

Passenger issues in North West Kent and adjacent London Boroughs

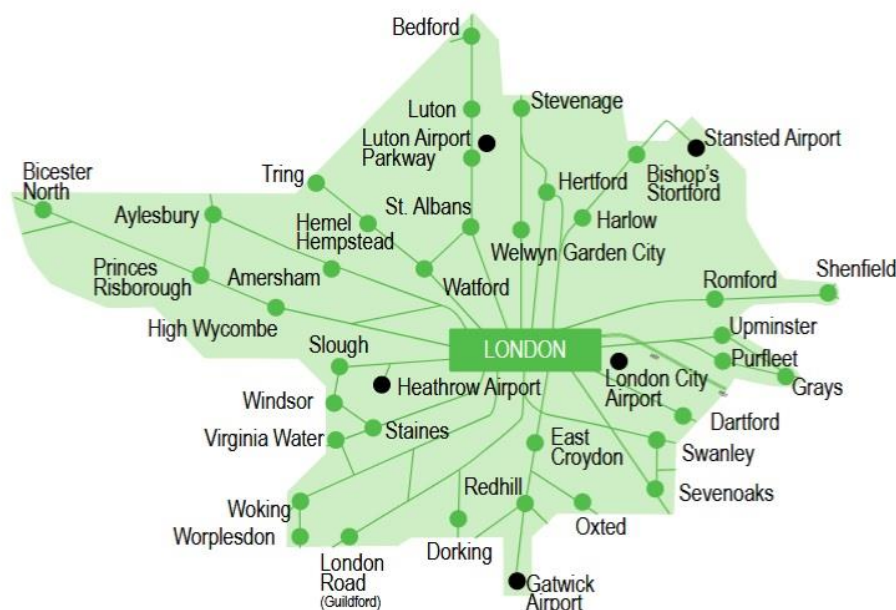
What is London TravelWatch?

London TravelWatch is the official watchdog for London’s travelling public. The current organisation, formally known as the London Transport Users Committee, was established alongside the London Assembly by the 1999 GLA Act.

We aim to secure a better journey experience for everyone travelling in and around London and are the only statutory transport user body to be completely multi-modal. We are an appeals body for passengers unhappy with how the industry has dealt with their complaint. We are also a statutory consultee and carry out research and investigation on behalf of passengers.

We press for a better deal for travellers in and around London, covering a wide range of issues, responding to formal and informal consultations, using primary and secondary data to support our evidence based case, acting as a critical friend to operators and working in partnership with other public interest bodies where appropriate. We regularly meet and seek to influence the relevant parts of the transport industry on all issues which affect the travelling public including timetables, routes, frequencies, fares, ticketing, station standards, access, vehicles, safety, personal security and the information provided both to passengers and to users of London’s principal roads. We also work with a wide range of public interest organisations, user groups and research bodies to ensure that we remain aware of the experiences and concerns of the travelling public.

We represent 13 million people who make 3.5 billion journeys a year in and around London on all TfL (Transport for London) modes and in the London Railway Area, which is shown in the map below.



(Crossrail only – Reading to Shenfield)

Rail services

1) Three major rail routes serve North West Kent and the adjacent areas of Bexley and Bromley. These have experienced growth in usage and crowding at peak times in recent years: what is being done to deal with these issues?

- Southeastern and Thameslink services from Gravesend and Dartford.

These take three different routes to London Bridge, Cannon Street, Waterloo and Charing Cross with the recently introduced Thameslink service serving Blackfriars and then continuing north to Luton. There are also half-hourly services from Gravesend and Dartford to London Victoria via Bexleyheath, Lewisham and Denmark Hill.

A programme of train lengthening to 10 or 12 cars has been completed. This has required platform lengthening at many stations. The refranchising of the Southeastern franchise currently underway will also provide other opportunities to improve services. A new half-hourly Thameslink service between Rainham (Kent), the Medway towns, Gravesend, Dartford, Abbey Wood, Woolwich Arsenal, Greenwich, London Bridge and north to Luton, replaced a Southeastern service from 20 May 2018 but has proved to be very unreliable. As a result an interim timetable of an hourly service is being implemented on 15 July 2018.

- Southeastern and Thameslink services from Swanley.

Southeastern services from Kent call at Swanley on their way to Bromley South and Victoria (also Blackfriars in the peak). There is also a Thameslink service from Sevenoaks that calls at local stations via Swanley to Bromley South and continues to Blackfriars. Prior to 20 May 2018 this was a through service to Kentish Town via Farringdon and St.Pancras International. As with the Rainham (Kent) service, since then the timetable has proved to be very unreliable, and in some cases required replacement by bus services or additional stops inserted in Southeastern services. It is hoped that the interim timetable from 15 July 2018 will restore reliability to this route. From December 2019 an additional Thameslink service will operate, replacing the peak hour services to Blackfriars from the Maidstone East line that calls at Swanley. It will be a regular all day service linking Maidstone East and Swanley, then fast to London Bridge, and on to Blackfriars, Farringdon, St.Pancras International and Cambridge.

- Southeastern services on High Speed 1 from Gravesend and Ebbsfleet International.

These operate to and from St.Pancras International and Stratford International in London and to Ashford and East Kent.

- Eurostar services to Paris and Brussels also pick up and set down at Ebbsfleet International.

2) How will services be affected by the Elizabeth Line and future franchises?

MTR Corporation as the concession operator for the Elizabeth Line has already taken over operation of Abbey Wood station from Southeastern in anticipation of the opening of the core central section of the Elizabeth Line in December 2018. This will provide a service from Abbey Wood via Woolwich, Canary Wharf, Liverpool Street, Farringdon and Tottenham Court Road to Paddington. The full Elizabeth Line operation with services to Heathrow Airport and Reading should open in December 2019. This will have a significant effect on travel between North Kent and central London through the connection with Southeastern services at Abbey Wood.

The new Southeastern franchise operator will be announced later this year and will take over in January 2019. It is expected that major changes to timetables will take place in December 2022.

Rail fares and tickets

1) Oyster/Contactless validity has been extended to Dartford and Swanley

After much campaigning by London TravelWatch, Oyster and Contactless payment cards are now accepted at Dartford and Swanley. This has considerably reduced the number of Penalty Fares previously issued at these stations as passengers previously wrongly assumed that because they were served by 'metro' suburban services that these were valid at these stations. Local TfL bus services call at both stations and there was a particular issue for passengers at Dartford travelling to the Darent Valley Hospital.

London TravelWatch has previously expressed the view that Oyster and Contactless payment card acceptance should be extended further from Swanley to Sevenoaks and from Dartford to Gravesend in line with the operation of 'metro' services over these routes and the widespread availability of these technologies amongst the population of these areas.

Major developments at Ebbsfleet and Bexley

1) Why is improved access to this area so important?

The area is in the process of receiving several major developments such as the Ebbsfleet Garden Village and in the Bexley part of Thamesmead that will include thousands of homes, retail, leisure and industrial development.

To support this development and also to deal with existing problems of traffic congestion such as around the Dartford Crossing and the M25, the Government is proposing major investment in the road and rail networks in the area. These include:

- A lower Thames Crossing Motorway between the M2 junction 1 near Strood, going east of Gravesend and Tilbury linking to the M25 near junction 29¹.
- A possible extension of the Elizabeth Line from Abbey Wood to Ebbsfleet.
- A possible extension of Southeastern Victoria – Bromley South services via Swanley, Farningham Road and the former Gravesend West branch to Ebbsfleet. These proposals are put forward in Network Rail’s Kent Route Study.²

Bus services

TfL has a legal duty (GLA Act 1999) to meet the needs of passengers travelling to and from the capital as well as within it. As such, there are various cross-boundary bus services operated by TfL beyond the Greater London Authority boundary. TfL and non-TfL bus services in the area can be seen on the maps included in the appendices along with a link to London TravelWatch’s previous research on cross-boundary bus services.

1) Which of these services comes within the remit of London TravelWatch?

All TfL contracted services are within the remit of London TravelWatch, plus we have a duty to consider cross-boundary movements and the connectivity by bus to railway stations within the London Railway Area.

A recent success for London TravelWatch in this area has been the diversion of route 96 via Darent Valley Hospital and the ‘fastway’ bus priority route to Bluewater shopping centre. This has enabled direct links from Woolwich, Welling, Bexleyheath and Crayford to the hospital without the need to change buses in Dartford.

2) Why is there is a disparity between TfL contracted services and others?

TfL bus services are operated according to a TfL contract following a tender process. TfL specify the service frequencies, fares, type of bus, route etc. TfL takes the revenue risk on the services that it provides. Typically, the county council where the bus operates will make a financial contribution towards the operational costs.

Bus services outside London which are not contracted by TfL are operated either on a commercial basis by the bus company or are financially supported by the local authority. Subsidy, in various forms, to ensure services are provided where they are not commercially viable is often dependent on the resources available to local authorities. The social and economic geography of an area, including features such as car availability, car parking, traffic enforcement, and the dispersal of development may mean that sustaining a bus network can be very challenging.

¹ <https://highwaysengland.co.uk/lower-thames-crossing-in-my-area/>

² <https://cdn.networkrail.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/06/South-East-Kent-route-study-print-version.pdf> and <https://cdn.networkrail.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/06/South-East-Kent-route-study-technical-appendix.pdf>

All of these factors have led to frequent service changes and successive business failures of both large and small operators since bus deregulation in 1986 in this area. This in turn has led to a loss of passenger confidence and decline in usage.

Other bus services operating in Kent are run either on a commercial basis or are financially supported by Kent County Council. To support the residential and other development in the area Kent County Council has developed in partnership with others the 'fastrack' system of dedicated roads and priority for buses ³.

Devolution of rail services to TfL

1) What are the key problems for passengers using suburban rail services in and around London which need to be addressed?

Many suburban services suffer from poor performance and customer service, poor value for money for passengers and sub standard station facilities. The fares and ticketing structure is also extremely complex.

2) How do devolved rail services differ from the predominant system of franchising used for most UK rail services? If rail services were devolved, would it mean that TfL would be running services?

The model used for existing devolved rail services differs as services are run as a TfL concession rather a conventional franchise. This means that TfL awards the concession and deals with fares policy and forward planning, taking the commercial risks associated with ticketing and other revenue and incentivising the concessionaire to concentrate on the delivery and development of services.

3) How would this improve things for passengers?

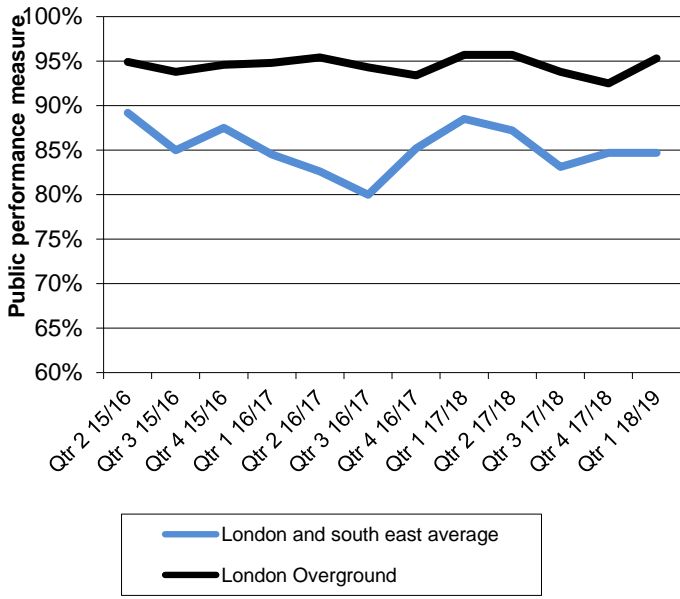
The performance of London Overground as a TfL-procured service, has vastly improved since the start of the concession in 2007. It has gone from being one of the worst performing franchises (under the previous Silverlink franchise) to one of the best with very high passenger satisfaction as a result.

More recently, some commuter services out of London Liverpool Street operated by Greater Anglia have been transferred to TfL and the early signs are that service improvements have been made as a result. Passengers have benefited from more frequent services, improved customer service, decent standards for stations, enhanced ticketing facilities, additional staffing and improved information.

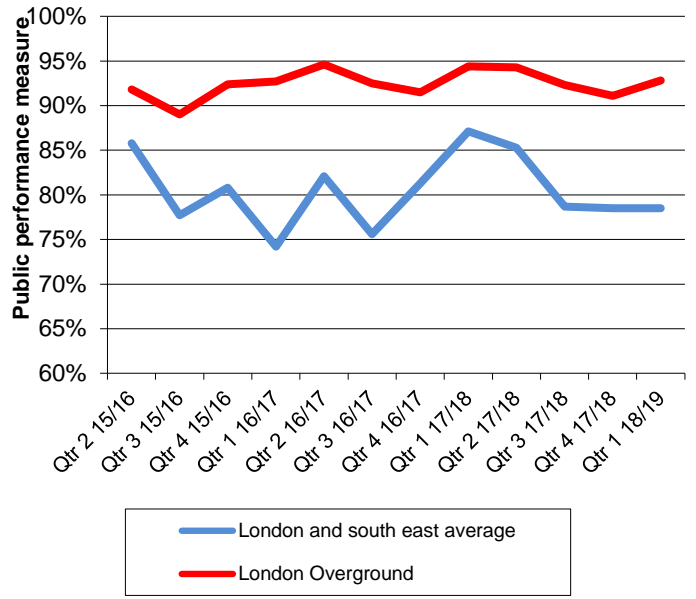
Those passengers needing assistance have also benefited from a turn up and go service. The graphs below show the performance of London Overground and TfL Rail services over the last two years, relative to other services in London and the south east.

³ <http://www.go-fastrack.co.uk/>

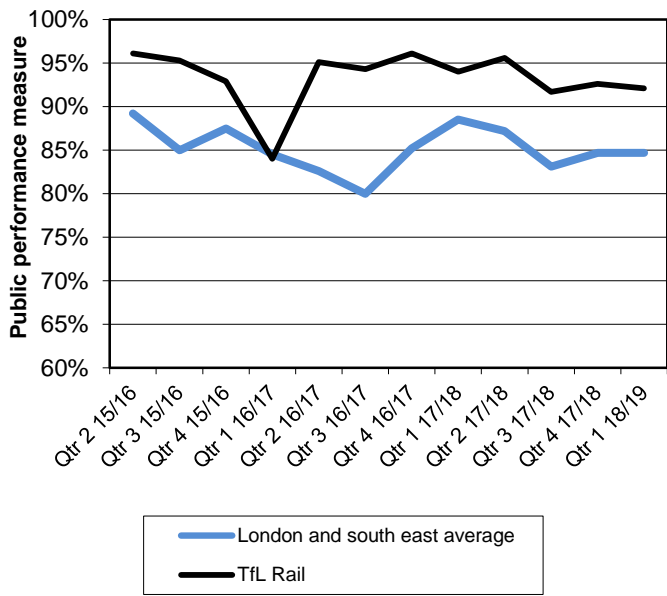
London Overground - all day performance



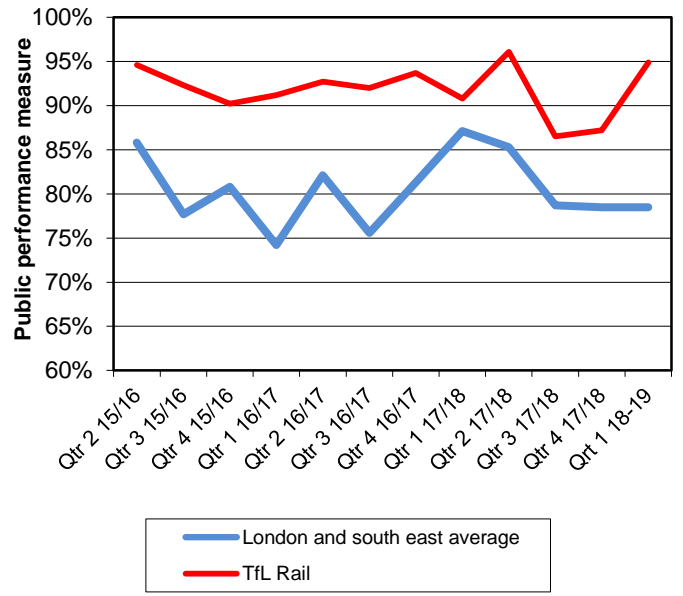
London Overground - peak performance



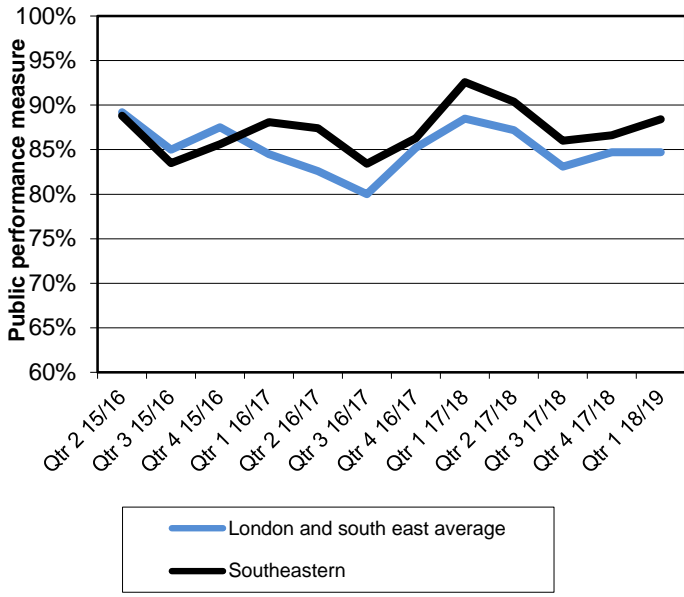
TfL Rail - all day performance



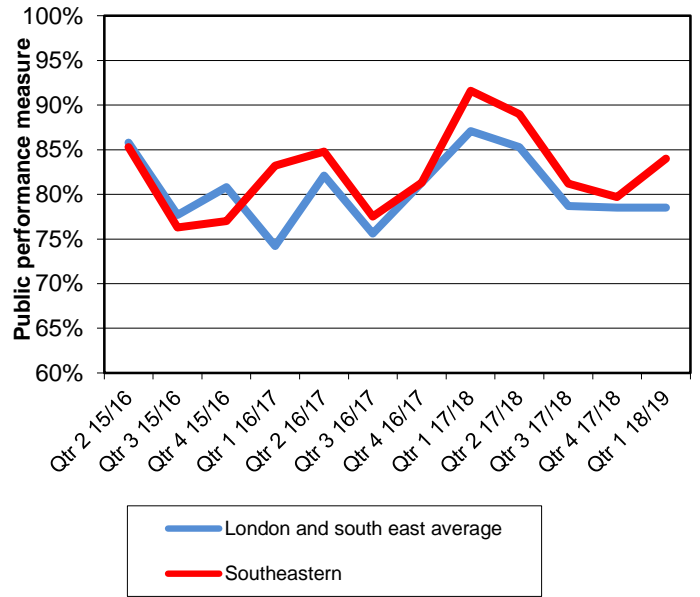
TfL Rail - peak performance



Southeastern - all day performance



Southeastern - peak performance



4) Why would TfL provide a better service?

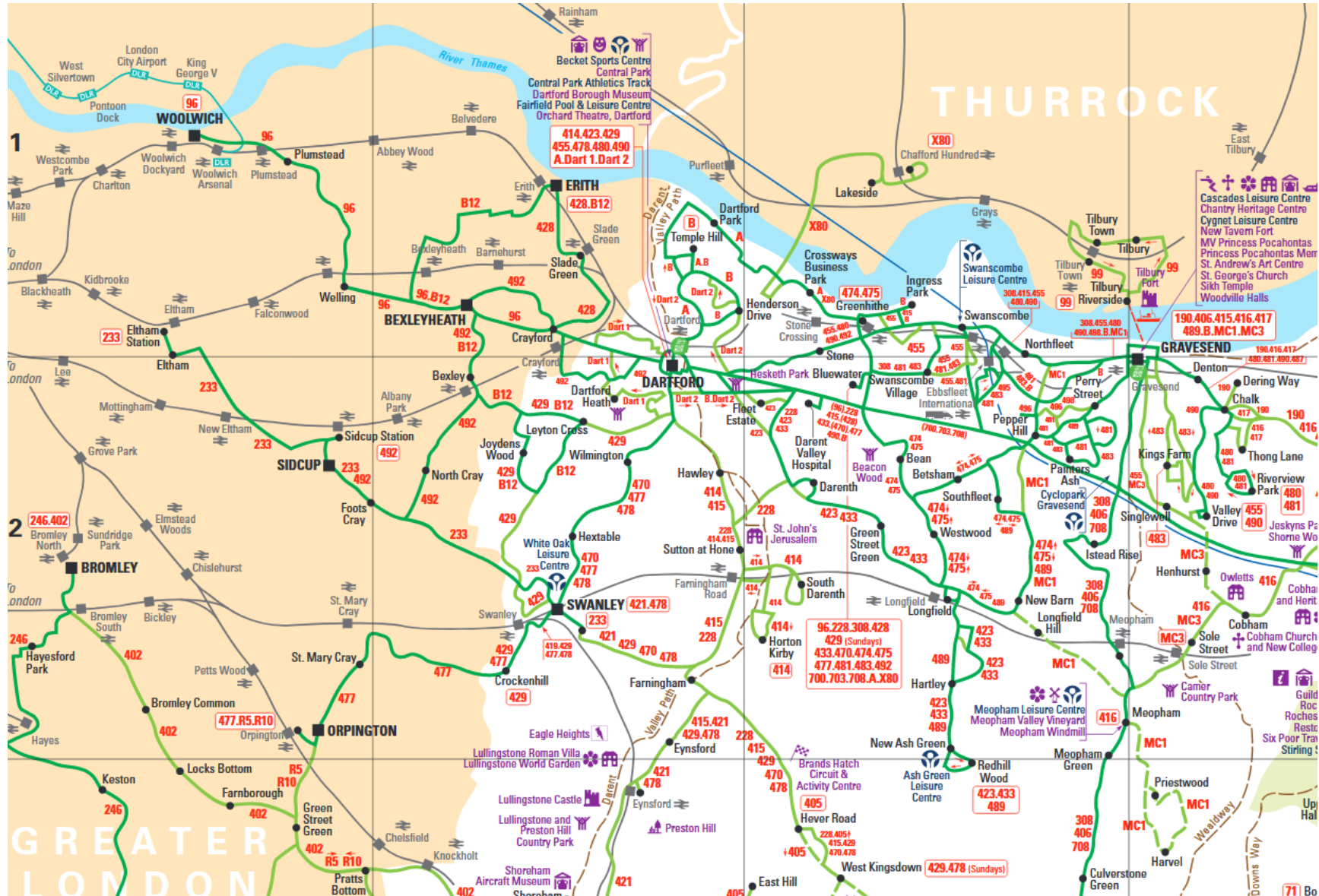
- TfL provides incentives for the operator based on performance and customer service - TfL take the revenue risk. This ensures that the operator focuses on performance as the main variable to their income, and also has a knock-on benefit to other operators' performance
- There is closer alignment with other modes – London (and the surrounding area) is a network so TfL have a vested interest in improving the network as a whole not just a narrow part
- Concessions have stronger incentives to work with Network Rail as they, for example share some of the costs of delays to services
- TfL's concession model includes a commitment to staffing levels and minimum station standards for every station
- TfL aims for a commitment to four trains per hour – but only where Network Rail deem capacity as being available, not at the cost of other operators
- People can make Oyster/Contactless payments at all stations served
- TfL take a lead in station management where there are multiple operators, and have proven success with this at Liverpool Street and Stratford.

5) How can the Mayor and TfL ensure that the interests of passengers outside London would not be adversely affected in any new rail devolution settlement?

In 2013, London TravelWatch developed a protocol with Transport Focus (then Passenger Focus) to address this issue (see appendix 2). This recognises that London's railway network is used by people making a wide range of journeys, both locally and longer distance and TfL signed up to them. All passengers must be treated fairly, regardless of where they are travelling. Fair treatment needs to cover all the relevant areas, from how the timetable is planned and fares set, through to operational decisions about things like information dissemination during disruption.

Interestingly, the improvements London Rail achieved also had a positive effect on longer distance services using adjacent lines into Liverpool Street.

Appendix 1: Kent County Council bus map



Appendix 2: Essential passenger safeguards to ensure successful and fair devolution of rail services

London TravelWatch is seeking these to make sure that the interests of all passengers, regardless of where they are travelling to or from, are taken account of in any agreement to devolve more responsibility for train services to the Mayor of London through TfL.

1. **Guaranteed even handedness in track access** between continuing Department for Transport franchises and any devolved concession operations so as to ensure that the needs of all passengers are catered for equitably.
2. **Guaranteed interavailability of ordinary tickets over common routes within the London travel area** irrespective of operator.
3. **A commitment to work together with other operators in providing seamless information to passengers**, especially during times of disruption and at interchanges between services provided by franchisees and the concessionaire.
4. **A commitment to an operational agreement to work together in the best interests of all passengers**, sharing resources at times of disruption, and where separate provision is not justified, to maximise efficiency.
5. **Separation of the formulae for setting fares** between franchises and concessions, to ensure that political or commercial decisions in either do not have unintended negative or anomalous consequences for the other.
6. **A commitment to regular and meaningful consultation** by all parties with London TravelWatch and Passenger Focus on all issues affecting passengers. This should be inclusive from the tender design stage by TfL through to day to day operation by the concessionaire, and should at a minimum be comparable to that currently required of train operating companies under the existing franchise arrangements and licensing regime.
7. **A commitment to regular and meaningful dialogue with passengers and user groups on issues affecting them.**
8. **A commitment to work with local authorities**, both inside and outside London, to ensure a better whole journey experience, by means of improved interchanges and through ticketing schemes with local public transport operators.
9. **A commitment to transparency of data**, on items such as delay attribution and service performance.

Appendix 3: useful links

TfL bus services in the area:

<http://content.tfl.gov.uk/bus-route-maps/south-west-london-bus-map.pdf>

Non-TfL bus services in the area:

http://www.surreycc.gov.uk/_data/assets/pdf_file/0016/10843/Surrey_Map_Side_Web_2016.pdf

<http://www.surreycc.gov.uk/roads-and-transport/buses-and-trains/bus-timetables/staines-chertsey-and-walton-bus-timetables>

London TravelWatch research on cross-boundary bus services:

http://www.londontravelwatch.org.uk/documents/get_lob?id=1898&field=file