
Minutes

Agenda item: 4
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Minutes of the meeting of the Board held on 27 September 2016 at the Thameside Centre, Wyatt Road, Staines, TW18 2AY

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Present

Members

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

Guests

Councillor Olivia Rybinski	Spelthorne Borough Council
Councillor David Sleight	Wokingham Borough Council
Alun Prytherch-Evans	Windsor Lines Passengers Association
Councillor Robert Evans	Surrey County Council
James Tringham	Senior Corporate Communications Manager, Transport for London
Johnnet Hamilton	Senior External Relations Manager, Transport for London

Members of the public

Secretariat

Tim Bellenger	Director, Policy and Investigation
Janet Cooke	Chief Executive
Sharon Malley	Executive Assistant
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. He said that since the previous meeting he had attended the funeral of London TravelWatch board member Ruth Thompson and that an event in her memory was planned.

He also gave thanks to Surrey County Council for their assistance with arrangements for the meeting, including the provision of the meeting venue and refreshments.

2 Apologies for absence

Richard Dilks gave apologies for absence.

3 Declarations of interest

John Stewart reminded the meeting that he was Chair of HACAN, the body representing residents under the Heathrow airport flightpath. He did not think that this interest would prevent him from taking part in discussions about rail access to Heathrow airport. The Board agreed that this need not preclude his participation in the discussion, but that the conflict should be noted.

4 Chair's activities and Transport Focus update

The Chair said that he had attended three Transport Focus meetings since the previous London TravelWatch board meeting. He had attended a board meeting of Transport Focus in July which had focused on research projects, including the tram passenger survey, the South East Quadrant emotional tracker, bus passengers' trust in operators, and a survey of highways roadside facilities. The meeting had also received a presentation from Michele Dix on plans for Crossrail 2.

The Chair had attended an informal members' meeting in September that discussed the buses Bill currently going through Parliament and the impact of the forthcoming Waterloo station closure. He had also chaired a meeting of the Transport Focus Statistics Governance Group, which had looked at the impact of on-line questionnaires as an alternative to paper versions.

In his role as Chair of London TravelWatch, he had attended meetings with the four new transport leads on the London Assembly to brief them on London TravelWatch's work. He had also discussed budget and business planning with Caroline Pidgeon AM and Keith Prince AM.

He had also attended meetings with Val Shawcross, the Deputy Mayor for Transport, and the Commissioner for Transport at Transport for London, Mike Brown.

5 Minutes

The minutes of the Board meeting held on 19 July 2016 were agreed and signed as a correct record, subject to amending the word 'has' for 'have' in the penultimate line of page 9.

6 Transport user issues in Spelthorne

Councillor Olivia Rybinski gave a presentation on the "In the Zone" campaign, which aimed to re-zone Spelthorne stations into TfL Zone 6. She said that the campaign group included local residents and councillors and had grown in size over recent years.

Councillor Rybinski said that there were six stations in Spelthorne, the principal ones being Staines, Ashford, Sunbury and Shepperton. They served areas that shared characteristics with London metro areas. She said that there were 13 Zone 6 stations further away from Westminster than Spelthorne.

Councillor Rybinski said Thorpe Park, which was served by stations outside Zone 6, supported the campaign for re-zoning because its visitors often assumed they could use Oyster cards to travel there and were then fined for travelling without a ticket.

Spelthorne residents were deterred from travelling to central London because of the cost of tickets from their stations. Those who did travel often took buses to Hatton Cross station or drove to Feltham station in order to board trains within Zone 6. This was adding to road congestion and not an efficient use of the transport system.

Councillor Rybinski said that people of Spelthorne felt overlooked in transport terms, having to continue to use paper tickets and being penalised with higher fares than some people who lived further away from central London. She wanted better travel options for residents in her area.

Members discussed how the campaign could be taken forward. Councillor Rybinski said that South West Trains was proving difficult to convince and would not commit to improvements. A member of the public noted that some Transport for London buses operated in Spelthorne and accepted Oyster cards but the trains did not.

The Director, Policy and Investigation, said that London TravelWatch's policy was to support the extension of Oyster to stations such as Ashford and Staines. The Department for Transport had resisted this because of its preference for the ITSO system and South West Trains refused because it was not in its franchise and not commercially attractive. Councillor Rybinski noted that TfL have said that revenue can increase by re-zoning.

The Director, Policy and Investigation, suggested that it would be useful to commission a survey of passengers to find out how much rail heading was actually taking place and to identify the impact on air quality and congestion. He said that simplification of the fares structure overall could also assist locations such as Staines. Councillor Rybinski said that the South West Trains ticket machines were

complicated and often led to passengers buying more expensive tickets than necessary.

Members agreed to assist Spelthorne with its attempts to extend Oyster acceptance to its stations and to share data as appropriate. The Chair thanked Councillor Rybinski for her informative presentation. The Board agreed that this provided an important and useful example of the boundary problems that arose around the edges of the Greater London Authority area.

7 Transport issues in Wokingham

Councillor David Sleight, the Deputy Executive member for Transport at Wokingham Borough Council, gave a presentation to the meeting about rail access to Heathrow Airport.

He said that the borough of Wokingham contained significant employment hubs, including the head office of Microsoft UK and Reading University, and that access to Heathrow was very important both for existing residents and to drive growth. He said that there was a direct service to Gatwick Airport and it was likely that a new western rail link to Heathrow would be open by 2024. However, rail access from the south of Heathrow was still difficult.

Councillor Sleight said that several schemes had been put forward but that there was no current commitment to a southern rail link. Wokingham Council was fully supportive of the southern rail access and increased levels of connectivity.

Members noted that discussions about rail access to Heathrow often got tied up with questions about airport capacity and the proposal to build a third runway Heathrow. Councillor Sleight said that a third runway would improve the business case for a southern rail link.

The Chair said that London TravelWatch did not have a position on runway capacity. However, if a decision were made to increase capacity at Heathrow, this would present both an opportunity and a need for fresh thinking on improving public transport access to the airport. He noted that major European airports had far greater rail integration than Heathrow and Heathrow risked being left behind.

The Chair thanked Councillor Sleight for leading the discussion and noted that public transport access to airports was an issue London TravelWatch would continue to pursue.

8 Windsor Lines Passengers Association

Alun Prytherch-Evans of the Windsor Lines Passengers Association gave a presentation about local aspirations for rail services known as the Windsor Lines. These services covered around 44 miles of track between Waterloo and Reading, including loops at Hounslow and Kingston and branches to Windsor, Weybridge and Camberley.

He said that the association sought to maintain constructive dialogue with the train operators and had found South West Trains to be largely co-operative. The association had worked with the operator to achieve several benefits for

passengers over the years. The association's membership was knowledgeable and the operator respected it and took it seriously.

The association held regular meetings with senior South West Trains staff and hoped to continue this practice following the award of the new franchise in June 2017. On the whole, the association viewed South West Trains as a good operator.

Mr Prytherch-Evans said that the service had radically improved over the last 20 years and that a significant ambition of the association, a 'whole line' timetable, had now been achieved. This meant that trains at junctions now connected within 5-10 minutes, which was a significant benefit for passengers.

Platforms at most stations had been lengthened and most trains on the Windsor Lines were now 10 coaches. The remaining platforms were due to be lengthened by June 2017. Mr Prytherch-Evans said that the rolling stock was regularly refreshed and well maintained. In addition, Network Rail and South West Trains together had re-laid 13 miles of track and three complicated junctions.

He said that the association did have some concerns about some specific aspects of the service. For example, the doors on some of the coaches were not reliable, and punctuality targets had been met by lengthening end-to-end journey times. The association did have some long-term aspirations that it would like to see met, and these were distributed to members. However, on the whole, the association was satisfied with its train service.

Members asked which of the association's aspirations were the priorities. Mr Prytherch-Evans said that there was strong demand in the area for the southern rail link to Heathrow Airport, as alternative means of reaching Heathrow were unsatisfactory.

The Chair thanked Mr Prytherch-Evans for his encouraging contribution from the passenger perspective. Members noted that the association's objectives were largely in line with London TravelWatch's priorities and hoped that work would continue for the benefit of passengers in this area.

9 Passenger issues in North West Surrey and the Thames Valley (LTW533)

The Director, Policy and Investigation, introduced a report looking at various passenger issues in Spelthorne and the surrounding area. He said that some of the issues in the report had already been considered during previous items, such as access to Heathrow Airport. Other issues included rail devolution, particularly in relation to the south west franchise, which included provision for the separation of a London business unit. The Director, Policy and Investigation said he had met the bidders for the franchise and members noted that it was unfortunate that only two companies had bid.

The Director, Policy and Investigation, said that even if some responsibility were devolved to TfL, the timetable paths remained the responsibility of Network Rail and the Office of Rail and Road had final arbitration on routes and paths. This meant there were safeguards for passengers as TfL would not be able to block longer distance routes from accessing the devolved networks.

Mr Prytherch-Evans said the Windsor Lines Association had concerns about the destruction of the whole-line timetable if services were devolved to TfL. The Chair noted that performance on the Shenfield line had improved since devolution to TfL, both for shorter and longer distance services. This was also an example of TfL and Network Rail successfully sharing twin-track routes.

Members noted that London TravelWatch strongly supported the principle of devolution but not at the expense of integrated services such as those on the Windsor Lines. London TravelWatch would continue to hold discussions with groups such as the Windsor Lines Association to ensure it was fully representing them in its work.

James Tringham, Senior Corporate Communications Manager at TfL, said that TfL was keen to ensure devolution proposals did not have negative impacts on other passengers. He said that issues such as fare zones and Oyster acceptance had not progressed quickly and he hoped the move towards devolution would provide an opportunity to address them.

The Chair said that London TravelWatch recognised the problem of democratic deficit with devolution and has emphasised the need for partnership with other local authorities. London TravelWatch would continue to promote the needs of passengers in areas such as Spelthorne when meeting decision-makers and operators.

10 Waterloo station

The Policy Officer (RN) presented a report on forthcoming engineering works at Waterloo station and the impact this would have on passengers from the Spelthorne area.

He said that platforms at Waterloo would be extended to 10 coach, and there would be major disruption during the period of the works. Trains would make use of the defunct international platforms during the works but they would be closed again once the works were complete.

The works should enable 30% more passengers to use Waterloo station, although there was not planned to be any increase in the number of trains. This meant that questions of resilience and the speed of loading and offloading trains became critical.

For a period of three weeks in August 2017, eight platforms at Waterloo would be completely closed, with very significant disruptions for passengers. Some stations on routes into Waterloo would also be closed.

The Policy Officer (RN) said that Network Rail's infrastructure abilities were good but they had a tendency to overlook the needs of the passenger during infrastructure works. He had been disappointed that Network Rail had not consulted London TravelWatch in advance of finalising the engineering programme in order to obtain input from the passenger perspective.

He noted that works at London Bridge would still be underway while Waterloo was closed and that this could have knock-on impacts for interchanges such as

Clapham Junction. In addition, many of Network Rail's South East staff had moved to Kent and Sussex, leading to a significant loss of experience. It was important that Network Rail learned the lessons from London Bridge but this may be difficult given the change in personnel.

The Director, Policy and Investigation, said that Waterloo station's layout had not changed since the 1930s and the works were a necessary update. However, there was some concern that Chessington South would be closed over August, when it was used heavily by visitors to the Chessington theme park. He also noted that the rail replacement buses were planned to follow the routes of closed rail lines but they may be better taking passengers to alternative open stations instead.

Members noted that the Travel Demand Management Board, involving London TravelWatch, Network Rail, the rail operators and Transport for London, had spent considerable time reviewing the plans for Waterloo. This aimed to ensure a joined-up approach for passengers.

The Chief Executive said it was frustrating when the industry failed to take advantage of London TravelWatch's knowledge and experience. Officers said that Network Rail had been resistant to involve London TravelWatch at an early stage and that there was no incentive for Network Rail to consider passenger needs as a fundamental building block when planning engineering works. It was noted that in relation to Waterloo, there was still enough time for the passenger perspective to be accommodated in the programme and London TravelWatch would continue to press for this.

The Director, Policy and Investigation, said that other works in the Waterloo area were underway, including the redevelopment of the Shell Centre, and these would also have an impact on bus routes and taxis using the station. It was agreed that London TravelWatch would continue to work with Network Rail and others to ensure that the works were conducted in a way that minimised disruption for passengers.

11 Matters arising (LTW534)

Member discussed TfL's policy of not offering pre-booked assistance for passengers with disabilities, preferring to offer a turn-up-and-go service for users. It was noted that this worked well for London-based passengers who were used to the system but did not address concerns of people travelling to London from long distances who were used to booking Passenger Assist. London TravelWatch would keep this issue under review.

The Chair said that he had looked at the websites of five transport operators and from his brief assessment their contact details seemed easy to find. This was an issue that could now be absorbed into the ongoing work programme, in the light of the ORR Guidance on Complaint Handling.

12 Key activities (LTW535)

Members noted that bus shelters and countdown signs were sometimes not being replaced following road works. It was agreed that officers would take this up with Transport for London.

Action: Executive Assistant

Members noted that TfL was not able to confirm that the works at Bank underground station would include step-free access to the Central line platforms. It was agreed that the Chair would write to TfL to seek confirmation of the current position.

Action: Executive Assistant

The Chair said he had not been at the meeting with Baroness Jenny Randerson but had been at the meeting with David Kurten AM.

The Policy Officer said London TravelWatch had held a meeting with Chris Gibb, the government-appointed lead of the review of Southern performance, which had been very useful. Mr Gibb had listened to London TravelWatch's concerns about the management of the network and indicated a willingness to meet again.

13 Any other business

The Policy Officer (VS) noted that there had been significant change at senior levels in TfL, with the departure of officers including Peter Bradley, Mike Weston, Paul Blackwell and Mike Stubbs.

14 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 accessibility assistance on London Underground and reviewed the meeting.