
Minutes

Agenda item: 5
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Minutes of the Policy Committee meeting held on 10 September 2019 at Europoint, 5-11 Lavington Street, London, SE1 0NZ

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Present

Members

Jackie Ballard, Alan Benson (Chair), Karen McArthur, Abdi Osman

In attendance

Tim Leighton	Head of Operations Delivery, Network Rail (Item 5)
Ben Rudkin	Head of Service Delivery, Southeastern (Item 5)
Chris Vinson	Senior External Communications Manager, Southeastern (Item 5)

Secretariat

Tim Bellenger	Director, Policy & Investigation
Keletha Barrett	Policy Officer (Item 5)
Gytha Chinweze	Governance Officer
Mags Croucher	Casework Officer (Item 5)
Richard Freeston-Clough	Operations and Communications Manager
Susan James	Casework Manager
Luke Muskett	Committee and Public Liaison Officer

Minutes

1 Apologies for absence and declarations of interest

There were apologies sent from Safia Iman, Arthur Leathley and Laura Osborne.

2 Chair's introduction and pre-meeting announcements

The Chair welcomed those present to the meeting and made the standard safety announcements.

3 Minutes

The minutes of the Policy Committee of 11 June 2019 were agreed by the Board and signed by the Chair.

4 Matters arising (PC167)

The Director, Policy and Investigation said that he had recently raised the point about London TravelWatch being part of the steering group on Euston station in a meeting he had attended with Trenitalia. He said that he would continue to push to get the organisation represented on the group.

5 Update on Lewisham stranded train incident

Mr Vinson stated that in early spring 2018 a cold swell of weather had hit the UK and had had a severe effect on the rail network. It resulted in an incident at Lewisham where passengers self-evacuated onto the tracks due to their frustrations at the time it was taking for their stranded train to be rescued. Following the incident, Southeastern, in partnership with Network Rail, had produced an independent report to see what had gone wrong and how a similar scenario could be prevented from happening again. Mr Vinson commented that the Rail Accident Investigation Branch (RAIB) had also produced its own report with a more narrow scope to look at specific failings that had occurred throughout the disruption.

Mr Vinson summarised how the weather had unfolded on 2 March. He stated that over the course of the morning there had been a number of stranded trains on the Kent mainline and high-speed network as rain froze on contact with the rail and a snow drift hit mid-Kent. As the day progressed, Southeastern changed their travel advice from asking passengers not to travel unless it couldn't be avoided to do not travel at all.

He remarked that they were in a difficult position as people had already travelled into work in the morning expecting to be able to get back home in the evening. Due to this the company had decided to run services during the evening peak. However, as a result of a number of weather related issues, trains soon began experiencing problems which finally resulted in the incident at Lewisham with a train stranded across the junction.

Mr Vinson stated that Southeastern recognised that the disruption had had a major impact on passengers and the company had offered enhanced compensation for those affected of either £100 or double the Delay Repay rate – whichever was greater. They had also made senior staff available to journalists and media outlets to apologise to passengers and to make them aware of the compensation they were entitled to.

Mr Leighton said that the incident at Lewisham had been a 'wake up call' for his and Mr Rudkin's teams to do things differently as a collective team in the south east. He stated that their investigation had been very broad in its remit and there had been some key findings and issues as a result of it. The first was that there was a lack of awareness of the severity of the issue at Lewisham and staff were slow to react to the situation as it unfolded. Mr Leighton commented that the team

had been 'on the back foot' from the start and the full range of resource that was available had not been deployed quickly enough.

Mr Leighton remarked that they had had a 'service mentality' rather than thinking about the individual passengers' needs. Having made the decision to run trains at the start of the day there had not been enough regard to the risk that the changing weather conditions could bring to services. Mr Leighton commented that another area that was lacking during the incident in Lewisham was their standard processes. He said that teams had focused on the train rather than thinking about the passengers stranded inside and didn't have sufficient understanding about what they were dealing with.

Mr Rudkin continued that there had been a number of actions that had followed from the review into the incident at Lewisham. This included strengthening training to make sure that train drivers and incident response staff had the appropriate tools specifically around meeting passengers' needs. Southeastern would also be 'beefing up' their emergency procedures beyond that of the standard set by the Rail Delivery Group.

Mr Rudkin said that there were some longer term actions arising from the report, one of which was looking at increasing the use of conductor rail heating at a number of key locations including Lewisham. They would also be trialling a new anti-ice product and exploring the use of ice breaker shoes on some passenger trains which would physically scrape the ice off the rail. Mr Rudkin added that the organisation wanted to improve its communications to give passengers more relevant and comforting information in times of disruption.

Mr Rudkin stated that some of the actions from the investigation had already been completed. This included revising their joint procedures to ensure that the focus was on the passenger. He remarked that the organisation had been on a 'big, cultural journey' and had made major strides in the area. Mr Rudkin commented that the change had already resulted in improved results with one recent side-by-side evacuation at Swanley having been completed within 90 minutes.

Mr Rudkin said that they had also developed some simple flow charts that help staff rather than confuse them in times of disruption. There had also been some practical measures put in place such as stores of food and water at strategic hub locations across the network. He stated that in times of hot weather they would allow emergency door barriers to be opened to improve airflow and at times of extended delays they would deploy emergency toilets from mobile response units.

Mr Vinson added that Southeastern had revised their winter timetables to ensure that in times of likely disruption all trains would have toilet facilities on them. A member commented that she regularly used Southeastern services and toilet facilities were regularly out of use.

Mr Vinson replied that following the death of one of their cleaners whilst on duty the company had put in controls so that the cleaning of the facilities could only be carried out at places on the network where it was safe to do so. He said that Southeastern had also invested millions to improve the maintenance of the toilets on its trains which had resulted in the current situation where the availability of a working toilet was at its highest it had ever been. He added that the awareness of

when a toilet was out of use was also now very high as this was communicated to passengers as soon as possible.

Mr Leighton stated that some further actions that they had implemented with Southeastern was to agree a timetable in times of disruption to bypass train planning activities that would otherwise need to be done in real time. They would also be looking at the weather forecast several weeks in advance and preparing teams to think about the risks of operating services. Mr Leighton explained that there had been a fundamental change around the timetable and the level of seniority of the people making decisions on it. There had also been a review of the number of stations that would be skipped in times of disruption based on the levels of footfall at the station. This had resulted in some stations, for example Albany Park, being put back into the timetable plan.

Mr Leighton said that a huge amount of time had been spent training staff alongside emergency services in simulated disruption scenarios and relationships with them had strengthened as a result of that. In terms of management of social media, there had been a significant amount of effort put in into improving this form of communication with passengers. He added that it was also a useful tool with good quality information that could be used to drive decision making in the control centre.

Mr Leighton stated that the new anti-icing fluid had been trialled last winter and had produced good results. He said that in times when they would be running a reduced service they would spread the coverage of snow and ice treatment trains evenly throughout the day so that the rail always had some form of protection on it. Mr Leighton commented that Network Rail and Southeastern had made significant strides in improving their resilience to weather related disruption in the previous winter. He added that they regularly meet to review performance and how they had dealt with stranded trains, particularly with regard to how well they had catered for passengers.

A member asked whether all the long-term actions had been implemented and if not what the timetable was for them to be acted upon. Mr Leighton replied that they were still considering their policy on conductor rail heating. He remarked that although that it was effective in heating the rail to prevent it from freezing the solution was not particularly environmentally friendly.

Mr Rudkin stated that Southeastern was also looking at ensuring that the specification for new rolling stock had extended battery life so that systems would remain on for longer if there was a loss of power to the train. Mr Vinson said that the current fleet was nearly 30 years old and had a much shorter battery life than more modern trains. He said that they had considered retrofitting larger batteries on the current rolling stock though the cost to do so was too high. Therefore, it had become a priority when procuring future fleets.

The Chair asked how much the battery life on the current rolling stock was down to its design specification and how much it was down to the age of the trains. Mr Vinson said that it would be the design specification that was responsible for their performance. Mr Leighton commented that in the meantime the current battery life of the trains would have to be managed in the most optimal way possible.

A member asked how confident Network Rail and Southeastern were that the measures they had put in place would work in times of disruption. The Chair asked whether any lessons learnt from the review into the Lewisham incident were employed during the heatwave in the summer. Mr Leighton replied that since Lewisham the focus was now centred on the passenger rather than the train itself. Mr Rudkin stated that the preplanning and preparation before weather related disruption had also vastly improved.

Mr Vinson commented that Southeastern was very prepared when the heatwave occurred in the summer. He said that thanks to this they had announced that they would run a revised timetable a day earlier than any other operator in the country. Although they had received some criticism for this, in practice it had meant that passengers were advised of potential disruption well in advance. He added that thankfully they did not have an incident on the day and that the procedures had worked well. Mr Rudkin added that he was aware from speaking to colleagues at Govia Thameslink Railway (GTR) that following their report into Lewisham they had also shifted their focus to concentrating on the passenger.

The Chair stated that although Southeastern and Network Rail were criticised for what had happened at Lewisham the publicity they had received during the heatwave had been positive. He asked how much this was shared with other operators in the industry. Mr Leighton said that they had shared the improvements that they had made with the industry though admitted that operators were not always good at listening to others' experiences and agreed that this was an area that needed to be improved upon. The member asked at what point they would begin to evacuate passengers. Mr Leighton replied that it would be from around 60 minutes, though there would be a risk assessment to ensure that this was the best approach.

The Director, Policy and Investigation asked whether there was any regard to the types of passengers on trains. He said that those travelling at peak times on commuter type services would likely have greater need to get where they needed to go compared to services running on a weekend where people would more likely be travelling for leisure. He asked how a driver with a 10 car train that was full with many people standing communicated that back to the control centre.

Mr Rudkin replied that the driver would pass the information through the signaller. He added that the trains also had a direct PA system connected to the control centre which could be used to relay messages to passengers if the driver was occupied with trying to resolve the problem with the train.

The Director, Policy and Investigation said that there were questions for the control function at Lewisham, particularly with regard to the quality of their decision making and the speed in which they made them. He said that in the RAIB report it mentioned that there was a reluctance to use permissive working procedures which would have helped to resolve the problem a lot sooner. He asked whether since Lewisham there had been a change so that control staff could now use permissive working.

Mr Leighton said that he would not have expected the control team to take advantage of such procedures and that instead that should have been done in the signal box. He added, however, that at Lewisham he did not believe that it had crossed the signallers' minds that that was an option open to them. Mr Leighton

commented that since the incident at Lewisham staff were much more aware of the tools that were available to them and would be prompted to use them.

The Chair thanked all speakers present for their time.

6 Congestion Charge and ULEZ (PC168)

The Casework Manager said that if members had any questions on her paper they could email her and she would get back to them. She said that London TravelWatch would have to be aware of any information coming out from TfL in preparation for the expansion of ULEZ. The Director, Policy and Investigation stated that under similar type schemes in the past people affected would have to purchase new vehicles, which would have been a significant expense. However, he commented that there was an array of older vehicles that complied with the ULEZ criteria and could be purchased quite affordably on the second hand car market.

The Casework Manager added that there was the potential for the restrictions on vehicles to get tighter and for the Zone to be expanded to include all traffic within the M25. The Director, Policy and Investigation remarked that a ULEZ around Heathrow Airport was being considered as a compromise in allowing a third runway to be built. All airside vehicles would also have to be electric.

7 Any other business

There was no other business.

8 Resolution to move into confidential session

The meeting resolved, under section 15(b) of schedule 18 of the Greater London Authority Act 1999, that by reason of the confidential nature of the next following item/s, that it was desirable in the public interest that the public should be excluded from the meeting.

In confidential session, members reviewed financial or reputational risks posed by the meeting.