

Board meeting
15.09.20



Minutes

Agenda item: 4
Drafted 24.06.20

Minutes of the meeting of the Board held on 16 June 2020 virtually over Zoom

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Present

Members

Jackie Ballard, Alan Benson, Arthur Leathley (Chair), Karen McArthur, Laura Osborne

Secretariat in attendance

Tim Bellenger	Director, Policy and Investigation
Richard Freeston-Clough	Operations and Communications Manager
Emma Gibson	Director
Susan James	Casework Manager
Shahid Mohammed	Finance Manager (Item 10)
Luke Muskett	Committee and Public Liaison Officer
Anthony Smith	Chief Executive (Item 1 – 9)

1. Chair's introduction and pre-meeting announcements

The Chair welcomed those present to the meeting. He stated that he wanted to put on record on behalf of London TravelWatch his thanks to all those working in the transport industry during the Covid-19 pandemic. He remarked that they continue to do their jobs despite the obvious risks to their safety, and their efforts had helped keep London moving during the crisis.

2. Apologies for absence

There was an apology for absence from Safia Iman.

3. Declarations of interest

Alan Benson reminded members that he was also Chair of Transport for All.

4. Chair's activities and Transport Focus update

The Chair stated that despite the inability to have face-to-face meetings due to the pandemic he had been able to have many virtual meetings using platforms such as Zoom. He remarked that he, the Chief Executive and the Director had met with Alison Moore, the new Chair of the London Assembly Transport Committee. She had taken great interest in London TravelWatch's work during the pandemic, particularly how the organisation could build up evidence to assist them with their own scrutiny work.

The Chair said that there had been a lot of good work that had come out of the omnibus survey that Transport Focus was producing each week. He commented that this was likely to continue for the rest of the year and perhaps even into 2021, depending on how the situation evolved over time.

5. Minutes of previous meetings

A member raised an issue with the sentence attributed to her which said London TravelWatch should be careful not to partner up with organisations simply because members of its board work or have some association with it. She remarked that what she had intended to say was that it should not look as though that was the reason for partnering up with other organisations. The minutes were amended as suggested. The amended minutes were agreed by the Board to be signed by the Chair at a later date.

6. Matters arising (LTW621)

There was no additional update to the outstanding item in the document.

7. Impact of our influencing activity report (LTW623)

The Operations and Communications Manager highlighted a number of successes for London TravelWatch in trying to assist passengers during the Coronavirus pandemic. These included a quick response from transport operators and TfL to a set of questions put to them, which were then published on the London

TravelWatch website. Another success was persuading Eurostar to offer their customers cash refunds rather than the vouchers that they were originally offering people. He mentioned some very good media coverage which included the Director being on several BBC interviews talking about issues around the TfL bailout package and what passengers could expect as lockdown eased. There was also national press coverage including in *The Daily Mail* and *The Daily Express*.

The Operations and Communications Manager said that on 6 May London TravelWatch had held a very successful *Emerging from Lockdown* seminar which was viewed by several hundred people live and many more since then. Heidi Alexander was the keynote speaker and several other quality speakers from across the industry also attended.

The Operations and Communications Manager said that there had been a lot of work on the website to provide information for people travelling during the lockdown and to advise people how they could get refunds on their tickets. He remarked that the number of visitors had gone down though this was expected as fewer people were using the transport network.

8. Casework report (LTW619)

The Casework Manager stated that in preparation for the Board meeting she had looked at the statistics to see the share of cases between London TravelWatch and Transport Focus. At the beginning of the lockdown many of the cases that had come in were for London TravelWatch, particularly requests for refunds from Eurostar and TfL passengers. However, this had recently changed with more cases falling under Transport Focus' remit. She said it would be interesting to see whether this trend would continue or would balance out over time. The Casework Manager said that despite some continuing technology issues the team was working hard and adapting well to handling cases for both organisations.

9. Mark Evers

Mr Evers said that TfL as an organisation recognised that it had a critical role to play in getting London moving again, though to do so in a way that maintained the safety of the travelling public. He said that the network was getting back to service levels that were not that far away from normal. This was in contrast to the peak of the crisis where they were running around 60% of the Tube services and 80% of buses due to a lack of operational staff available. He remarked that as of the day before, TfL had managed to run 93% of its Tube service, including a full service on the Victoria line, approximately 90% of bus services, and between 80% and 90% on Docklands Light Railway (DLR), TfL Rail and London Overground.

Mr Evers stated that demand on the transport network continued to be significantly down on pre-Covid 19 levels though it was increasing daily. At the height of the pandemic TfL was seeing around 5% of normal journeys taking place on London Underground, whereas now they were 86% down on normal levels. He said that on 15 June much of the growth in passenger numbers had happened after the morning peak, suggesting that people were travelling to go to non-essential shops as they had reopened, and TfL would continue to monitor that. On the buses,

levels were around 68% down on normal and there had been an increase of between 20% and 25% in the past week.

Mr Evers said that there was a sharper morning peak on the Tube than on the bus network, and the peak itself had shifted to earlier in the day to approximately between 5.45am and 7.30am. Though it could only be speculated as to why that was, it was assumed that this was because the people travelling were working in either the health or construction sector which tended to start earlier in the morning. He remarked that there were also hotspots on the network which were being more heavily used than TfL would wish, particularly at stations in East London including Stratford, Canning Town and West Ham.

Turning to the road network, Mr Evers stated that traffic on TfL red route roads was down 17% on the same time last year, though it had increased by 5% in the past week. Travel on the road network had recovered faster than public transport though recently demand on public transport has been accelerating and catching up with it.

Mr Evers said that there had been a lot of comment by the Government and the media about guarding against a car-led recovery, so TfL was trying to ensure that public transport was a viable option for people alongside increasing the numbers of people walking and cycling. As a means to ensure against a car led recovery, TfL had decided to temporarily increase the Congestion Charge to £15 per day, increase the operational hours of the charge and make adjustments to residential discounts.

Mr Evers said that TfL was doing a number of things across the network to encourage active travel. He commented that over 1,000 traffic signals had increased their green man time to allow more time for pedestrians to move around the city. As well as this, the Mayor and TfL had published their Streetspace plan to put sustainable travel at the forefront of London's recovery from Covid-19. He added that TfL was working with a number of local authorities to ensure that more space was allocated to make walking and cycling easier. In terms of cycling, Mr Evers said that May saw the busiest month on record for Santander Cycles. On the previous day there had been over 38,000 hires, an increase of 35% on the same day last year.

Mr Evers said that people coming back to London's transport network should not expect to return to the same one that they had used before the lockdown. Wearing face coverings had become mandatory on public transport, and they had seen between 80% and 90% compliance with the new rules. At the same time, TfL recognised that some people would not be able to wear face coverings, and they were working with staff to ensure that they were aware of this.

Mr Evers remarked that social distancing was being implemented across the network though this meant that they could only accommodate 15% of the normal capacity. So it was important that people able to work from home continued to do so. He commented that TfL had also invested in hospital grade disinfectant for the enhanced cleaning regime that had been implemented, and over 500 hand sanitisers had been installed across the network.

Mr Evers said that in the coming weeks, as demand on the network rose, there would be a gradual increase in hotspot locations where forms of crowd management would have to be enforced. This could include holding people at the entrance to the station and at gate lines, and non-stopping trains at certain stations if a train was already at capacity.

A member asked Mr Evers whether he felt it would be challenging enforcing the requirement to wear face coverings on the network. Mr Evers replied that TfL was basing their plans for this on how other operators had dealt with it around the world. From the evidence they had received, the general rule was that people adapted to the new situation fairly quickly and compliance rates were very high. He said that the immediate concern was ensuring that people that cannot wear a face covering do not feel uncomfortable travelling on the network for fear of judgement from others. He remarked that TfL was monitoring this to see whether they needed to put out additional information on this or introduce a card/badge for people to carry on them.

Another member said that he had received a number of messages from people concerned that information about people exempt from wearing face coverings was not being communicated to people, particularly in stations. He asked that if a card or badge was introduced that this not be made mandatory. Mr Evers replied that TfL acknowledged that in its efforts to get the message out about face coverings to the majority of passengers, they were lacking some information about the people who were exempt, which they would try to rectify. In terms of the card/badge, he confirmed that it would not be mandatory to carry one if such a scheme was introduced.

A member asked Mr Evers whether he knew the timeframes for when the Night Tube would start operating again. Mr Evers replied that at present there was no timeframe under consideration. He commented that there would be discussions about the service but that its reintroduction did not feel in any way imminent.

The Chair asked how much notice TfL would need to change signage in order to go from enforcing a 2 metre social distancing rule to 1 metre. He also asked if the 2 metre rule was kept to whether it would be possible to safely manage crowds if demand continued to increase. Mr Evers replied that TfL had deliberately chosen to install fixed signage that did not specifically reference 2 metres but to generally make people aware to socially distance. The specific messaging over tannoy, on posters and on other materials was cheaper and easier to replace if the rules changed. He commented that if such a change in the rules happened they could update their information across the majority of the network in around a week. With regards to how long the crowd control measures could be enforced, Mr Evers said that it was difficult to say, though TfL was working with local authorities and the police to try to mitigate against any issues.

The Chief Executive asked why busy stations such as Clapham South were closed whilst quieter stations remained open. Mr Evers replied that there were a variety of reasons for doing so. This included looking at things such as places around those stations like hospitals, whether they enabled interchange, the critical facilities within the station that need staff present, and specific absentee rates across the network. On the example that were given, Mr Evers remarked that he did not know

the exact reason why the station had been closed but he would look into it and come back with an answer.

ACTION: Committee and Public Liaison Officer

The Chair raised a question from a member of the public who had asked if more measures could be introduced, such as 24 hour bus lanes, double red lines on red routes and additional parking charges to prevent a car led recovery. Mr Evers replied that some of the options mentioned were things that TfL were actively considering, though there had to be a balance as a degree of road travel was essential for certain businesses and for deliveries.

The Director asked if bars and restaurants were to reopen at the beginning of July how TfL was planning on managing the numbers of people using the network, particularly in the evening. Mr Evers replied that some of the research he had seen suggested that under such a scenario people would not all immediately return to using public transport. However, TfL would try to ensure that there was enough capacity on the network if the numbers of people using it started to increase. He reiterated that TfL was not looking to reintroduce the Night Tube at present.

A member said that he had been approached by a number of people with sight impairments who were having difficulty navigating around the new temporary barriers that had been installed to manage flows of people around stations. On another topic, he asked with the reduced numbers of people allowed on buses whether wheelchair users would be expected to wait longer as the allocated space would be more likely to be taken up. If that was the case, he asked whether any consideration had been given to make changes to hopper fares as journeys may exceed the time when the discount could be applied.

Mr Evers acknowledged that in response to the pandemic TfL had tried to put the necessary protection measures in place for the majority of passengers as quickly as possible, though with additional time they would have done things differently. Now that they had that time, TfL would go back and reassess what they had put in place and change things as and where they were needed. On the second question, Mr Evers replied that unfortunately at some locations people would be expected to wait longer for a bus though they would try to ensure that wheelchair space was being used appropriately.

The Director asked whether TfL could display all the latest travel information in a single location on its website to make it easier for people to access, especially those that had been away from the network for several months. Mr Evers replied that they had been making incremental changes to the website since the lockdown, though now was the appropriate time to reassess it to ensure people returning to the network had the information they needed.

The Chair thanked Mr Evers for attending the meeting.

10. Finance report (LTW624)

The Finance Manager stated that the finalised figures in the previously circulated report were awaiting an audit, which had been planned for September. There

would be a small surplus of around £4,000 which would be transferred over to the organisation's reserves taking it to a £49,000 holding balance. There had been significant variants to staff costs which were funded from particular grants in aid from the Greater London Authority (GLA) for compensation for loss of office and redundancy payments. Accommodation costs following the office move were lower than expected, as were IT support costs, and these funds had been used to upgrade the Customer Relationship Manager (CRM) system.

Turning to the budget for the current year, which had also been approved, the Finance Manager said that the budget for 2020/21 was £1.134 million, which included a budget reserve of £75,000. So far £35,000 of that had been allocated to upgrading IT equipment and employing a digital engagement specialist. It was anticipated that all costs for the year would be contained within the total budget allocation. A member asked if she could see some financial information on a monthly basis. The Finance Manager replied that he could circulate this.

ACTION: Finance Manager

11. Any other business

There was no further business to discuss.

12. Resolution to move into confidential session

It was resolved, under section 15(2)(b) of schedule 18 of the Greater London Authority Act 1999, that by reason of the confidential nature of the item(s) to be discussed, it was desirable in the public interest that the public should be excluded for a section of the meeting.