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## Ticket office staff will rush for redundancies, claims Tube boss ahead of strike vote



LU managing director Mike Brown

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**Tube staff vote to strike over ticket office closures**

The boss of London Underground sent a defiant message to unions today ahead of a vote on the first major Tube strike action for four years.

Transport for London faces a showdown with the RMT, which is demanding the Mayor scrap plans to cut almost 1,000 jobs by closing the majority of ticket offices next year and saving £50 million annually.

The union will tomorrow announce the results of a members' ballot, which is likely to back strike action this month. But LU managing director Mike Brown said he expected a rush for the offer of 950 voluntary redundancies among ticket office staff. "There'll be no compulsory redundancies and I fully expect we will be oversubscribed," he said.

"We haven't asked for voluntary redundancies for many years, so the demand has built up."

TfL will begin the full automation of ticket sales with a major software upgrade and the installation of new machines in November.

Some £20 million will be spent on new or upgraded machines which will all be touch-screen and be able to issue refunds, resolve incomplete journeys and vend Oyster cards. The staggered closure of tickets offices will be completed in the first half of next year.

Every ticket office will closed but seven will be converted to information centres — including Liverpool Street, Euston, King's Cross St Pancras and Heathrow — although others could be

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saved depending on union demands.

All ticket services will be automated, with passengers assisted by multi-task station staff. TFL says even the most difficult transaction will be possible by machine once the upgrade is done.

Mr Brown said: "We will show everyone the kit this year and prove that every function can be carried out on the machines."

He vowed services for vulnerable passengers, such as the escort service for the blind, will be unaffected.

RMT leader Bob Crow said: "The planned cuts impact on every member of Tube staff in terms of future employment prospects, recruitment freezes and safe, efficient services."

He has claimed the cuts will compromise safety and the union could strike as early as January 17.

The white collar union TSSA today said it will ballot members on the same issue, with a result on January 27.

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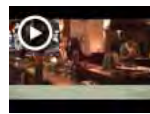
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