

Progress of the London Underground and National Railways Passenger Screen Trials

Department for Transport

Progress of the London Underground and National Railways (LUNR) Passenger Screening Trials

The Secretary of State for Transport (Mr Douglas Alexander): We announced in November last year that the Department for Transport will be undertaking a small number of trials at stations on London's surface and underground rail networks, to test the effectiveness of passenger screening equipment in an operational environment.

The first trial took place on the platforms for the Heathrow Express at Paddington station over a four week period during January and February of this year. The data from the trial has been analysed and will be included in the final trial report.

The next phase of the project will be held at stations on the London Underground and will test equipment that can detect traces of explosives on passengers and their belongings.

Following consultation with London Underground, the British Transport Police and other stakeholders, Canary Wharf and Greenford have been chosen to host the next series of trials.

The trial at Canary Wharf will begin on Wednesday 17 May and will also run for a period of around four weeks. The trial will test the use of a document scanner, a finger scanner and a cabin baggage X-ray machine. Each day a small number of randomly selected passengers will be invited to take part, although any participation will be entirely voluntary. There will be minimal disturbance to the station's operations and the flow of passengers throughout the day will not be affected.

Once the trial at Canary Wharf trial has been completed, a similar trial at Greenford station will begin in which equipment that can analyse explosive traces on clothing and bags using swabbing and air samples will be tested.

Furthermore, in conjunction with the British Transport Police, we shall be trialling the use of explosives-sniffing dogs at a main London station and a major regional station, also for a limited period.

The sole purpose of these trials that we are undertaking is purely to test their application in a genuine rail environment. They are not direct measures to enhance security at these stations. No decisions have been taken on the future use of this equipment, all the data and feedback we can gain during the tests is merely to help inform any future judgements.

The UK's railway system is a network made up of 2,500 stations and 11,000 miles of track. It carries one billion passengers a year. The British public understand that a closed security system on a rail network of this size is unworkable.

However we must still aim to cut down the risks as much as possible, whilst still allowing people to go about their day to day business.

No single security measure is either foolproof or capable of mitigating every threat so we need to keep a range of measures available. It is therefore important that we not only consider both existing and emerging technologies, but that we subject them to vigorous tests in a mix of authentic environments to see just how effectively they can contribute towards keeping our networks as safe and efficient as possible.