

Board meeting

10 November 2020



Casework report quarter 2 2020/21

Agenda item: 10
LTW636
Drafted 14.10.20

Casework report written by Susan James, Head of Casework for London TravelWatch and Transport Focus

Quarter two

Overview

Quarter two of this year consisted of the 'fall out' following lockdown and August saw an increase in contacts as people started using the transport network again for both work and leisure purposes.

Eurostar started to recover in the summer months but this changed when the decision was made that passengers arriving from France, Belgium and the Netherlands must self isolate for two weeks on arriving into the UK. Eurostar responded to this by making standard tickets more flexible so that passengers could amend their plans as the rules surrounding Covid change.

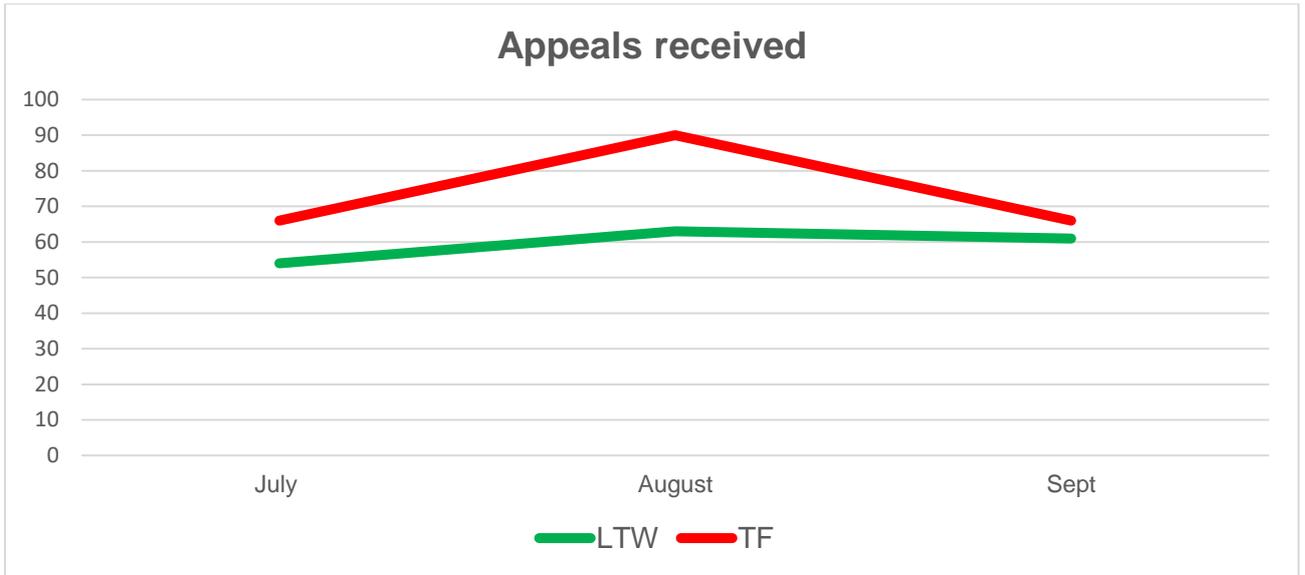
At the end of September we received the news that the Department for Transport had decided not to offer those with railcards a refund or extension even though they could not travel for three months during lockdown. This was particularly disappointing for passengers and frustrating for the casework team. Some responses from the passengers who had approached Transport Focus are in the appendix.

Terminology

Cases received by Transport Focus and London TravelWatch are still called 'appeals' as London TravelWatch still receive these from transport providers not part of the Rail Ombudsman scheme. The question has been raised as to whether or not these contacts should still be referred to as appeals and ideas on this subject would be welcomed.

Appeals received by Transport Focus and London TravelWatch from July to September 2020

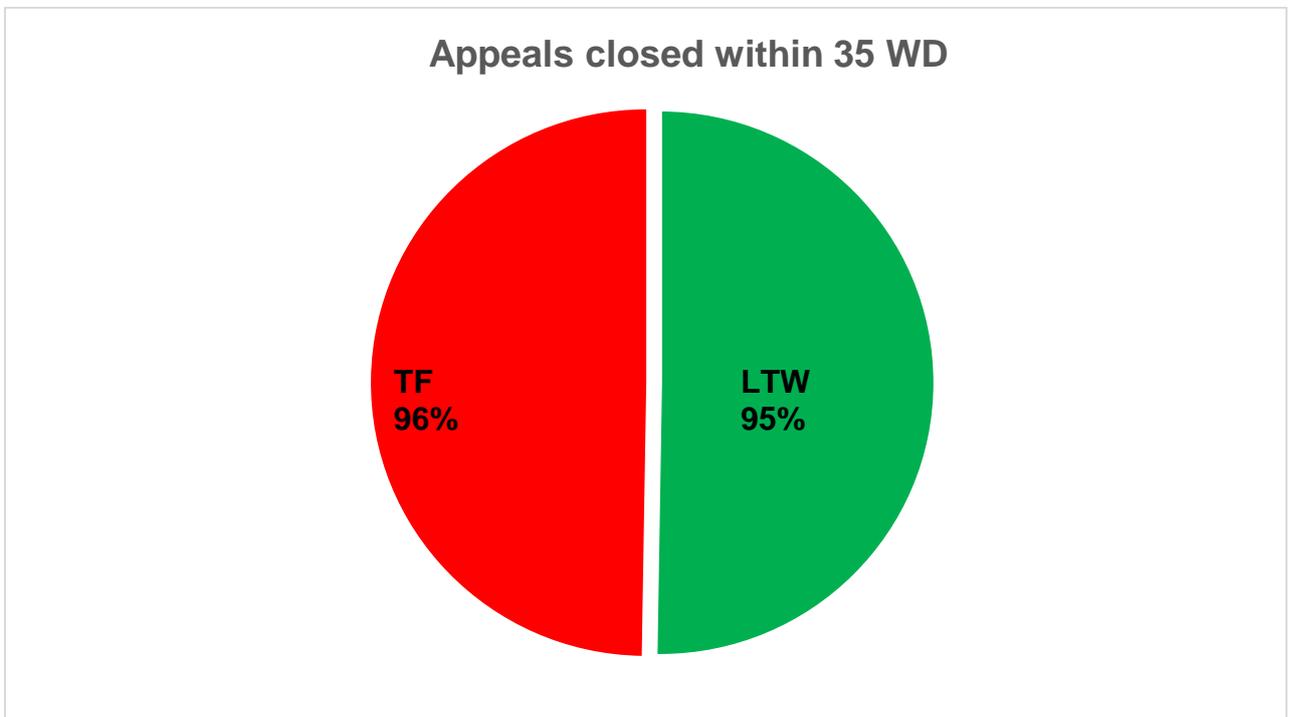
Total cases received - 400



Casework performance

The target for closure for appeal cases is 35 working days (WD). It is acceptable for cases to be open beyond this time if the caseworker is negotiating with the operator or if the case is of a complex nature and the caseworker requires assistance from other staff members. However, the passenger must be kept informed of the situation no less than every 15 working days until the case is closed.

The casework team have worked hard to close more cases within the 35 day time frame and they have improved by approximately 7%.



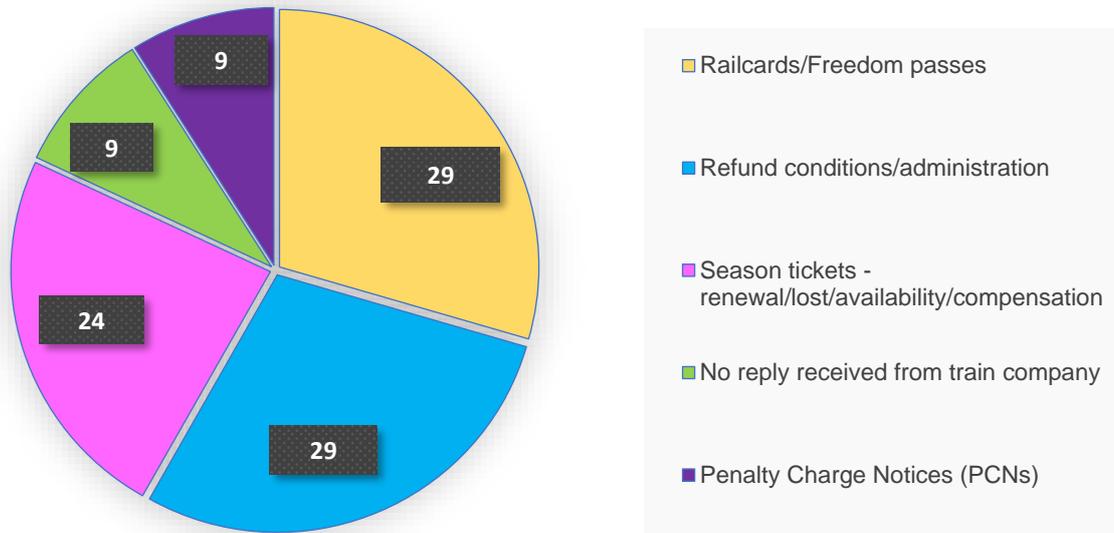
Complaint information

Operators receiving the most complaints	No of complaints	Subject of complaint	Outcome
Railcards	40	Unable to use to travel	37 Neutral* 3 successful
Eurostar International Ltd	33	Refunds – unable or unwilling to travel	21 successful, 10 neutral*
thetrainline.com	24	Refund conditions	16 successful, 7 neutral*

*An example of a neutral outcome would be one where the passenger does not believe that their refund calculation is correct. The casework team would check the calculation themselves and with the TOC. A neutral outcome would be where the calculation is correct and the caseworker would reassure the passenger of this.

TfL by mode	No of complaints	Subject of complaint	Outcome
TfL Congestion Charge	6	Refunds and lack of response	23 Successful 17 Neutral
TfL LEZ	3		
TfL Oyster 60+	1		
TfL Policy	1		
TfL Santander Cycle Scheme	5		
TfL Streets	1		
TfL Thames Clipper	1		
TfL Underground	1		
Transport for London	11		
total	42		

The five most common complaint subjects overall



Case types received

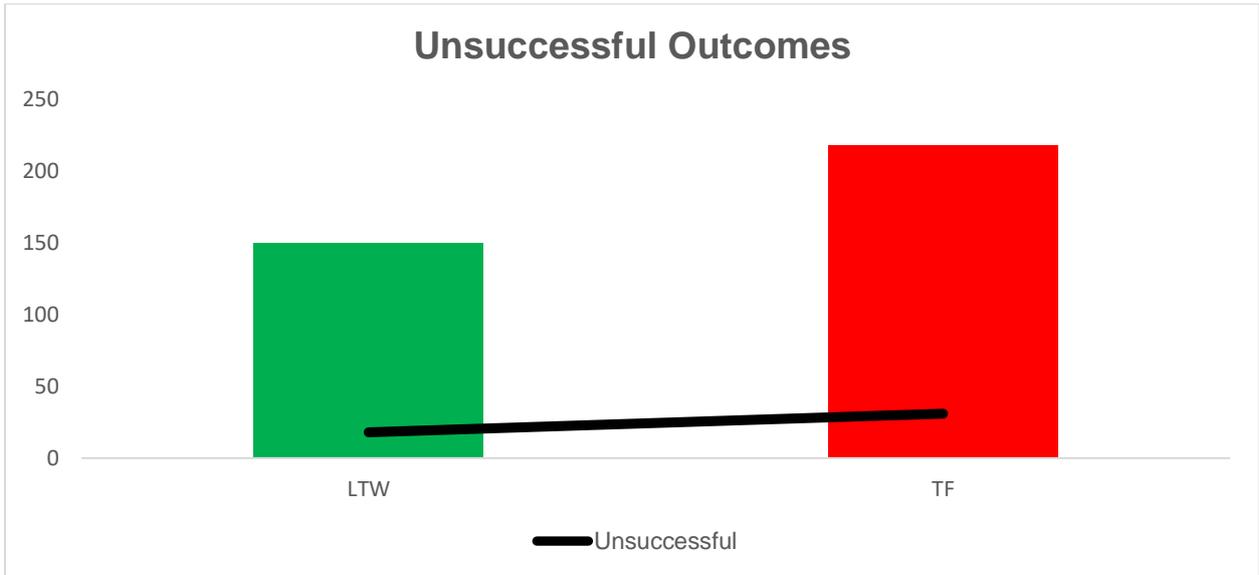
The types of cases received has not particularly changed in this quarter. Cases continue to be extremely challenging and time consuming. Nevertheless, the team have had some excellent success and we have received very positive feedback from grateful passengers (see appendix).

In addition, the casework team continue to have successes where the TOC has refused to refund a passenger and the Rail Ombudsman has upheld the TOC's decision. Some passengers have then turned to Transport Focus and London TravelWatch for help and we have successfully argued for a different outcome on their behalf.

Closed appeals

150 appeals closed for London TravelWatch in this period

218 appeals closed for Transport Focus in this period



The graph above demonstrates the low numbers of unsuccessful appeal outcomes in this period. London TravelWatch had 18 unsuccessful cases and Transport Focus had 31.

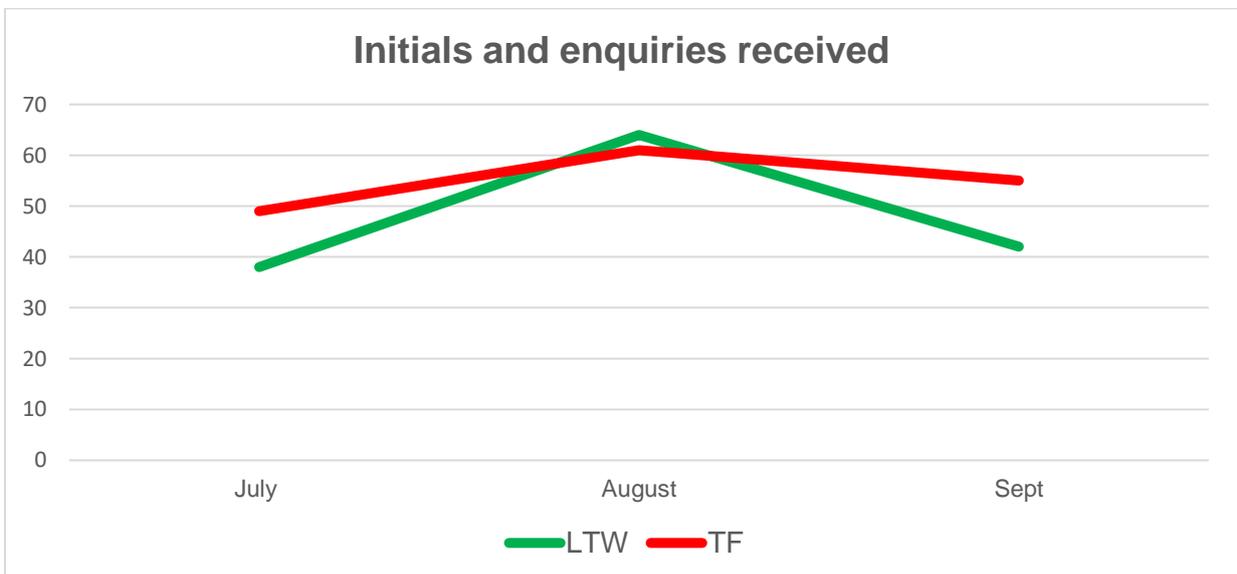
Initial and enquiry contacts

On behalf of Transport Focus and London TravelWatch, Ventrica received 309 initial and enquiry contacts in quarter two which is more than double the amount in the previous quarter. This was expected as passengers returned to the transport network.

The table below shows how many of these case types were received each for Transport Focus and London TravelWatch per month in the previous three months. The majority of passenger contacts were for those looking for help with TfL and Eurostar refunds – London TravelWatch and Railcards – Transport Focus

Initial/enquiries received in Quarter two 2020/21

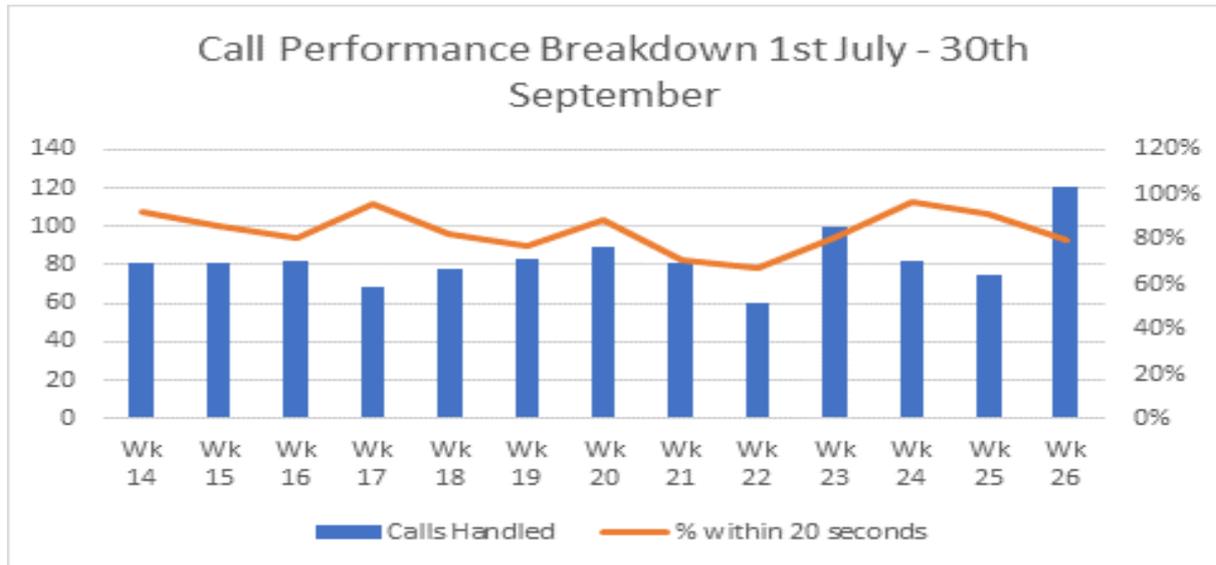
Total number of contacts received - 309



Ventrica – call answering and initial enquiries

Calls answered in 20 seconds by Ventrica

In this quarter, Ventrica answered 92% of calls within 20 seconds and 94% within 30 seconds.



Most contacts are regarding Railcards or signposting to the rail operator. This may be because the Transport Focus telephone number is much easier to find than that of the TOCs. Work is currently underway for new information to be gathered from callers which will give a high-level indication of the reason for the call and capture information such as the wearing of face coverings, that we may otherwise miss.

Rail Ombudsman

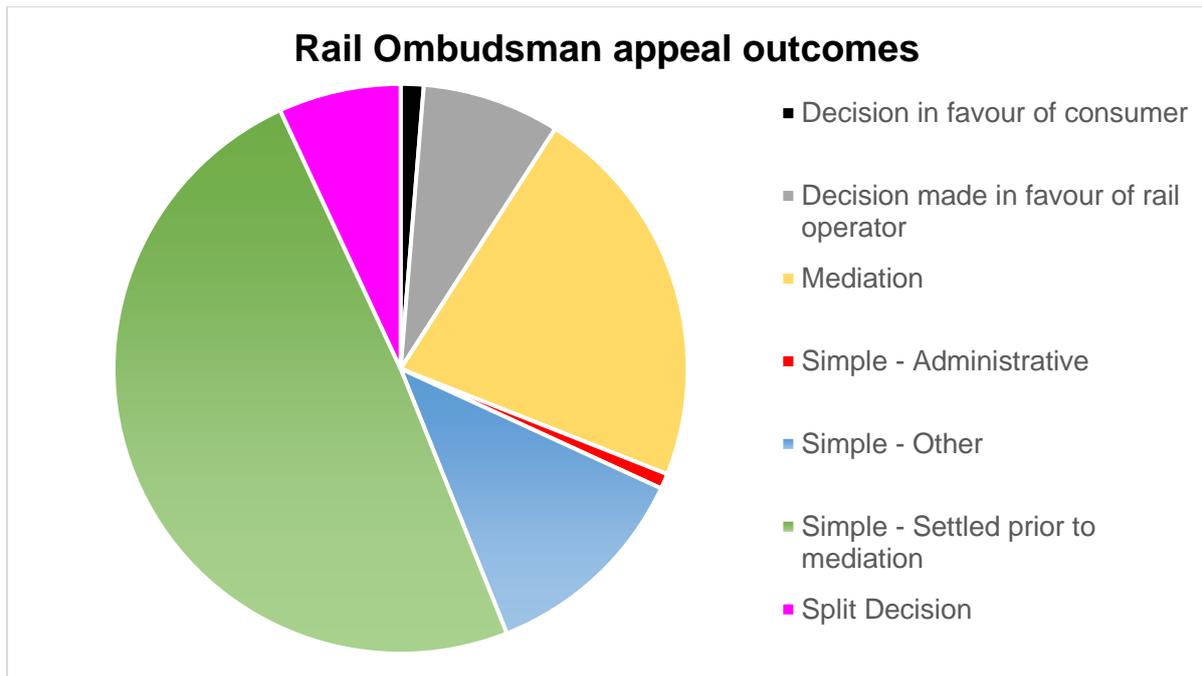
During quarter two, the Rail Ombudsman received more appeals from GWR and Greater Anglia passengers.

Rail Operator	No of complaints	Subject of appeals	Outcome
GWR	32	Complaints handling and overcrowding*	Almost all simple outcome**
Greater Anglia	30	Season ticket refund conditions	Almost all simple outcome**

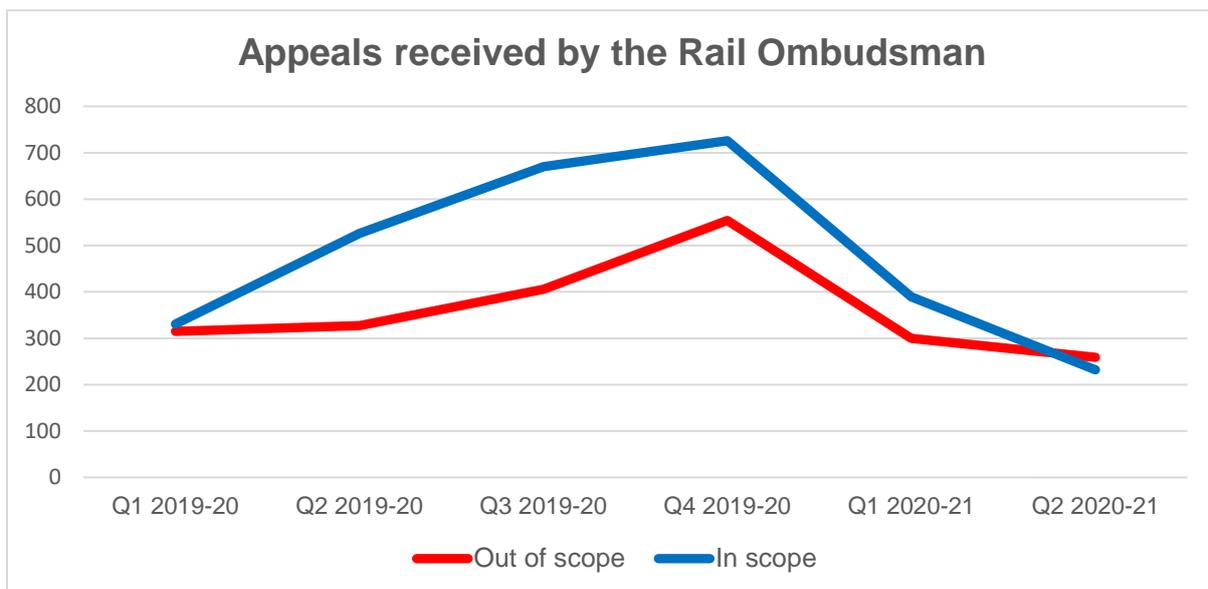
*overcrowding at this time is most likely linked to social distancing

**an example of a simple outcome would be the Rail Ombudsman advising the TOC that a cheque/refund had not been received by the passenger

Rail Ombudsman appeal outcomes



The number of appeals to the Rail Ombudsman continues to reduce, due to the low numbers of passengers travelling during this time. During this quarter 84 cases were transferred to TF/LTW as they were out of scope for the Rail Ombudsman. Most of these cases were regarding passengers questioning the calculation and amount of their season ticket refund. This is considered a policy issue and therefore out of the scope of the Rail Ombudsman. Other out of scope cases are usually where the passenger has not yet approached, or is still in liaison, with the rail operator.



Appendix one

Passenger feedback – Railcards

Thank you clarifying this situation to its conclusion. I share your disappointment but would thank you for all efforts made on Railcard customers' behalf.

I'd like to thank you for your assistance and understanding. You are quite right that they'll lose loyal customers like myself who would have continued to use their services year in year out.

Thank you for our efforts on our behalf and it must be very frustrating to have had the [DfT](#) respond in such a negative and high handed manner. However this is dressed up the issuer is guilty of breach of trust at best. The purchaser buys a card in the expectation that full use may be used. The argument that this has been prevented by "Act of God" - the PUS at the [DfT](#) if you will - does not hold water. The stupid thing is that to extend the validity would cost no more than its administration but such is the arrogance of Departments of State this will not be countenanced. One would do well to remember that "arrogance is the anaesthetic that numbs the pain of stupidity." There is little point in pursuing legal action which would be very expensive and I don't doubt that the flag of Crown Immunity would be hoist. There are two courses of action open to me, firstly I will not renew my card and secondly, I will write to my MP who, being of the Opposition, will give me the tribal answer and, please forgive me, bugger-all else! I know this from past experience.

You may be interested to know that an old friend of mine, Colin [Foxall](#), was sometime chairman of Passenger Focus; regrettably we lost contact some years ago. I should like to thank you and your staff for the efforts you have made on behalf of the travelling public. I think you have done extraordinarily to penetrate the fog that surrounds Government departments and it is only their intransigence and arrogance in not giving their reasons that has precluded the right answer. The milch-cow which is the poor old taxpayer will just have to grin and bear it. - not that I'm a cynic mind!

Dear Susan, thank you for your email, so grateful for your efforts, pretty shocking they don't want to help as a gesture of goodwill, as you said.

Passenger feedback - general

I needed to firstly thank Mags for what she did to help me. I can't thank her enough.

It is not normally in my nature to send reviews or emails of this kind, but in this particular instance, it is the absolute least I could do.

I had an outstanding complaint regarding a ULEZ penalty charge with TfL since October 2019. Despite my various contact attempts to reason with TfL, the debt was passed on to an enforcement agency known as CDER. It had increased from £80 to nearly £600 in that time.

I had sent £100 as full and final settlement as I could not afford more, and could provide evidence the debt was unjust.

Despaired and stressed about the situation, I complained last week through Travel Watchdog - the reference is in the title of this correspondence. My initial call was taken by Glenda who was very proficient and easy to talk to. Then Margaret took on my case after I had sent in all the necessary paperwork.

She quickly reviewed my case and responded, kindly empathising with my situation but informing it would take 20 days to resolve. However, this morning my car was clamped by CDER. I called them and they were holding me to ransom, requiring me to pay £458 within the hour or they would tow away my vehicle, charge me for the pleasure and then increase the costs further by selling at a discount via auction.

I am pregnant right now and struggling to cope with the financial impact of Covid-19. I contacted the Travel Watchdog at around 10:25am. The girl I spoke to (Teresa, I believe?) kindly passed my message and the urgency to Margaret. You definitely have a modern day superhero on board because by 11:20am I had received a call from TFL cancelling the unjust penalty notice with a promise to promptly remove the clamp. I literally could not be more grateful for her efforts. It's so difficult to find this kind of service or support in most situations / companies these days.

Your service is an excellent and important one. I would be happy to provide a review or testimony should you ever need me to. Have a blessed day!

Many thanks for your email. You are providing a fantastic service and doing a great job. A seemingly small thing can have a huge positive impact on someone's day.