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**Secretariat report**

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Agenda item 8

CA045

Drafted 29.4.10

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**Meeting with Transport for London to discuss passenger telephone numbers**

**1 Purpose of report**

- 1.1 To receive for information the notes of a meeting with Transport for London (TfL) attended by representatives of London TravelWatch.

**2 Recommendation**

- 2.1 That the report is noted.

**3 Background**

- 3.1 On 17 March 2010, the Vice Chair, Sophia Lambert, the Director, Public Liaison and Committee Administrator, met with Annabelle Goymer (Contact Centre Transformation Programme Manager, TfL) and Matt Winfield (Stakeholder Engagement Manager, TfL) to discuss the use of 084 numbers by TfL.
- 3.2 Ms Goymer reported that TfL were gradually reducing the number of phone numbers used to contact them, so that there could in future be a single 0843 number from a total of about forty currently, not all of which are in frequent use.

**4 Information**

- 4.1 Passenger Information line (0843 222 1234)
- 4.1.1 This number replaced the former number of 0207 222 1234. The passenger information number gives callers a choice of an automated system or talking to an operator. With this arrangement there is no longer a limit on the number of lines available. Consequently there ought not to be any engaged tones and the capacity of the automated system to handle simultaneous calls should not to be exceeded in any normally foreseeable circumstances. There could, of course, continue to be queuing to speak to operators. However, the system would include provision for calls to one department to be overflowed to another department with spare operator capacity to minimise queuing.
- 4.1.2 TfL are using a non-geographic number to enable them to include the option of an automated service and have the ability to spread the load during peaks to Oyster or Surface Transport call centre staff. The phone number is revenue sharing because TfL wants to cover at least some of the costs of running the line. TfL estimated that the passenger

information line would never cover more than 75% of the costs of operating the lines and this should also be set against the investment they are making in telephone systems. Ms Goymer was, however, very much aware of the problems for PAYG (Pay As You Go) mobile phone users, and was particularly concerned that the different networks are currently able to charge different rates (it should be noted that the higher mobile phone costs represent revenue to the mobile phone operator and do not increase returns to the information provider).

4.1.3 We felt that, TfL could make a reasonable case that they should have a revenue-producing line for passenger information if the revenue is doing no more than covering (part of) its operating costs. We are still concerned that the cheapest way of getting information is by broadband internet and the most expensive by PAYG mobile.

4.2 Complaints line (0845 300 7000)

4.2.1 This is currently the 0845 number on the complaints poster on the buses. It is not automated but is answered by operators. There are no plans to automate complaints. Ms Goymer was unable to tell us the total annual number of telephone complaints received, but undertook to send us this information and also to let us know what the trends were, i.e. are telephone complaints increasing or decreasing. She said that there were rarely queues on the line, except when there was a major problem. At the time of writing, this information is still awaited.

4.2.2 We urged the principle of a free telephone line for complaints. Changing to an 0800 line would not solve the problem as PAYG mobile-users would still have to pay, and this was a group that we were particularly keen to help. A possible option would be two numbers : an 0800 one for landline users and an 0207/0208 number for mobile users, thus keeping their costs to a minimum. This option posed, in TfL's view, major technical problems.

4.2.3 We therefore proposed that, if the dual number option were not possible, then the two next best options would appear to be either :

- An 0300 line, which means that all callers, including those on mobiles, would be charged the standard landline rate. There is a charge to the information provider but it is lower than for an 0800 number. It does provide the technical flexibility associated with all non geographical numbers. These numbers are available as a concession only to non profit and governmental organisations. Ofcom have indicated that TfL, and for that matter London TravelWatch, would qualify.

Or :

- A standard, geographical 0207/0208 line. This would be cheap for both landline and mobile users. It would also be cheaper for TfL (as there is only the rental charge usual for phone lines), but it would not allow for a queuing system, so if all the operators were busy, callers would get an engaged tone. We felt, however, that this could be an acceptable downside, given that there were rarely queues.

4.3 Oyster Helpline (0845 330 9876)

4.3.1 This is currently the 0845 number for customer services enquiries relating to Oyster. This service provides a single port of call for issues relating to Oyster. It enables callers to request

statements; provides information about the procedure for applying for child and student discounts as well as dealing with requests for refunds and queries about lost or stolen cards.

- 4.3.2 We recognised that it could be argued that this service could be seen to be primarily a passenger information service but that as it also deals with refunds to a certain extent it has the functionality of accepting complaints. The Casework Team have confirmed that it has received complaints from passengers who have found that the cost of the telephone call was more than their resulting refund was actually worth.

## **5 Equalities implications**

- 5.1 The issue of 0843 and 0845 numbers presents serious equalities and inclusion implications for access to information on the grounds of ability to pay. This is particularly important to low income groups who may no longer or never had access to telephone landlines and who rely on mobile telephones.

## **6 Legal implications**

- 6.1 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 the Committee to be desirable, to make recommendations with respect to - any matter affecting the functions of the Greater London Authority or Transport for London which relate to transport (other than of freight).

## **7 Financial implications**

- 7.1 There are no specific financial implications arising from this report.

## **Appendix**

### **Explanation of numbers**

0800 : free to landline users; mobile users have to pay a charge per unit of time set by the provider. This varies from provider to provider. The body using the number also has to pay a rental for it and a charge per minute for each call made to it.

0800 80 : a “mobile-friendly” (but not free) rate for members of the Helpline Association, capped at 2.1p per incoming minute

0845 : now free or low cost to most landline users. Mobile users may have to pay more. The body using the number has to pay a rental for the number and receives no revenue from callers.

0843 : Charged to landline users and Mobile users pay more. Users pays rental, but receives some of the revenue from the calls.

0207/0208 : Conventional geographical London numbers. Cheap, often free for anybody using a landline in London, and included in a number of Mobile contracts; but PAYG often charged more.

0300 : Cost the same or less than calls to 01 and 02 prefixed numbers and will be included as part of any inclusive minutes or discount package. These rules will apply to calls from any type of line including mobile, BT, other fixed line or payphone. These numbers are only available for Governmental organisations and not for profit organisations. Ofcom have confirmed that TFL would qualify.