

CONFIDENTIAL BRIEFING NOTE FOR MEMBERS

Board meeting 03.06.14

Re: Item 8, London Underground Vision for the Tube, including ticket offices

Officers have been briefed on various aspects of the proposals for closing London Underground's ticket offices. Based on these briefings, officers suggest that members may wish to centre their questions of London Underground (LUL) at the Board meeting on the following areas:

1. Will LUL co-operate with a public consultation exercise in respect of the proposals?
2. How can LUL demonstrate that they have taken into account our research into ticket purchasing and passenger journey experience?
3. Stations have been divided into categories (Gateway, Destination, Metro and Local) with different proposed staffing arrangements. Is it feasible that some stations could be moved from one category to another, and how will their future processes allow for ongoing review?
4. How will local variations be taken account of, particularly where National Rail tickets are a significant part of the sales of individual ticket offices?
5. Will LUL offer National Rail TOCs or London Overground the option of taking over ticket offices at interchange stations?
6. What will be the functionality of the new TVMs? How will passengers be able to get printed mini-statements of Oyster history from TVMs?

Summary of proposals

In November 2013 Transport for London (TfL) told us that they were going to bring forward proposals to change the way in which tickets were sold and travel paid for at London Underground stations. This involved the closure of all ticket offices at London Underground stations and their replacement by increased staffing at ticket vending machines to assist passengers with those machines, increased numbers of such machines and at key 'gateway' stations the introduction of 'travel information centres' as replacements for conventional ticket offices. This programme of change was also linked with a series of other proposals, such as the introduction of night services on certain tube lines.

The full details of the London Underground proposals can be seen visually on the map that can be downloaded at <https://fitforthefuture.tfl.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/2013/11/Stations-factsheet1.pdf>. A copy is attached to this report for reference. A further site which gives useful information is

<https://fitforthefuture.tfl.gov.uk/future-stations/> . This site is aimed solely at LUL staff; members of the public cannot comment on this consultation.

The principle objectives of the consultation are to close ticket offices, invest in additional ticket vending machines (TVMs) and reorganise staffing arrangements at stations. Stations are categorised into four types, (Gateway, Destination, Metro and Local) with different proposed staffing arrangements.

London TravelWatch research

London TravelWatch conducted research in 2013 into ticket purchasing and passenger journey experiences (http://www.londontravelwatch.org.uk/documents/get_lob?id=3710&field=file) . This recommended that the role and utility of ticket office staff should be broadened: with highly visible staff who are able to answer passengers queries and resolve problems: and to have roaming staff able to help with Ticket Vending Machines (TVMs) and sell tickets from portable devices as well as from behind the counter.

During 2013, we carried out research on a series of issues affecting passengers, which included our research document “Passengers’ ticket purchasing and journey experience”. This focussed on how passengers wish to purchase tickets, including analysis on the utility of ticket office windows, TVMs and new methods of payment such as contactless. The lessons from this document are very clear – passengers place a huge value on having ticket office windows available, not specifically because of the ticket office itself, but as a clear focal point where they know staff will be available, they know they can get correct information and be sold the correct ticket (whatever journey is being made) with confidence. Passengers do value multi-functional and visible staff such as floor walkers, but in addition to ticket office staff (who are considered visible to passengers as they know they are there) rather than instead of them.

The report also highlighted the need for further improvements to the design and functionality of TVMs, to Oyster Pay As You Go usage details and to gaps in passengers understanding and knowledge of how Oyster works, how much journeys cost and how to resolve incomplete journeys.

Discussion with London TravelWatch and public

Since November 2013 London TravelWatch staff have continued to discuss the proposals with London Underground. However, as LUL’s ongoing discussions with the trade unions have been played out in the form of strike action, and this was likely to result in changes to the proposal, London TravelWatch has refrained from inviting public comment until the outcome of this was known.

However, at no stage yet has there been a request for a formal London TravelWatch response to the proposal to booking office proposal, and no formal consultation with members of the public to make comments on how it will affect them or their use of their local station.

In the case of National Rail services, where changes are proposed to ticket office hours, London TravelWatch would participate in a consultation process allowing passengers to have their say on any proposals. It would therefore be appropriate for London TravelWatch to conduct a similar process in respect of London Underground ticket offices. Internally we have agreed how we could handle this.

Areas where further clarification is required from London Underground

A – Ability of TVMs to replicate transactions currently available at some LUL ticket offices

The scale of impact will be significant. Whilst “less than 3%” of passengers using ticket offices may sound small, it equates to 600,000 passengers per week. Many of these do require transactions that can only currently be made at a ticket office window.

In our confidential discussions with Mike Brown, MD of LUL, we have understood that all of the transactions that are currently possible at ticket windows will be available at TVMs. He has also made such statements to the London Assembly Transport Committee. However, Lucy Preston, Travel Products Manager, who is managing part of this project has said that this will not necessarily be the case and that LUL is not a franchised train operator and so has no obligation to provide or continue to offer many of the National Rail products that are only available at ticket offices.

Members are advised not to refer specifically to the conversations between London TravelWatch, Mike Brown and Lucy Preston as the information was provided in confidence. However, the question of whether TVMs will be able to replicate all current ticket office transactions, particularly the National Rail elements, is very important to London TravelWatch. This is because a number of stations (e.g. Moorgate, West Brompton, Harrow-on-the-Hill and stations to Amersham) have LUL operated ticket offices but are served by National Rail trains. These stations have large numbers of passengers travelling to diverse destinations often well beyond the Oyster boundary. Some stations such as West Brompton also (as a result of local lobbying by users / user groups) have a larger destination matrix than other stations because they sell so many more National Rail tickets than most other LUL stations.

A non- exhaustive list of transactions that cannot current be made via Ticket Vending Machines include: Tickets for travel on later days, tickets from stations other than where the TVM is located, discounts such as privilege tickets, company cheque payments, Oyster refunds, redemption of PERTIS vouchers (permit to travel) and many more.

B – Possible solutions relating to sale of tickets

We are aware that there are possible solutions for the issue, whether a centralised “remote” ticket office that can issue any tickets to any TVM via video link, or a code that the floor walking members of staff can type in to access a complete range of tickets to sell. If one or both of these are to be introduced, they must be universally available from day one.

A further alternative / long term solution would be to consider restructuring through ticketing arrangements between London Underground and National Rail. At present most through journeys involve an element of an add-on fare that allows through travel on one ticket. This in most cases would result in a cheaper fare than if passenger paid for the relevant parts of the journey separately and used an Oystercard.

An example is an advance purchase single from Stockwell to Norwich.

From LU zone 12 to Norwich £12
From Liverpool Street to Norwich £9
Cash LU zone 12 fare £4.70
Saving from through ticket £1.70

Oyster LU zone 12 off-peak single £2.20
Combine advanced purchase single from Liverpool Street to Norwich with Oyster off-peak single £11.20
Saving from combination with Oyster 80p

Another option would be to consider moving the operation of LUL ticket offices at joint National Rail stations over to the National Rail operator (or London Overground) serving that station, and allowing them to maintain the sale of the complete range of tickets. Whether a station ticket office is run by LUL or by a National Rail operator is largely attributable to historical or political factors rather than any rational operational or passenger reason. For example West Brompton is LUL because it was there before the establishment of National Rail platforms in the 1980s, and Seven Sisters is LUL because it related to the need to construct the Victoria Line in the 1960s. (British Rail at the time wanted to reduce its commitments, and of course passenger volumes were significantly smaller than today).

C – Categorisation of stations

Officers also have a number of comments on the categorisation of the stations into Gateway, Destination, Metro and Local. We have surveyed stations since the announcement, and have concluded that the stations are each so different and unique, that for the four examples given (one for each category) is not possible to assess whether the example staffing proposed is adequate.

Officers are also concerned about the very different layouts of different stations, including the different numbers of entrances/exits and ticket office windows currently present.

We also feel that a number of stations we would be more appropriate in another category, some in a “higher” category, and some “lower”. Examples of where the station categorisation might not be appropriate include Tower Hill, St Pauls and Covent Garden with their substantial numbers of tourists, all of which are categorised as Metro; and Ealing Broadway, West Brompton and West Hampstead with their substantial interaction with National Rail services, which are all categorised as Local.

D – Oyster

In many areas of London, the LUL ticket offices are the only place to resolve Oyster queries and refunds. National Rail stations are unable to do this and the knowledge of passengers that they can get their Oyster queries resolved at a London Underground ticket office is a positive.

E – Loss of potential for reversion to use at ticket offices

Officers have considerable concern that all the LUL literature on the ticket office proposals show a supermarket where the ticket offices used to be. The sale/lease of these units would render it impracticable to re-open any ticket offices that are shown to be too great a loss. As noted above, at National Rail served stations it would be appropriate to offer the opportunity for the relevant train operator or London Overground to take over the operation of these ticket offices.

Suggested recommendations and further courses of action

We recommend a commitment that passengers will be able to access the full range of tickets from day one of the closures, from any LUL station, with any transactions that won't be possible being highlighted and discussed with us beforehand. This could be in the form of video links, codes for staff, ticketing restructures or the passing of LUL ticket offices to National Rail or London Overground to operate.

We would strongly suggest a station-by-station approach to categorisation and staffing plans, compiled with London TravelWatch assistance, to ensure the appropriate staffing provision. This should apply to the stations currently above "Local", and the local stations should be grouped in to those with similar layouts and characterisations.

We recommend a moratorium on the sale of the ticket office space, such that if the new system causes hardship or is considered worth re-introducing ticket offices to some stations, the possibility is there.

Members are recommended to approve the setting up of a consultation process for London Underground ticket offices to run for a period of a six weeks with a view to reporting the results back to the Policy Committee on 16 September 2014 to inform a formal response from London TravelWatch to these proposals.

Tim Bellenger

19 May 2014