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A Sign Language Avatar Was Said to Be Coming to 250 London Stations. TfL Says It Has No Contract and No Avatars.

Heather Grizzle · November 20, 2026

Coverage said Silence Speaks' AI signing avatar was headed for 250+ TfL stations. TfL says it holds no contract and has no avatars at any station.

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In the spring of 2025, a UK startup's AI sign language avatar was widely reported to be on its way to more than 250 Transport for London stations. Eighteen months later, NCG asked TfL for the paperwork behind that claim. On 20 November 2026, after an internal review, TfL answered: it holds no contract, purchase order or memorandum of understanding with the company, and there is no sign language avatar at any TfL station today.

W SKRÓCIE

- In April 2025, Silence Speaks announced an AI sign language avatar and described itself as "collaborating with" Transport for London. The release named no stations, no numbers and no deal.
- In May 2025, WIRED reported that TfL was planning a rollout and described TfL as the agency responsible for more than 250 stations. Later coverage turned that into an "agreement" and a "partnership" that would bring avatars to more than 250 stations.
- Asked under the Freedom of Information Act, TfL says it holds no contract, purchase order or memorandum of understanding with Silence Speaks, that there are no sign language avatars at any TfL station, and that its press team did not work with the company on its public comments.
- The one avatar trial that did run on TfL's network, Project Luna in 2024, was run by the then Overground operator with GoMedia, powered by Signapse rather than Silence Speaks, and funded by the Department for Transport. TfL says it holds none of the trial's records.
- Two of NCG's questions remain unanswered, and the next stop for them is the Information Commissioner's Office.

A QR code on a platform

Picture a Deaf commuter on the platform at Hackney Downs in the summer of 2024. A sign near the stairs carries a QR code. She scans it, and a signing avatar on her own phone tells her about the next departure, a delay, a change to the service. For a few months that was real at five London Overground stations. It was a trial, and like most trials it ended.

A year later, the same commuter could have read in WIRED and a string of technology sites that a different company's avatar was coming to more than 250 TfL stations. If she had gone looking for it in November 2026, she would not have found it at any of them. TfL now says it holds no contract for the second avatar and no records of the first.

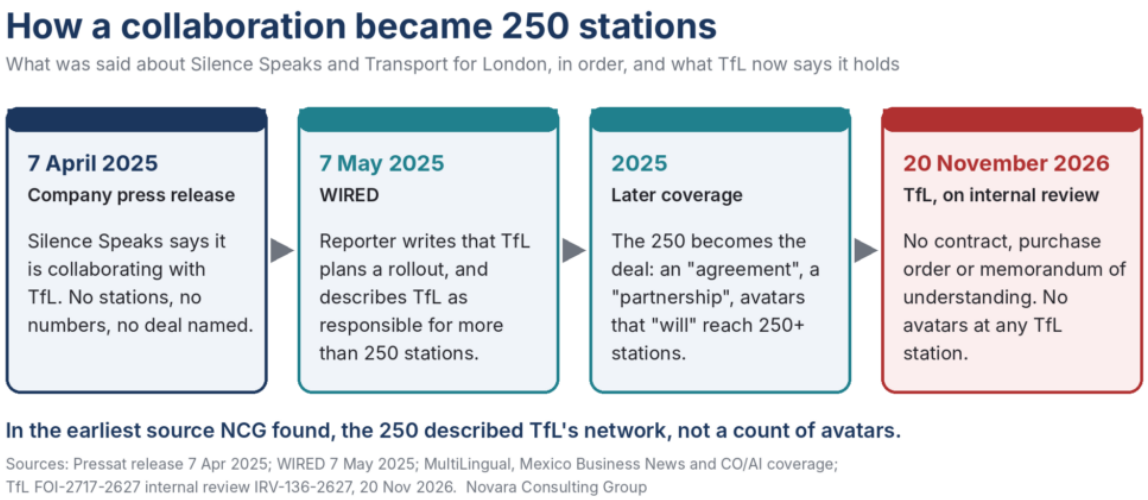
That gap, between what the coverage said and what the transport authority holds, is the subject of this piece. It is also the gap every buyer of sign language AI should learn to look for, because a deployment claim travels much faster than the contract that should stand behind it.

How "collaborating" became 250 stations

The story starts with a press release. On 7 April 2025, Silence Speaks, a UK company that turns text into British Sign Language through an AI avatar, announced its product through the Pressat newswire and described itself as a company "collaborating with Transport for London (TfL)". That is the only mention of TfL in the release. It names no stations, no number and no agreement.

A month later, on 7 May 2025, WIRED published a profile of the company by Simon Hill. In the reporter's own narration, Silence Speaks was "getting a huge lift with Transport for London," which the article described as planning a rollout of visual displays carrying train announcements, with QR codes linking to sign language videos. The same passage described TfL as the agency responsible for more than 250 stations. As far as NCG can find, that is where the number enters the story, and in that sentence it describes the size of TfL's network rather than the size of any deal.

Then the number moved. CO/AI wrote that TfL was planning to deploy the avatar across its network of more than 250 stations. Mexico Business News called it an agreement with TfL covering more than 250 stations. MultiLingual called it a partnership through which Silence Speaks would bring real-time AI sign language announcements to more than 250 train stations. Each retelling was a small step from the one before. None of them, as far as NCG can see, cites a contract.



A description of TfL's network became, over a few retellings, the size of a deployment. TfL's records do not support a deployment at all.

No one in that chain needed to say anything false for this to happen. A company describes a relationship generously, a reporter adds context about the buyer, and the next writer folds the context into the claim. The result is a sentence that reads like a procurement fact and is not one. For a Deaf passenger, the difference matters: a promise of 250 stations sets an expectation of access that, on TfL's own account, was never contracted.

What was said, and what TfL says it holds

Data	Źródło	What it said about TfL
7 April 2025	Silence Speaks press release	Silence Speaks is collaborating with TfL; no stations or numbers named
7 May 2025	WIRED (reporter's narration)	TfL is planning a rollout of displays with QR codes to sign language videos; TfL is responsible for more than 250 stations
2025	CO/AI	TfL is planning to deploy the avatar across more than 250 stations
2025	Mexico Business News	An agreement with TfL to bring avatars to more than 250 stations
2025	MultiLingual	A partnership that will bring AI sign language announcements to over 250 stations
20 November 2026	TfL internal review	No contract; purchase order or memorandum of understanding; no sign language avatars at any TfL station

Source: Pressat, 7 April 2025; WIRED, 7 May 2025; CO/AI; Mexico Business News; MultiLingual; TfL internal review IRV-136-2627, 20 November 2026

What TfL's files show

On 9 October 2026, NCG asked TfL four questions under the Freedom of Information Act. The first asked for any contract, purchase order, memorandum of understanding, partnership agreement or pilot agreement between TfL and Silence Speaks from January 2023 onward. The second asked whether Silence Speaks supplied the avatar in Project Luna, the 2024 Overground trial. The third asked for any evaluation of that trial, including feedback from Deaf passengers. The fourth asked how many TfL stations offer a sign language avatar today.

TfL's first reply, on 4 November, said it held none of the information. It explained that the contract had been managed by Arriva Rail London, the former Overground opera-

tor, and that the information predated TfL's current operators. It did confirm one fact: the trial ran at five stations. The reply treated all four questions as if they were about the Overground trial, including the two that were not.

NCG asked for an internal review the same day. Question 1 was about any agreement with Silence Speaks, not just the trial, and question 4 was about today, which cannot predate anyone. The review panel, made up of staff who had not handled the original request, replied on 20 November. Having consulted the relevant experts, it confirmed that TfL holds no record of a contract, purchase order or memorandum of understanding with Silence Speaks, and that TfL currently has no sign language avatars at its stations.

The panel went further than the question. It noted that while Silence Speaks' press release mentions TfL, it says nothing about how the technology is being used at TfL, and it said there had been no liaison with TfL's press team to support any public comments Silence Speaks may have made.

> Currently we do not have any sign language avatars at TfL stations.
>
> TfL internal review, 20 November 2026

The care here matters, and it is worth copying from Tim Scannell's rail work. TfL's answer shows what TfL says it holds. It does not show that no one at TfL ever spoke to Silence Speaks, and it does not show that anyone acted in bad faith. The panel's denial also names contracts, purchase orders and memorandums of understanding, but not the partnership or pilot agreements NCG asked about. What it does show is that the paper a buyer would expect behind a 250-station deployment is not in TfL's files, and that the number of TfL stations with a sign language avatar, in November 2026, is zero.

The trial that did happen

There was a real avatar on TfL's network, and it was not Silence Speaks'. In July 2024, Arriva Rail London, which ran the London Overground on TfL's behalf, began trialling Luna, a product of GoMedia, a subsidiary of the rail technology company Icomera. Luna was powered by Signapse, the AI signing company whose avatar NCG has written about at Cincinnati's airport and on UK rail screens. Passengers at Hackney Central, Hackney Downs, Hoxton, Upper Holloway and Willesden Junction could open a webpage by URL or QR code and see station information, live departures, di-

sruption and announcements in BSL on their own phones. The trial was scheduled to run until September 2024 and then be reviewed.

Luna was paid for with public money. GoMedia developed it through the Department for Transport's First of a Kind programme, delivered by Innovate UK. In September 2024, GoMedia held a demonstration at Camden Road station, and its own account lists TfL, the Royal National Institute for Deaf People and Innovate UK among the guests, who rode with the app to Hackney Central.

The only results NCG can find are GoMedia's. It reported that RNID tested Luna earlier in 2024 with 20 participants, including Deaf BSL users and people with hearing loss, and that 16 of the 20 said a network-wide rollout would increase their independence. That is a promotional summary, not an evaluation. NCG has found no published assessment of whether the signing was accurate, whether disruption messages arrived in time, or what happened to the service when the trial ended.

That is what question 3 asked TfL for. TfL's answer, on review, is that because the trial predates its current operators and TfL was not party to the original contract, no information is held on its behalf. The timing does not quite fit that reasoning. The trial ran under Arriva Rail London, which held the Overground concession for TfL from November 2016 until 2 May 2026. First Rail London took over on 3 May 2026. The trial predates First Rail London, not the concession it ran under.

Jul 2024

Luna trial begins

Arriva Rail London, operating the Overground for TfL, trials GoMedia's Signapse-powered Luna at five stations.

Sep 2024

Camden Road demonstration

GoMedia demonstrates Luna to guests including TfL, RNID and Innovate UK.

7 Apr 2025

Silence Speaks release

The company describes itself as collaborating with TfL.

7 May 2025

WIRED profile

TfL is described as planning a rollout and as responsible for more than 250 stations.

3 May 2026

New Overground operator

First Rail London takes over the concession from Arriva Rail London.

9 Oct 2026

NCG asks TfL

Four questions under the Freedom of Information Act.

20 Nov 2026

TfL internal review

No contract, purchase order or memorandum with Silence Speaks; no avatars at any TfL station; no trial records held.

What is still open

Three things remain unanswered, and each has a next step.

The first is the gap in TfL's denial. NCG asked about partnership and pilot agreements as well as contracts, and the review did not address them. The second is the search itself. NCG asked TfL to check whether trial records reached it during the concession or at the handover to First Rail London, and whether TfL staff received anything after attending the Camden Road demonstration. The review does not say whether those searches were done. Both points can go to the Information Commissioner's Office, which since April 2023 has expected complaints within six weeks of an authority's last response.

The third is the trial's own record. Luna was funded through a Department for Transport programme delivered by Innovate UK. If an evaluation of Luna exists, including what Deaf passengers said about it, the public bodies that paid for the trial are the next place to look.

Silence Speaks is invited to respond. If the company holds a written agreement with TfL, or can explain what its collaboration with TfL involved, NCG will publish that response and correct any fact this piece gets wrong.

The other half of the map

In October, Tim Scannell published the replies to his own Freedom of Information requests to Network Rail, Govia Thameslink Railway and West Midlands Trains, and NCG wrote them up in Never Signed, or Signed Wrong. His requests showed what the BSL screens already on UK platforms do not cover: spoken announcements, unplanned changes and emergencies. His requests did not reach TfL.

This piece fills in that corner, and the London answer comes one step earlier. Outside London, the question is what the screens sign. Inside TfL's network, the question is whether the screens exist at all. A Deaf passenger standing on a London platform today has no avatar to watch, whatever the coverage said in 2025.

What to ask before you believe a deployment claim

☐ Ask for the contract, purchase order or signed pilot agreement, not the press release or the news coverage.

☐ Ask the buyer, not the vendor, whether the deployment exists and where it runs today.

☐ Check whether a number in coverage counts deployments or describes the size of the buyer.

☐ For any trial cited as proof, ask who supplied the avatar, who paid for it and who evaluated it.

☐ Ask for the evaluation, including what Deaf users said and whether the signing was checked for accuracy.

☐ Ask what happened when the trial ended, and who decided.

DISCLOSURE AND METHOD

NCG has no commercial, advisory or other relationship with Silence Speaks, Go-Media, Icomera, Signapse, Arriva Rail London, First Rail London or Transport for London. The Freedom of Information request (FOI-2717-2627) and the internal review request were made by NCG's founder; TfL's replies of 4 and 20 November 2026 are described from the originals, which NCG will share on request. Press coverage was read on 20 November 2026. This piece reports what TfL says it holds; it does not show that no discussions between Silence Speaks and TfL took place, and it makes no claim about the quality of any product named. Silence Speaks is welcome to respond, and NCG will publish any correction of fact.

TIPS

Know something about a sign language AI system that the public should know? Send it to tips@novaracg.com. Every tip is read by me and kept confidential. If you work in the UK, writing to us is not by itself a protected disclosure under the Public Interest Disclosure Act 1998, so before you share employer information, check your options with Protect (protect-advice.org.uk), the free whistleblowing advice line.

SUPPORT NCG

NCG does this work without vendor money, so our findings stay ours. If it has been useful to you, you can support NCG's independent work here. NCG is a for-profit company, not a charity. Contributions are not tax-deductible and buy no service or influence.

Notatki

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Jak cytować

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