
Minutes

Agenda item: 4
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Minutes of the meeting of the Board held on 19 July 2016 at 169 Union Street, London SE1 0LL

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Present

Members

Chris Brown, Richard Dilks, Glyn Kyle, Stephen Locke (Chair), Abdikafi Rage, John Stewart

Guests

Dana Skelley OBE	Director of Asset Management for Surface Transport, Transport for London
Marek Banasiak	Development Manager Bus Infrastructure, Transport for London
Alex Phillips	Bus Policy Manager, Transport for London
John Barry	Head of Network Development for Buses, Transport for London

Members of the public

Secretariat

Tim Bellenger	Director, Policy and Investigation
Janet Cooke	Chief Executive
Richard Freeston-Clough	Communications Manager
Sharon Malley	Executive Assistant (minutes)
Robert Nichols	Policy Officer (RN)
Vincent Stops	Policy Officer (VS)

1 Chair's introduction and pre-meeting announcements

The Chair welcomed members and visitors to the meeting.

2 Ruth Thompson

The Chair announced the death of London TravelWatch board member Ruth Thompson.

The Chair said Ruth had remained active in her work until very recently, including appearing at a London Assembly Transport Committee hearing on the pedestrianisation of Oxford Street, and her death was a huge loss to London TravelWatch. She was extremely dedicated in her work for transport users in London and she would be greatly missed.

The Chief Executive said that colleagues from across the industry had expressed shock and sorrow at her death, including members of the Assembly and officers at Transport for London. She said that Ruth's husband had said he was very touched by the kind messages he had received.

It was agreed that London TravelWatch would send a note of condolence to Ruth's husband. A minute's silence was observed in her memory.

3 Apologies for absence

There were no apologies for absence. Richard Dilks sent apologies in advance for his anticipated lateness.

4 Declarations of interest

There were no declarations of interest in addition to the standing declarations.

5 Chair's activities and Transport Focus update

The Chair said that he had participated in two Transport Focus meetings since the last London TravelWatch board meeting. Transport Focus's board meeting June had taken place by phone and had focused on Transport Focus's internal reorganisation and the terms on which Transport Focus would undertake additional work. It had also looked at the Govia Thameslink Railway (GTR) problems and Southern's project to obtain feedback from passengers on their journeys via a smartphone app. The Chief Executive said London TravelWatch would support this work because of the problems being experienced by Southern passengers in the London area.

The Chair said the Transport Focus board meeting had also considered the consumer landscape consultation being undertaken by the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills, which was likely to include revisiting the issue of Alternative Dispute Resolution in the autumn.

The other Transport Focus meeting had been of the Statistics Governance Group and had reviewed progress with the National Rail Passenger Survey and draft invitation to tender for a new contract in autumn, with a focus on enabling online completion and shortening the survey.

In his capacity as Chair of London TravelWatch he had attended meetings with new London Assembly members, focusing on the transport leads. He had met Caroline Pidgeon AM and Florence Eshalomi AM and other meetings were in hand.

The Chair said that he had given evidence to the London Assembly Budget and Performance Committee on Transport for London's (TfL) budgetary position and its impact on passengers. He had also attended meetings with individuals from TfL and the Office of Rail and Road (ORR), as well as participating in London TravelWatch's successful seminar on interchanges.

6 Minutes

The minutes of the Board meeting held on 24 May 2016 were agreed and signed as a correct record, subject to the addition of the words "for TfL" after the words "apparent tendency" in the first line of the fifth paragraph on page 7.

7 Matters arising (LTW526)

It was noted that the minutes recorded an action that had not been included in the matters arising report. London TravelWatch officer would chase David McNeill from TfL about their approach to booking accessibility assistance at Underground stations.

Action: Executive Assistant

The Director, Policy and Investigation, said that London TravelWatch appeared to be receiving an increased number of telephone contacts because transport operators were removing their own numbers from their websites and London TravelWatch's then became the first number that passengers found.

It was agreed that London TravelWatch would review the contact details provided on transport operator websites then, if there appeared to be a problem, write to the ORR as part of the discussion over complaint handling protocols to emphasise the need for transport operators to include their own phone numbers on their websites.

Action: Director, Policy and Investigation/Casework Manager

The Chief Executive said that the Chair had written to the new Secretary of State for Transport, Chris Grayling MP, to request a meeting and a discussion on devolution. It was noted that it may be useful to speak informally to the clerk of the transport select committee to discuss the possibility of an enquiry.

Action: Communications Officer

The Chief Executive said she was due to meet senior individuals at Govia Thameslink Railway shortly and would ask about their timetable in relation to

proposals to close ticket offices. It was important that GTR did not use its other ongoing difficulties as a smokescreen to hide decisions relating to ticket offices.

Action: Chief Executive

8 Key activities (LTW527)

The Director, Policy and Investigation, said he had attended meetings in relation to the forthcoming South West franchise. He said London TravelWatch's key messages had been about the need for devolution, bringing the metro services to a consistent four-trains-per-hour level, and extending Oyster and contactless payments to stations such as Staines, Epsom and Esher.

Members discussed the recent simultaneous closures of both the District line and c2c service at Barking. This was poor practice and had been raised as a concern by London TravelWatch. It was noted that London TravelWatch should aim to have input into the Barking area redevelopment and may need to make a site visit there in future.

It was noted that London TravelWatch would be reviewing its cycling policy later in the year in light of engagement with users. The work remained ongoing.

The Chief Executive said that Waterloo station would be subject to major engineering works beginning in August 2017 and London TravelWatch had attended a meeting to discuss passenger communication about this. The fact that communications were being considered so far in advance was welcomed. However, London TravelWatch, as a statutory consultee, should have been consulted about the works themselves, but this had not happened.

It was noted that there would be a period of significant reduction in service during the works. The focus was currently focused on the impact of the reductions themselves, with issues of displacement at other stations and on other modes not yet being closely examined.

The Chief Executive said she had attended a comprehensive briefing on a recent incident at the Blackwall Tunnel which had resulted in serious road congestion across a wide area. She said the main learning outcome had related to the need to find ways of giving advice to motorists already on route.

Dana Skelley, Director of Asset Management for Surface Transport at Transport for London, said that there was also a focus on being able to fix problems more quickly. In addition, it was possible to learn from other modes and their policy to evacuate if the problem remained after a certain period of time had elapsed. This approach was not currently taken in relation to roads but may be useful in such situations.

The Chair noted that Gavin Barwell MP had been appointed as Minister for London within the Department for Communities and Local Government and it was agreed that London TravelWatch should seek a meeting with him.

Action: Director, Policy and Investigation

9 Bus stations (LTW528)

The Chair welcomed Transport for London's Dana Skelley, Director of Asset Management for Surface Transport, and Marek Banasiak, Development Manager Bus Infrastructure, to the meeting. The Policy Officer (VS) presented a report on bus station management and said that thinking about bus stations had been prompted following London TravelWatch's report on best practice at interchanges. London TravelWatch wanted to see minimum passenger facilities and standards for bus stations and TfL should put greater focus on this issue. The Chief Executive said that London TravelWatch had held some discussions with Ms Skelley and Leon Daniels, the Managing Director for Surface Transport at TfL, on the need for minimum standards at bus stations.

Ms Skelley said that some service standards, such as cleanliness, were written into contracts, and that TfL was carrying out research into bus users' expectations. TfL was working to make more staff available at bus stations and to make better use of public address systems to improve information to passengers.

Members noted that there had been problems in the past with the design of bus stations, with the layout of stations such as Vauxhall being particularly confusing for passengers. Concerns had been raised at the time that the station design was architecture-led rather than focusing on the needs of passengers and improvements had needed to be made retrospectively. Similar problems had occurred at Walthamstow.

Mr Banasiak said that design was important and that signage standards, for example, had developed in recent years. Ms Skelley said it was important to take on board the idea of engaging earlier with transport users.

The Director, Policy and Investigation, said that some bus stations were built by developers as part of larger development schemes and that the final results were sometimes unsatisfactory. An example was the bus station at White City. The Policy Officer (VS) said that this was due to the bus stations being designed at a town planning level without sufficient input from transport specialists.

Mr Banasiak said that TfL tried to initiate discussions with developers at an early stage to try to get the design right from the beginning and he was working closely with developers at Brent Cross at the moment. There was also a focus on sorting out ownership issues so that TfL had a stronger negotiating position.

Ms Skelley said that TfL was organised differently now from when the Walthamstow scheme was developed. Schemes were now sponsored by individuals with responsibility for ensuring that benefits and outcomes were realised.

The Chief Executive said that passengers also faced problems at dispersed bus stops, such as at Elephant & Castle and Victoria. There were no staff at such locations to assist passengers. At the East Croydon bus station there were no staff in attendance during the evening peak. In addition, there was no facility to top-up Oyster cards at bus stations.

Members noted that they had visited White City and had found the bus station there very difficult to navigate. Walthamstow Central was good but buses going to

common areas were served by different stops. Tottenham Hale was poor, even though it was relatively new, as it had little information for passengers. Canning Town bus station was difficult to access for wheelchair users and there was not enough consistency in the information provided.

Members asked whether bus stations were under the responsibility of individual managers. Mr Banasiak said that some bus stations were staffed but not all, with staffing generally prioritised for the most busy stations. Work was underway to try to improve communications between London Underground staff and staff at bus stations.

The Policy Officer (VS) asked whether TfL implemented minimum standards that passengers should expect at bus stations. Mr Banasiak said that there was a standard for information on bus stops and shelters but that there was also need for real-time information and better information links between Underground and bus services.

The Chief Executive said that TfL should develop passenger standards for bus stations, along similar lines to those applied to train stations. Mr Banasiak said that TfL would be considering this further over the summer and the discussion was useful in providing direction. Issues such as Oyster top-up, availability of staff and information, management of dispersed stops and intuitive, easily navigated design were all important to passengers.

Members asked whether TfL owned its bus stations in London. Mr Banasiak said that one of the definitions of a TfL bus station was that TfL owned the land, which was why bus stops in places like Brixton and Elephant & Castle were not defined as bus stations.

The Chair thanked Ms Skelley and Mr Banasiak for attending and looked forward to progress on this issue following the meeting in August.

10 Bus strategy

The Chair welcomed TfL's Alex Phillips, Bus Policy Manager, and John Barry, Head of Network Development for Buses, to the meeting. Mr Phillips said that the pattern of bus demand was changing, especially in the central area, and that other transport projects such as Crossrail would also have an impact on bus use. This, together with growth in housing in areas such as Croydon, East London and Colindale, gave the opportunity to tweak bus route arrangements.

Mr Phillips said there was potential to redistribute existing capacity from the central London area to areas of housing growth. The onus was on bus priority, which was crucial to improving bus speed and reliability and encouraging people back onto the network.

Mr Phillips said the pattern of bus demand was complex, with routes often seeing demand peak in the middle and trail off at either end. This could lead to the creation of capacity in central London. The network was subject to continuous review and the TfL team was now organised by borough, meaning officers had detailed knowledge of local areas.

Mr Barry said that the bus network carried 70% more people than 15 years ago, which was a huge upsurge in demand. TfL had continued an established policy of making bus routes shorter and not running routes across central London. They had tried to make routes easy to understand, removing weekend variations and matching day and night services where possible. A lot of work had been done on improving reliability, including investing in extra buses and drivers and infrastructure such as extra bus stands.

Alongside this, changes to the network had been made to take account of other transport changes. For example, route 38 had been reduced in frequency when the Victoria line was improved.

The current strategic approach was to gradually transfer capacity from areas with improved rail links, mainly central London, to areas of pressure, mainly housing growth areas. However, the changes would be incremental and it was unlikely to involve a ring of buses terminating around the edge of central London with passengers changing onto other modes to reach the centre. Buses would continue to take passengers into central London.

Members asked whether TfL possessed data on how willing bus passengers were to switch modes, or whether there was a hard core of bus users. Mr Phillips said transport decisions were affected by issues such as price and network coverage, as well as personal preference. Some passengers preferred the bus to the tube as they were able to see out of the window.

Mr Barry said that attitudinal research among passengers had shown a slight preference for buses and it was unlikely that everyone would switch modes. Price differential was also a strong factor, as was the extra time involved in walking to tube stations that were often further away than bus stops.

The Director, Policy and Investigation, said that the new bus hopper ticket may influence passenger behaviour and may result in passengers changing buses earlier in order to avoid a second fare. Mr Phillips agreed that changes in behaviour may offer other opportunities for reviewing the bus network.

It was noted that significant changes in the Oxford Street area were likely given the proposals for pedestrianisation. This was still at an early stage but TfL would continue to try to take people where they wanted to go.

Members said that the review was an opportunity to introduce bus priority to some routes where it was currently lacking. Mr Barry said that he supported increased bus priority but that 80% of bus routes were on borough roads so changes required borough support. TfL was keen to include bus priority planning at the outset when new developments were proposed.

In relation to the pedestrianisation of Oxford Street, the Policy Officer (VS) said that the idea of re-routeing buses onto Piccadilly would be difficult because Piccadilly was already very busy. Mr Barry acknowledged this but said it was important to maintain a link between the West End and Edgware Road.

The Chief Executive said that TfL should prioritise bus routes during roadworks and that buses should have been able to continue two-way operation during the recent works on Tooley Street.

In relation to the forthcoming introduction of the night tube, Mr Barry said that TfL would implement the night bus changes already consulted on and would review the position in Spring and again after one year. It was difficult to model how the night tube would impact on the night bus use as the situation was so novel.

Mr Barry emphasised that the overall plan for the bus network would see gradual changes that responded to change in need and were linked to bus priority. He hoped to have more discussion about the bus network as a whole, not just individual routes, as he wanted more feedback on what people thought the overall network should look like.

The Chair thanked Mr Barry and Mr Phillips for participating in an active debate on the issues. London TravelWatch looked forward to further exchanges with TfL as their thinking developed.

11 Bus performance (LTW529)

The Policy Officer (VS) presented a report showing that the speed and reliability of the London bus network was declining. He said the decline was leading to a reduction in patronage and revenue for TfL. Mr Phillips and Mr Barry stayed for the consideration of this item.

Mr Phillips said that he hoped that increases in bus priority would assist bus performance to return to previous levels. Over the long term, demand was expected to track general levels of population growth.

He said that TfL was looking closely at the impact on bus use of major roadworks underway in London. He said that it usually took around six months for patronage levels to return to pre-works levels following a period of disruption, but with so many works underway at once it was difficult to predict future patronage levels.

The Policy Officer said that during initial discussions about the changes to road layouts needed for the Cycle Superhighway schemes, London TravelWatch had been told that 21 schemes would be introduced to mitigate the negative impact on buses. However, this had now reduced to five. Mr Barry said that many of the bus schemes were in the hands of the highway authorities but he hoped to see more implemented. He also hoped to have opportunities for proactive measures, not only mitigation works.

Members asked about levels of driver retention and Mr Barry said that this was not a major area of concern at present. He said that currently 0.05% of miles were lost due to driver absence, compared with 2% 20 years ago.

Members noted that giving bus companies incentives to reduce excess waiting time (EWT) could lead to buses being driven too fast for safety. Mr Barry said that the main aim of the EWT target was to improve reliability so that passengers would have a shorter 'longest' journey.

Members said that short-turning buses before they reached their advertised destination, and holding buses for periods at stops to regularise the services, led to greater unreliability for passengers. Mr Barry acknowledged that this had increased recently and TfL was unhappy about it.

The Director, Policy and Investigation, asked whether the reduction in night bus patronage might be related to the increase in taxi services such as Uber. He noted also that bus use might decline as petrol costs reduce, making the use of private cars more attractive. Mr Phillips said that it was difficult for buses to compete with cars if their cost came down but TfL worked to improve public transport to make it as attractive an option as possible. He thought reductions in night bus patronage were possibly linked to night and weekend roadworks.

The Chair thanked Mr Barry and Mr Phillips for their contribution to the discussion of this item and noted that there were likely to be many issues for further consideration.

12 Southern Rail (LTW530)

The Director, Policy and Investigation, presented a report on the recent poor performance of Southern Rail and priorities for improvement. He said that Southern had not notified London TravelWatch of its significantly reduced timetable prior to its introduction and that he was surprised that so many cuts fell on metro services that were already driver-only operated, given that previous cancellations had been to longer-distance services with conductors. He noted that the timetable had been revised the day before the meeting to reintroduce a small number of services, following responses to the previous service changes, including from London TravelWatch.

The Director, Policy and Investigation, said that some of the service reductions appeared unnecessarily severe, such as the significant reductions to the London Bridge/Peckham Rye route.

Members considered the data in the report. It was noted that all performance measures were declining, including right time arrivals, the public performance measure and the number of trains planned to run. This was frustrating. In addition, Southern Rail did not liaise closely enough with TfL, which compounded problems.

Members noted that Govia Thameslink Railway (GTR), operator of the Southern Rail route, did not appear to be interested in improving services and did not seem to be engaging with the issues. Morale among staff appeared to be very low. The Policy Officer (RN) said that GTR's behaviour was driven by its contract with the Department for Transport rather than delivering for passengers.

It was noted that the reduced timetable was due to last at least four weeks but could be in place for longer. This could lead to a significant shift in patronage away from rail that could take a long time to recover. It also disincentivised investment in rail.

Members discussed the causes of the poor performance, including difficult industrial relations and the size of the overall franchise. It was noted that franchises appeared to be most successful when small, self-contained and run by managers with local knowledge.

It was noted that passengers did not always have options when it came to choosing transport and it was not possible for many people to switch to another train

company if GTR were failing. This compounded the impact that GTR's poor performance was having on passengers' lives.

Members noted that the Gatwick Express service, also operated by GTR and suffering poor performance, charged premium fares even though passengers did not experience a premium service. It was unfair to charge premiums when the service was so poor.

The Board strongly endorsed the organisation's continuing call for compensation to be paid to rail passengers following delays of 15 minutes, rather than 30 minutes as was currently the case. Recent developments made the case for this change even more compelling.

Members discussed the question of whether London TravelWatch should align with others in calling for GTR to be relieved of the Southern franchise. The Policy Officer (RN) noted that much of the cause of the problems was in the DfT's specification and management of the contract with GTR, particularly in relation to the speed of change to staffing structures. It was important to include the DfT's role when considering the causes of problems as removing the franchise from GTR would not address all the concerns.

It was agreed that members would consider this issue in more detail in the confidential session of the meeting.

13 Annual accounts (LTW531)

The annual report and accounts for the year 2015/16 were received.

14 2017 meeting calendar

The dates for meetings in 2107 were agreed.

15 Any other business

There was no other business.

16 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.

During the confidential session, members considered Southern Rail and reviewed the meeting.