



The voice of transport users

The London travelling environment: what consumers think

January 2014



London TravelWatch is the official body set up by Parliament to provide a voice for London's travelling public, including the users of all forms of public transport. We are funded by and accountable to the London Assembly.

Our role is to:

- speak up for transport users in discussions with policy-makers and the media
- consult with the transport industry, its regulators and funders on matters affecting users
- investigate complaints users have been unable to resolve with service providers
- monitor trends in service quality.

Our aim is to press in all that we do for a better travel experience for all those living, working or visiting London and its surrounding region.

Published by:

London TravelWatch
Dexter House
2 Royal Mint Court
London EC3N 4QN

Phone: 020 3176 2999
ISBN: 978-0-9511432-6-1

Foreword

Londoners spend a lot of time travelling. Typically a commuter spends an hour or more getting to and from work in the capital – far more than elsewhere in the country. So the quality of the environment that passengers find themselves in is of critical importance. At best, journeys can be a pleasant experience; at worst they turn into an endurance test. This report sets out our research to find out what consumers of London's transport services think about their travelling environment and what might be done to improve it.



London TravelWatch got a wide range of consumers – both frequent and less frequent travellers – to talk in detail about what makes or breaks their journey in terms of their travelling environment.

There are some very clear issues emerging. Some – such as overcrowding – will be very difficult to tackle without continuing investment in new capacity. This is happening in some areas but for consumers it cannot come fast enough. Others – such as anti-social behaviour – relate to wider aspects of society and are seen as a matter for the police as well as for transport operators. But the report highlights a number of areas where progress can reasonably be expected from the industry – for example in dealing with the effects of anti-social behaviour and vandalism, and in improving lighting and station design. There is also room for improvement in the more prosaic matters of litter and rubbish clearance.

More positively, the research identifies a role for transport operators in promoting the impact of what has already been achieved. In a number of areas, less frequent users had a more negative view than frequent ones. Efforts to improve accessibility, improve information, increase lighting and boost the visible presence of staff still need to be got across to a sometimes sceptical public.

Most of the improvements we identify would necessarily fall to the train operating companies and Transport for London (TfL). But we hope that our findings, and the ideas they generate will be of interest to all who are concerned to see our capital develop transport services worthy of all who live, work or visit here.

Stephen Locke
Chair

Contents

Introduction and key findings	4
2 Research objectives and methods	6
3 Context	8
1 Review of recent value for money research	
2 Defining the travelling environment	
3 Passenger priorities	
4 Hierarchy of needs	
4 Key themes	12
1 Safety	
2 Personal security	
3 Graffiti	
4 Cleanliness	
5 Free papers	
5 Stations and stops	21
1 National Rail / London Underground	
2 Bus and tram stops	
6 Vehicle issues	31
1 Overcrowding	
2 Cleanliness and personal proximity	
3 Noise pollution	
7 Staff	35
1 At stations	
2 In transit	
8 Mode specifics	39
1 National Rail	
2 London Underground	
3 Tram	
4 Bus	
9 Conclusions	44
Appendix A - Focus group discussion guide	47
Appendix B - Focus group composition	53

Introduction and key findings

Passengers tell us that the most important aspects of their journey are reliability and the cost of travel. These issues tend to dominate people's perceptions of public transport. Recent research by London TravelWatch¹, exploring passenger attitudes to value for money found that the travelling environment had a big impact on overall value for money perceptions.

Many regular travellers however, especially commuters, are resigned to accepting that they will have to pay high fares and endure poor travelling conditions. Most are pragmatic and tolerate the fact that there have to be more compromises and constraints on journeys made in the London area compared to those made by public transport in other parts of the country.

In spite of this however, this research found some evidence to suggest that passengers think that recent investment in stations and vehicles by TfL and train operating companies (TOCs) is having a positive impact on many aspects of the travelling environment. This was true particularly for frequent travellers but non-users generally did not believe this was the case.

Requirements in relation to the travelling environment vary according to the specific circumstances of each journey. However during the course of this research it has been possible to identify a hierarchy that can be used to help understand the needs that will generally apply to most passengers and journeys across all modes. This can also be used to help identify what the priorities should be for future improvement to the travelling environment for public transport services in the London area.

Addressing the problem of anti-social behaviour is the most fundamental need and important priority at the foundation of this hierarchy. There is a universal requirement for the industry to be more proactive in tackling these issues. This is because many of the actions regarded by passengers as anti-social behaviour are not criminal in nature and are therefore a matter for operators to resolve rather than the police. In these cases passengers want more visible and frequent operations by revenue protection inspectors (RPIs), and officers who perform a Police Community Support Officer (PCSO) role such as Railway Enforcement and Travelsafe Officers. This is borne out by TfL's crime statistics bulletins which show that despite a decline in crime, passengers are still concerned about this issue,

¹ Value for money on London's transport services: what consumers think, 2013: www.londontravelwatch.org.uk/document/14387

which was consistently identified as a cause of dissatisfaction among regular users and an important barrier amongst infrequent users.

The large steps/gaps between trains and platforms on the rail network are another particular area of concern that passengers believe the industry needs to address urgently. Passengers expect this to be easy to do as part of the basic customer offer, and therefore one which should have priority in terms of investment.

The problem of overcrowding at peak times is a demand and capacity issue that is unlikely to improve without fundamental changes to entrenched working patterns and the fare structure. However, this is an element of the travelling environment that was identified as having deteriorated and which is likely to get worse in the future. This represents a major barrier to using public transport more frequently among infrequent and non-users.

Passengers believe that the travelling environment would be significantly enhanced if operators paid more attention to the cleanliness of vehicles especially and stations and stops to a lesser extent. In contrast to anti-social behaviour and overcrowding, this is an issue that is considered to be the clear responsibility of service providers to address.

2 Research objectives and methods

London TravelWatch has had a long standing commitment to improving the passenger travelling environment and has published reports on issues such as trackside rubbish, graffiti and the provision of toilets on stations².

However no one study or report has researched passenger attitudes to the travelling environment as a whole or at a qualitative level. Therefore, in July 2013, London TravelWatch commissioned AECOM to conduct qualitative research to understand passenger perceptions of the travelling environment for journeys made in and around London by public transport.

This research explores which factors exert a positive or negative impact on journeys made by public transport in London. The research investigates, in detail, the range of influences and establishes a broad hierarchy of importance from a consumer perspective. The research also explores the impact that the travel environment has on consumers' value for money perceptions. The specific research objectives of the project were:

- to identify the travel environment factors passengers felt impacted on their journeys
- to understand what influence these factors have on attitudes to modal choice
- to identify passenger priorities in relation to environmental factors
- to evaluate the impact of passenger environment issues on perceptions of journey quality and value for money
- to identify priorities for future improvement.

A qualitative approach was adopted comprising six, 90 minute focus groups in order to reflect the views of a broad range of passengers, and the demographic profile of London's population. The groups were comprised of passengers with regular experience of making journeys either as a commuter or for leisure on National Rail, London Underground, DLR, buses and London Tramlink services.

The sample was constructed to represent the views of passengers using daily, weekly, monthly and annual season tickets and Oyster PAYG, and those travelling by National Rail, Underground, buses and trams in and around London. Full details of the sample structure are outlined in Appendix B.

² This has included 'Good riddance to bad rubbish – an action guide for passengers and others' published jointly with the Rail Passengers Council in 2003

Group discussions were conducted among passengers living in a wide variety of locations across London and the South East. The sessions took place in Central London, Wimbledon and Croydon.

The research approach adopted for this study was qualitative rather than quantitative because the primary objective was to gain insights from passengers and an understanding of their attitudes on travel environment issues, rather than to provide a measurement of them. The intention was to include a cross section of users of different service providers in the London area rather than attempting to represent all of them equally within the research.

The sample size and structure was designed to be sufficiently robust to have confidence in the findings which should be regarded as indicative of the views of public transport users rather than statistically significant.

It should be noted that the discussion forum format of a market research focus group will encourage participants to focus on negative rather than positive aspects of the travelling environment. The element of bias and exaggeration that tends to result from this has therefore been taken into account in the analysis of the research findings.

3 Context

3.1 Review of recent value for money research

In 2013 London TravelWatch commissioned research to investigate passenger perceptions of value for money on London's transport services. This work was focussed on consumer views in relation to the cost and reliability of services but demonstrated that the travelling environment also impacts on overall perceptions of value for money³.

The research suggested that, even if they are not satisfied with value for money, passengers in London often have pragmatic attitudes towards public transport. In terms of the travelling environment, these attitudes can be summarised as:-

- Those using commuter services tend to recognise the fact that buying a ticket does not provide an automatic entitlement to a seat. Many also accept the need to stand as long as this can be done safely and reasonably comfortably
- Many are prepared to put the needs of other passengers first, even if this may have a negative impact on fares and value for money. For example, investment in facilities that improve accessibility for passengers with disabilities tended to be welcomed
- Anything that is felt to compromise personal security when using public transport is considered to be unacceptable. Using poorly maintained subways, especially at night, is often cited in this respect.

3.2 Defining the travelling environment

For the purposes of this research, an extremely broad interpretation of the term 'travelling environment' was used. As indicated by the discussion guide used for the focus groups (appended), participants were initially invited to offer explanations and examples of what this means for them in the context of public transport.

The themes identified were then incorporated into the discussions that followed at a more specific level. Participants were asked to consider typical journeys they made and to identify elements of these that could be regarded as the travelling environment. The moderator encouraged participants to think in terms of their total journey experiences to avoid the possibility of only the most obvious and familiar aspects being covered.

³ Value for money on London's transport services: what consumers think, 2013: www.londontravelwatch.org.uk/document/14387/get

The discussion guide was designed to help define the parameters of the travelling environment in terms of where this was perceived to begin and end for each mode used. Prompts were also used to ensure that issues not mentioned spontaneously were explored (such as trackside litter and vegetation, for example).

The discussions aimed to encourage participants to talk about what they hear, feel and smell as well as what they see when using public transport, to help understand the extent to which various factors exert a positive or negative influence on journey experiences.

3.3 Passenger priorities

Although fares and reliability were not the focus of this research, it was notable that participants were nevertheless keen for these issues to be considered as part of the discussion about the travelling environment.

At the time of recruitment, participants were informed about the subject matter of the research and invited to take photos of any aspect of the travel environment they would like to discuss in the focus groups. The fact that around 50 participants failed to provide a single photo between them provided an early indication of how difficult it is to separate views of the travel environment from general attitudes about public transport.

This was reinforced in the focus groups when participants were challenged about why they had failed to respond to the invitation to provide photos as stimulus for the discussions. There was a common consensus during unprompted discussions that the travel environment is a lower priority issue than fares and service reliability in almost every circumstance. At a more considered level, most participants acknowledged the relationship between these factors to be a complex one, with each aspect having an impact on perceptions of the other. For example, one person explained that he would be less concerned about fares if reliability could be guaranteed and the travel environment improved. However, for most, the travel environment was widely considered to be less important than these other elements.

3.4 Hierarchy of needs

In contrast to views on the more rational and tangible issues of fares and reliability, attitudes towards the travel environment tend to be more subjective and more variable. This means that there is no consistent set of agreed criteria that are used by passengers to evaluate satisfaction with the travel environment when using public transport. Instead, each person has their own personal view about the impact of different aspects that changes according to variables

such as the mode used, the time and purpose of the journey, and the station, route and service provider used.

The fact that views about the travelling environment tend to be mixed and inconsistent can create difficulties in analysing and interpreting findings and drawing meaningful conclusions from them.

One way to help understand priorities from a passenger perspective is to consider the travel environment using a diagram based on Maslow's hierarchy of needs. This is usually interpreted and illustrated as a pyramid with the most basic and fundamental needs at the bottom. By simplifying and adapting this concept, it can be used to illustrate the relative importance that consumers place on various factors in many facets of their lives. It is often used in the analysis of qualitative research to help identify and understand the things of most fundamental importance (hygiene), the critical to success factors that are used to differentiate between products and services, and the unexpected enhancements that have the potential to 'surprise and delight' consumers.

Passenger needs can be segmented into three tiers that can be expressed as shown in this diagram:



Hygiene factors

These can be regarded as the things that passengers consider to be so fundamental that they represent their minimum requirements of the service provider or mode. As such, there is no credit to be gained for delivering against expectations in this area but a lot to lose for falling short of them in terms of consumer confidence and propensity to use services in the future.

Critical to success

Critical success factors are those that passengers will use to assess whether expectations have been met when using public transport. In the context of the travelling environment, these are the variety of factors that determine the extent to which the journey experience is considered to be pleasant and comfortable. The majority of issues relating to the travel environment fall into this category.

Enhancement factors

These tend to be relatively low priority issues that become important mainly when needs at lower levels in the hierarchy have been fulfilled. Delivery at the apex of the pyramid has the potential to 'surprise and delight' passengers and to create the impression that expectations have been exceeded.

4 Key themes

During the course of the research, a number of themes were identified by participants as being relevant to almost all journeys made rather than being specific to any particular mode or circumstance. This section considers each of these five themes in detail and identifies their perceived position within the needs hierarchy and the explanations behind this. Safety and personal security were regarded as hygiene factors, graffiti and cleanliness as critical to success and removing free newspapers as enhancement factors.

Hygiene factors

4.1 Safety

Perhaps unsurprisingly, the ability to guarantee personal safety is considered by passengers to be the most fundamental requirement of using public transport. As such, this issue can be seen to represent the foundation of the needs hierarchy. There were three issues in relation to the travelling environment that were occasionally identified as falling short of the basic minimum standards that are expected by passengers: platform gaps, bus acceleration and tram tracks.

Platform gaps

Participants were aware of seeing and hearing frequent reminders when using London Underground to ‘mind the gap’ between the platform and the train. However, safety concerns in this respect tended to be expressed more frequently in the context of National Rail than London Underground. These related to the height and / or distance of the step which was considered to be a particular problem for those travelling with children and elderly passengers.

“The thing I don’t like about using trains is that there is often a big gap between the train and the platform compared to the tram which makes me feel unsafe.” [Tram user, Croydon]

Participants acknowledged that this is not a consistent problem across the network or at every station, but Clapham Junction was identified as a station at which difficulties are often experienced.

Bus acceleration

In contrast to trains and trams that tend to accelerate smoothly, there was some feeling that travelling by bus can be somewhat less consistent in this respect. This was occasionally felt to be a result of the stop-start nature of buses travelling particularly on routes in Central London but was sometimes blamed on erratic driving and a failure to be sufficiently considerate to passengers. This was felt to

be a particular concern for passengers who have just boarded and not reached a seat before the bus pulls away and especially dangerous for those on the stairs. This even led to a discussion in one focus group about the possible need for seat belts to be provided as an additional passenger safety measure (although the risks when seated were generally not considered to represent a problem).

“The problem is that some of the drivers drive really fast so the bus can be really jerky and shaky so it’s really dangerous when you are moving around the bus.” [Non-user, London]

“The problem with buses is that the speed is controlled by the driver so if he is tearing around it’s a problem for passengers, especially on the stairs.” [Tram user, Croydon]

“Some of the drivers go hell for leather then slam on the brakes so there have been times when I have seen passengers go flying. Can’t they drive more smoothly, would that be so difficult?” [Bus user, Wimbledon]

Tram tracks

A minor safety concern was mentioned by one or two tram users in relation to tram tracks in the road. They were concerned about the absence of barriers (that are used to keep passengers away from the tracks when a train crosses a road). In quiet suburban areas, some locals are still getting used to trams sharing space with other road users and this can therefore represent an additional hazard for pedestrians.

“You first become aware of the track on road and start to look left and right to see whether tram is coming. You don’t cross over train tracks like you do with the tram so at first I was very wary because you don’t know where it’s coming from but now I have got used to it.” [Tram user, Croydon]

4.2 Personal security

Two areas were identified which related to personal security: anti-social behaviour and stations and stops.

Anti-social behaviour

This was identified as an area of universal concern in all of the focus groups. Participants expressed regret that anti-social behaviour seems to be an increasing problem within society as a whole and on public transport specifically. This was recognised as a problem across all modes but the general consensus is that buses and trams

seem to be more adversely affected than National Rail or London Underground.

There was considerable anecdotal evidence across the sample of different ways in which anti-social behaviour has been experienced at first hand when making journeys by public transport. This is often associated with groups of young men, especially when it is obvious they had been drinking alcohol, but more frequently the problem is linked to children travelling to or from school.

“I’m put off using buses because of the school kids on them. In my day we couldn’t behave like that but nowadays they terrorise old people and they are abusive. It’s not just older children, it’s all of them.” [Non-user, London]

“School children make a lot of noise and they can get over-excited and unruly. Most of them don’t have any respect for adults and I want to avoid getting involved in anything to be honest.” [Tram user, Croydon]

Many examples of anti-social behaviour were provided but the most common theme tended to be noise pollution. Most often, participants claim to be offended by the frequent use of swear words used in loud conversations that were impossible to block out and ignore. One of the infrequent users of public transport had stopped his children from making journeys by bus after they were subjected to racially abusive language during a journey. Participants also objected to what they perceived as the increasingly frequent habit of playing loud music from a mobile phone or other device, without using headphones, and even holding it against a window to amplify the sound.

“It really bothers me when kids get on the train and play music out loud because that’s offensive to me and really annoying. I tend not to say anything because I’m not a confrontational person.” [LU user, London]

“I once took my kids on the bus and the language from a guy on the bus was atrocious and when he got off my son said to me ‘is this the reason why we don’t use the bus?’” [Non-user, London]

“I am worried about my teenage children using the bus because I don’t think it is safe and when people have been drinking they think it is acceptable to racially abuse people.” [Bus user, Wimbledon]

All forms of anti-social behaviour were considered to be threatening and intimidating to other passengers to the extent that some participants claimed there had been occasions when they had got off the bus or tram and waited for the next service in order to avoid it. All recognised that this is a problem that is difficult to address since no one seems prepared to take responsibility for it. Other passengers are reluctant to confront gangs due to fears of retaliation and the

driver is assumed to not have the authority to take action or to be unwilling to do so due to the need to keep the bus running to a schedule.

“When there are school children on the bus some of the language is terrible. There have been times when I have asked them to stop swearing because it has been so bad. Why can’t the driver say something because they can hear it too?” [Bus user, Wimbledon]

“I don’t think alcohol should be allowed on trains due to the behaviour associated with it because I’ve been scared when I have been travelling late at night when people have been drinking.” [LU user, London]

“Sometimes I don’t feel safe on the bus, even during the day. There have been times when the crowd on the bus have made me feel so uneasy that I have got off and walked.” [Bus user, Wimbledon]

“Have you seen the type of people that use night buses? The last time I was on one I thought there was something on my head and it was the man sitting behind me playing with my hair. I have never been on a bus since.” [Non user, Wimbledon]

“These things are very important because they determine the extent to which you will enjoy the journey or not and they all relate to the amount you pay.” [Bus user, Wimbledon]

Stations and stops

Personal security concerns were frequently raised in relation to certain train and London Underground stations, and bus and tram stops less frequently. Participants reported feeling vulnerable at certain times when travelling alone. This was especially true for women and those making journeys late at night.

Often the issue was less to do with the station itself and more to do with problems associated with the local area. Concerns in this respect then tended to be exacerbated by the fact that public transport often becomes the focal point that attracts the type of person that passengers expressed concerns about. This was highlighted as an obvious disincentive to considering making more journeys by public transport if it involved using a station in such an area.

Participants also talked about these personal security concerns being heightened in situations when the station is located away from a main road. Many claimed to feel uncomfortable if the station is not overlooked by houses or if there are unlikely to be other people nearby. The way the station is accessed can exacerbate concerns, especially if this is via passages, subways or car parks that are poorly lit.



“Because it’s away from the main road I’m always aware of footsteps. Sometimes there aren’t many people around so I’m more wary if I hear something because it’s quite dark and no street lights and just not very well lit.” [LU user, London]

The quality of the lighting at the station is also important in terms of providing reassurance for passengers, especially in quieter areas or at times when not many others will be using the service. The fact that it was felt staff were less likely to be on duty in these circumstances reinforced this. Participants assumed that most stations have CCTV cameras but this failed to allay concerns since there is no way of knowing whether the images are being monitored. Although footage from the cameras was expected to be a helpful source of evidence in the event of problems occurring, there was uncertainty about how effective the cameras are at preventing incidents in the first place.

“It always makes me feel better when I know there are staff around. There are often no staff at West Harrow and it makes me feel uneasy in case I need assistance. Even though there are CCTV cameras I would feel better if there was a person there too.” [LU user, London]

“We all assume that there will be nobody at stations but if we got used to seeing someone more often it might improve the perception so you might be more inclined to use it.” [Non user, Wimbledon]

Critical to success factors

4.3 Graffiti

Although raised as a salient issue across all focus groups, there was some agreement that graffiti seems to be less of a problem

nowadays than it was in the past. Interestingly, this was an issue that tended to elicit mixed views.



*“When I was at school graffiti used to be everywhere but I don’t see so much of it around now so I assume it must be because they make more effort to clean it up now.”
[Non user, Wimbledon]*

When participants were shown examples of graffiti, there was some acknowledgement that those with artistic merit could provide a degree of aesthetic enhancement to certain areas of London. Some were aware of graffiti having been commissioned by councils and other bodies and considered this to be an appropriate way to showcase artistic talent.

“I don’t mind graffiti too much because some of it can be really good. It can be quite nice to see it in areas like London Bridge which is really grey and run down.” [Rail user, Croydon]

However, even those who were most receptive and positive considered graffiti on vehicles to be unacceptable. This was felt to demonstrate a lack of care or maintenance by the service provider that raises uncomfortable questions about depot security.

“I wouldn’t like it if a train came into the station covered in graffiti because that would suggest to me that they were not being looked after and they are not being cleaned and the upkeep can’t be that great.” [LU user, London]



“I saw a carriage with tags all over the outside recently and I was surprised that the train company let it go out like that. Obviously you don’t want it taken out of service but they must have spares that could replace it.” [Rail user, Croydon]

The vast majority of graffiti was considered to fall into the category of being non-artistic and was always thought to be objectionable. The main concern among passengers tends to be the associations created by this type of graffiti rather than its lack of visual appeal. Participants were worried that those responsible would be loitering at stations after dark which raises concerns in relation to personal

security. This type of graffiti is therefore always expected to be removed.

“When you see that it makes you worry that the person who did it might still be around so it makes you concerned for your safety, especially women.” [Rail user, Croydon]

Most participants were sympathetic about the problem of graffiti and recognised this as a difficult and expensive issue for transport operators to deal with. On balance however, most were unable to condone what they considered to be acts of vandalism and therefore expected intervention to help allay concerns relating to personal security.

“If the company doesn’t remove graffiti then it sends a signal that they are endorsing it.” [LU user, London]

“It’s not art, it’s vandalism and it doesn’t make any difference if it’s done better than other graffiti you see. If it was in a gallery it could be art but I wouldn’t want it on the front of my house so I don’t want to see it on a train either.” [Non-user, London]

“Some graffiti is absolutely brilliant but none of it is acceptable if we have to pay for someone to clean it up.” [Bus user, Wimbledon]

“I think all graffiti is unacceptable and there should be zero tolerance of it otherwise there is a danger that it will get out of hand.” [Bus user, Wimbledon]

4.4 Cleanliness



When discussing cleanliness, there were occasional references to issues such as windows that need washing or upholstery requiring a deep clean. In reality however, littering was felt to be the most visible and obvious manifestation of this problem and this tended to be the focus of passenger concerns in this area. The issues raised in the focus groups can be broadly divided between littering at stations and stops and littering on vehicles.

There was some agreement that this is another area in which improvements have been noticed at stations and stops in the recent past. The main exception to this was thought to be bus stops, especially those that are close to fast food outlets or pubs. These were acknowledged to be more difficult to keep clean due to the volume and type of litter likely to be left at them and because they lack the staff presence of

train and underground stations. It was suggested that providing rubbish bins adjacent to all bus stops would help to control littering to some extent, although there is some feeling that the type of person who would leave food cartons on the pavement would be unlikely to use bins if they were available. Passengers also object to gum, cigarette ends and spit on the ground at bus and tram stops.

“I hate it when there is spit on the ground at bus and tram stops. That’s always a problem when school children have been there, it’s disgusting.” [Tram user, Croydon]

Littering on vehicles was generally considered to be more offensive than at stations and stops. This was identified as being more of an issue for buses and trams than on National Rail or London Underground trains. Passengers were concerned about their clothes being soiled from food or drink left on seats but also considered the amount of litter often left on the floor of vehicles to be unacceptable. The sight and smell of take-away food cartons was thought to be especially objectionable with chicken bones often mentioned as the worst example of this. Bottles or cans of drink were also identified as a particular problem as they create a mess over a wide area when they roll around on the floor of the vehicle. Participants occasionally suggested that more frequent cleaning is required to help minimise this problem, perhaps at the end of the route or shift rather than at the end of the day only.

“It makes me feel sick when there are chicken bones all over the tram. There are all sorts of take away food and people just leave it behind after them, especially late at night.” [Tram user, Croydon]

“If you go into any shop there will be a sign saying no food or drink. Why can’t they do the same on public transport?” [Non-user, London]

Enhancement factors

4.5 Free papers

Attitudes to free papers on public transport are interesting and broadly consistent. These tend not to be regarded as litter so discussions tended to focus on how rather than whether papers are left by passengers.

Rather than creating a litter problem, many participants perceived that they are providing a public service by leaving their paper behind for others to read. This perception is enhanced by the act of folding the paper neatly and leaving it somewhere other than on the floor (or perhaps the seat). This led to frequent spontaneous suggestions for a facility that would allow papers to be left tidily for the benefit of other passengers, such as a rack or a container, perhaps by the entrance to the vehicle.

“I always get a free paper and leave it behind so other people can read it too, but never on the floor or the seat, always behind me.” [LU user, London]

“I don’t think that leaving the Metro behind is littering because there’s nowhere to put it when you have finished with it. There should be a place to leave papers so other people can read them, it wouldn’t be too difficult.” [Non-user, London]

“It depends what condition the paper is in. If it’s folded then someone else will read it but if it’s ripped up then it’s litter.” [Non user, Wimbledon]

Frequent environmental concerns were expressed in relation to the number of Metros and Evening Standards left on public transport in London each day. The request for a facility to promote re-use among passengers is expected to help in this respect but participants also want to see more visible and proactive recycling measures implemented by service providers to allay concerns in this area.

“I’m not a big environmentalist but every day there are hundreds of trees being used for zillions of free papers. If I knew they separated the papers from the other rubbish and recycled them I wouldn’t mind so much. I assume they must do because there are so many of them.” [Non-user, London]

“I take my litter with me but always leave my Metro behind for someone else to read. I always think it seems a shame when I see them being collected and binned at the terminal.” [Rail user, Croydon]

5 Stations and stops

5.1 National Rail / London Underground

Five issues in relation to the travelling environment were identified which related to stations and stops: station exterior, station entrance, station appearance, station trackside and station facilities:

Station exterior

During the focus groups, participants were asked to consider an end-to-end journey to identify the points at which aspects of the travel environment have most and least impact.

Unless interchanging on other transport modes, passengers do not consider areas beyond the immediate vicinity of stations to constitute part of the travel environment. The exceptions to this are safety concerns in relation to vehicle movements, especially at the busier transport hubs in central London.

Passengers who experience busier interchanges tended to accept environmental issues such as noise and the smell of traffic as part of their lifestyle choice to live or work in London.

Station entrance

This is usually the point at which most seem to become conscious of the travel environment and aware of potential influences on their journey experience. This is especially true for busy stations or at peak times but may be delayed until after the point of entering smaller stations or at quieter times of the day.

Some passengers talked of being aware that their pace quickens as they enter crowded areas, often funnelling into a confined space. Even for commuters and those travelling regularly, this can be a stressful experience as they mix with others entering the transport system and anticipate the journey ahead. Less frequent users of public transport have to be more alert due to their lack of familiarity with the system and the need to look for signage and information. All are aware of the need to be more vigilant at busier and crowded stations, especially in an environment where it is easy to be distracted by looking in bags, taking out wallets and purses, having tickets ready etc.

“My experience starts as soon as I get on the escalator because then I realise I am going underground.” [LU user, London]

Station appearance

All participants agreed that the appearance of the station is something that passengers are acutely aware of and that this is an element that can make an important contribution to overall perceptions of the journey and mode being used.

“The presentation of stations is important. You very rarely see stations covered in litter nowadays, unless it’s late on a Saturday night when people are coming home.” [Rail user, Croydon]

This tended to elicit generally positive responses across the sample. As was also the case in the recent value for money research conducted by London TravelWatch⁴, participants recognised tangible improvements in the appearance of many stations as a result of recent investment. At a macro level, the most visible manifestation of this was considered to be stations that have undergone high profile redevelopment work such as King’s Cross, St Pancras International and some of the underground stations on the Jubilee line. Many other stations were assumed to have benefited from a programme of renovation or decoration, even if specific details are not always obvious or known.

“They have made a big effort with some of the stations on London Underground recently and it shows because some of them are really nice now.” [Tram user, Croydon]

“Clapham Junction is a major station but it used to be horrible. It has recently been done up and there are shops and food places and coffee bars on the bridge across the platform and it’s really lovely now.” [Non user, Wimbledon]

“Is that what Blackfriars looks like now? I had no idea it had changed that much. If I was made aware that tube stations looked like this now it would totally change my perceptions. I want to know that they have spent money on the stations to make them newer and safer and that might encourage me to think about using them more.” [Non user, Wimbledon]

At a micro level, it was widely agreed that even without substantial expenditure it is possible to make a big difference to the travel environment through small touches. On exposure to stimulus materials, participants agreed that the addition of plants or hanging baskets of flowers can create the impression that a station is being cared for and well maintained. This in turn then

⁴ Value for money on London’s transport services: what consumers think, 2013: www.londontravelwatch.org.uk/document/14387/get



creates an expectation that staff have more of an interest in keeping the surroundings clean and tidy. There was also some feeling that if effort is invested in the upkeep of properties, it has the effect of

helping to deter vandalism and graffiti away from an area that receives attention.

“I like to see things like that (flowers) because it softens the environment. The more you do things like this the more people will start to respect the area they live in.” [Non-user, London]

“I think it looks really nice when they make an effort because it makes it feel more homely and welcoming. I don’t expect the flowers to last through winter but it’s nice while it lasts.” [Non user, Wimbledon]



Participants were also shown the type of images that were agreed to have a negative impact on value for money perceptions and therefore considered to be unacceptable when using public transport. The general perception was that this type of

environment is becoming a less common sight at stations and these images were therefore considered to be unrepresentative by frequent travellers. This view was confirmed by those recruited as infrequent users who suggested that the pictures of poorly maintained stations conformed to the stereotype of public transport that tends to be held by non-users only.

“Norwood Junction is a real pits of a station. It’s run down, it’s not painted, you have to go into a tunnel and it always smells of urine and it needs a good lick of paint. It has seats but they are too close to the edge of the platform so it’s very uncomfortable. It’s just horrible and a bit like a ghost town, it’s just horrible.” [Rail user, Croydon]

Station trackside

These issues tended not to be raised spontaneously during the focus groups and when prompted were considered to be low level priorities in the context of the travelling environment generally (or in the context of stations specifically).



Litter along the trackside was acknowledged to be a common sight but not to the extent that it is considered to be offensive or to represent a problem. During the course of discussion, it occasionally occurred to participants that paper could be a fire risk and that other objects could pose a safety hazard for trains. In order

to avoid either of these problems, and the delays to services that would be the inevitable consequence, most agreed that tracks should be cleared of rubbish regularly enough for these possibilities to be minimised.

“I don’t like to see that because it encourages rats and it’s just carelessness and there’s no reason why they can’t clean that up. It also makes me think there might be a risk of fire or could cause an accident if it gets under the train.” [Rail user, Croydon]

“Stuff that has been left by the track side worries me because I’m concerned that it will come through the windows if there is an accident, such as cable drums and bits of wood.” [Rail user, Croydon]

“Some rubbish you know won’t be there tomorrow but stuff on the tracks seems to stay there for weeks. The problem is that it’s dangerous because it could cause a fire.” [Bus user, Wimbledon]

The issue of overgrown trackside vegetation was even less salient for participants than that of trackside litter. Once again, discussion therefore needed to be prompted by the moderator. Even when participants were shown photographs, this was felt to be a non-issue to the extent that most claimed to have never previously considered it prior to participating in the research. It was certainly not something that passengers were conscious of in terms of making an impact on journeys and the only possible concern was whether this could represent a safety risk e.g. if drivers are unable to see signals.

“Overgrown weeds and vegetation isn’t attractive but it’s not offensive to look at and it’s not litter.” [Bus user, Wimbledon]

Station facilities

Discussions in the focus groups confirmed passenger priorities in relation to facilities provided at stations. These are summarised below in the needs hierarchy diagram previously referred to on page 10:



Hygiene or minimum requirement factors would include:-

- Access to ticket purchasing facilities must be available at all times at all stations. Some thought that this should mean that staff should be on hand when the station is open but most were prepared to accept ticket vending machines as an alternative.
- The quality and quantity of information must always be sufficient to enable an infrequent passenger to make an unfamiliar journey (especially when the station is unmanned).
- There is a common consensus among passengers that stations (and vehicles) should be accessible to those with disabilities.

Critical success or meeting expectations would include:-

- Passengers understand why it is not possible or practical to provide toilets at all (smaller) stations. Where they are available they are expected to be open while trains are running and to be kept in a good condition and cleaned regularly.
- Similarly, the critical success criteria against which waiting rooms are evaluated relate more to the condition they are kept in rather than whether they are provided at all. When there is no waiting

room, passengers expect some basic shelter to be available, to enable passengers to keep out of the rain if trains are delayed.

“Some of the outside stations have waiting rooms which I appreciate in the winter, especially if they have the heating on. The ones I have been in have been pleasant and clean but didn’t have much seating.” [LU user, London]

“Waiting rooms are usually useless. They are either too hot and smelly in the summer or the glass ones are open and colder than standing on the platform in winter.” [Rail user, Croydon]

- The minimum requirement for car and bike parking spaces is that security can be guaranteed for vehicle and passengers. This means that parking spaces should be well lit and ideally covered by CCTV cameras. When there are no car parking spaces outside central London, there should be provision for dropping off and collecting.

“I’ve only just started driving to the station and I use the car park for security because they have security cameras and I’m happy with it because they are monitored.” [Rail user, Croydon]

“East Croydon is badly designed if you drop someone off in a car. You have other parts of the journey when you travel by train and we shouldn’t be penalised for wanting to do that and East Croydon is a major hub. At Manchester Piccadilly you can park for free for 30 minutes.” [Rail user, Croydon]

- Catering facilities are expected at larger stations only and at major terminal stations a selection of outlets is required. Participants felt that current provision is adequate in this respect. When kiosks or vending machines are provided at smaller stations, this is always welcomed and often considered to be an unexpected bonus.

“It’s always worth having something because it improves the environment and it makes you feel that there are people around and it’s especially important if you have missed your train or there are delays. You like to have those sorts of facilities at train stations.” [Rail user, Croydon]

- Litter bins are expected to be provided at all stations (especially where there are catering facilities). Passengers understand the security implications but consider the clear plastic bag style bins to be an acceptable compromise.

“If there is a vending machine or catering facilities you have got to provide bins because you can’t create litter without having somewhere to put it.” [Rail user, Croydon]

“At Victoria there is McDonalds and loads of other places like that and not a single rubbish bin so what are you supposed to do, walk miles to find a bin?” [Rail user, Croydon]

Enhancement or exceeding expectation factors would include:-

- Many are aware that free Wi-Fi is now available at many stations and welcome this. The hope is that this programme will continue to be introduced across the network over time (and this will exceed expectations if it is available at smaller stations).



5.2 Bus and tram stops

As bus and tram stops do not have many of the facilities available at train stations, hygiene factors become relatively more important for bus and tram users. Three issues relating to the travelling environment were identified by passengers: the structure and appearance of bus and tram stops and the presence of other passengers.

Structure

- Some tram stops were criticised for failing to provide even the most basic level of shelter from the weather. This was identified as a disincentive to make more journeys by tram during the winter months in the Croydon groups.

“One of the things I dread about using the tram is when it rains because most of the stops are open and there is nowhere to hide if there is no shelter.” [Tram user, Croydon]

“We would usually get the tram to go shopping in Croydon or Wimbledon but if the weather was bad in the winter I would think ‘sod that’ and take the car instead, even though the parking would cost more.” [Tram user, Croydon]

- Some tram stops were thought to be attractive on the basis of having been designed to integrate with the local environment.

“I like most of the stops because they fit in with the surroundings. Most of the stations are green and they have trees and plants around, compared to somewhere like Clapham Junction which isn’t very pretty to the eye.” [Tram user, Croydon]

- The provision of good lighting and CCTV was considered to be a critical issue. Many expressed concerns about personal security at certain stops and cited this as a reason for not using buses or trams more frequently after dark.

“There are CCTV cameras at tram stops but they don’t always record because I was mugged at a tram stop and the police said the camera wasn’t on at the time.” [Tram user, Croydon]

“The lighting isn’t a problem at stops that are on high streets but at other ones it can be quite dim on some of the quieter streets and it can make it daunting.” [Tram user, Croydon]

- Participants were very positive about stops that provide real time information about services to the extent that those without this facility are often considered to be inadequate.
- Other information was also welcomed (such as timetables, route details, local maps etc.). Some participants were also aware that certain stops have ‘text and go’ details available and many wanted information about apps to be provided as this is clearly a strong current growth area.

Appearance

- Broken glass or graffiti provides an extremely negative signal to potential users. As well as being dangerous and unsightly, it creates concerns about personal security in an area where vandalism has recently occurred.

“I think about the shelter and the seat and whether the window has been smashed or vandalised or have got graffiti on.” [Bus user, Wimbledon]

“It doesn’t look very nice when the glass is shattered all over then path and it puts you off sitting at that bus stop. You would rather walk to the next one that hasn’t been broken.” [Bus user, Wimbledon]

Stops are evaluated on the basis of how clean and tidy they are. As previously explained, any litter is considered to be unacceptable but there are certain things that passengers find especially objectionable.

“Sometimes the litter is terrible around bus stops, there are often cigarette butts and cans and that sort of thing, actually in the shelter itself.” [Bus user, Wimbledon]

- Some wanted to see bins provided at stops but accepted that this alone is unlikely to be the solution to the littering problem.

“I have seen people at the bus stop throwing rubbish on the ground even when there is a bin there so it’s all about what kind of person you are rather than whether bins are provided.” [Tram user, Croydon]

“Often there are bins at the bus stops but sometimes they are full but also it’s because there are some people who will throw rubbish on the ground even when there is a bin just to be anti-social.” [Bus user, Wimbledon]

- Passengers ideally want seats to be provided at stops but understand why this is not possible in certain places or when the pavement is very narrow. Although some participants claimed that the comfort of the seats was important to them, this is less important than whether they are available.

Other passengers

- On approaching a stop, some claimed to make an instant assessment of the other passengers already there. This can determine whether they would decide to join the queue, stand to one side or even walk to the next stop.

“It depends who is at the stop rather than what the stop is like. If I didn’t like the look of the people who were there or if they were a bit rowdy, I might walk on to the next stop.” [Bus user, Wimbledon]

- Some older participants regretted the fact that people tend not to form orderly queues or to respect them at bus stops. This has created an unpleasant culture of selfishness, especially in situations when it may be unlikely that all passengers waiting will be able to board the next bus. This is less of an issue at tram stops due to the fact that there are multiple boarding points.

“What I hate is that there is no queue at the bus stop so there is no respect for the disabled or women with buggies because there is no order and it’s a free for all and London Underground is even worse.” [Non-user, London]

“Years ago everyone used to queue at a bus stop behind the sign but now people just stand anywhere. There should be a line on the ground or something to show where the queue is, especially since some people don’t know which end is the front or the back.” [Bus user, Wimbledon]

- Many participants objected to people smoking at stops. Some were uncertain about what is allowed in this respect but others want the ban from smoking inside shelters to be enforced more rigorously.

“One of the problems with tram stops being more open is that people think they can smoke at them. There are signs to say you can’t smoke but people still do on the platform and that contributes to the mess when there are cigarette butts on the ground.” [Tram user, Croydon]

“If the bus stop has a shelter you’re not supposed to smoke under it, you have to walk away, but people still do and I had to move to get away from someone’s smoke recently.” [Bus user, Wimbledon]

The following picture illustrates some of the thoughts that might be running through passengers’ minds as they approach a bus stop.



6 Vehicle issues

6.1 Overcrowding

This was identified by participants as one of the only areas in which there has been a noticeable deterioration in the travelling environment in recent years. Critically however, passenger concerns in this area tend to be focused on comfort rather than safety.



This was acknowledged to be a problem that tends to be restricted to journeys made in peak periods, although the general perception is that overcrowding seems to be getting worse at these times. At best, commuters have now come to accept the low likelihood of getting a seat for all or part of their journey. This is balanced against generally positive responses to newer trains on London Underground and London Overground with lower density seating which is designed to accommodate passengers standing more safely and comfortably. At worst, this can mean having to let one or more trains or buses go at the busiest times in order to be able to board.

Overcrowding was therefore consistently identified as a key driver of dissatisfaction among commuters especially and a barrier to more frequent usage among those making infrequent journeys. It was also recognised that overcrowding contributes to other vehicle-related concerns, such as hygiene and noise pollution.

“The reason the trains are being designed differently is because at peak times they are packed, they are absolutely rammed and that’s what puts me off using them because I won’t endure that.” [Non-user, London]

“I don’t use the tube because you sometimes have to let three trains go before you can get on one because they are so crowded.” [Non user, Wimbledon]

6.2 Cleanliness and personal proximity

Many were uncomfortable about the standards of personal hygiene of other users when using public transport generally and these concerns were magnified in situations where overcrowding occurs. This was identified as an issue that commuters feel they have to tolerate when travelling at peak times and one that represents a strong disincentive to use transport services in London by infrequent users.

Key concerns in this area are related primarily to cramped travelling conditions that create a lack of personal space and often extremely close personal proximity to other passengers. Participants talked about being forced to travel in unpleasant conditions that involve breathing in germs in unventilated vehicles and tolerating body odour and other smells, especially in the summer months.



“Sometimes in the summer, the smell of sweaty people makes me want to vomit, especially if someone lifts their arm up to hold onto something in front of me.” [Rail user, Croydon]

“I always think of germs when I travel on the tram or bus because it feels dirty with all those people breathing so I always open the window and then someone else closes it.” [Tram user, Croydon]

“The thing I dislike most about public transport is the overcrowding. I don’t like to be that close to other people and have them breathing in my face.” [Non user, Wimbledon]

Some participants were uncomfortable with surface hygiene in any public environment and these issues were felt to be especially acute in the context of public transport. This is exacerbated by awareness of the headlines from a report that one infrequent traveller claimed to have seen recently.

“I saw something about them collecting samples from buses and the germs and the filth they found was disgusting. There

was semen and faeces and about five types of bacteria that they didn't know about." [Non user, Wimbledon]

"I hate having to hold onto poles and that sort of thing because you don't know how clean they are and I'm funny about that sort of thing." [Tram user, Croydon]

Concerns relating to the personal hygiene of others were often considered to be one of the most offensive aspects of the travelling environment.

6.3 Noise pollution

As previously discussed, bus and tram passengers often object to loud and rowdy groups of school children, especially when bad language is used. Other examples of noise pollution that are objected to on all forms of public transport can be summarised as follows:



- *Mobile phones* were regarded by many as the scourge of those travelling on public transport. This is a particular source of irritation since people often feel they need to talk loudly to make themselves heard if there is background noise or if the connection is poor.

"When I'm on the way home from work and I'm tired and someone is standing next to me on the phone, it really annoys me." [Tram user, Croydon]

"Sometimes the phone calls are very loud and will go on for the whole journey and it's very annoying. I don't know how

people can do it without being embarrassed about causing irritation to other passengers.” [Bus user, Wimbledon]

- *‘Personal’ music.* Many objected to being forced to listen to the music of others, due to ‘leakage’ from poor quality headphones or because of the volume that the music is being played at.

“Noise is a problem. If there are people on the phone or with headphones I often move to the other end of the carriage so I don’t have to listen to it.” [Rail user, Croydon]

- *Overheard conversations.* Even if not conducted at a high volume, these can be a source of irritation for other passengers, who are unable to move away on an overcrowded service.

Those who were familiar with quiet zones on some trains recognised that these would be impossible to police effectively on commuter services in London and would therefore not represent a practical solution. Most also acknowledged that this situation is likely to get worse as Wi-Fi becomes more widespread across the public transport network. Although most participants welcomed this facility at stations, they did not want to see mobile phone / device reception introduced on London Underground trains for this reason.

7 Staff

7.1 At stations

Passenger needs and expectations regarding the contribution made by staff to the travelling environment were broadly consistent with those identified in the Ticket Purchasing and Journey Experiences research⁵ conducted earlier this year by London TravelWatch. Findings on this occasion suggested that staff should have a multi-functional role that can be summarised as follows by combining the output from both pieces of research:

“When I was younger, staff used to sell tickets, give advice and clean up outside peak hours but now all they do is sit in a ticket office.” [Non user, Wimbledon]

Three issues were identified in relation to the travelling environment: tickets and information, safety and security and station upkeep.

Tickets and information



Selling tickets and providing information was generally expected and assumed to be the primary function of station staff. There was a widespread feeling that a member of staff should ideally be available to buy tickets from, especially among those who were reluctant to use

ticket vending machines. In addition to selling tickets, staff were expected to be available to provide help and advice, especially in situations where the journey or route is complex or unfamiliar. Passengers do not expect that sales staff will be confined to a ticket office all the time, but instead expect that they may need to fulfil other functions, especially at smaller stations.

Safety and security

Assumed staff responsibilities fell into two broad categories in this respect. As previously mentioned, some participants voiced concerns about personal security when using certain stations after dark. Women especially felt reassured by the knowledge that a member of staff is present, even if their role is to act as a deterrent

⁵ Passengers' ticket purchasing and journey experiences, 2013: www.londontravelwatch.org.uk/document/14360/get

rather than being expected to intervene in the event of problems arising.

“I don’t think there should be unmanned stations, the one I live near has staff there on and off throughout the day. Stations in certain areas should have staff there the whole time, it’s just common sense.” [Non-user, London]

However, there is a general expectation that staff should be on hand to deal with any incidents occurring within the station. These could range from the need to report lost property to administering basic first aid or having someone available to liaise with the police to report more serious events.

Station upkeep

Participants were unaware of contractual obligations or restrictions on staff but assumed that their multi-functional role could extend to aspects of station maintenance and upkeep, especially at less busy locations on the network. On a day-to-day basis, this might include picking up litter and ensuring the station is kept clean and tidy and some participants were aware that this includes more specific tasks such as keeping platforms clear of snow during the winter.

“At Sanderstead they always have a member of staff who is there until about midnight. If they can provide that at Sanderstead, why can’t they do it at other stations? They don’t just sit there selling tickets, they act as security and will grit the platforms in winter.” [Rail user, Croydon]

“There’s no reason why the staff that work at stations couldn’t pick the litter up because they are always standing around, but they won’t do it if it isn’t in their job description.” [Rail user, Croydon]

7.2 In transit

There was a broad consensus among participants about what was required of staff on vehicles. Overall, passengers would like staff to be more visible and proactive during journeys on all modes. The requirement of the role in this respect can be broken down into three discrete tasks: enhancing the environment, enforcing the rules and dealing with problems.

Enhancing the environment

Although many recognised the likely cost and practicality barriers, there was some interest expressed in the idea of a mobile member of staff who would help to ensure the travelling environment is maintained to a certain standard and that it is as pleasant as possible at all times. The role in this respect was expected to encompass duties such as collecting litter, ensuring that luggage and bags are

stored correctly rather than on seats and ensuring that the protocol surrounding priority seating is being observed.

“All it needs is someone getting on at the end of the line and picking up the worst of the rubbish, it doesn’t need to be a full spring clean.” [Tram user, Croydon]

Enforcing the rules



This was essentially seen as a revenue protection function. Most participants recognised that fare-dodging has a negative impact on the cost of using public transport so it is in the interests of all fare-payers to ensure this is minimised. The general perception is that it is

currently too easy to travel without a valid ticket so most would welcome more frequent spot-checks to help prevent this. There should be a particular focus on trams in this respect given the ease with which passengers can board without needing to pass a barrier or show a valid ticket.

“I think there should be people going through the train telling people to move luggage and bags from the seats because it stops people with a ticket from being able to sit down.” [Rail user, Croydon]

“With other forms of public transport you have to go through a barrier to use it but with the tram you can just get on and get off when you like if you are lucky so it encourages the wrong type of person to use it.” [Tram user, Croydon]

“There should be a figure of authority on the bus, like when there used to be a conductor on the bus then anyone being anti-social could be asked to leave the bus.” [Bus user, Wimbledon]

Participants also expected that the possibility of spot-checks would help to deter passengers from lower-level forms of anti-social behaviour such as noise pollution and putting their feet on seats, or if not, that someone would have the necessary power to intervene and take appropriate action.

“Why do they have loads of inspectors all at the same bus stop? Why don’t they spread out on different buses and stop the kids from running riot? They have the staff but where are they when we need them at 3.30 when the schools turn out?” [Non-user, London]

“Staff on trains should help the travelling environment by making sure people don’t put their feet or bags on seats and stop other people sitting down or going in First Class and getting a penalty fare.” [Rail user, Croydon]

Dealing with problems

This was assumed to be a role that could be fulfilled only by the British Transport Police or someone in a position of recognisable authority, such as a Police Community Support Officer or a revenue protection inspector. This was regarded as the most challenging task to fulfill since it involves dealing with the most difficult situations likely to occur on public transport. Passengers like to think that transport staff have easy access to someone with the ability to deal with unruly passengers and with more serious instances of anti-social behaviour.

In the context of the subject matter of the research, it was suggested that these joint responsibilities would ideally be fulfilled by a team of staff with a title such as 'Travel Environment Officer'. In order to achieve maximum effectiveness and flexibility, it was envisaged that officers could patrol certain routes by hopping on and off services and even switching between modes.

"They should use PCSOs to help patrol the buses. They wouldn't need to be on every route, just the ones that are known to be more of a problem because there are only a small number of incidents in a week." [Non-user, London]

8 Mode specific concerns

8.1 National Rail

Within the focus groups there was a general feeling that that the travel environment in relation to National Rail trains is subject to greater variation than for other modes.

Although all modes are subject to fluctuations between peak and off-peak travelling conditions, this was thought to be most acute in the case of National Rail, certainly as far as the extremes of each condition are concerned. This is exacerbated by the more evident fare difference when using National Rail at different times of the day. This is a value for money issue but understandably it also influences perceptions of the travelling environment.

Within this, large discrepancies by route and train operating company were acknowledged across the sample. Although most commuter routes into London are subject to similar levels of overcrowding, travelling conditions are felt to vary significantly according to the age and specification of the rolling stock. Not surprisingly passengers are more likely to prefer travelling on new trains and these are felt to make a big difference to the travelling environment. Air conditioning was mentioned as having the potential to make a big difference in this respect, although it is not liked by all passengers. Trains that appear to be cleaner and well maintained have a positive impact on perceptions as do trains with more modern facilities such as improved provision for standing passengers and enhanced access to priority spaces.

“The new green trains that go to East Croydon are lovely but the one I get to St. Albans is horrible. The seats are dirty and there is often residue from other passengers left behind, it’s disgusting.” [Non user, Wimbledon]

Although fluctuations from one train to another are unavoidable, this can have the effect of creating inconsistencies and disappointment in terms of passenger perceptions. When an enhanced travelling environment is experienced on a particular train, this can create a feeling of dissatisfaction if the same standard is not achieved on subsequent journeys made by the same mode.

Focus group participants felt that National Rail operators need to provide more detailed and accurate information, especially during unplanned disruption.

8.2 London Underground

Frequent users of London Underground are surprisingly positive about their travel environment, given the difficult circumstances under which this mode operates for much of the time. There are three

elements that were identified as being more specifically relevant to London Underground trains than other modes: aggressive behaviour, temperature and mobile phone / device reception.

Aggressive behaviour

Participants felt that travelling on underground trains encourages passengers to behave more aggressively than normal in the context of public transport usage. This was usually attributed to the volume of passengers attempting to use services, especially during peak times. At times when services are too full to allow waiting passengers to board, participants recognised that it is necessary to adopt an attitude of ‘each for their own’ rather than to observe conventions of etiquette that normally apply in a public environment.

“If people try to get on before others have got off it really winds me up. People push and stand on your toes and all manners seem to go out of the window so I try to not behave as badly as other people do but you feel the tension rising.” [LU user, London]

Temperature

Aggressive behaviour was also felt to be fuelled by what are considered to be almost unbearably high temperatures that have to be endured on certain routes, especially in the summer months. This creates a travelling environment that many considered to be almost unacceptable and contributes to other environmental problems, such as body odour, as previously indicated. Most participants recognised the difficulties faced by London Underground in attempting to address this problem and therefore welcomed the recent introduction of air conditioning on newer trains on certain lines.

“It depends on the time of year. In the summer it’s absolutely terrible because there’s no air conditioning so if you travel in the rush hour it’s a nightmare.” [LU user, London]

“It does get hot and smelly in the summer. I don’t know whether people tend to wash less but it does get really smelly.” [LU user, London]

Mobile phone / device reception

Free Wi-Fi is welcomed at the stations where it is known to have been recently introduced and participants hoped that this will continue to be rolled out to more locations in future. Some were aware of recent speculation about whether it would be possible to make Wi-Fi available across the network, including on trains when they are underground. However, this tended to be resisted by the majority of participants who felt that the travelling environment is unlikely to be improved if passengers are able to make phone calls at all times.

“At the moment there is a little bit of sanctity on the tube because you can’t get your messages and I prefer that rather than listening to business people making phone calls.” [LU user, London]

8.3 Tram

In spite of generally high levels of satisfaction among tram users, a number of issues relating to the travelling environment were identified as areas for potential future improvement:

- Tram passengers want more visible security reassurances. This is thought to be a more urgent need for trams without monitors publicly displaying CCTV images that many are familiar with on buses.

“You are always aware of the security when you travel by bus. There may be no one watching it but at least having it there makes you feel more secure.” [Tram user, Croydon]

- This is exacerbated by the fact that tram passengers are conscious of the lack of human contact for problem resolution that is a feature of all other modes. The possibility of making a journey without coming into contact with a member of staff was occasionally acknowledged.

“I always feel quite uncomfortable when I go on the tram, even though I use it every day, especially at less busy times. On the bus you know the driver is not far away but it’s not the same on the tram and sometimes you can feel a bit vulnerable.” [Tram user, Croydon]

- Some stops were felt to need better shelter, especially where there is no current provision.
- Some stops were felt to need better lighting, especially those not situated on roads and overlooked by houses and those in less built-up areas.
- Access and egress was occasionally thought to be difficult due to the fact that platforms (or pavements) are too narrow to accommodate the number of passengers using the stop.

8.4 Bus

Travel environment issues were often thought to be worse on buses than other modes of transport. Issues identified as being specific to buses can be summarised within the following two categories: passenger issues and safety and security.

Passenger issues

- There was some discussion in the focus groups about the ‘rules’ that the driver must observe in terms of picking up passengers at stops. There was uncertainty about whether the driver is obliged to wait for someone running for the bus who has indicated an intention to board. This was balanced against the understanding that buses need to run to a schedule and reliability was generally considered to be the main priority in this respect.

“I hate it when you see people waving at the driver and they ignore them, I think that’s so mean, especially when it’s an old person.” [Bus user, Wimbledon]

“If a bus driver sees someone running for the bus they are supposed to wait for you but a lot of them don’t do it even though it’s a part of their job.” [Non user, Wimbledon]

- One or two participants claimed to have witnessed instances when a disabled passenger was refused access because the priority spaces on board were already occupied by buggies. There were mixed views on this issue, as those who travel with young children feel that they have as much right to use these spaces as a wheelchair user. The problem seems to be a lack of understanding of the priorities since these are not clearly indicated on buses or at stops.

“I’ve seen women with a pram and children and disabled people left in the pouring rain with no shelter at the stop because there’s no room on the bus for them.” [Non-user, London]

“Last week I was on a bus and the driver wouldn’t let a man in a wheelchair on because there were two buggies in the space. He told him he would have to wait for the next bus.” [Bus user, Wimbledon]

- The priority spaces on the bus are often subject to similar levels of confusion and misunderstanding. Some participants were aware of occasions when this had caused disputes among passengers and it was felt that this could be resolved by clearer signage regarding the protocol and priorities that apply.

“There is no priority but the driver can ask for the buggies to be folded to make more room for other passengers.” [Bus user, Wimbledon]

- Some participants expressed disappointment about general levels of respect among certain passengers towards elderly passengers or mothers struggling with children. Specifically, this usually amounted to a lack of courtesy among young people and school

children especially, who do not offer seats to others in greater need of a seat.

Safety and security issues

- Participants often felt that drivers are too passive in dealing with the anti-social behaviour problems associated with buses. Most understood why the driver is unable or reluctant to intervene and therefore want to see other staff present on board more frequently.

“Bus drivers don’t do anything to intervene if there are problems, they just let people run riot because they don’t want to get out of their cab.” [Non-user, London]

As previously mentioned, some participants considered the stairs to be dangerous if the bus is driven quickly or erratically. However, there was also a view that negotiating the stairs can represent a safety risk at any time when the bus is moving.

“I don’t like using the upper deck of a bus because the bus will still be moving when you come down and I once slipped and fell down the stairs.” [Non-user, London]

A lesser but nevertheless important concern for some was that the floor surface in some buses can become dangerously slippery in wet weather.

9 Conclusions

Asking consumers to discuss their perceptions of the travelling environment revealed some interesting insights. It soon became clear that this was not something uppermost in the minds of most passengers, however, when they were pushed further, it became a different story.

There are a number of issues that do not just impact on the overall quality of the journey but could cause people to change their behaviour at certain times or in certain locations, or even prevent them from using public transport in the first place. The fact that some of these concerns were based on unlikely or infrequent occurrences did not matter, people remember the bad experiences and will continue to do so unless they can be convinced that improvements have been made.

Encouragingly, the research shows that many passengers believe that there have been a number of improvements to the travelling environment across most modes of transport in the London area in recent years. Passengers have noticed the effect of increased investment in stations and vehicles. Nevertheless, the research also identifies considerable room for improvement in various aspects of the travelling environment, occasionally at the most important and fundamental level.

Policy makers and operators should note that:

- 1. After fare levels and service reliability the travel environment is the major concern for passengers that determines passenger satisfaction with public transport and its attractiveness to non-users.**

It is perhaps unsurprising to conclude that fare levels and service reliability are more important issues for the majority of passengers. However, aspects of the travel environment are important drivers of dissatisfaction. They are also extremely important in terms of the contribution they make to perceptions of value for money and general satisfaction amongst existing users as well as the willingness of non-users to change their habits.

- 2. It is easier to identify factors that have a negative rather than positive impact on journeys.**

Consumers tend to remember one negative experience rather than the many positive ones that they are exposed to. Operators need to address as a matter of priority those factors that are considered by passengers to be of a basic hygiene nature, that can contribute to dissatisfaction with services provided.

3. The perception that the travel environment has improved over recent years tends not to be recognised by non-users.

As noted above, previous poor experiences of public transport represent a major barrier to infrequent users and non-users making more use of public transport. It is difficult to change this perception unless journeys are made on services that have been improved as the result of recent investment.

4. There are two aspects of the travel environment that continue to deteriorate in the minds of passengers that represent a disincentive to making journeys by public transport.

Anti-social behaviour represents the biggest problem in this respect. This covers a wide variety of issues from fears about personal security to passengers not queuing for buses. In this research, this was identified as being more of a problem on buses and trams than on National Rail or London Underground services. Passengers feel that priority should be given to greater visibility and frequency of revenue protection activities and the use of Police Community Support Officers.

The other issue is overcrowding, especially during peak times. In addition to the obvious discomfort that this can cause for passengers, it also exacerbates problems with associated travel environment issues such as noise pollution and concerns relating to personal proximity and hygiene.

The actions required by the industry to improve passengers' perceptions of the travelling environment can be summarised as follows:

- Addressing anti-social behaviour by highlighting the presence of authority figures such as station staff and bus drivers, and giving more confidence to those in these roles to take a leadership responsibility and be able to intervene appropriately; providing greater visibility and frequency of revenue protection activities; improving lighting at stations and stops; improving the coverage of CCTV, including the addition of monitors that are visible to passengers
- Tackling over-crowding of services not only by using larger or more vehicles, but also by improving the usable space within vehicles for standing by providing more and better grab handles
- Taking a more pro-active approach to the issue of litter both on vehicles and at stations and stops, by using more 'in service' cleaners, wider availability of disposal bins and bags; the provision of specific collection points for free newspapers for

reuse by other passengers and better promotion of the amount of litter or rubbish on vehicles and at stations and stops is recycled.

Network Rail needs to work with operators to tackle the issue of 'step-gaps' between the train and platform, as well as addressing issues of line-side litter, rubbish and graffiti more vigorously not only to improve operational performance, but also to help reduce the fear of crime and anti-social behaviour on the rail network.

Bus operators should also consider regular 'in-service' cleaning of buses and also replacing ticket bins (which are now largely redundant of their original purpose in London) with larger receptacles for litter.

Appendix A - Focus group discussion guide

London TravelWatch – Travel Environment 90 minute groups - discussion guide

Introduction

- Introduce self / AECOM / viewing facility
- Explain nature and purpose of research
- Outline research agenda and process
- Respondent details: name, age, occupation, where live

Context

- What types of journeys do you typically make by public transport?
- How frequently do you make these journeys?
- Which modes do you use most often / occasionally?

[Moderator note: Focus on primary mode used most often and compare for other modes]

- As you know, the subject of this research is the travelling environment when using public transport. What does this mean to you? What are your top of mind associations?
- What else could travelling environment include? What are the less obvious things that contribute to overall perceptions?
- How important are these things to you? How do they compare to other factors such as fares and service reliability?
- How much consideration do you give to these issues? How much influence do they have on your decision to use public transport? How do they impact on choice of mode? How do they affect the quality of the usage experience?

[For the following sections, focus on primary mode for regular user groups and explore as appropriate for occasional users]

Total Journey experience - rail

[Encourage participants to consider all aspects of the experience as outlined below and identify environmental factors that exert a positive or negative influence on usage perceptions. Probe to establish which of the senses are being affected at each stage]

- **Approaching the station** - where does the station environment begin? When do you become aware of this? What do you notice first? What else are you aware of?
- **At the station** – car park; bike storage area; entrance; concourse area; ticket office; retail outlets; free papers; bins; waiting rooms; toilets; platforms; lighting; tracks; stairs and subways
- **Boarding** – train arriving; train exterior; doors and windows; vestibule area; first impressions of carriage interior
- **During journey** – seating; cleanliness; bins; toilets; temperature; announcements; lighting; other passengers; view from train

- **Alighting** – approaching station; exiting train; platform; toilets; station concourse; retail outlets; bins; lighting
- **Station egress** – immediate surroundings; where does the station environment end; when do perceptions of train / public transport stop
- *[For each factor identified, especially those that have a negative impact]*
How does this make you feel when it is experienced? Who do you consider to be responsible for it? What impact does this have on your journey? What impact on your views about travelling by train? What impact on your views about public transport? How could it be improved and how would this affect your impressions?
- What are the most important of the issues identified when travelling by train? How could these be prioritised / ranked? Which are the things that would make most impact if addressed? What difference would each make to your perceptions and the quality of the usage experience?
- What things are you less concerned about? Which things have less impact on your views? What needs to be done about these things to enhance your experience?
- What are the things you can live with? What are the lowest priority concerns?
- To summarise, what are your minimum expectations in relation to the travelling environment for rail? What would need to change to get to a level that you would feel happy / comfortable with? What would exceed your expectations?

Total journey experience - Underground

[Encourage participants to consider all aspects of the experience as outlined below and identify environmental factors that exert a positive or negative influence on usage perceptions. Probe to establish which of the senses are being affected at each stage]

- **Approaching the station** - where does the station environment begin? When do you become aware of this? What do you notice first? What else are you aware of?
- **At the station** – car park; bike storage area; entrance; concourse area; ticket office; retail outlets; free papers; bins; waiting rooms; toilets; platforms; lighting; tracks; stairs and subways
- **Boarding** – train arriving; train exterior; doors and windows; vestibule area; first impressions of carriage interior
- **During journey** – seating; cleanliness; bins; temperature; announcements; lighting; other passengers; view from train
- **Alighting** – approaching station; exiting train; platform; toilets; station concourse; retail outlets; bins; lighting
- **Station egress** – immediate surroundings; where does the station environment end; when do perceptions of underground / public transport stop?
- *[For each factor identified, especially those that have a negative impact]*
How does this make you feel when it is experienced? Who do you consider to be responsible for it? What impact does this have on your journey? What impact on your views about travelling by underground?

What impact on your views about public transport? How could it be improved and how would this affect your impressions?

- What are the most important of the issues identified when travelling by underground? How could these be prioritised / ranked? Which are the things that would make most impact if addressed? What difference would each make to your perceptions and the quality of the usage experience?
- What things are you less concerned about? Which things have less impact on your views? What needs to be done about these things to enhance your experience?
- What are the things you can live with? What are the lowest priority concerns?
- To summarise, what are your minimum expectations in relation to the travelling environment for London Underground? What would need to change to get to a level that you would feel happy / comfortable with? What would exceed your expectations?

Total journey experience - tram

[Encourage participants to consider all aspects of the experience as outlined below and identify environmental factors that exert a positive or negative influence on usage perceptions. Probe to establish which of the senses are being affected at each stage]

- **Approaching the stop** - where does the stop environment begin? When do you become aware of this? What do you notice first? What else are you aware of?
- **At the stop** – platforms; bins; shelter; lighting; tracks; surrounding area
- **Boarding** – tram arriving; tram exterior; doors and windows; vestibule area; first impressions of carriage interior
- **During journey** – seating; cleanliness; bins; toilets; temperature; announcements; lighting; other passengers; view from tram
- **Alighting** – approaching stop; exiting tram; platform; bins; lighting; shelter
- **Stop egress** – immediate surroundings; where does the stop environment end; when do perceptions of tram / public transport stop?
- *[For each factor identified, especially those that have a negative impact]*
How does this make you feel when it is experienced? Who do you consider to be responsible for it? What impact does this have on your journey? What impact on your views about travelling by tram? What impact on your views about public transport? How could it be improved and how would this affect your impressions?
- What are the most important of the issues identified when travelling by tram? How these could be prioritised / ranked? Which are the things that would make most impact if addressed? What difference would each make to your perceptions and the quality of the usage experience?
- What things are you less concerned about? Which things have less impact on your views? What needs to be done about these things to enhance your experience?
- What are the things you can live with? What are the lowest priority concerns?
- To summarise, what are your minimum expectations in relation to the travelling environment for trams? What would need to change to get to a

level that you would feel happy / comfortable with? What would exceed your expectations?

Total journey experience - bus

[Encourage participants to consider all aspects of the experience as outlined below and identify environmental factors that exert a positive or negative influence on usage perceptions. Probe to establish which of the senses are being affected at each stage]

- **Approaching the stop** - where does the stop environment begin? When do you become aware of this? What do you notice first? What else are you aware of?
 - **At the stop** – pavement, road; bins; shelter; lighting; surrounding area
 - **Boarding** – bus arriving; bus exterior; doors and windows; entrance area; first impressions of vehicle interior
 - **During journey** – seating; cleanliness; bins; temperature; announcements; lighting; other passengers; view from bus
 - **Alighting** – approaching stop; exiting bus; platform; pavement; road; lighting; shelter
 - **Stop egress** – immediate surroundings; where does the stop environment end; when do perceptions of bus / public transport stop?
-
- *[For each factor identified, especially those that have a negative impact]* How does this make you feel when it is experienced? Who do you consider to be responsible for it? What impact does this have on your journey? What impact on your views about travelling by tram? What impact on your views about public transport? How could it be improved and how would this affect your impressions?
 - What are the most important of the issues identified when travelling by tram? How could these be prioritised / ranked? Which are the things that would make most impact if addressed? What difference would each make to your perceptions and the quality of the usage experience?
 - What things are you less concerned about? Which things have less impact on your views? What needs to be done about these things to enhance your experience?
 - What are the things you can live with? What are the lowest priority concerns?
 - To summarise, what are your minimum expectations in relation to the travelling environment for trams? What would need to change to get to a level that you would feel happy / comfortable with? What would exceed your expectations?

Travel environment specifics

[The purpose of this section will be to explore issues and problem areas in more detail and to identify areas for improvement. Stimulus photos to be shown at this stage]

- What is your impression of stations and stops? What are the key differences by mode? What are the best / worst examples? What sort of environment do you want? What are the minimum requirements? What would exceed expectations? What would impact on likelihood to use a mode / public transport more in future?

- How about the provision of shelter and seating? What are the best and worst examples? Is availability or comfort of seating more important to you? Would you be prepared to compromise on one to get an improvement in the other?
- What do you think of the cleanliness of vehicles / carriages? What are the issues / concerns? Should bins be provided? What about free papers? What do you expect in terms of cleaning regimes? What if more cleaning meant longer turnaround times and reduced service frequency?
- What facilities should be available? What is the minimum expectation? What would exceed expectations? How does this vary by mode / size of station? What do you need in terms of retail outlets? What about catering facilities and range required?
- What is your view on toilets? Are there always toilets available when you need them? What about the condition and cleanliness of them? Would you be prepared to pay (more) to use them to get improvements?
- How about trackside issues such as vegetation, rubbish and graffiti? Which is most / least acceptable? How does this compare with roads or footpaths you use? How would you feel if they were in the same condition as trackside you experience? What about the risk of vegetation affecting the driver's sighting of signals? What if dealing with trackside issues caused delays and disruption to services? What about safety implications if not addressed (explain branch falling on Kentish Town train disabling electrics and facilities for 3 hours)?
- What could be done about other passengers? What are the main problems (littering, noise, feet on seats, anti-social behaviour etc.)? Should passengers be encouraged to behave more responsibly? What could be done? What do you think about awareness campaigns - do they work; how could they be enforced? What do you do when using public transport? What do you consider to be acceptable and otherwise?

Hard vs. soft factors

- How could you categorise the factors that impact on perceptions of the travelling environment? What is the difference between these? How would you define each type? What would you call each of the groups / categories?
- What are the most obvious / visible issues [spontaneous then prompt with litter, graffiti, dirty vehicles / carriages / interiors, poorly maintained stations / stops, any other issues previously identified during the group]?
- Are these more important because they are more tangible? Do they impact more on perceptions because of this? What does it depend on?
- What things are less immediately apparent [spontaneous then prompt with vehicle noise, ride quality, announcements, lighting at stations / stops and inside vehicles, CCTV any other issues previously identified during the group]?
- Are these less important because they are less evident? Do they impact less on perceptions because of this? What does it depend on?
- How do distinctions made affect your overall views of the travelling environment? How does this influence what you consider to be the main priorities?

Trade-offs

- What are the key themes that have emerged from the discussion so far? Are there any issues that are common to all modes of public transport?

- What are the issues that are the greatest cause for concern? What has the most (negative) impact on perceptions of the travelling environment?
- What are the priorities that service providers should focus on? What are the top three things that you would like to see addressed?

[Moderator to get broad consensus from group in order to conduct trade-off exercise. This will naturally depend on areas identified but will be along the following lines for each issue]

- What is the nature of the problem? What impact does this have on you and your journeys? What would ideally be done to rectify this?
- Would you be prepared to pay more in order to see an improvement / resolution? *[If not]* Why is this unable to justify additional cost of staff / cleaning / resources etc. to address this issue?
- To avoid fares increasing, what trade-off would you be prepared to consider to get improvement in this area *[moderator to suggest trade-offs as appropriate e.g. fewer seats to reduce cleaning / repair bill; no free papers / catering to minimise rubbish; remove graffiti but allow vegetation to become overgrown; allow vegetation to overgrow but train reliability may get worse; improve lighting and CCTV but reduce numbers of staff etc.]?*
- What are the key learnings from this exercise? Which trade-offs are easiest / most difficult to make? What does this imply about the travel environment priorities?

Future improvements

- What are the priorities for improvement and future investment? What learnings could be applied across modes? What would best practice look like for public transport?
- What are the most obvious opportunities for quick wins? What are the things that would make the most immediate impact? What difference would this have on your perceptions?
- What are the longer term improvements that are required? What would make the most difference to you in future? How would these things impact on your perceptions over time?
- Would any of these improvements affect your use of public transport if implemented? What would be most likely to make you use public transport more if addressed? Which would impact most on the quality of the usage experience?
- Would anything make you use public transport less if left unchanged?
- For each improvement, what would be required to achieve an acceptable standard? What would be even better than this? What would exceed your expectations?

Summary

- What are the key themes that have been identified in relation to the travelling environment?
- What are the most important issues for each mode?
- What are the factors that have the biggest positive and negative impact on your perceptions and the quality of the usage experience?
- What are the things that impact on your likelihood to use public transport in future?
- What are the main priorities for improvement and investment?

Appendix B - Focus group composition

The composition of **six focus groups**, each lasting approximately 90 minutes was as follows:

Composition of focus groups - regular users of public transport

	Regular users of public transport			
Life stage	Single or double income with no children and young family	Older family empty nesters	Single or double income with no children and young family	Older family empty nesters
Age indication	25-45	46-70	25-45	46-70
Socio economic class	ABC1	C2D	C2D	ABC1
Primary mode	LUL	Bus	Tram	National Rail
Location	Central London	Wimbledon	Croydon	Croydon
Group no.	1	2	3	4

Composition of focus groups – less frequent users of public transport

	Less frequent users of public transport	
Life stage	Single or double income with no children and young family	Older family empty nesters
Age indication	25-45	46-70
Socio economic class	ABC1	C2D
Location	Wimbledon	Central London
Group no.	5	6

Additional recruitment criteria

- A mix of both sexes in each group
- Groups to be recruited to be representative of the ethnicity of their local area

Regular users

- All to be using public transport on at least a weekly basis
- All groups to comprise a mix of commuters and those who use public transport for business or leisure purposes
- Commuters to be using public transport every or most working days
- Business or leisure users to be using public transport at least twice a week
- All to use the specified mode most often for the journeys they are making
- At least half in each group to use other modes at least once a month

Less frequent users

- Most in each group to be using some form of public transport at least once a month (occasional)
- None to be using public transport more than once a week
- One or two in each group to be using public transport less often than once a month but at least three or four times a year (Infrequent)
- None to be anti-public transport and would be prepared to consider using it more often in future

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Website: www.londontravelwatch.org.uk
ISBN: 978-0-9511432-6-1