
Minutes

Agenda item: 4
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Minutes of the meeting of the Board held on 23 May 2017 at the Hat Factory, Luton LU1 2EY

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Present

Members

Jackie Ballard, Alan Benson, Glyn Kyle, Stephen Locke (Chair), Abdi Osman, John Stewart

Guests

Neil Middleton	Association of Public Transport Users
Arthur Taylor	Bedford Commuters Association
Oliver Jaycock	Luton Airport
Alejo Perez Monsalvo	Luton Airport

Secretariat

Tim Bellenger	Director, Policy and Investigation
Janet Cooke	Chief Executive
Sharon Malley	Executive Assistant

1 Chair's introduction and pre-meeting announcements

The Chair noted that the meeting was taking place in the period immediately prior to a general election. Therefore, in order to discuss matters that may be considered to be political, the meeting was being held in confidential session throughout. Two guests, Neil Middleton and Arthur Taylor, had been invited for their particular knowledge of travel in the Luton area and agreed to keep matters discussed at the meeting confidential until after the election.

Once the election was concluded, the reports and minutes of the meeting would be published as normal on London TravelWatch's website.

2 Apologies for absence

Apologies for absence were received from Richard Dilks.

3 Declarations of interest

There were no declarations of interest in addition to those standing declarations recorded on the London TravelWatch website.

4 Chair's activities and Transport Focus update

The Chair said that he had attended a meeting of the Passenger Contact Group of Transport Focus in Manchester, which had discussed Virgin West Coast's apparent failure to meet the requirements of the Consumer Rights Act 2015 or to respect the guidelines on complaints handling from the Office of Rail and Road. The Chief Executive of Transport Focus had written to the Managing Director of Virgin West Coast to express their concern.

The Chair had also attended an informal Transport Focus board meeting that reviewed the organisation's stakeholder survey and the three-year work plan.

There had been a further quarterly meeting between the Chairs and Chief Executives of London TravelWatch and Transport Focus, this time to discuss various issues including the proposed Rail Ombudsman scheme, future work plans and input to Network Rail route supervisory boards.

The Chief Executive agreed that Virgin West Coast was problematic and noted that they it previously been one of the better train operators but had now become inflexible and dogmatic. The Chair said it was striking how much worse it was than other operators and noted that the complaints backlog at Great Western Railway, another train operator that had caused recent problems, was clearing.

The Chair said he had met Dan Moore at the Department for Transport to discuss the work of London TravelWatch and its input into DfT policy. Mr Moore had been very interested in London TravelWatch's activities and recognised the need for London issues to have a higher profile at the DfT.

The Chair had met two London Assembly members, Steve O'Connell and Unmesh Desai, to update them on London TravelWatch's role, and had had a productive meeting with the new Walking and Cycling Commissioner Will Norman. The Commissioner was keen to develop the interests of all transport users and wanted to bridge the gap between pedestrians and cyclists.

5 Minutes of the Board meeting held on 11 April 2017

The minutes of the Board meeting held on 11 April 2017 were agreed and signed as a correct record, subject to the correction of 'ben' to 'been' on page 4.

6 Matters arising (LTW551)

The Director, Policy and Investigation, said that the indications from Transport for London about step-free access to the Central line platforms at Bank underground station were positive. He thought it may be possible to use old escalator shafts to provide space for the lifts. This would be in a later phase in the project and so in a different budgeting period but there would be a strong case for proceeding with the works. The opportunity cost of not doing so would be significant.

The Chief Executive said that her email about the Rail Passenger Redress Scheme had been sent to members of the London Assembly Transport Committee, not all Assembly members. She noted that there was reference to a Rail Ombudsman scheme in current political manifestoes.

The Chief Executive said that she remained concerned that Network Rail was not picking up on London issues with the development of the new route supervisory boards. If the opportunity arose she and the Chair would raise this with Vernon Everitt at TfL at their forthcoming meeting.

Work continued on London TravelWatch's report on small stations and the Director, Policy and Investigation, said he hoped to be able to publish it following the election. It may be possible to launch the report at a small station and to gain interest from local press in the areas where small stations have been identified.

The Director, Policy and Investigation, said that the Policy Officer (VS) was working on amendments to the report on Cycling in London and that he would circulate the revised version shortly for further comments.

Action: Policy Officer (VS)

7 Key activities (LTW552)

Members asked the Director, Policy and Investigation, about the aim of the DfT's Southeastern franchise bidders day. The Director, Policy and Investigation, said that the event was to promote the Southeastern franchise to potential bidders and noted that London TravelWatch had submitted its response to the DfT's consultation on the franchise.

He said that the franchise was due to begin operation in late 2018 but it would not be possible for the metro part of the franchise to be devolved at that stage as the window for this had been missed. There would need to be at least one year of 'shadow' running prior to full devolution, during which costs, revenues, and responsibilities for stations and trains could be established.

It was noted that the DfT's planned consultation meetings on London aspects of the franchise had been cancelled and that London TravelWatch would seek to ensure that these were reinstated after the election.

Action: Director, Policy and Investigation

Members noted that the proposed changes to bus services were being brought forward in response to financial pressures. It was likely that most passengers were unaware of the significant changes that were due to take place.

The Director, Policy and Investigation, said that he had attended a briefing on changes to the timetable operated by Govia Thameslink Railway. These changes saw the removal of services from midnight to 5.00 am on weeknights between Victoria and East Croydon and some Thameslink services in order to enable maintenance works and improve reliability. Some user groups had expressed concerns about the changes. Neil Middleton said that the changes had been introduced at very short notice and were also not well considered, as running the last train at 12.15 am rather than midnight, as currently planned, would be very beneficial to users. It was noted that GTR had introduced an hourly bus service between Clapham Junction and East Croydon to assist passengers seeking to travel when trains were not running.

On the engineering works due to take place in August at Waterloo station, the Director, Policy and Investigation, said that there would be a reduction in services during the period but not full closure. August was the best time to undertake the work as it was the period of lightest use of the station, and the works were necessary to improve capacity and reliability. However, there would be a high level of disruption for passengers. This issue should be considered at a future London TravelWatch board meeting.

Action: Executive Assistant

The Director, Policy and Investigation said that Network Rail did appear to be contrite over the handling of the Gospel Oak to Barking electrification works. There had been poor record-keeping over many years, leading to difficulties in establishing the location of sewers and others services. The engineering team had broken three sewers when pile driving and there had been difficulties in installing the track because of unexpected ground conditions. The Chief Executive said she hoped it would be possible to identify the areas of Network Rail's responsibility in order to learn lessons for the future.

8 Ticketing arrangements and fare levels (LTW553)

The Director, Policy and Investigation, gave a presentation on fares and ticketing for passengers in the Luton area. He said that the line serving Luton station from central London had a very complicated fare structure resulting from historical attempts to manage passenger flows in peak periods. Unusually, the return journey for an off-peak ticket could not be made during the evening peak period. In most other areas, off-peak tickets carried no restrictions on the timing of the return journey. This made ticketing arrangements on these services more difficult and complicated than many others.

The Director, Policy and Investigation, said that the ticket to Luton Airport Parkway station did not automatically include the shuttle bus to the Airport itself. Passengers often did not realise that they should buy a ticket which did include the shuttle bus and instead had to buy the bus ticket on arrival at the station. This added delay and complication to passengers' journeys.

The Director, Policy and Investigation, noted that East Midlands trains ran a fast service to Luton Airport Parkway station once an hour but that not all tickets were valid on this service, in particular discounted two-for-one tickets that were often used by families travelling to the airport. This led to many infrequent passengers receiving penalty fares for this journey.

The Director, Policy and Investigation, said that many of the complexities stemmed from the need to manage crowding when the trains on the line had either four or eight carriages. However, trains on this route today were longer so some of the crowding issues had been addressed, which should enable some of the complexities to be removed.

Mr Middleton said that passengers had been promised a fare review in 2005 but it had never materialised. In addition, he said that the link between price and timetable was wrong as demand increased after 7.00 pm but the number of trains reduced. He said that some reduced price tickets were available that allowed travel off-peak in the morning but peak in the evening, but they were not well promoted so people bought Anytime tickets instead, which were more expensive.

Mr Taylor said that it was difficult for passengers to obtain group fare tickets and also that it was not straightforward to buy the discounted shuttle bus ticket from the station to the airport.

Mr Middleton said that he understood Govia Thameslink Railway would be launching a smart ticket option in June that would calculate which fare would be optimal after the passenger has completed a journey. This would be a step forward, but would not address the issue of restrictions on the return off-peak ticket. If the restrictions could not be lifted entirely, it would be helpful if they could be reviewed and the restricted period shortened.

The Director, Policy and Investigation, said that it was possible to purchase an off-peak ticket from London to Luton in the evening peak but that passengers making the same journey at the same time could not use an off-peak ticket if it was the return portion of an off-peak round trip.

Members noted that these complications were extremely confusing from the passenger perspective. There was concern that passengers buying tickets in good faith may end up paying more than they needed to or be charged penalty fares for innocent mistakes. The Chief Executive said that given the need to protect revenues it would take a several years to phase out all the complications but in the meantime it would be useful to look at statistics for penalty fares as a demonstration of the extent of the problem. It may also be possible to make progress on individual issues such as penalty fares caused by confusion about ticket validity to Luton Airport.

Members agreed that it was important to review the evening off-peak return issue. The Director, Policy and Investigation, said that political parties referred to fares simplification in their manifestoes so it would be appropriate to write to the Department for Transport on this following the election.

Action: Director, Policy and Investigation

9 Franchising issues (LTW554)

The Director, Policy and Investigation, presented a report on franchising issues affecting Luton, Bedfordshire and Hertfordshire. He said that the area was covered by three main lines into London with services provided by five franchised operators and an open access operator. East Midlands Trains ran fast services to St Pancras, with one per hour stopping at Luton Station and one per hour stopping at Luton Airport Parkway station. The Airport operators were hoping that more fast services would be timetabled to stop there.

The Director, Policy and Investigation, said that the line between St Pancras and Bedford was configured to carry electric trains up to 100 miles per hour but East Midlands Trains needed to be able to reach 125 mph to maintain current journey times. He wanted to see the upgrade of this line to enable trains to run at their maximum speeds.

The East-West rail project aimed to restore rail between Oxford and Cambridge, via Milton Keynes and Bedford, reconstructing a railway that closed in 1967. Infrastructure work was underway under the auspices of the Department for Transport and it was likely that the future operation of the line would be let under a new, dedicated franchise.

Mr Middleton said he was concerned about press reports that Luton and Bedford may lose their inter-city connections to stations such as Leicester. This would be problematic now but if the East-West link was completed it would be important to increase connectivity at Luton and Bedford so that the benefits of the East-West link could be realised.

The Director, Policy and Investigation, said that Luton station was not step-free. Funds had been set aside for accessibility work but the work and the funding were cancelled in 2010. Access for All funding to install lifts had now been deferred to beyond 2019.

Alan Benson, the London TravelWatch board member and a wheelchair user, said that it had taken three days of negotiation with GTR in order to organise his visit to Luton. Train operators were obliged to provide transfers to inaccessible stations from the nearest step-free station, which in this case was Luton Airport Parkway. However, on arriving at Luton Airport Parkway, GTR sent a taxi that could not accommodate his wheelchair, despite his having provided dimensions in advance.

Mr Benson said he would have preferred to take a bus from the Parkway station but the bus system in Luton was not unified and it was difficult to find information on bus services. He eventually decided to use the guided busway to Luton station, which was much more straightforward than waiting for a taxi, but it had not been

easy to find out about this service in advance. Mr Benson said that the individuals he encountered at the station had been knowledgeable and helpful but the system itself was not knowledgeable. He had been reliant on staff at the station to provide information and assistance. He noted that the difficulty in organising this journey had prevented him from carrying out other business for several days.

It was agreed that London TravelWatch would pursue Mr Benson's experience with GTR. If this involved commenting in public, it would need to be delayed until after the election had taken place.

Action: Director, Policy and Investigation; Communications Officer

The Chair thanked Mr Middleton and Mr Taylor for their very useful contributions and for putting the passenger perspective across very clearly.

10 Surface access to Luton Airport

Oliver Jaycock and Alejo Perez Monsalvo from Luton Airport gave a presentation on how airport users reached the airport now and in the future. Mr Jaycock said that London TravelWatch's report on access to airports had been very useful and had mirrored some of their own thinking.

Mr Jaycock said that 22 million people lived within a two-hour drive of Luton airport and 14.5 million passengers used the airport in 2016. The airport was growing rapidly, much more quickly than had been projected, with a 50% increase in passenger numbers in the last two years.

The airport was subject to significant development and transport links were vital to its success. There were five elements to the airport's transport plan: to build a multi-storey car park; extend Oyster to the airport; introduce overnight train services; create a new transit link between the station and the airport; and increase the frequency of direct train services. On this last point, Mr Jaycock said he thought it would be possible to stop four fast trains per hour at the airport, relatively evenly spaced, which would work economically as well as benefitting the airport. He thought it may be possible for the airport to operate as a railhead for the region. He said there had been varying degrees of progress with each of the elements of the transport plan.

In response to a question, Mr Jaycock said that around 20% of current passengers used the airport for business and also noted that it was the largest airport in the UK for private aviation.

Mr Jaycock said that of passengers leaving the airport by rail, around 80% went south. However, the overall origin of passengers using the airport was about 55% from the south, 45% from the north, which demonstrated significant latent potential demand for northbound onward routes.

Members asked about progress with extending Oyster to the airport. Mr Jaycock said that the DfT included this requirement in its franchise but did not discuss with Transport for London in advance about its technical feasibility. TfL said that it was

not currently feasible, but they were trying to find ways to achieve this by 2018/19. The airport would welcome London TravelWatch's support in this.

Mr Perez Monsalvo briefed members on the proposed mass passenger transit system. This would replace the current shuttle bus between the station and the airport and would run on dedicated rails directly to the terminal building. The system would be more reliable as it would not need to interact with the roads so would not be subject to congestion.

The airport hoped to be able to award the contract for the civil engineering works by the end of October 2017 and for the IT systems by November 2017. He hoped the transit system would be operational by spring 2021. He recognised from the experience of other similar systems that wayfinding and signage would be very important.

In response to a question, Mr Perez Monsalvo said that the current intention was that passengers would be charged to use the transit system but that the charge could be incorporated into the cost of a train ticket.

The Chair thanked Mr Jaycock and Mr Perez Monsalvo for attending and for their interesting and informative presentation. It was agreed that London TravelWatch would continue to support the case for Oyster access to Luton Airport, building on the organisation's success in getting Oyster extended to Gatwick. London TravelWatch was also supportive of getting the new mass transit link between the main line and the airport up and running as soon as possible.

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 discussed the performance of Southern Rail with Chris Gibb, considered the confidential minutes and reviewed the meeting.