
Minutes

Agenda item: 4
Drafted 18.04.16

Minutes of the meeting of the Board held on 22 March 2016 at 169 Union Street, London SE1 0LL

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Present

Members

Chris Brown (from Item 10), Richard Dilks, Glyn Kyle, Stephen Locke (Chair), Abdikafi Rage, John Stewart, Ruth Thompson

Guests

Jill Collis	Director of Health, Safety and Environment, Transport for London (Item 5)
Keith Jipps	Customer Service Director, Thameslink and Great Northern (Item 9)
Neil Middleton	Association of Public Transport Users (Item 9)
Bob Oram	Rail and Maritime Union (Item 9)
Steve Murphy	Managing Director, MTR Crossrail (Item 10)

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)

1 Chair's introduction and pre-meeting announcements

The Chair welcomed members and visitors to the meeting and made standard safety announcements.

The Chair and members sent condolences to colleagues at the European Passenger Federation following the attacks in Brussels.

2 Apologies for absence

There were no apologies for absence. Chris Brown sent apologies in advance for his anticipated lateness.

3 Declarations of interest

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

Members were reminded that the meeting was taking place during the pre-election period and that they must avoid making statements that were seen to favour particular candidates or party positions.

4 Chair's activities and Transport Focus update

The Chair said that he had attended two main sets of Transport Focus meetings since the last London TravelWatch Board meeting. He had attended the Passenger Contact Group on 9 March, which looked at how Transport Focus handled complaints and interactions with the public and considered future management arrangements. On 16 March he chaired the Statistics Governance Group in Manchester, which discussed progress with the changes to the National Passenger Survey and other research projects. He also attended a Transport Focus board meeting and conference, which considered the contribution of buses to the northern powerhouse, and which received presentations from holders of the new Trans-Pennine Express and Northern franchises. The meeting also considered an update of research on UK highways, including motorway service areas.

As Chair of London TravelWatch he had attended several meetings with Transport for London (TfL), including with Shashi Verma on complaint handling, and regular update meetings with the Managing Directors for surface transport and customer experience. He had also met with representatives of the Labour and Conservative mayoral teams, attended a meeting of the Office of Rail and Road's Consumer Expert Panel and met Tom Brake MP.

5 Safety update (LTW517)

Jill Collis, Director of Health, Safety and Environment at TfL, gave a presentation on safety issues affecting London Underground, with particular focus on the gap between trains and platforms.

She said that London Underground had been trying to improve safety at the platform edge for many years, with the Mind the Gap announcement beginning in 1968. A recent incident at Clapham South station showed that platforms did not need to be crowded for problems to occur.

London Underground had been implementing specific platform safety measures since the mid-1990s, with the focus now on location-specific solutions that addressed particular problems in particular places. This included putting vinyls on the platform at known hazard spots, moving departure boards away from the platform edge and introducing barriers to divert people from dangerous areas. In addition, physical measures such as the use of nosing stones to reduce the size of the gap, were implemented where possible.

Ms Collis said that the vast majority of safety incidents occurring at the gap between the train and the platform did not result in serious or life-threatening injury. However, London Underground would continue to try to improve safety for its passengers and would look closely at recommendations arising out of previous problems.

Members asked about the amount of time allowed for passengers to enter and leave carriages and whether this was dangerous for passengers with mobility impairments. Ms Collis said that it was difficult to balance the need for enough time for safe movement on and off carriages with the need to minimise congestion on the platforms ahead caused by delays. A trial in this area had taken place and analysis of the outcomes would be considered in due course.

Ms Collis said that TfL had previously introduced various safety measures at once, which made analysing the impact of each individual intervention difficult. The current policy was to introduce new measures one at a time and then review the outcomes, to be more certain about which measures were most effective.

Ms Collis said that she was head of safety for both London Underground and London Rail. Members noted that London Underground appeared to have a better approach to new safety initiatives than National Rail or TfL Rail. Ms Collis said that she sought to share best practice across the industry and good ideas from one area were often adopted in another.

The Director, Policy and Investigation, said more could be done to influence passenger behaviours, such as encouraging people with heavy luggage to use lifts rather than escalators and to apply handbrakes on pushchairs. In addition, lift signage sometimes implied that lifts were only for people with mobility impairments. Ms Collis said this was being reviewed and also that staff were being asked to encourage the use of lifts where appropriate. She said that London Rail recently promoted a campaign about putting brakes on buggies.

Ms Collis said that the Rail Safety and Standards Board had a programme for high-risk areas such as Farringdon station and she liaised with Network Rail colleagues through this. She noted that the new trains using Farringdon had a bigger gap between the train and the platform.

Members asked whether there was a danger of information overload for passengers, which could mean that important messages sometimes got lost. Ms Collis said this was an area for review.

Members asked how business case assessments on safety were evaluated. Ms Collis said that criteria included reductions in the number of incidents, improvements in journey times and the reputation of the business. Ms Collis acknowledged that the network would continue to get busier and TfL hoped to be able to increase capacity where possible.

The Chair thanked Ms Collins for her interesting presentation.

6 Minutes

The minutes of the Board meeting held on 26 January 2016 were agreed and signed as a correct record. The minutes of the Governance committee held on 3 November 2015 were noted.

7 Matters arising (LTW518)

The report of matters arising was noted.

8 Key activities (LTW519)

In response to questions, the Director, Policy and Investigation, said that the meeting about Oxford Street pedestrianisation had looked at ways of improving the environment and had been attended by TfL, the City of Westminster and others.

9 Outcome of Govia Thameslink Railway ticket office closure consultation (LTW520)

The Director, Policy and Investigation, presented a report on the outcome of the consultation run by London TravelWatch about proposals to close ticket offices on the Govia Thameslink Railway (GTR) franchise.

He said that although the consultation was now officially closed, responses continued to come through. There had been around 8,000 individual responses to date.

The Director, Policy and Investigation, said that London TravelWatch's remit related to the sale of tickets and did not cover staff security or job losses. London TravelWatch would only look at the ticket office arrangements and not any of the other aspects raised by the proposals.

The Director, Policy and Investigation said there had been some mixed messages from GTR, with some staff suggesting that the changes were of a trial nature that could be reversed. It was important to note that if the official Schedule 17 protections were removed from individual ticket offices, there would be no obligation to consult again on any further changes.

The Director, Policy and Investigation said he thought that the proposals were not acceptable in their current form. There was not enough clarity about the definition of a ticket office, not enough knowledge about the impact on passengers and no

proposal for any sort of phased introduction. There was a need to look more closely at the types of tickets being purchased by passengers at each station. The Director, Policy and Investigation, noted that many of the responses from GTR had a strong emphasis on the use of the Key smart ticket but this may not be appropriate in the London context.

The Director, Policy and Investigation, noted that there had been a major shift in the last decade in how passengers bought tickets, with far fewer transactions taking place at ticket windows. However, passengers valued staff at stations, not necessarily for ticket sales but for their visibility and assistance.

Keith Jipps, Customer Services Director at Thameslink and Great Northern, said that the proposals would see the introduction of hosts at some stations in place of staff in ticket offices. This would see increased engagement with passengers and ensure that staff were more available than currently. Overall the proposals would mean an increase of over 2,000 additional staffing hours per week.

He said that he supported the idea of a period of transition and that GTR would not close ticket windows until they were certain there would be no passenger detriment. There was no incentive for them to make it more difficult for passengers to buy tickets. He noted that the increased hours of staffing would mean greater availability for assisted travel.

It would be more challenging to introduce these changes at some stations than others and detailed operational plans were being drawn up for each. He said that GTR was committed to maintaining the proposed hours of operation for the duration of its franchise until 2021. He was willing to discuss the enforcement of this with the Department for Transport.

In response to a question, Mr Jipps confirmed that although implementation would take place over a period of months, the intention was to make changes across the whole network, not run a trial at a small number of stations first. He said he would be happy to share operational plans with London TravelWatch.

Neil Middleton from the Association of Public Transport Users addressed the meeting. He said that members of his group had no confidence that ticket machines would sell them the lowest priced ticket, unlike staff at ticket offices. This was a major failing of the proposals. In addition, it was not possible to purchase point to point tickets with all available discounts from ticket machines or using smart or contactless products. His group opposed the proposals.

Bob Oram from the Rail and Maritime Union addressed the meeting. He said that the redefining of ticket offices was a critical issue and moving ticket machines from the office to the concourse was a fundamental change which could set a precedent across the industry. He was concerned that there was not enough detail about how the measures would be implemented in practice and that handling significant amounts of cash on the concourse would be risky.

Members discussed the proposals. They noted the very large number of responses objecting to the plans and also the lack of clarity around issues such as ticket availability from machines and handling of cash. They also raised concerns about the potential loss of Schedule 17 protections should there be a future

decision to reduce or remove the station hosts that had been put in to replace ticket office services.

Members noted that it would be very difficult to implement the whole scheme by September given the disparate nature of the stations involved. There was no assurance that plans for difficult stations such as Loughborough Junction and Denmark Hill were being fully considered.

Mr Jipps said that the proposals would allow for all forms of payment, including cash, and that risk assessments would be carried out about cash handling at each station. Ticket office areas would be maintained to allow the depositing of cash in safes.

In response to a question, Mr Jipps said he had been surprised by how much interest the proposals had generated. The objections had led to the realisation that more needed to be done to reassure passengers that the changes would not be detrimental. He said that hosts would be available to help passengers use ticket machines and that though some ticket availability would be lost at some stations, this would only affect some very rarely purchased tickets.

Mr Middleton said that passengers did want to be able to use ticket machines but some combinations of ticket were hard to buy at machines.

The Chair concluded the discussion by noting the general agreement that passengers valued staff on concourses and platforms, and this could be a welcome aspect of the proposals. However, there were too many doubts for London TravelWatch to support them as they currently stood. Concerns related to vending machines, cash transactions, how the station hosts would operate and ticket availability. If the proposals did go head, London TravelWatch would want to see a pilot scheme in a small representative cross-section of before any decision to roll out the changes more widely across the network.

Action: Director, Policy and Investigation

10 Crossrail

The Chair welcomed Steve Murphy, the Managing Director of MTR Crossrail, to the meeting. Mr Murphy gave a presentation on the background of Crossrail and its 100 km route. He said that there were several infrastructure owners of the network including TfL, National Rail and Heathrow Airport.

When fully operational Crossrail would create a 10% increase in London's transport capacity, with a target of running 24 trains per hour through the core central route. Each train would accommodate 1,500 passengers, with rolling stock being built at Derby. MTR Crossrail was not responsible for the construction of the line but was working very closely with Crossrail on the construction.

The project was being managed in stages. The current stage saw MTR Crossrail run existing trains on the existing line from Liverpool Street to Shenfield. The next stage would see the introduction of new trains on that line.

In May 2018, MTR would takeover the Paddington to Heathrow service and later that year would run new trains on the core route. This would mean MTR Crossrail running three independent sets of track with no crossover. The final stages, in 2019, would see the connection of the core route to the tracks in the east then the west.

Mr Murphy said that since MTR Crossrail had taken over the Liverpool Street to Shenfield line, levels of passenger satisfaction had increased and the amount of delay caused by operator failures had been reduced. The relationship between MTR Crossrail and Network Rail had improved and the focus was on practical solutions to problems rather than contractual disputes, which led to a significant reduction in delays for passengers. The rolling stock was being maintained in the same place by the same operator, but by adding MTR's expertise and management reliability had improved. The focus was on building relationships with partners rather than relying on contractual levers.

Members asked how MTR had achieved improvements with rolling stock reliability. Mr Murphy said that MTR had good rolling stock engineers with strong focus on the operational management of the fleet. In particular, managers prioritised ensuring that trains arrived at the depot in time for servicing, which had not always happened under the previous operator. It required a lot of effort but was possible.

In response to a question, Mr Murphy said that running 24 trains per hour through the core would be a big challenge but MTR Crossrail was successfully operating the Liverpool to Shenfield line, which was also challenging. He said the biggest challenge when fully operational would not be the core but pinch-points such as Stratford, and spare trains would be held around the network to speed recovery.

Members welcomed the improvements MTR had brought to the line it was currently operating. The Chief Executive noted that this was a good model for services across the London metro area and London TravelWatch called for it in franchise responses.

Members noted that the new Crossrail trains would have a relatively low level of seating, with the expectation being that most passengers would stand. Mr Murphy said that communication of issues around the style of the trains would be led by TfL and that the average journey length would be around 20 to 25 minutes.

In response to a question, Mr Murphy said that Crossrail would be operating in two Network Rail regions, which added a level of complexity. He noted that there would be some planned sharing of train paths, with trains scheduled to weave around each other. The timetable had been cast in conjunction with other operators on the network, and making use of the wealth of knowledge and experience held by signal controllers.

The Chair thanked Mr Murphy for his presentation and his detailed response to questions.

11 Any other business

There was no other business.

12 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 National Rail issues and reviewed the meeting.