

# Bus drivers in East London strike against low pay and fatigue, defying strike-breaking operation by Stagecoach

Henry Lee and reporters  
23 April 2026

Bus drivers working for Stagecoach in Bow, East London, are holding the second of three one-day strikes on Friday April 24, following a three-day walkout last month. They are fighting schedules that are causing dangerous levels of fatigue. A further strike is planned for May 15.

The Unite members are facing a concerted strike-breaking operation by Stagecoach. Scabs have been recruited from other cities, and the company had offered a bribe to any Bow driver willing to break the strike. Pickets shouted, “shame on you!” and “£50!”, the sum for which they sold out their colleagues.

On the picket line last Friday, workers raised the need for unity across London if the strike breaking operation is to be defeated and working conditions defended. But Unite is following the opposite strategy, even blocking a joint fight with Stagecoach drivers at nearby Lea Interchange Bus Company.

*World Socialist Web Site* reporters spoke with drivers on the picket line at Bow. They described the conditions they face and their determination to fight.

**Joe** has been a bus driver for more than 30 years, “In recent times, things have changed concerning the welfare system in this garage.” Drivers’ schedules were a big issue, “some are horrible. Unbalanced duties, short breaks and all. Long jobs on certain routes.”

He said it was important for all drivers to stand together, even if their own routes were manageable, “I’m not going to take myself out, ‘I don’t do those things, so it doesn’t concern me.’ It concerns everyone. Because we are all in one boat.”

Stagecoach had made noises about looking at some of the routes with long round trips, “But concerning the

short [meal] breaks, they haven’t talked about it. And that is causing a lot of fatigue. “40 minutes break we get. 40 minutes is not enough. Sometimes I have to go and find food, come in and sit down, and I can’t even finish my food. I have to rush and throw the food away and go.”

He responded to the company’s strike-breaking efforts, “This is something that is not even right, for other drivers to be coming in. Because they all know the reason why we are striking. I’m sure they’re also experiencing the same because I’ve read some comments from Scotland, what they are going through. And I’m like, why would they travel all the way down here to cover our jobs for us? You guys are still there fighting the same issues, and you travel because they are offering you a certain amount of money. Just to lure you.”

Joe said, “The problem that we are facing is more or less, drivers are not united. We are not united at all. We are not like the trains, the Underground. We are not like them. Which is very, very sad indeed. All because of all this privatisation that came in Margaret Thatcher’s time. So, it’s brought some sort of divisions.”

Privatisation had proven a disaster, “It’s all about profit making. That’s it. The only way they can make their profits is to squeeze drivers. And we suffer. We are the driving force for their success, so why do they have to squeeze a lot from us? That is not right.”

Another driver joined the discussion to add, “It’s not only us we are looking after. It’s the new drivers that are coming in. It’s important for them also.” New drivers are placed on inferior pay. “A lot of them come in and find that the conditions are not good. A lot of people leave and a lot of them have accidents also.”

Twenty years ago, the job was manageable, “We worked and we were happy to finish, go home and come back again and do work again. But now... it’s really hard on us. It’s like the company don’t care about us. And it’s not only us. It’s the passengers’ safety also. Because after working 8, 9 hours, 10 hours, and not a long enough break, you get tired.” The number of passengers was increasing too, but “this is not something that they are taking into consideration.”

Stagecoach has refused to budge, “They haven’t even come back to us to at least discuss anything.” Instead, “they are providing their drivers an extra 50 pounds to come in, which is wrong.”

Another driver described their inadequate break times. After subtracting 15 minutes from their 50-minute meal break to travel to the garage and back, “we have only a 35-minute break. In the law, you have a minimum 40-minute break if you have a 9-hour or 10-hour shift.”

Break time and toilet facilities were also a major concern for drivers across London, “We cover all central London from here to Oxford Circus. About facilities? Zero facilities. That’s all.”

Another driver reported, “The working hours are a bit long, tiring, fatigue-wise, and short breaks.” Especially on the weekends, you can drive 4 full trips to the end of a route and back, “you’d be doing 8-plus hours. It’s really draining... 8 hours and 20 minutes is the whole duty. You get a 45- or 50-minute break, which is not enough. By the time you finish, you’re just drained and you’re back the next day.”

WSWS reporters asked if there should be a united struggle with drivers at Lea Interchange. The driver replied “Yes, obviously. No one’s here individually. If we do gain something, everyone’s going to be benefiting from this. So yes, unity, solidarity is the most important thing for drivers.”

The earlier round of strikes at Bow in March, were timed to coincide with a strike at another Stagecoach subsidiary, the Lea Interchange Bus Company, less than 2 miles away. But the strike at Lea was called off by Unite officials for a three-year pay offer of just 4 percent this year (below inflation, which is rising due to the US war on Iran), and rises in the next two years linked to CPI.

At **Lea Interchange**, drivers told WSWS reporters they supported the fight by drivers at Bow and were

critical of the pay deal. Two drivers who had transferred from another company under Transfer of Undertakings (Protection of Employment) (TUPE) legislation, were on slightly better pay than average, but said the deal was divisive as it “kept us happy, but for the rest of the drivers it’s much worse. This is the worst company in London to work for, and if you raise your voice at all you’re targeted.”

Another said “It’s all about the shareholders. In here they don’t give a shit about the drivers, profits are all they care about.” The pay deal was not enough, “With this war, prices are going to rise by much more than 4 percent.” His colleague added, “That’s why I voted no.”

Many more raised the same issues of long hours and short breaks, which Bow drivers are fighting, but the deal at Lea left them unaddressed.

To bring together their struggles, bus and transport workers must resist the divide and conquer tactics of the union bureaucracy. This will require building rank-and-file committees, uniting workers at Lea Interchange, Bow and other garages, and reaching out for support to workers on the London Underground and across the transport network.

The needs of bus workers and passengers for a high quality, safe and affordable public transport system must be prioritised against the profit requirements of the private transport operators and the austerity diktats of a Starmer government that is slashing public spending to prepare for escalating wars of aggression.



To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

**[wsws.org/contact](https://wsws.org/contact)**