
Secretariat Memorandum

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Agenda item 11

LTW 290

Drafted 26.1.09

Review of Christmas services and operations 2008

1 Purpose of report

- 1.1 To review the service patterns and operations during the Christmas 2008 / New Year 2009 period for Transport for London, National Rail, taxi and other services.

2 Background

- 2.1 At the Board meeting on 16 December 2008, the Board requested a review of the public transport services that operated over this period to be brought to this meeting.

3 Planned services - Transport for London (TfL)

- 3.1 In general terms the level of services provided by Transport for London during this period was not subject to much comment or complaint from passengers, and a mystery shopping exercise by London TravelWatch staff noted that the TfL leaflets were available in good time and readily available, with reasonable additional information available at London Underground stations.

- 3.2 However, comments were received from the London Borough of Newham regarding the operation of the Docklands Light Railway (DLR) on Boxing Day. The service provided was a standard 30 minute interval service on all branches, which combined over core sections to operate every 10 minutes. No information about these changes was made available other than via the TfL website and telephone travel enquiry service regarding the exact timings from individual stations, or when the first and last trains would run.

DLR commented that this was in line with previous practice and that poster space was limited due to the amount of ongoing engineering work which had prior call on such space. However, it did undertake to advertise departure times from terminals via their website in future.

- 3.2.1 This case also illustrates the growing practice within TfL of publicising service availability only through electronic media and the telephone enquiry service. Newham commented that substantial numbers of people in their borough do not have access to media such as the internet, and are therefore disadvantaged by the lack of printed material.

- 3.3 The service on London Overground also attracted some comment from user groups over the Christmas period because of closures required by Network Rail, which meant that no services could access Clapham Junction from the West London Line between the 27 December 2008 and 4 January 2009. Rail tickets were made available on local bus services 295 and C3.

4 Planned services - Train Operating Companies

- 4.1 In terms of pre-planned changes to services, which were publicised well in advance, the National Rail network did not attract much comment, except for the issue on the West London Line noted in 3.3 above, and that of the general level of Boxing Day service provision. This varied according to Train Operating Company and Network Rail division, and in many cases was considered to be poor if it was provided at all.

London TravelWatch's current position is that Boxing Day services should operate to the equivalent of a Sunday service due to the fact that many major stores open on this day and it is a major day for visiting friends, relatives and sporting events.

5 Planned services – Heathrow Airport

- 5.1 At the Board meeting held on 16 December 2008, BAA Rail outlined the work of the teams within Heathrow Airport which manage the onward transport of passengers. With particular reference to Christmas, information was gathered earlier in the year and shared at director-level with transport operators and other airports.

For Christmas 2008, a bus replacement service was planned for Heathrow Express and Gatwick Express as neither service was due to run over this period, taking advantage of the relatively clear roads on Christmas day.

The Board was impressed with the level of coordination across three international airports, and suggested that it should be publicised as an example of good practice across the industry.

5 Unplanned disruption

- 5.1 The London TravelWatch paper (LTW 276, tabled 16.12.08), on the planned closures across all networks over the Christmas period, highlighted the number of scheduled engineering closures, the potential risks of overruns and how, in previous years, this has had a major impact on passengers.
- 5.2 The most major unplanned disruption for the period was on the West Coast Main Line from 2 to 8 January 2009. This was as a result of a number of apparently unrelated incidents, some of which were not attributable to the railway industry.
- 5.3. The sequence of events as they occurred is set out in the letter of the 8 January 2009 from Iain Coucher, Chief Executive of Network Rail, to Sharon Grant. (Appendix A).

- 5.4 Of the failures attributable to the railway industry, Network Rail lists the causes as one off failures of equipment and contractor accidents, rather than systemic failure. However it is worth noting that in reference to the last two incidents (those at Bletchley and Kenton) there is an acknowledgement that the failures were related to equipment that had been incorrectly installed as part of the West Coast Main Line upgrade.

6 Equalities and inclusion implications

- 6.1 It is vital that members of the public who rely on public transport over the Christmas period are not inconvenienced, and can get to their final destination during this period. Furthermore, it is important that information regarding disruption to members of the public is provided in advance, giving accurate information on replacement bus services or other means of transport.
- 6.2 In terms of social inclusion, because the bus network is now extremely comprehensive and frequent only the few areas that are not covered by Sunday services were left unserved for any period covered by this report.
- 6.3 There is a further matter of equality and inclusion regarding the means by which travel information is made available to the public. Newham Council's point (3.21, above), that those without internet access are excluded if the internet is the primary means of giving information, is supported by London Travel Watch.

7 Financial implications

- 7.1 Not applicable – report is for information only

8 Legal powers

- 8.1 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). Section 252A of the same Act (as amended by Schedule 6 of the Railways Act 2005) places a similar duty upon the Committee to keep under review matters affecting the interests of the public in relation to railway passenger and station services provided wholly or partly within the London railway area, and to make representations about them to such persons as it thinks appropriate.

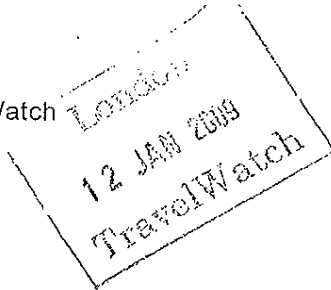
9 Recommendation

- 9.1 That the report is received for information.



Iain Coucher
Chief Executive

Sharon Grant
London TravelWatch
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8 January 2009

Dear Ms Grant

I am sure you are aware of the problems that have been experienced on the West Coast Main Line over the last few days.

At Network Rail, we recognise that we provide a vital and important public service. With that in mind, it is clear the last few days have resulted in an unacceptable level of disruption to passenger and freight services. We have attempted throughout to get information to passengers about the disruption quickly enough to help them find a way to make their journeys.

There has, however, been a great deal of inaccurate speculation in the media about the problems, the causes and the impact. It is important to stress that none of the incidents of the past few days have happened as a result of the timetable changes on the West Coast Main Line. They are the types of issue which happen from time to time on an operational railway, and not linked to sites where project work has been completed.

We have been acutely aware how vital it is to manage these incidents properly and efficiently. Intensive investigations will continue to take place over the next few days. Our top priority must be to deliver rail services for our customers and to find the root causes of these problems to prevent them from happening again. Our investigations will be the basis on which we decide how best to proceed, in discussion with our customers, the train and freight operating companies. In the meantime, I thought it would be useful to let you know some of the technical facts about the incidents.

Firstly, on 2 January, a light aircraft crashed onto the railway, at Colwich in Staffordshire, with the remnants of the plane being strewn over the railway. Sadly, there were three fatalities. All rail services were suspended. As the site and railway were declared a scene of crime by the police we were prevented from getting access whilst the police and Air Accident Investigators undertook their duties. While we are, of course, extremely conscious of the tragedy for the passengers and pilot on the plane, and our sympathies go out to their



families, we must also be thankful that there was no major injury or loss of life to rail employees or passengers as a result.

The plane came down between the rail lines and although it took the overhead wires down, the overhead line stanchions unaffected. Network Rail's incident and repair teams worked flat out to return the railway to full service as quickly as possible. The main work was to clear up the debris and general repairs of the lineside and infrastructure, particularly the overhead lines. The railway was returned to operational service on Sunday afternoon, 4 January.

Later that day, however, there was an incident with overhead wires at Watford Junction. This caused trains from London Midland and Virgin to get caught up in the wires, pulling them down and causing very significant damage. Our maintenance teams worked hard throughout Sunday night and succeeded in getting the railway back in operational use for the Monday morning peak.

It is now clear that a unit securing a live wire to the side of one of the overhead line gantries failed. This wire (the "return wire") returns unused electricity to the national grid and is fixed to the side of overhead line gantries to one side of the track. This wire swung down, striking and disabling the mechanism that keeps the main contact wires above the track in tension and at the right height. As a result, this caused them to sag and then to become entangled in the pantograph of the next train passing through the area. This is a known, but very rare type of failure.

On Monday, whilst undertaking snagging works, a subcontractor placing earthing straps on one of the overhead lines near Rugby Station slipped and touched a nearby live line. Fortunately, the operator was uninjured. However, the live line shorted out and caused damage that made the line unusable. The relevant contingency plan was implemented and the line was repaired by mid-morning, but there was a degree of disruption to services.

Then, very early on Tuesday morning, at Bletchley, an overhead wire (the catenary wire, which is strung above the contact wire keeping it at the proper height above the track) snapped at a joint where two long strands of the wire were joined. The only known previous failure of this nature was attributed to installation error. In this instance, the installation was undertaken more than five years ago. The failed component is being sent to an independent testing company to determine if an installation error was again the cause or whether another issue exists. One line was lost to traffic and restored later in the day.

At about nine o'clock on Tuesday night, there was a further incident at Kenton in North West London. Every few miles in the overhead line system there are "neutral sections" that divide electrically separate sections. In 2006, one was installed at this location, and trains have



been going over this piece of railway for over two years. However, it now appears that the installation of this neutral section was not properly done, resulting in larger than normal impact loads being imparted onto the system. Eventually, the supporting mechanism failed, with the wires consequently being pulled down by a passing train.

This caused serious passenger disruption on all lines into Euston. The slow lines were brought back into service around 10am on Wednesday. Large numbers of people, in teams from across the business worked for hours until it was sorted out. A near-full service was available by 5am today (Thursday). We are now trying to establish why this had not been picked up over the previous two years, and have started a systematic inspection of all such neutral sections on the West Coast Main Line. These inspections will be completed over the next few days.

As we have said, we need to work with the facts, so we can decide how best to manage our railway. As you would expect, there is a major focus and attention on this area. In the meantime, whilst I recognise it may be of scant consolation to those who have had their journeys disrupted this week, it is important to remember that the completion of the West Coast Main Line project last month will enable a step change in services for passengers and freight users and bring benefits to communities the length and breadth of the country. There are over 60,000 more seats for passengers per day, and long-distance journeys are up to 30% quicker. I would reiterate that the introduction of the new timetable was in no way a causal factor in this week's problems.

Once again, we recognise that this series of unconnected events has caused unacceptable disruption to passengers and freight users for which I apologise sincerely. Everyone at Network Rail, including myself, my senior colleagues and the many people who have worked tirelessly to get trains running again recognises this, and is totally committed to making sure those using the West Coast Main Line have a service which they can rely on.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Iain Coucher". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style. Below the signature is a long, horizontal line that extends across the width of the signature.

Iain Coucher
Chief Executive