

London TravelWatch  
169 Union Street  
London SE1 0LL

The London Assembly Transport Committee  
City Hall  
110 The Queens Walk  
LONDON, SE1 2AA

georgina.wells@london.gov.uk

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Dear Georgina

### **London's bus services**

London TravelWatch is the statutory body that represents London's transport users. Thank you for consulting with us and inviting our views on these important issues for Londoners. This is a very pertinent investigation and responds well to our call in the run up to the Mayoral elections, 2016 for:

*Reliable bus services that keep up with the pace of change<sup>1</sup>.*

London's bus services have improved immeasurably over the last 15 years. Performance, particularly reliability, is far better, customer satisfaction has risen, geographic coverage, hours operated and frequencies are greater. Information and ticketing have all improved. However, more congested streets mean longer and less reliable bus journeys. London TravelWatch has been constantly warning about this situation.

London is growing. This will mean a million more homes, one and a half million more people and millions more road based trips a day. London's bus services must evolve to serve new areas of demand and changing, often higher, demand along existing corridors. London's highways authorities have to respond to these changes and give bus services greater priority on all of the roads they use, for longer times of the day and on every day of the week. In general, we think the planning processes TfL use are sound and now more transparent, though more can always be done.

The safety of bus passengers and those that use the roads is an important issue, but not one London TravelWatch has prioritised due to resources available to it and the fact that others are better placed, and have a legal duty, to manage these issues. The Traffic Commissioner has a duty to ensure bus companies operate in a safe manner. The Driving Standards Agency monitors bus drivers driving. The police, TfL and the local highways authorities are charged with investigating road traffic collisions and implementing schemes to reduce collisions. We know TfL and the bus companies continually seek to reduce casualties, both on and off the bus.

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<sup>1</sup> Transport users' priorities for the 2016-20 mayoral term. London TravelWatch, February 2016

That said, London TravelWatch is seeking to commission research into the passenger injuries that occur on London's buses caused by either collisions, or passengers slips, trips etc. We will publish this research when it is complete.

I hope the Commission find this submission useful. It draws from many years of experience, discussions with TfL and stakeholders and research, some our own. If we can assist the commission further please contact me at [REDACTED]@londontravelwatch.org.uk

Regards

[REDACTED]  
Policy Officer

## The Assembly's questions

### General questions

#### 1. Is London's bus network fit for purpose?

In 2013, in its submission to a London Assembly scrutiny commission London TravelWatch said:

Bus services are performing well in London and this is reflected in customer satisfaction scores. London's bus services have been independently judged to perform well against international comparators<sup>2</sup>. However, they are vital to London and should not be taken for granted. London's bus passengers want to see still more improvement.

Looking forward, bus services will come under increasing pressure as the population of London grows, demand rises and revenue support either remains as it is now or reduces. There is also some evidence that measures implemented to ensure bus service performance (bus priority in its widest sense) are being lost. Little new bus priority is being progressed.

Transport for London (TfL) has a sophisticated process for tracking changing demand and travel patterns and has generally responded well to performance issues and to crowding. However, there are unmet local needs, local performance problems and aspirations for better bus services. We would like to see TfL respond to this in two ways.

Firstly, we want TfL to link its bus service planning function with bus priority planning (as suggested in KPMG's *Independent strategic review of the provision of bus services in London*). This would enable TfL to work collaboratively with the London boroughs, their major stakeholder, to develop bus services, but also to provide additional bus priority on local roads.

Secondly, we want TfL to find ways of expressing, more transparently, the reasons for the decisions it makes, particularly when it decides not to take forward community aspirations for new services.

In June 2016, London TravelWatch published research<sup>3</sup> into the views of bus passengers. This was an online poll undertaken using a representative sample drawn from a Populus' proprietary panel.

From this research, London TravelWatch concluded then that passengers were satisfied with their bus services. The top priorities for improvement were:

- for more to be done to tackle anti-social behaviour

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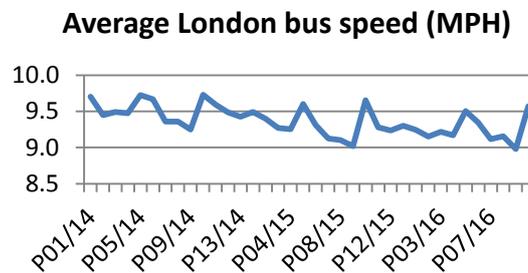
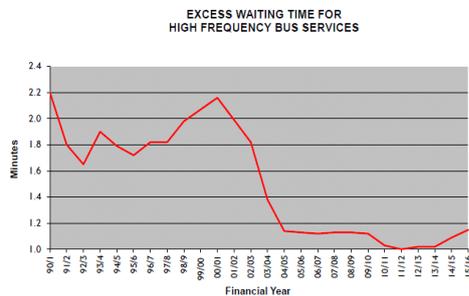
<sup>2</sup> <http://content.tfl.gov.uk/Item05-Independent-Bus-Review-July09.pdf>

<sup>3</sup> Bus passengers' priorities for improvement, London TravelWatch, March 2016:  
[http://www.londontravelwatch.org.uk/documents/get\\_lob?id=4174&field=file](http://www.londontravelwatch.org.uk/documents/get_lob?id=4174&field=file)

- higher frequencies
- more buses going where passengers want and
- more bus stops with next bus displays (despite higher levels of smartphone ownership)

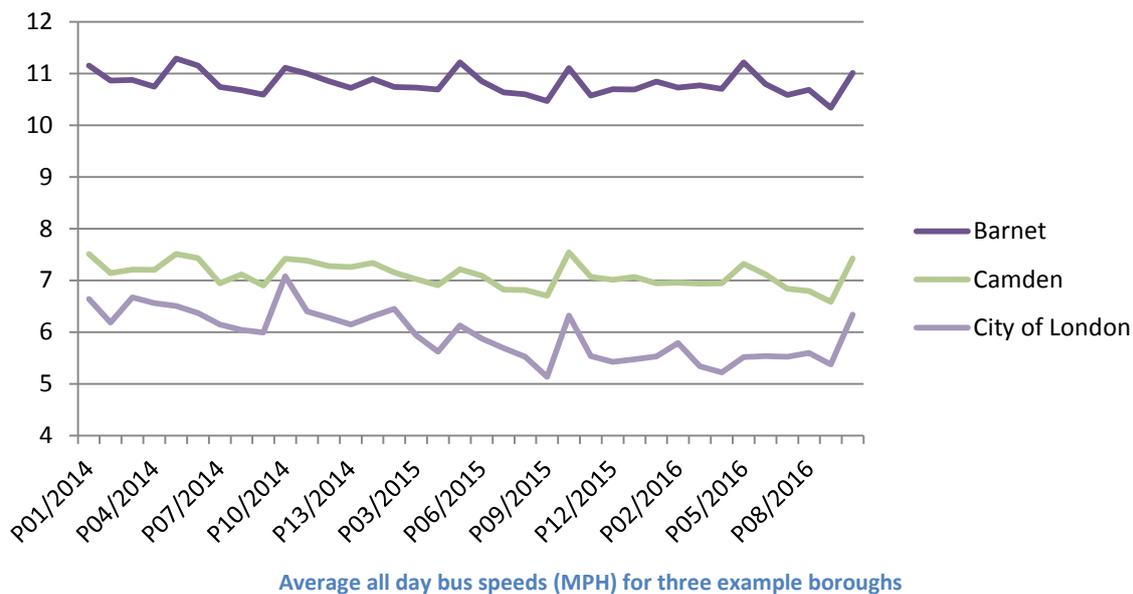
Therefore, in 2013 and as late as March 2016 London TravelWatch took the view that performance was good, passengers were generally satisfied, but of course, there was room for improvement.

Coming up to date London TravelWatch has become concerned about both the deterioration in bus speeds and reliability. Much more has to be done to reduce general congestion on London's roads, because buses are being caught up in this congestion. Much more needs to be done to prioritise the bus and minimise the impact of congestion on bus services.



there had been an improvement over the previous position in 2000. However, recent financial restraints on both TfL and local authorities outside of London have led to reductions in such services for example in Surrey<sup>5</sup> and route 167 provided by TfL in Essex<sup>6</sup>. These routes may be on the peripheral parts of the political and administrative area of Greater London but the enforced changes of travelling habit required of passengers, and reduction in access to jobs and services for Londoners and of labour availability from outside London will have a cumulative effect on London in terms of air quality and traffic congestion.

Generally bus service performance is better (in terms of reliability and speed) in outer London than inner London. The graph below of average, all day bus speeds is produced from TfL published data.



### 3. What different challenges do the inner and outer networks face?

The main challenge for all of London's bus service is the increased travel demand associated with rising population and economic growth alongside incremental reductions in road traffic capacity. All of this is leading to worsening congestion.

In central London, many construction sites take away road space. There has been loss of bus lanes to the new cycle facilities and considerable loss of motor traffic capacity. Buses are being caught up in general traffic congestion. The rise in App based Private Hire vehicle operation in central London and parcel deliver services appear are increasing.

In outer London, there will be a greater effect of rising car use causing increased levels of congestion and performance problems. The impact of the central area

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.surreycc.gov.uk/roads-and-transport/buses-and-trains/bus-timetable-changes/forthcoming-bus-timetable-changes/changes-to-abellio-bus-services-31-december-2016>

<sup>6</sup> <https://consultations.tfl.gov.uk/buses/167/>

'gating'<sup>7</sup>, that has been implemented to ensure the central area operates sensibly will be having an affect, though TfL were unable to quantify the impacts on performance when members asked at their meeting in May 2016. There is also the need for connectivity to areas outside of London that the lack of public transport links lead to the use of private cars to make the journey.

Many more services use highly residential streets that have high levels of parking which causes delay and prevents the installation of formal, accessible bus stops.

## **Designing the bus network**

### **4. How well do TfL currently plan bus routes?**

London's bus network changes very slowly over time. There are occasional area-wide changes affecting a handful of routes, such as the changes associated with the creation of the Olympic Park. Generally, the changes are minor and often affect single routes, but these changes will have been proposed after consideration of geographically associated routes.

London TravelWatch supports this evolutionary approach to changes to the bus network because it reflects the slowly changing nature of demand. Moreover, passengers often dislike change because they have organised their lives (their work and schools etc.) around their bus network.

London TravelWatch meets with TfL and puts forward our and passenger aspirations. Generally, we accept the analysis that TfL undertakes and the conclusions it reaches. Sometimes changes are made following on from our comments.

There are some instances where we disagree with TfL in their planning decisions. For example, London TravelWatch has proposed a service between two areas of north London<sup>8</sup> where there is a particularly high number of members of one particular community because we believe there is demand that is not recognised by TfL's modelling. We think a trial service would be useful. We also believe that hospital journeys should have greater priority than other journeys, whereas TfL's planning assumes all journeys are equal. We often seek to have passenger use made of what the industry calls 'dead mileage', journeys to the garage for example<sup>9</sup>, whereby buses are making the journey anyway and so could benefit some passengers at marginal extra cost. An example of this was the recent extension of route 68 to include Norwood Bus Garage (set down) and St. Julian's Farm Road (pick up) in West Norwood, which has benefitted passengers from these areas, and also provided crowding relief to longer distance passengers on routes 196 and 468 where there was previously a crowding pinch point<sup>10</sup>. Previously buses had run out of service over this section of route and TfL had repeatedly turned down the requests to make the service available, as their standard modelling of demand did not identify

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<sup>7</sup> Gating or active travel management is the use, by TfL, of their traffic signal network to slow the entry of vehicles into the central area in order to maintain flow there.

<sup>8</sup> [http://www.londontravelwatch.org.uk/documents/get\\_lob?id=1806&field=file](http://www.londontravelwatch.org.uk/documents/get_lob?id=1806&field=file)

<sup>9</sup> [http://www.londontravelwatch.org.uk/documents/get\\_lob?id=2219&field=file](http://www.londontravelwatch.org.uk/documents/get_lob?id=2219&field=file)

<sup>10</sup> <https://westnorwood.wordpress.com/2016/06/25/new-stop-for-68-bus/>

this as necessary. However, following lengthy dialogue with London TravelWatch and local residents and councillors it was agreed to do this.

Additionally it is particularly difficult to work with hospitals because although many recognise the importance of bus transport too few actively collect and report data about patients, staff and visitors. This is a significant issue for TfL bus planning. Any reconfiguration of health services in London and surrounding areas needs to carefully consider how passengers will be able to access these by public transport.

5. Does TfL take account of the London Plan and housing developments when planning bus routes? Could they improve the way they make these decisions?

TfL's planning system does take account of the London Plan and housing development; however, changes will often follow rather than lead the development. It would be preferable for bus services to be established prior to residents, etc. moving in, but of course, this would be costly.

This issue works both ways. Development should also take account of bus services and particularly not over supply parking as this will encourage car dependency and congestion and undermine London's bus services.

6. What bus priority measures has TfL already introduced and how successful are they?

The single most successful bus priority measure has been the central area congestion-charging scheme. Following its introduction in 2003 buses were able to operate with much less delay and indeed some buses were arriving at their destination much too early and stand space became an issue.

The importance of tackling congestion should not be underestimated because buses will often be caught up in the general traffic and suffer the same delays.

Shortly after the formation of TfL in 2002, it implemented many successful bus priority schemes. There have been 'whole route' proposals and one-off schemes. All have contributed to the improving performance of London's bus services. These schemes include:

- bus (taxi and cycle) lanes
- parking and loading restrictions on bus routes
- bus gates that allow buses to get ahead of general traffic
- priority and signalised junctions (selective vehicle detection)
- exemptions from banned turns and privileged access to some roads
- the removal of bus stop lay-bys and the implementation of a kerb parallel to the road. This ensure buses can move off without being 'trapped' at the stop
- targeted intervention to keep buses moving.

All of these measures have contributed to maintaining the performance of bus services. Additionally bus lanes will benefit taxis and cycles, though at some locations taxis have to be excluded because allowing them in to bus lanes would negate the benefits.

The hours of operation of bus priority and waiting restrictions is important. Too often the operational hours are too limited reflecting historically busy times when London worked Monday to Friday and Saturday mornings, Now London is a 24/7 city. The operational hours of bus priority and waiting restrictions should reflect this.

7. What impact could the introduction and development of the Hopper ticket have on the design of London's bus network?

The Hopper ticket will lead to more journeys because it significantly reduces the cost of travel. There will be some changes to how some passengers travel (changing buses more often) because there is no financial cost to interchange. However, though the Hopper ticket will reduce the cost of changing buses to some passengers it should not be used to justify the shortening of routes because passengers find changing bus inconvenient and will mean greater journey time variability.

8. Does TfL plan new bus services to stimulate demand or just to respond to existing demand?

Our understanding of TfL's planning process is that it generally follows demand. It does not seek to stimulate demand or to retain existing customers when passenger expectations change. We note that TfL buses have been very slow to follow the trend in vehicle specification and comfort of operators outside of London for items such as on board free Wi-Fi or seating that is more comfortable. This is an area where we think that TfL could significantly improve its offer to passengers.

9. What tools does TfL have to monitor and forecast demand?

TfL monitors new development, surveys passengers directly and analyses Oyster information to discern demand.

### **Alternative models and approaches**

10. What other approaches to network design should TfL be considering? As appropriate, please make reference to these or others: orbital routes, through routes, bus rapid transport systems, shuttles and hubs

#### **Orbital routes**

There are in fact many orbital services between all manner of town centres and other passenger objectives. The aspiration for better orbital services arises because of a desire to travel directly between two centres where demand is less than the demand on radial routes. In outer London where population densities and demand is less this mismatch will be greater. Part of a solution to this is to improve the performance (speed and reliability) of bus services between these centres with the measure outlined in 6 above regarding priority for buses.

#### **Through routes**

London TravelWatch generally resists the shortening of routes because the services then become less convenient as journeys require changing buses. However, this has to be balanced against performance because it is more difficult to reliably operate a longer service than a shorter one. Again prioritising the bus is essential.

#### bus rapid transit systems

Bus rapid transport systems can carry huge numbers of passengers if the road space necessary can be allocated to them. There may well be routes or sections of routes that could operate in this manner along some of London's major roads.

#### shuttles and hubs

The 'red arrow' routes 507 and 521 and the Golders Green station H2 and H3 routes could be described as shuttle buses. It may be appropriate to introduce 'shuttle' services between some of the main stations and Oxford Street should pedestrianisation happen as planned. London's town centres and bus station operate as hubs.

11. Is it a good idea for TfL to consider different types of networks for different areas of London? How could this work in practice?

London TravelWatch has suggested to TfL that they consider trialling the model of branded bus services that many successful provincial bus companies operate commercially. In many ways, outer London bus services are similar to these provincial services insofar as the car is the competition. Perhaps a branded, very high quality service could attract non-bus users where a standard TfL red bus offer has not.

Where there are greater numbers of elderly people, it would be helpful to ensure bus stops are more numerous. Where frequencies are low, it would benefit passengers if the timetable were easy to remember by departing at the same times each hour. There are a number of examples of such low frequency services operated by TfL that would benefit from this, mainly in outer London, and often most heavily used by the elderly or serving areas that are otherwise wholly dependent on the private car. As such, they are not that attractive or understandable to people who do not use them now. TfL could in our view learn lessons from other areas on how to operate and promote these services better.

12. How successful have existing express routes been, such as X26 and 607?

The X26 and 607 have proved very popular, but have needed substantial investment in bus priority measures over many years and nevertheless would benefit financially and performance wise with additional bus priority measures.

The X68 is—a peak hour only route that gives low-cost access to central London jobs and higher education from areas of Croydon and parts of Lambeth that do not have

as much rail access as other locations. The route is expensive to operate and previously had a very high subsidy per passenger. However, it has a significant social benefit to passengers on low incomes who otherwise might not be able to afford or get to jobs and higher education in central London. In our recent research on affordability of travel in outer London <sup>11</sup> we identified that there may be other areas of London that might benefit from a similar type of service to the X68.

13. What can we learn from others cities about successful/unsuccessful bus network redesign?

Successful bus network redesign works with passengers as intelligent and informed consumers, appreciating local knowledge, and culture such as retaining familiar bus route numbers. As such, the TfL evolutionary and consultative approach is good, but does have its limitations in terms of marketing and branding of local services.

14. What are the challenges associated with this kind of large-scale change to the bus system?

There will be both winners and losers. Some passengers have built their lives around certain services. The greater the change, the more likely it will be that the analysis will be wrong.

15. Could TfL improve the way it consults the public on proposed changes to bus routes? How?

There has been and remains a problem with engaging passengers regarding their services and any changes proposed. This has reduced since TfL have been able to email their Oyster database.

TfL are now much more transparent as to why change requested by passengers does not meet their planning criteria or fails on business case grounds. This is an important change rather than previous responses to request that a proposal did not 'work'.

Obtaining meaningful contributions from passengers about proposed changes could be obtained if TfL were to adopt a focus group or market research approach rather than just calling for comments via consultation, targeting directly passengers that would be affected directly by changes they propose. However, market research and recruiting passengers for such focus groups would be expensive and difficult.

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<sup>11</sup> [http://www.londontravelwatch.org.uk/documents/get\\_lob?id=4100&field=file](http://www.londontravelwatch.org.uk/documents/get_lob?id=4100&field=file)