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# LESSON LEARNED

## Emergency Communications: Improving Communications with Train Passengers Trapped Underground following a Mass Casualty Incident

### SUMMARY

London's emergency response organizations and Transport for London (TfL)—London's transport service agency—could not communicate with train passengers trapped in underground tunnels immediately following the July 7, 2005, bombings in London. The London Assembly report recommends that London's emergency response plans and the TfL's train communications systems should be updated to enable emergency responders and train staff members to communicate with passengers trapped in tunnels.

### DESCRIPTION

On July 7, 2005, four suicide bombers detonated explosive devices between 8:50 a.m. and 9:47 a.m. on three underground commuter trains and a street bus in central London. The first explosion occurred on an eastbound Circle Line train traveling from Liverpool Street to Aldgate station at 8:50 a.m. Within 1 minute, a second bomb detonated on a westbound Circle Line train leaving Edgware Road station for Paddington station. At approximately 8:53 a.m., a third bomb exploded on a southbound Piccadilly Line train traveling between King's Cross and Russell Square stations. Finally, a fourth explosion occurred on the top deck of a double-decker bus at Tavistock Square at 9:47 a.m. The attacks resulted in 52 deaths and 700 injuries. London's primary emergency response organizations responded to the explosions and began rescuing and evacuating victims.

The TfL is London's main transport service agency. It manages London's entire transport network, including its bus and metro rail services. For more information about the TfL, please visit [Transport for London](http://www.tfl.gov.uk).

Many passengers trapped inside the underground tunnels did not receive critical information following the explosions because the blasts damaged the trains' communications systems. Most passengers did not know what happened, if they were in danger, or what they should do next. They also did not know if emergency responders were aware of the underground incident and were sending help. Many passengers could not see anything because the blasts also damaged the internal and emergency lighting systems within train compartments and tunnels.

Passengers who attempted to evacuate through the train doors either could not open the automatic doors or were afraid to do so, fearing electric currents on the railway tracks. Train drivers could not immediately communicate with or issue evacuation instructions to the passengers. Passengers became even more alarmed when they saw smoke coming from the bombed compartments and were afraid that fires were imminent. Many waited 25 minutes or more after the explosions to receive communications and evacuation instructions from an official source. This resulted in confusion and panic among the trapped passengers.

The London Assembly report recommends that the TfL update its train communications systems. This will enable station staff and emergency responders to quickly provide critical information to train passengers following a mass casualty incident. The report also recommends that London's emergency plans should include an explicit provision for communication with people affected by a major incident. Communications with trapped victims should be initiated as soon as possible after the arrival of emergency responders or transport service staff members at the incident site.

#### **CITATION**

Greater London Authority, London Assembly. *Report of the 7 July Committee*. Jun 2006.  
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