

# MEETING LONDON'S TRAIN DRIVER CHALLENGE



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The passenger benefits of £20bn of investment in London's rail infrastructure have been well documented. These include improved East-West connections from Crossrail, more frequent, higher capacity North-South services from Thameslink and the introduction of night services from London Underground.

What is less obvious is that, behind the scenes, train operators will be tackling a major logistical challenge: how to expand and upskill the large workforce of London-based drivers that will be needed to bring these new services into operation. This article examines the implications for the industry and its people, and provides a five-step survival guide for train operating companies.

## London today

London's passenger rail services are delivered by 16 separate private and public operators, including intercity, commuter, underground, overground and light rail services. Some services such as London Underground and London Overground operate entirely

within London. Others have key depots based at London terminals. Between them, these operators employ nearly 6,500 train drivers in London – over one third of all passenger train drivers in the country.

## Growth implications – the challenge

The introduction of Crossrail and the expansion and growth of other services will create a need for hundreds of new drivers in the lead up to 2018, when the introduction of new services will reach its peak. As a consequence, the industry is facing the basic challenge of attracting and training enough fresh recruits to support growth, while replacing those that retire or leave the role. There will also be increased requirements for experienced drivers to help with training and assessment.

But recruitment of new drivers isn't the only challenge. Many of the existing drivers will need to acquire additional skills to drive new trains, over new routes and utilising new technologies, such as automatic train operation and advanced ERTMS signalling infrastructure.



Image:  
*The railway tracks of Docklands Light Railway, © mkos83 – Fotolia.com*



At the same time drivers will need to adapt to rising service expectations from passengers and play a more significant role in service delivery. Those of us who travel on the London Underground will have noticed that a greater emphasis is now being placed on driver announcements. This is just the start. The next generation of drivers will be expected to play a full role in the overall customer experience. For some drivers, this represents the biggest challenge of their driving careers.

Operators are going to be under pressure to implement these changes cost effectively and without disruption. Here we set out a five-point plan for successfully negotiating the challenge.

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### The five-point plan

#### 1. Determine requirements

The industry has well-proven methods for calculating driver requirements, using driver diagrams to determine workload and therefore driver numbers. In London, a key consideration is where to locate driver depots. Operational demands may suggest concentrating depots in the central area. However, London depots may be harder to recruit for and are potentially more open to competition from other operators. A depot strategy that considers both operational and human resource issues is essential.

#### 2. Plan the pipeline

Having the right number of train drivers at the right time is a deceptively complex challenge. Recruitment has to start up to two years before drivers are needed and requires detailed planning. A key issue is what to do with the additional driving capacity that builds up in preparation for the introduction of

new services. By planning ahead this additional capacity can be used to strengthen operational resilience during the transition and to develop the workforce too. Operators need to build these opportunities into their overall resourcing strategy.

#### 3. Attract drivers

The timing of London's new services means that several TOCs will be in the market for new drivers and trainers. Given the sheer numbers required and the high level of quality being sought for the new generation of modern drivers, TOCs must market their appeal to a wider and more diverse range of candidates. There may also be opportunities to coordinate the recruitment effort across operators – addressing the challenge of Sir Roy McNulty to improve cooperation across the industry for mutual benefit and cost efficiency.

#### 4. Modernise training

New courses and materials will be needed to deliver an unprecedented level of driver training cost effectively and without disrupting ongoing operations. Fortunately there have been significant advances in driver training techniques and facilities, including portable, ultra-realistic driving simulators. Operators need to incorporate these innovations into their driver training strategies.

#### 5. Embrace resource management technology

Compared to other industries, the rail sector has been slow to take advantage of the latest software solutions for planning and managing the workforce. This is starting to change as systems vendors introduce a new generation of solutions built on more modern, flexible technology. At the same time, apps are coming on stream. These can improve communications with drivers and enable them to access the operational information they need quickly and easily, using smartphones and tablets. Operators should be evaluating the opportunities presented by these solutions and incorporating them into their operating methods.

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