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Boxing day Tube strike set to go ahead

By Mark Odell

A strike by drivers on London Underground on Boxing day looks set to go ahead after peace talks broke down on Monday.

Aslef, the main drivers' union, said it had secured a vote of more than 90 per cent of members in favour of industrial action in a dispute about rostering.

This is the third year in a row that Aslef has called industrial action on December 26, one of the busiest shopping days of the year in London. It could also make life difficult for sports fans travelling to traditional Boxing day fixtures.

The union is demanding its members should be allowed to volunteer to work on Boxing day, a change to existing practice which sees drivers rostered on to work on all bank holidays.

"This result shows the strength of feeling among our Tube driver members," said Aslef general secretary Mick Whelan. "We are seeking quite reasonable assurances – that working on this day will be voluntary and that those who do attend will be adequately compensated. It is beyond belief that management cannot make an offer that achieves these points."

The strike was called after two days of talks between the union and London Underground management at Acas, the reconciliation service.

Howard Collins, London Underground's chief operating officer, said he was still hoping to find a resolution to the dispute after the management's offer was rejected by Aslef.

"London Underground has a longstanding agreement with all trade unions which covers working arrangements on bank holidays, including Boxing day," he said. "Further industrial action will not achieve anything and I would urge Aslef leadership to work with us to resolve this dispute."

The dispute has been running for three years, with strikes on Boxing day in 2011 and 2010, but disruption was limited. The industrial action is not strictly enforced and last year some 80 per cent of drivers turned up for work. On Boxing day last year, London Underground ran half of all planned services.

Aslef has also named two further strike dates on January 18 and 25, but as in previous years, it is likely these will be called off. The union represents 2,200, or 60 per cent, of Tube

drivers.

The action is likely to renew calls for driverless trains, an idea backed by Boris Johnson, the mayor of London. London Underground is looking to introduce rolling stock without a driver's cab from early in the next decade but insists all trains will have a member of staff on board.

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