



London Assembly Member  
City Hall  
The Queen's Walk  
London  
SE1 2AA

23 February 2010

Dear

London TravelWatch welcomes the motion tabled for Mayor's Question Time on 24 February, calling for a cross-party review our organisation's costs and procedures, as this will provide an opportunity to demonstrate the value of the work we undertake on behalf of London's travelling public.

In advance of your consideration of this motion, you may find it helpful to have the following general information about our role, and our thoughts on the strategic issues that might be considered by the review.

London TravelWatch is unique. It is the only such body set up by statute but sponsored by a regional tier of government in England – though it has served as the model for similar bodies recently established in Scotland and proposed in Wales.

The organisation has existed in various guises for almost sixty years, during which its role has expanded considerably. It is now tasked with representing travellers using all modes of transport in and around Greater London.

Although its Chair and 12 board members are appointed by the Transport Committee of the Assembly, London TravelWatch is an independent organisation with no political affiliations or allegiances.

We represent passengers travelling by:

Bus
National Rail
Underground
Docklands Light Railway
Tram

Taxi and private hire car
River services and ferries
Dial-a-Ride

as well as:

Pedestrians
Cyclists
Motorcyclists
Motorists

### **The role of London TravelWatch**

London TravelWatch's powers and functions are invested in it by law.

It is, for example, the statutory **appeals body** for complaints about transport operators in London. Members of the public, who are dissatisfied with the response to an initial complaint to a transport operator, have the right to refer their case to London TravelWatch for further investigation and resolution.

London TravelWatch is also a **statutory consultee**. Wherever there is a proposal to introduce, to vary significantly or to discontinue a service, whether it be bus, Underground, rail, or on major roads, we **must** be consulted. In particular, rail operators and the Mayor must give London TravelWatch notice of their plans for services and fares, and our response must be considered.

London TravelWatch also has a general duty to keep **under review, consider and make recommendations** on any matter affecting the interests of the travelling public in London, and to receive representations from the public on those matters.

### **The case for a London travel champion**

London is a unique and challenging city in transport terms, and unlike any other in the UK. The sheer scale of travel is considerable, with 70% of all rail journeys in the UK beginning and/or ending in London, an enormous Underground system, and a bus network which is unequalled in its coverage and carries 40% of all bus trips in Great Britain.

The transport issues faced by Londoners are different from and more complex than those found elsewhere. The needs of people travelling into or through London may be different, too, from those of people who live and travel purely within the city. We work closely with Passenger Focus, the national rail and bus passenger body, to ensure that our roles are complementary – but its modal remit is narrower and it is not equipped to focus exclusively on the unique scale and complexity of London's transport systems.

The statutory powers that London TravelWatch has, coupled with its strong research base and expert knowledge of the system, rooted in its casework

experience and network of contacts, make it well placed to challenge transport providers to improve and adapt services, and to take into account travellers' needs and expectations.

Stakeholder relations are key to the success of a small championing body. London TravelWatch aims to work in partnership with TfL, and all other providers of transport services in London, to ensure that the voice of the traveller is heard at every stage of the policymaking process.

It meets regularly with TfL's senior staff and with each of the train operating companies which serve London. Policy and operational staff frequently attend our board and committee meetings. Also, our individual board members have links with allocated London boroughs, and we are in close contact with a large number of local and mode related travel groups.

### **How we work**

Our **Board** focuses on key strategic policy issues such as the Mayor's Transport Strategy and the Thameslink project, as well as maintaining an oversight of the work of the organisation. More in depth work is carried out in committee.

Through its **Consumer Affairs Committee**, London TravelWatch oversees its complaints appeals system, dealing with upwards of 2000 cases per year. The handling of penalty fare appeals, and bus drivers' behaviour, are common causes of complaint. Success may take the form of compensation payments, or changes to policy or procedures by an operator.

From our casework, we are frequently able to detect emerging policy issues, and to take these forward at our regular meetings with TfL and the train operating companies. For example, we successfully took up with TfL the time allowed to Oyster pay-as-you-go users to complete journeys on the Underground without incurring a fare surcharge, and got it extended.

The efficiency of the complaints systems run by operators is monitored by London TravelWatch. They vary enormously and one of our strategic objectives is to encourage them to improve their complaints handling and approach to customer care.

We pursue the rights of passengers as consumers - for example, their right to timely and accurate information about services. This has led to us reviewing TfL and other operators' websites, and challenging the use of costly telephone tariffs for information services and complaints.

We are the first port of call for several thousands of queries from travellers each year on a wide variety of transport issues, and we have an important role in signposting the travelling public to appropriate sources of help

Through our **Fares and Ticketing Committee**, we bring the passenger perspective to bear on fare structures across all modes, as well as zoning and

changes in fare levels. This includes taxi and tram fares, discounts for particular categories of user, the increasing use of ticket machines, and of course Oyster. London TravelWatch has worked closely with TfL over many years on the process of “Oysterisation”, consistently raising glitches in the planning and implementation stages.

On behalf of passengers, our **Transport Services Committee** now systematically monitors the performance of the transport providers across a range of appropriate criteria, including reliability of service. It also considers responses to a wide range of consultations, on service changes, on rail franchise specifications, and on national policy issues such as taxi licensing or penalty fares where there is a specific London dimension. We home in too on particular passenger frustrations, e.g. the use of replacement buses, and achieve numerous changes to service delivery.

London TravelWatch responded to some 70 consultations in the first six months of this year. For example it submitted detailed evidence on the proposal for the “extended Circle Line”, and has undertaken a major piece of work on the proposed withdrawal of the South London Line service. This committee also oversees evidence given to enquiries by the Transport Committee of the Assembly, and to the House of Commons Transport Select Committee.

Finally our **Access to Transport Committee** raises a wide range of operational and policy issues which affect ease of access to transport in its widest sense. These include the ease with which passengers can reach hospitals and healthcare facilities, and passenger convenience at major interchanges, such as step free access and signage considerations.

This year too, for example, our initiative has secured agreement to fund a walking route between Euston and the new St Pancras stations, by working with Camden Council and industry stakeholders.

### **Facing the future**

London TravelWatch faces a number of strategic challenges, if it is to continue to develop its role as an effective voice for the travelling public of London. We suggest that a cross-party review might well focus on the following:

- The strategic and statutory role of London TravelWatch – what emphasis should we place on our many statutory functions, and what balance should we strike in our work between the short, medium and long term concerns of passengers
- Resources for research, communications and networking – our budget for 2010/11 is just £1.4m. There are 8.7 billion journeys made in total in London each year – our budget provides us with less than 0.02 pence per million journeys. Passenger Focus, the national body has a budget of £8.5m for only 3.7 billion journeys, which equates to 0.23p per million journeys.

- Understanding the respective roles of Transport Committee and London TravelWatch, and knowing the boundaries.
- How can the Mayor and Assembly best empower London TravelWatch to represent the interests of the travelling public? Could it be better respected, encouraged and engaged as a respected partner in developing and discussing transport issues?

We look forward to working with you to agree the review process.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "S.M. Grant". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

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## London TravelWatch's area

