

‘Disabled people are forced to slide down the stairs on their bottom’: How Peckham Rye Station is the busiest interchange in the country with no step-free access

The government announced the £40 million upgrade had been shelved earlier this year - but residents state urgent action is needed to address overcrowding concerns

by [Issy Clarke](#) [22nd August 2025](#) Southwark News



[L-R: Peckham Rye station, Peckham Vision founder Eileen Conn, Platform 1/2](#)

Disabled people are being forced to slide down the stairs on their bottom if they want to use Peckham Rye Station, according to appalled residents and business owners.

In 2023, Network Rail was granted planning permission to construct new lifts and additional staircases to the platforms. The plans would also have involved opening up the back of the station to create a new entrance leading into the ticket hall.

However in July the Department for Transport announced the £40 million upgrade had been put on hold, saying it needed to “prioritise funding on the schemes that will make the greatest difference for passengers and economic growth as soon as possible.”

Campaigners say the delay means it will be “eight years at the earliest,” before Peckham Rye station finally gets an upgrade.

Platforms were supposed to be widened: “It’s like a tin of sardines”

The upgrade would have addressed this by expanding the rear of the station, introducing additional staircases and lifts for the first time, and widening the platforms and passageways.

“Quite often you will find two trains coming in at once on Platforms 1 and 2, each of them escorting hundreds of people, and they are all trying to force their way down the single staircase,” said Iain Johncock, a regular user of the station who is campaigning for Peckham Rye to be prioritised when Network Rail funds next become available.

“The scheme we want to see implemented would have created a second access point on the platform so it would split the passengers into two different groups, which would help.”

Platforms 1 and 2 are located on an island platform and connected with the station by a single staircase. Asked if he had ever heard of an accident happening on the platform, Iain said he hadn't but was "very surprised there hasn't been one."

"I take the 7.44am Thameslink service into central London every morning and it is like a tin of sardines," said another Peckham resident, Andreea Vasilcin. She added that "no one actually knows the true number of people coming through the station because a lot of people slip out without paying through a side gate, which is often just left open and unsupervised."

Alongside concerns about overcrowding, the upgrades would have addressed the lack of step-free access in the station, which currently sees the disabled and elderly forced to slide down the stairs on their bottom.

The nearest alternative is Denmark Hill Station in Camberwell, a 15-minute bus ride away.

Terry Titheradge, 75, who lives behind the station, said he used to take the train to Bromley to visit his family several times a week but now has to cough up a hefty taxi fare after an accident left his wife wheelchair-bound two years ago.

"It costs me £70 now just to go to Bromley in a taxi and back, when we've both got Freedom Passes we could use, but we can't access the station," he said. "I don't drive, I'm partially sighted. We're stuck."

"I recently witnessed a lady in a wheelchair get off the train in Platform 1. She was lost and didn't know what to do. She got out of her chair and a young man carried the chair down for her while she came down 40-odd steps on her bottom, hanging onto the handrail. It was shocking."

We spoke to one trader who was disappointed to hear the upgrade had been delayed. Jenny, of Jenny's Kitchen inside Rye Lane Market, says she has customers who arrive from all over London to try her salads, and some of them can't get off at Peckham Rye.

"I work on my own, so I have to lock up my shop and take the salad to them," she said. "When I ask them why they can't come to the shop, they say it's because there isn't a lift and they have to get someone to help them down the stairs."



CGI of proposed new entrance

Long-time Peckham resident and community activist Eileen Conn said she reckoned it would be "at least another eight years" before the station received an upgrade because of restructuring required at the back of the building.

“That will take at least four years, and the government has said there will be no decisions about money until the next Parliament which is another four years. So at the earliest, a decision would be made in the first year of the next Parliament.”



Community activist and Peckham Vision founder Eileen Conn

Asked if it could provide assurances that the upgrade of Peckham Rye would be prioritised by the government, the Department for Transport said the scheme would be kept “under review as part of our pipeline of schemes for potential progression in future as funding becomes available.”

To help lift pressure in the meantime, campaigners are calling on TfL to speed up proposals to increase the number of trains on the section of the Windrush line which serves Peckham Rye from four to six an hour.

However TfL recently admitted that plans to improve the frequency on the part of the Windrush line serving Peckham Rye will not be introduced until May 2029 at the earliest.

Yet the Windrush line between Crystal Palace and Highbury & Islington will see an increase in frequency much sooner than that, with plans to raise the number of hourly trains from four to six by December 2026.

“If this increase could be bought forward it would seriously alleviate congestion because you would have the same number of people in more trains, so therefore fewer people getting off the train at the same time,” said Iain.

“Peckham is always the last to receive investment and is the first to be cut. This is yet another example.”

Peckham Rye Station’s transformation: the final piece in the puzzle

The accessibility upgrade being delivered by Network Rail is separate to the work to restore Peckham Rye’s Victorian features.

Local architect Benedict O Looney has been working on the project since 2009, with the support of Network Rail, the Railway Heritage Trust and Southwark Council.



CGI showing what renovated Station Square will look like

A ‘prelude’ to the modernisation of the Grade II-listed station, his work involved restoring the existing Victorian fabric of the station. During the works, he and his team of architects uncovered a buried staircase, an abandoned billiard room, and a stunning facade.

Separately, in 2011 the council and the Mayor of London announced they were embarking on a £3-5 million project to upgrade the square outside the station.

Later this year, the worn-out 1930s shopping arcade will be pulled down, creating an open square in front of the station entrance.

Cllr Helen Dennis, Southwark Council’s Cabinet Member for New Homes and Sustainable Development, said: “We’re very disappointed that the Peckham Rye Station upgrade has been paused.

“Peckham Rye Station is the busiest interchange in the country without step-free access, with almost six million passengers using it last year alone. Improving accessibility and reducing overcrowding is vital for passengers and Southwark’s residents.

“Our £27 million station square transformation, which will create a vibrant civic space and deliver major public realm improvements, is still going ahead.

“Transforming the square and the new station together is vital to improving the area for local people, including unlocking more jobs, opportunities and much-needed new genuinely affordable homes.

“We’ve committed £1 million to support the station upgrade and stand ready to help ensure the project goes ahead. We remain fully committed to working with all partners to find a way forward and remain hopeful the Government will match our ambition.”