
Minutes

Agenda item: 4
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Minutes of the meeting of the Board held on 9 July 2019 at the Quaker Meeting House, 7 Upper Lattimore Road, St Albans, AL1 3UD

Contents

1. **Chair's introduction and pre-meeting announcements**
2. **Apologies for absence**
3. **Declarations of interest**
4. **Chair's activities and Transport Focus update**
5. **Minutes of the Board meeting held on 02 April 2019**
6. **Matters arising (LTW604)**
7. **Annual accounts (LTW605)**
8. **Passenger issues in Hertfordshire and adjacent London boroughs (LTW606)**
9. **Any other business**
10. **Resolution to move into confidential session**

Present

Members

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

Guests

Peter Brooks	Abbey Flyer's User Group (Item 8)
Giles Croot	Harpenden Thameslink Commuters' Group (Item 8)
Leslie Freitag	Watford Rail Users Group (Item 8)
Robin Hall	Watford Rail Users Group (Item 8)
Patrick Ladbury	Local Development Manager, Govia Thameslink Railway (Item 8)
Trevor Mason	Team Leader – Strategic Transport and Rail, Hertfordshire County Council (Item 8)
Neil Middleton	Association of Public Transport Users (Item 8)
Nick Sutton	Political Assistant to the Mayor of Watford (Item 8)

Secretariat

Tim Bellenger	Director, Policy and Investigation
Richard Freeston-Clough	Operations and Communications Manager
Saphia Haffejee	Policy Officer
Luke Muskett	Committee and Public Liaison Officer
Joanna Simons	Chief Executive

1 Chair's introduction and pre-meeting announcements

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

2 Apologies for absence

The Chair stated that he had received apologies for absence from Safia Iman, Karen McArthur and Abdi Osman.

3 Declarations of interest

Laura Osborne declared that part of her role at London First involved dealing with the bus and rail operator Go-Ahead. The Chair declared that he also chaired Network Rail's Anglia Route Supervisory Board.

4 Chair's activities and Transport Focus update

The Chair stated that there had been a lot of work at Transport Focus in setting up a campaign targeted at delay repay, which would be formally launching at the end of the month. London TravelWatch would also be working closely on the project.

The Chair commented that the Board had met with the London Assembly Transport Committee. He added that both he and the Chief Executive would be attending their meeting the next day to explain the strategy for London TravelWatch in the coming years. Joanna stated that the papers for the meeting were available online and that she and the Chair would update members at the next Governance Committee meeting. The Chair remarked that as part of the long term strategy for London TravelWatch they would be explaining how the organisation could work more closely with Transport Focus.

The Chair said that he had been involved in a number of press releases including those discussing the fare anomalies in the south east and falls in bus passenger numbers and bus speeds. For fare anomalies, London TravelWatch would be campaigning to try to get this resolved and was keen to involve MPs whose constituents were particularly affected by unfair fares and ticketing arrangements.

5 Minutes of the Board meeting held on 02 April 2019

The minutes were agreed by the Board and signed by the Chair as a correct record.

6 Matters arising (LTW604)

Joanna commented that the key activities would be reworked into a report that would be sent to the Chair.

7 Annual accounts (LTW605)

Joanna stated that there had been no substantial changes since the Board received an update from auditor Paul Clark at the previous Governance Committee. As had previously been discussed, there was a deficit which had marginally taken down the organisation's reserves to below the target level.

8 Passenger issues in Hertfordshire and adjacent London boroughs (LTW606)

The Chair welcomed all the external guests to the meeting and thanked them for giving up their time to speak to members. He asked if a representative from each of the various organisations could give an introductory 10 minute opening statement which would then be followed by questions from members.

Mr Middleton stated that the Association of Public Transport Users (APTU) was a multi station rail user group representing passengers on the Thameslink north line between Harlington, Bedfordshire and West Hampstead. He had produced a physical handout of points for members and wished to point out a couple of key things from it.

Mr Middleton remarked that the first area he wished to cover was the implementation of the May 2018 timetable changes. He commented that there had been a good deal of consultation early on in the process, though there had not been enough time to implement the recommendations that had come out of discussions. Mr Middleton noted that there was also a lack of focus in providing a reliable service when the issues with the timetable started. He added that it would have been preferable to have had the previous timetable with less frequent services than one with more frequent services that could not be relied upon.

Mr Middleton commented that the capacity on the line was full so there had to be a decision on how to fairly share out services across the network. He added that problems that occurred in London had wide reaching effects for passengers using trains elsewhere in the country. He therefore stressed the importance of working with organisations responsible for passengers outside of London such as Transport Focus.

Mr Middleton stated that Govia Thameslink Railway (GTR) had plans to extend contactless payment to Luton Airport. However, it would not be available beyond that, meaning passengers in Bedfordshire would lose out. He added that the numbers of people that could be certain would be working five days a week for the next year was falling, so having a more flexible pay as you go system was increasing needed.

In terms of the GTR franchise, there were questions as to whether it should be broken up to provide a better service for passengers. This could include Transport for London (TfL) taking over part of the line, and a natural candidate for that would be services to Moorgate. He said that the current arrangement provided none of the advantages of a TfL concessionary model and all the disadvantages of having decisions made nationally. Mr Middleton concluded that he hoped that APTU could work together with London TravelWatch in future to try and help address some of the areas of concern that the user group had.

Mr Brooks said that the Abbey Flyer's Users Group (ABFLY) represented both current and future passengers on the Abbey line and fought for its long-term preservation. At present services ran every 45 minutes, which was not friendly to the travelling public. Mr Brooks explained that a few years previously ABFLY had begun a study looking into increasing the service on the line to every 30 minutes. The first part of the study had looked at the infrastructure requirements and the second part had investigated the business case and cost to provide the additional trains. ABFLY had taken the study as far as they were able to and would continue to campaign for the scheme going forward. Mr Brooks said that the user group had been campaigning for better facilities at stations along the route, and they had also managed to get the operating time of trains to be extended by an hour later in the evening.

Mr Brooks stated that although passengers would benefit from the introduction of contactless payments coming to the line, people would not be able to use Oyster. There was also the issue that it cost more to travel into London from St Albans Abbey rather than St Albans City despite the fact that passengers had to interchange at Watford Junction. St Albans City also had the advantage of having between four and six trains travelling into London per hour, which seemed unbalanced.

Mr Brooks commented that the future for the line looked positive with passenger numbers continuing to be on the increase. A member asked if he knew what the revenue numbers were for the line. Mr Brooks replied that he did not, though said that passenger numbers averaged between 500,000 and 600,000 per year.

The Director, Policy and Investigation asked if it was known when contactless payments would be coming to St Albans. Mr Middleton commented that he had spoken with the ticket manager at GTR about it. He had said that the company would be extending contactless payments to Luton Airport in the autumn using the current TfL infrastructure. The reason that had been given for why Oyster was not included within this was that TfL was moving away from Oyster in the longer term due to the limitation that the technology had within it. Mr Mason remarked that the situation was very confusing for passengers who already had a complicated mix of smart ticket options. Mr Ladbury commented that contactless was becoming increasingly popular to purchase fares rather than Oyster.

Mr Middleton agreed with Mr Mason's point that the current range of tickets was confusing for people. He suggested that the industry should come up with a system where passengers had a single account that they could use to travel with. A member asked, in the absence of such a system, whether there was more operators could do to improve ticketing information at interchanges. Mr Ladbury agreed that there was more the company could do to make people aware of which tickets applied to which journeys.

Mr Croot commented that if there was to be an increase in the usage of contactless payment cards there would also need to be additional tap in/out points for passengers. He remarked that at Harpenden station's main entrance there was only a single tap in/out point which at busy times would easily cause overcrowding and delays to people entering and exiting the station. A member asked if there was any information about the level of penalty fares being applied to people using

Oyster/contactless cards. Mr Ladbury replied that he would come back with an answer.

ACTION: Committee and Public Liaison Officer

Mr Croot stated that Harpenden Thameslink User Group had been formed 15 months ago in response to the proposed May 2018 timetable changes, which had seen services from Harpenden cut by a third. As a result of the changes, overcrowding had got worse on the line and it had also caused other effects including passengers driving instead to St Albans, increasing traffic and over capacity at car parks. Mr Croot remarked that over a year later the full timetable was still not in operation.

Mr Croot stated that the user group had proposed an alternative timetable in order to resolve some of the issues experienced by passengers using the line, though this had been ignored. He remarked that in autumn 2018 GTR had carried out its own assessment which recommended a solution similar to what had been earlier proposed by Harpenden Thameslink User Group. However, again, this was not implemented.

Mr Croot remarked that St Albans City was not designed to be used as an interchange station though this is what it had become since the reduction of services at Harpenden. He commented that he was pleased that St Albans City was going to be upgraded; however, whilst works were carried out it was inevitable that crowding at the station would get worst. Mr Croot concluded that there was a deliverable solution that would help resolve the issues and that it simply required leadership from the industry in order to make it happen.

A member asked what GTR's response had been for why the proposed timetable alternatives could not be implemented. Mr Ladbury commented that the May timetable changes had been a situation that had been imposed on the company by the Department for Transport. He added that GTR had currently been issued a judicial review and until this process had been completed he would be unable to comment on it publicly. A member asked when the review would likely be completed. Mr Ladbury replied that it would hopefully be within the next month.

Mr Freitag stated that the Watford Rail User Group worked well with London North Western Railway who host a number of their meetings. He remarked that there had recently been a lot of disruption on the line, and his colleague, Mr Hall, had been in discussions with Network Rail to try and resolve this.

Mr Freitag said that two Saturdays previously a trespasser had got onto the track which resulted in all six lines being closed. The impact of this had been felt as far as Stoke-on-Trent. Mr Freitag explained that because the crossovers had been taken away there had been no ability to turn around services and nothing could get past. He stated that in years previously the policy had been for trains to proceed with caution – not stopping all trains from moving. The Director, Policy and Investigation remarked that Network Rail had informed them that they were considering reinstating the crossover at Watford.

Mr Freitag said that a great deal of expense had been put into the proposal to extend the Metropolitan line to Watford, otherwise known as the Croxley link.

However, work on the scheme appeared to be at a standstill. He remarked that there were major passenger benefits for the extension and asked that London TravelWatch pursue it in future.

Mr Sutton stated that he had been involved in the proposals to extend the Metropolitan line to Watford with both the previous and current Mayor of Watford. Although a great deal of money had been spent in preparation for the works, ultimately TfL was unprepared to take on the risk of escalating costs for the project and so it was effectively 'dead'. As a result, a study was untaken by the borough to look at alternatives that could be used on the land, which was currently being protected by Network Rail. Mr Sutton commented that there was an obvious requirement for additional public transport connections between Watford and Croxley, particularly for people working at the Croxley business park.

Mr Mason said that the number of rail passengers in Hertfordshire per year was approximately 71 million and was on the increase. In contrast, bus passenger numbers were 29 million and had fallen by 8 per cent. He commented that in most shire counties the proportion between rail and bus was two thirds bus and one third rail, though in Hertfordshire this was the reverse.

Mr Mason reiterated Mr Middleton's point that it was important that the limited capacity on the rail network was shared fairly for the benefit of passengers. He said that people in St Albans not only wished to travel into central London but to other parts of the country such as Liverpool or Newcastle, and there needed to be the necessary provision of service to make that possible to them. The Council was also trying to encourage people out of cars on onto the railways.

Mr Mason commented that Hertfordshire County Council was pushing forward with an enhanced bus partnership to increase the numbers of people using the service. However, the county was limited in terms of its own provision as it only controlled 5% of all bus services in the area. The Chair highlighted the bus operation that had been put on by the local university, which had proved very successful. He asked whether a similar scheme could be adopted by Hertfordshire County Council. Mr Mason replied that because of competition rules, the Council could only provide a bus service when there was no commercial alternative. The university however, as an independent third party authority, was free to set up services as and when it wished.

Mr Ladbury stated that GTR had appointed new managing directors for Thameslink/Great Northern and Southern/Gatwick Express. Performance wise, the first periods of the year had exceeded the targets made by the Department for Transport, particularly for Southern which had seen a substantial improvement. He acknowledged that there needed to be improvements in places like Harpenden and the company was working closely with Network Rail to find a solution. Mr Ladbury commented that one particular area that was a growing concern was the number of trespassers and suicides that were happening on the network. In response, GTR was working closely with the Samaritans and had launched a zero harm campaign which encouraged passengers to approach and talk to people who looked vulnerable.

Mr Ladbury remarked that GTR had committed to a £55 million redevelopment of St Albans City station. Possession would be happening at the end of the month

and hoarding would be going up to hide the works from the public. The entrance to the station would be extended, which would replace the current WH Smith and coffee shops. There would also be new male and female toilets, more ticket barriers, additional waiting rooms and more space on the platforms.

At the Ridgmont Road entrance there would be two more ticket gates added, a new building constructed and additional ticket vending machines. There would also be male and female toilets built. He commented that they had also been in discussion with local residents and had taken on their feedback about leaving the lower foliage, which was a good sound barrier against passing trains. Mr Ladbury concluded that a proposal for a new footbridge was going through the approval process with Network Rail in August. The Chair asked how much disruption would occur as a result of the construction of the footbridge. Mr Ladbury replied that planning for that had not yet started.

A member asked whether the timetable that had originally been introduced in May 2018 had started to settle down with fewer reliability issues. Mr Middleton replied that services had got better and the statistics reflected that. Mr Croot remarked that there was additional padding in the timetable that made the statistics seem better than was the case and services were still being cancelled, as had occurred the previous day.

Mr Middleton commented that a key point that the APTU had raised with GTR was around allowing passengers to predict when their service would arrive. He added that it was frustrating for people leaving their homes expecting a train to arrive at a certain time only for it to be cancelled at short notice. Mr Croot remarked that passengers used to be able to receive text alerts about cancelled or delayed services. However, since the May timetable changes that functionality had been removed.

Mr Ladbury commented that there had to be a balance struck between ensuring that passengers were not unduly affected by last minute cancellations and getting services running back to the timetable after disruption. Mr Hall commented that trains skipping stations and last minute reliability issues were two of the things that most irritated members of his user group.

A member asked whether the pavements and road surrounding the station would be upgraded alongside the redevelopment of the station. Mr Mason replied that this was being actively considered, particularly with regards to the Victoria Street access to Ridgmont Road. He stated that the Council wanted to have the station look and feel as welcoming to all passengers as it could be.

The Chair asked whether there were any messages on the trains informing passengers that Oyster was not accepted at stations beyond a certain point. The Director, Policy and Investigation replied that there had been in previous years. A member commented that she had noticed such information being displayed on other operators' services. The Chair commented that London TravelWatch wanted to ensure that everything that could be done to inform passengers about where their tickets were valid from was being done by GTR. Mr Ladbury replied that he would provide a written response to members.

ACTION: Committee and Public Liaison Officer

The Chair thanked all the speakers for giving up their time and for the evidence they had provided.

9 Any other business

There was no other business.

10 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.