
Secretariat memorandum

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CA019

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London TravelWatch research on use of 0845 numbers in the transport industry

1 Purpose

The Consumer Affairs Committee asked the Communications team to undertake an informal look into the provision of 0845/0870 numbers used for complaint or help lines. The Committee was concerned about the costs for passengers, and requested preliminary data as to whether these numbers were prohibitively expensive, and whether the business case for using (and retaining) 0845 numbers was compelling.

2 Recommendations

Members are invited to note the report for information.

3 Information

Organisations and companies who use 0845 numbers argue that it means they can use one number on all publicity, stationery and advertising. It is also argued that large volumes of incoming calls can be managed more easily, and therefore a passenger/customer is less likely to encounter a 'busy' tone. These numbers are also beneficial for business continuity, as the same number can be kept if a business moves. The cost of moving with geographical numbers is much higher, and no revenue is returned (unlike 085x or 087x numbers). Using these numbers is much cheaper for organisations and companies.

In 2007 the Office of Communications (OFCOM) introduced 0300 numbers for public bodies, which cost no more from a mobile than a national call rate. Switching phone lines from 0845/0870 to 0300 numbers would not need any legislation, and would save money for many mobile phone users, without adversely affecting landline users. 0300 numbers are included in 'free minutes' monthly contract packages, but for pay-as-you-go (PAYG) users costs can still be as high as 20p per min.

A study by the Citizen's Advice Bureau (see <http://www.leedscab.org.uk/forms/hungupreport.pdf>) found that PAYG customers were usually in the lower social bracket, and were therefore hit the hardest by calls costing between 15p and 50p per minute.

4 Methodology

We looked at the costs of 0844/0845/0870 calls from landlines and mobile phones, identified which (relevant) companies used these numbers exclusively, and then did a

'mystery-shopping' exercise with a proportion of them. We made these phone calls at different times of the day, including evenings and weekends.

5 Results and conclusions

The table below shows the results of this research, listed in order of the time taken for calls to be answered.

Company	Duration of call
NSL (NCP Challenger) bus operator	4 seconds
Grand Central	5 seconds
Virgin	9 seconds
Stansted Express	20 seconds.
Arriva	35 seconds
South West Trains	40 seconds
Travel line	40 seconds
ScotRail	44 seconds
London Underground Customer Service	47 seconds
First Capital Connect	49 seconds
National Express East Coast	50 seconds
C2C	52 seconds
Congestion Charging (during the week)	54 seconds
Congestion Charging (at weekend)	56 seconds
National Express Buses	2 mins 20 seconds
Chiltern	1 min 1 second
East Midlands	1 min 2 seconds
Go Ahead	1 min 6 seconds
Oyster Customer Service Centre	1 minute 10 seconds
First Great Western	1 min 12 seconds
Go Ahead London	1 min 40 seconds
National Express Buses	2 mins 20 seconds
Gatwick Express	3 min 40 seconds
East London and Selkent	3 mins 47 seconds

Although no phone call took longer than 3 minutes 47 seconds, London TravelWatch would recommend that transport companies provide an alternative number for customers who only have access to mobile phones, even though this may cause some initial confusion.

6 Equalities and inclusion implications

The issue of 0845 numbers presents serious equalities and inclusion implications on the grounds of ability to pay.

7 Financial implications

7.1. This research was outwith the business plan and so London TravelWatch has already incurred a small additional cost in order to carry out this research.

- 7.2. If London TravelWatch was to develop the case into a public campaign, and it is for the Committee to consider whether London TravelWatch has the resources for this as it is outwith the business plan in 2010/11.

8 Legal Powers

Section 248 of the Greater London Authority Act 1999 places upon London TravelWatch (as the London Transport Users Committee) a duty to consider – and, where it appears to it to be desirable, to make representations with respect to – any matter affecting the services and facilities provided by Transport for London which relate to transport (other than freight) and which have been the subject of representations made to it by or on behalf of users of those services and facilities. Section 252A of the same Act (as amended by Schedule 6 of the Railways Act 2005) places a similar duty upon it in respect of representations received from users or potential users of railway passenger services provided wholly or partly within the London railway area.