frequent events such as royal weddings and coronations provide more complicated challenges. But each time the company rises to the occasion. And the logistics surrounding such events provides a solid core of experience that enables the successful tackling of even larger events, including of course the 'Greatest Show on Earth' the Olympic Games – not just once, but three times.