

1. Introduction

I was recently asked to have a look at the Scheme of Delegation that London TravelWatch is currently working to with a view to making some suggestions about whether it needed updating. This discussion paper includes my observations on the current Scheme of Delegation and some recommendations as to how it might be updated.

2. Observations

2.1 A scheme of delegation for a different era

The current Scheme of Delegation (SOD) was written in 2015, at a time when London TravelWatch had a completely different Board. The Board at that time was considerably larger, and Board Members expressed interest and opinions in every policy area and on minutiae such as individual roundabout layouts and bus destination displays.

As a result, very few issues were delegated to officers to decide on (low level issues) and most policy decisions were reserved for the Board to make decisions on (high level issues).

The SOD also reflects a time when London TravelWatch responded to more street- by-street consultations than it does now.

With the current Board being much smaller, and more concerned with bigger picture strategic transport issues, the previous balance between high level and low level issues does not suit the times that we are currently operating in.

2.2 Decision-making principles

The decision making principles to help officers to decide when to refer matters to the Board still seem sound and sensible:

- Is novel or new in some way (e.g. Thames cable car)
- Is controversial on a wider scale (e.g. ticket office closures or hours reductions)
- Sets a wider precedent (e.g. Wandsworth Road to Ealing Broadway rail closure)
- Is not covered by existing London TravelWatch policy (e.g. a new system of ticketing).
- Is of major consumer interest (e.g. incomplete journeys on Oyster / contactless.
- Involves a decision on significant trade-offs between different groups of users (e.g. long distance travellers vs short distance local journeys)

- Poses a significant risk to the organisation (e.g. proposals to remove consumer rights).
- Takes account of London TravelWatch's work prioritisation criteria.

The SOD delegation goes on to say:

- Urgent matters that have a time constraint on responses or issues that would not normally go to the Board or its' committees but matters in which officers know that members have an interest in, are normally dealt with by email consultations to give members the opportunity to comment.
- In addition the process for agenda setting for meetings (which is constantly updated) of the Board or policy committee give the opportunity for the Chair(s) of these to discuss with officers whether an item needs to be put to these bodies or can be dealt with directly by officers.
- Officers will form responses to consultations and enquiries based on previously agreed policy and research carried out for and accepted by the organisation.

Using the 'case study' of the recent policy decision made on the issue of freedom pass holders losing their rights to morning peak-time travel, I think we can learn the following:

- London TravelWatch is not used to having to develop policy views in an urgent and time-critical way. Policy development used to move at a leisurely pace until covid 19 struck and TfL had to be bailed out by the Government.
- Major changes in policy by Government or the Mayor such as that for the Freedom Pass are usually accompanied by extensive consultation prior to their implementation and can be accommodated in London TravelWatch's existing processes.
- Nothing was written down about Freedom Passes in the SOD, in part because of disagreement in the Board at the time about London TravelWatch's position on the issue.
- That this kind of fast policy making is going to be the 'new normal' for the time being. When TfL's current financial deal with the Government runs out at the end of September a new one will have to take its place. Undoubtedly, there will be new conditions added that will not benefit some passengers, and London TravelWatch will have to decide its view quickly about these changes. The window for influencing may be very small so we will not have much time to decide on our position.
- The way policy views were decided on the Freedom Pass issue was not supported by all Board members.

2.3 How our scheme of delegation compares to other organisations

As part of my review of how London TravelWatch's SOD compares to other organisations' I have learnt that it is very unusual for a SOD to talk purely about policy decisions. It seems to be standard to include the following items in a SOD to clarify where decision-making sits:

- HR matters

- Budget decisions
- Document signing powers
- Provision for delegation in the Director's absence
- Tendering process approvals
- Entering into joint agreements with external organisations
- Risk management
- Health and safety management

3 Recommendations

1. That the Scheme of Delegation be updated to bring it into line with the expectations of the new Board. This needs to be done as quickly as possible once the pandemic has died down and it would be critical to have board member involvement in this process.
2. That the new Scheme of delegation should include headings in addition to policy decisions.
3. That the Board come to a decision at this meeting about how it wants rapid policy decision making to be done in future.

Emma Gibson
Director