

Interchange matters seminar 2.6.16

Introduction by London TravelWatch Chief Executive, Janet Cooke

Passengers travelling in and around London are far more likely than those elsewhere to use two or more modes of transport to get to their destination – Hence the quality of the interchanges they use is very important. There is a lot that can and should be done to improve this – most at relatively low cost if transport operators and providers recognise the need to do this and start to see their stations or stops from the user perspective.

But it is not just passengers who benefit from improved interchange arrangements – the industry does too and taken in the round there is usually a good business case for making things better, over and above ‘just’ wanting to improve the customer experience. One transport operator can do a lot to improve their bit of the overall journey for a passenger – but if they work together with others they can achieve so much more.

If passengers who do not need to travel through Central London to reach their final destination are not made to do so for whatever reason their journey may well be quicker, cheaper and more pleasant. It will also play a part in reducing congestion in Central London’s trains, tubes, buses and streets.

Similarly, giving very clear information about onward travel will not only be convenient for passengers it will also allow them to move smoothly through a station concourse to get to their train, or easily find the bus they need when they exit the station. Large, clear and appropriately placed signs that can be read from a distance whilst walking (the kind used during the Olympics not small discrete signs more appropriate to a private bank) will reduce the need for so many people to stop and scrutinise the train departure boards to see which platform they need — or allow people to set off in the correct direction to get their bus, confident that the stop they are being directed towards will be the one they want, rather than having to check a notice board to identify which bus stop number they need and then find their way to that stop.

Before I hand over to our guest speakers I just wanted to spend a few more minutes highlighting some of the key factors that help to improve and underpin a good interchange experience. Our research report *interchange matters* gives much more information and examples.

Ticketing

Clearly London is ahead of the game here with its widely used and recognised Oyster pay as you go (PAYG) / Contactless payment system – which cuts down the need to buy another ticket for onward travel in the London area and really facilitates easy interchange. Convenient for passengers but also with a range of advantages for operators which I do not need to spell out to such an audience – but looking back how painful was the process of getting PAYG onto the National Rail network?

- But we still need to get it expanded to give passengers travelling to areas immediately outside London such as Epsom, Slough and many others where,

ironically, passengers can already use Oyster on the TfL buses that serve these destinations but still need to buy a separate ticket to travel by train.

- A major achievement for passengers in January this year has been, after many years of campaigning, the extension of Oyster to Gatwick Airport Station. In the first week of operation more than 18,000 journeys were made to the station on Oyster or contactless – with take up rising every week – up to 42,000 at the end of April, the latest statistic that I have. Half of these journeys are made by visitors. How convenient! – and how much better than having to negotiate the sometimes six deep queues to buy tickets at the station. With knock on benefits at Victoria Underground where 30% of the demand for ticket sales used to be for passengers arriving from Gatwick.
- But come on Heathrow – let's see passengers travelling on your train services into London start to enjoy the same convenience.

Information – where do I start?

- At its most basic need to be able to find the way into the station. Am I the only person here who returning from an event nearby couldn't find an entrance into Liverpool Street station? I knew I was close because I could see the trains but I still couldn't get in. My first attempt to find my way into Fenchurch St station was similarly unsuccessful, even though I had started by following the signs from Tower Hill Tube station – I knew it was there because I regularly watched the trains going in from my office window a few hundred yards away.
- And when building works are underway nearby, as they so often are these days, station operators and managers need to consider amending signage. For example, as most of you will know very well, major construction works have been taking place around Victoria for several years – there was a time when even seasoned commuters could see the national rail station but could not necessarily work out how to get there from, say, Victoria Street.

Many different operators and providers manage the different parts of this major interchange and its surrounding area – London Buses, London Underground, Network Rail, WCC, Southern Rail, Southeastern – but it was only after our Board highlighted the problems transport users, especially those unfamiliar with the area, that someone (and in this case it was TfL) took the initiative and improved the overall signage.

- A key challenge for the industry here is to see things from the user perspective and recognise how complicated things can get. The problem is that the people who manage the transport network are usually too familiar with the infrastructure to see the problems passengers face or how things could be made more convenient.
- Something we would like to see improved even further is the London tube and rail connections map to make it easier for passengers not in the know to realise how complicated some interchanges are (Hammersmith for example requires a walk to another station but you wouldn't know it from the map) or how very easy others are (changing from National Rail to Underground at Farringdon). And then there are places where passengers can walk to another nearby station to change trains but not be charged an extra fare – in these days of transparency why can't this be made clear to everyone?

One team transport

Joint management would help coordinate on behalf of transport users especially when things go wrong.

At a pan London level the Travel Demand Management Board is starting to make some real improvements in dealing with passenger communications during disruption but we need to see more of this at and around key local interchanges.

Before I finish a short case study

East Croydon – one of the country's busiest railway stations with trams, buses and taxis immediately outside. Direct trains to Gatwick Airport, Luton and St Pancras international – and even an express bus to LHR!

Train station – incremental improvements to the infrastructure over the years and good to hear on train announcements about platform numbers for interchanging passengers, and to see that staff now have details of onward travel stuck on the wall so they can advise passengers – but will be even better when this information is clearly available so people can see for themselves as well

Tram stop – immediately outside main station entrance and London Trams have just, having read our report, produced an excellent poster giving clear details of onward travel by tram, bus and on foot. But this is slightly awkwardly sited due to space constraints – wouldn't it be nice to see it inside the station exit as well?

Buses – now have real time departure information – great – but, once again, the awkward arrangements here with bus stops dispersed across three areas, mean not all bus passengers are likely to be able to read it – wouldn't it be nice to have it in other locations as well?

And what about staff?

The bus station has a little booth for staff – but they're apparently only there until 3pm – but the majority of passengers leaving from East Croydon by bus will be during the evening peak. And problems can quickly build up here if there are even short delays with passengers queuing along the middle of the road – pretty dangerous and what a nightmare for the poor drivers having to negotiate their way through!

Wouldn't it be fantastic to see TfL locate one of their one team travel ambassadors here on a permanent basis – helping passengers day to day, able to intervene and marshal queues when problems arise with buses, trams or taxis – and able to help Southern out when problems arise in their station?

And on that hopeful note, I'll hand over to Leon to tell us what TfL are doing on bus interchanges?