

UNILEVER WORKERS GO OUT ON STRIKE IN ROW OVER THEIR PENSIONS



■ Picket line – Unilver strikers in Purfleet

Picture: MAXINE CLARKE BA53997_02

WORKERS at food and detergent giant Unilever have started a strike which could last up to 11 days because of a row over pensions.

About 190 at the firm's Purfleet factory are trying to persuade their employer to halt plans to scrap the final salary pension scheme for its 7,000-strong workforce.

Staff from all over south Essex formed picket lines and waved banners outside the London Road plant, which employs 240 people.

The strike followed a similar day of action taken at the site last month and is being mirrored by other Unilever sites across the country – involving thousands of workers.

A striking worker from Thurrock, who didn't want to be named, said: "It's gone well. We've had shifts, and about 50

people came down at 6am for the first one.

"We want to talk to the company and resolve this dispute – we don't really want to be on strike."

Action has been launched because Unilever, which produces products including Flora, Persil and Marmite, is planning to amend its final-salary pension scheme by moving workers onto a career-average scheme.

Unilever said it had been given time to prepare for the action, but unions claimed the walkouts would hit production of leading brands including PG Tips, Pot Noodle, Lynx and Wall's ice cream.

A Unilever spokesman said: "We believe the provision of final salary pensions is a broken model, which is no longer appropriate for Unilever."

'Lakeside park-and-ride to cause Olympic chaos'

By FAYE HACKWELL
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THE Olympic park-and-ride scheme at Lakeside shopping centre is expected to cause traffic chaos on the M25 and surrounding roads, a report has found.

The shopping complex is dedicating 1,970 of its 13,000 parking spaces to spectators travelling to sporting events at the Olympic Park in Stratford, and other London venues in July and August.

Traffic analyst Inrix has carried out a study into how London 2012 will impact on the UK's roads.

Greg Hallsworth, an analyst at Inrix, said: "To help minimise central London traffic, it is hoped 80 per cent of visitors

Report highlights fears of severe traffic congestion

to the main Games park will arrive by public transport and use park and ride schemes.

"However, with major shopping centre Lakeside claiming half a million shoppers weekly and being adjacent to the M25, one of the UK's most congested routes, traffic trouble will be near impossible to avert.

"This congestion risk is compounded by the fact the entrance into the park-and-ride sites is ticket-only. Any people with misplaced tickets will unfortunately add to the resultant tailbacks and could cause a domino effect on to the already congested M25."

Tariq Musaji, a driving instructor from Wickford, said Essex residents who regularly use the M25 should plan ahead to avoid getting caught up in queues by either using alternative routes or travelling at quieter times of day.

He said: "Organisers will need to make sure there are proper signs in place to tell everyone what lane they need to be in for the park and ride, to make sure there isn't confusion.

"There will also be the potential for big pile-ups if people don't keep their distances on the busy road."

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Support for new crossing to replace nightmare footbridge

A LABOUR campaigner has added his voice to calls to overhaul a "nightmare" crossing.

Reg Copley, who will stand for the party in St Laurence ward in May's Southend Council elections, has demanded action be taken over the Kent Elms footbridge on the A127.

Last year, the Echo revealed the council's Tory leadership was investigating whether it could tap into a £15million fund for "green" transport projects to bankroll some alterations.

The bridge's stairways, which make it impossible for some pensioners, people in wheelchairs and parents with prams to cross safely, have been the target of several campaigns for change over the past decade.

Mr Copley said: "I have carried out a survey of residents living close to their side of the footbridge, and they say it is a nightmare to use. It has never been, and never will be, push-chair and wheelchair friendly.

"It is outdated and the time has come for a new crossing."



■ Reg Copley – campaigner