
Summary

A summary of discussions made during London TravelWatch's Interchange Matters seminar – Way to go: what can be done to encourage more people to travel by public transport to London's airports?, held at London's Living Room, City Hall, The Queen's Walk, London SE1 2AA

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Present

Members

Arthur Leathley (Chair)

Guests

Paul Goulden	Age UK
David Innes	Arriva Rail London
Claire Walters	Bus Users UK
Murad Qureshi	Cogitamus
Daniel Gierhart	Crossrail
Peter Herridge	Crossrail
John Murphy	Department for Transport
Charlie King	East Surrey Transport Committee
Sarah Kemp	Gatwick Airport Ltd
Patrick Ladbury	Govia Thameslink Railway
Kerri Ricketts	Govia Thameslink Railway
Sam Bala	Great Western Railway
Adam Field	Great Western Railway
Alan Neville	Greater Anglia
Chris Casey	Heathrow Airport Ltd
James Cornelius	Heathrow Airport Ltd
Craig Owen	Heathrow Airport Ltd
Parveen Bhavra	HS1
Philippa Jackson	London Borough of Camden

Dominic West	London Borough of Hackney
Gavin Wicks	London City Airport
John Cartledge	London TravelWatch
Athol Noon	Markrides Associates
Paul Parsons	MTR Crossrail
James Bradley	Network Rail
Nick Greer	Network Rail
Richard Joslin	Network Rail
Bob Houghton	North Star/Luton Airport
Duncan Henry	Rail Delivery Group
Roger Blake	Rail Future
Karishma Shah	RNIB
Ian Jones	Siemens Rail Systems
Graeme Clark	Siemens Rail Systems
Kristine Beuret	Social Research Associates
Paul Nicol	South Western Rail
David Peerman	South Western Rail
Sarah Curgenvin	TfL
Jade Matthews	TfL
Edward Morris	TfL
Shashi Verma	TfL
Josh Lang	Transport for All
Nicole Badstuber	University College London
Jerry Lewis	West Hampstead Amenity & Transport (WHAT)

Secretariat	
Susan James	Casework Manager
Mike Brown	Caseworker
Mags Croucher	Caseworker
Janet Cooke	Chief Executive
Luke Muskett	Committee and Public Liaison Officer
Tim Bellenger	Director, Policy & Investigation
Gytha Chinweze	Governance Officer
Richard Freeston-Clough	Operations and Communications Manager
David Rose	Operations Support Assistant
Keletha Barrett	Policy Officer
Safia Haffejee	Policy Officer
Trevor Rosenberg	Policy Officer
Vincent Stops	Senior Policy Officer
Rhys Campbell	Temporary Caseworker

1 Introduction by Arthur Leathley, Chair of London TravelWatch

Arthur Leathley, Chair of London TravelWatch, welcomed those present to the meeting and made the standard safety announcements.

2 Shashi Verma, Director of Strategy and Chief Technology Officer at Transport for London (TfL) – Reflections on the global customer experience for passengers using public transport to get to the airport

Mr Verma began by describing the philosophy behind TfL's approach to public transport across London. Rather than thinking that the organisation's role was to simply run services, he remarked that the use of public transport should be looked at as a means to maintain London's economic competitiveness and status as an attractive place to do business. Mr Verma commented that using public transport was not an ends in itself: simply a means to get people to where they wanted to get to.

He stated that passengers had a very clear hierarchy in terms of what they expected from the transport system: safety, reliability, cleanliness and customer service. Mr Verma commented that by and large TfL had managed to deliver the first three sets of criteria and that without them the organisation would not be able to be looking at improving the customer experience on their services.

Mr Verma commented that different people had different needs when talking about information and ticketing. He remarked that commuters that lived in and around the city were usually well informed about where they needed to go and the means by which to get there. However, passengers new to the city often needed assistance in order to get to their destination.

In order for the audience to picturise the experience of somebody new to London, Mr Verma asked those present to remember a time when they had been visiting a different city for the first time. He recalled when visiting Milan how the signage for buses, though well known to local users, signposted people in opposite directions. Also, when buying a ticket from the ticket machine, he had been presented with 14 different options, and it was unclear which one would take him to his destination. Mr Verma remarked that such experiences had informed TfL's thinking and lot of effort had been put in to ensure that information for new visitors to the city was as clear as it could be.

Another area of improved customer service that TfL had been addressing was how passengers were treated when they could not provide a valid ticket for travel. Mr Verma suggested that people should not be treated as criminals for instances when they had simply forgotten to touch in or out with their contactless card. He added that he had also campaigned for six years in order to extend the Oyster card payment system to Gatwick Airport, partly due to the number of penalty fares issued to passengers unaware that they had to buy a separate ticket in order to travel the airport.

At the time of pushing for the extension of Oyster/contactless to Gatwick, there had been numerous reasons given for why it could not be done. Despite the objections, the extension was finally approved resulting in the current levels of

over 100,000 journeys to Gatwick paid for by Oyster/contactless each week. Mr Verma referred to a graph highlighting the increase of over £100 million in revenue that had resulted by extending the Oyster/contactless payment system to Gatwick (see appendix A). He suggested it brought into question why it had taken so long for the payment system to be approved, and why there was still resistance in extending it to Luton and Stansted airports.

He commented that one of the arguments made against the contactless payment method was the fact that people were not issued with physical tickets. He added that the reluctance to let go of paper tickets had been ingrained into passengers due to the legacy of the over 150 years that passengers had been issued tickets to use public transport. This would not be a problem if the system had been introduced for the first time in 2019, and many people happily use contactless cards to pay for other services (e.g. coffee shop cards).

Mr Verma concluded by saying that using public transport should be made as simple as possible for passengers. Ideally people could simply touch in with a contactless payment card and be reassured that they have paid the best fare for their travel and not think about the process of how they had paid for it. He stated that the aim was to take all unnecessary stresses out of using public transport so that there was no hesitation in using it. This in turn would facilitate the increase in its use, sustain the economic competitiveness of the city and increase revenues for operators.

3 Shashi Verma – Q&A

Claire Walters, Chief Executive of Bus Users UK, remarked that many tourists coming into London from outside the UK would not have a contactless payment card. She added that some people on lower incomes did not have a bank account, and, therefore, would also not have a contactless card. She asked how those people would be able to access public transport if a decision was made to remove cash payments and physical tickets.

Mr Verma replied that passengers were able to purchase an Oyster card from an array of different local shops, the cost of which would be refunded to them when it was no longer needed. For people visiting the UK from abroad, TfL regularly published the fact that people could not use cash on London buses. In addition, contactless payment cards from 145 countries had been used in the UK. Those passengers from countries yet to adopt the system would be able to purchase an Oyster card in the same way as was available to UK residents.

Charlie King, Chair of East Surrey Transport Committee, said that despite the positives of contactless payment, there were anomalies which would affect people. He gave the example that passengers travelling to Gatwick would need to have £15 on their Oyster card in order to make the journey, despite the fare only being £4. Although he was aware of the reason why, this would likely catch some people out.

Mr King added that foreign visitors to the UK could also be unfairly charged when using their contactless payment card due to fees charged by their banks. He gave the example of a Swiss colleague who had been charged £6 for one TfL bus journey.

Mr Verma replied that TfL had worked hard to remove fees on currency transactions though he admitted there was still work to be done to eradicate them completely.

Jerry Lewis from West Hampstead Amenity & Transport group said that despite what Mr Verma had said many people were arriving at London's airports without the knowledge that public transport was cashless. He stressed that more needed to be done to inform people before arriving to the UK. Mr Lewis added that London was the 'worst place to travel with luggage or if you have a disability or if you can't walk easily'.

Mr Verma replied that only buses were cashless and that there were no plans to take cash payments away from the Tube network. He added TfL spent a great deal of time getting the message across about London's bus network being cashless, though it would not be possible to reach all visitors to the city. With regards to accessibility, Mr Verma stated there was 'no shortage of investment going into trying to make it friendlier' for passengers. He added that nobody had designed the network to be unfriendly to those with additional accessibility requirements and was simply a by-product of the age of the infrastructure.

Chris Casey, Roads Strategy Lead at Heathrow Airport, commented that there would always be demand to use taxis to the airport. However, current legislation prevented them being used to their full capacity. He asked whether it was something that TfL was looking at in order to optimise it better. Mr Verma acknowledged that TfL was responsible for taxis though could not speak to the legislative issue he had raised. He did comment that it would be up to users which method of transport they used to get to the airport and it was not TfL's job to mandate one particular mode over another.

James Bradley, lead Strategic Planner at Network Rail asked whether TfL had considered adopting a smart paper ticket system as were used in European countries such as the Netherlands. He also asked why the UK used a gated system to prevent passengers evading fares far more than other countries, and whether there was a prevalence of greater fare evasion in the UK than abroad.

Mr Verma said that TfL had previously looked at adopting a smart paper ticket though the cost to integrate with all other tickets in operation would be too great. However, he said he would adopt such a card 'tomorrow' if it could replace the current paper tickets. With regards to gate use, he commented that it was a simple method of preventing fare evasion whilst also giving reassurance to other passengers that people could not get away without paying for their travel. He added that there was also a 'social aversion' to using gates in any capacity to control crowds in some countries, particularly Germany, which was likely to be the reason why they were not adopted.

Bob Houghton representing Luton Airport remarked that 'at long last' contactless payment would be extended to Luton terminals by the end of the year. He asked if some background could be provided on how confident visitors to the UK were in using the payment method. Mr Verma replied that a decision to extend contactless payment to Luton was 'news to me'. With regard to user confidence using the system, he replied that there were over six million active contactless payment users on the network and that between 50,000 and 60,000 new contactless cards were used every day – most of which were likely to be tourists coming to the UK from

aboard. Given those numbers, he did not accept that people did not have confidence using contactless payment to pay for their travel.

4 Janet Cooke, Chief Executive of London TravelWatch – Encouraging people to use public transport

Janet Cooke stated that the point that was raised about improving legislation around taxis was something that London TravelWatch was aware of and had raised previously. She stated that the organisation was in talks with TfL and the Department for Transport to attempt to change the law so that they could pick up as well as drop off passengers at airports in a single trip. Ms Cooke said that surface access was 'crucial' in encouraging people to use public transport to get to the airport. London TravelWatch was aware that passengers preferred not having to interchange when making their journeys but when this could not be avoided it should be made as hassle-free as possible.

Ms Cooke stated the aim of her talk was to highlight some of the issues that she had recently noticed passengers having difficulty with travelling to and from airports in London. They were confined to pictures (see appendix 2) of Gatwick Airport and Clapham Junction as these were the two locations she had recently visited, so members in the audience from Gatwick should not feel like they were being unjustly targeted.

The first set of images showed a sign in front of an escalator reminding people with luggage that it was safer for them to use the lift. Ms Cooke commented, however, that if everyone at the airport followed such advice this would likely lead to overcrowding and the potential for a greater number of slips, trips and falls. A more common sense approach was to target people that really needed to use the lift, such as people with large, heavy luggage or pushchairs. For those wheeling small hand luggage type cases, using the escalator would not be much of an issue and was not hazardous.

Ms Cooke stated the problems with signage extended further, as for those passengers where a lift was the most suitable way of getting into the airport it was not always clear where it was located. She commented that there was often no sign for the lifts next to the escalator and the colour of them tended to blend in with the surroundings.

Problems with locating lifts was not only an issue at the airport but at also at the rail station. Ms Cooke directed the audience to an image she had taken at Clapham Junction and asked if anyone could locate the lifts that were supposedly available on the platform – no one in the audience could do so.

Ms Cooke suggested that another way of encouraging public transport use to get to and from London's airports was marketing the speed in which visitors could get around to other cities across the UK. The audience was directed to a sign at Southampton Airport which had clearly highlighted in bold colours the speed in which passengers could get to Leeds, Newcastle and Scotland. She suggested if London airports could adopt similar advertisements this would likely lead to an increase in visitors.

5 Panel discussion: What is the industry doing to make it easier to travel by public transport? Kerri Ricketts, Govia Thameslink Railway (GTR), Sam Bala, South Western Railway (SWR) and Jade Matthews, TfL

Kerri Ricketts, Head of Customer Experience at GTR, explained that she wanted to touch on some of the issues that had been raised by Janet Cooke with regards to a common sense approach to signage. She also asked the various experts in the room to share their ideas so that the industry could understand new ideas that it hopefully could take away and develop to the benefit of passengers. Ms Ricketts acknowledged that sharing best practice was something that the sector had struggled with and needed to improve on.

Ms Ricketts remarked that points around accessibility and ease of navigating the public transport network were incredibly important factors for passengers. She stated she was in complete agreement with the comments made by Janet Cooke about Gatwick. On the positive side, Ms Ricketts remarked that GTR had improved some areas of its communication, particularly with the introduction of eticketing and Facebook messenger in order to communicate effectively with their passengers.

Sam Bala, Customer Experience Strategy Manager at GWR, had been interested in the points that Shashi Verma had made around not treating passengers as criminals. She acknowledged that the industry had definite work to do on customer service to treat people more even-handedly. GWR in particular had been pushing for a culture change in their working and had been putting colleagues through staff training schemes to address that.

Ms Bala remarked that her organisation had also been working hard on improving accessibility at stations for passengers. One policy that the company had introduced was ensuring that staff were readily available to help people departing from the train, and that they could communicate with them effectively. This was particular relevant for people visiting from outside the UK who spoke limited English. She added that most staff deployed in that role spoke up to four different languages.

Ms Bala commented that GWR was aware of the benefits of adopting a contactless system more widely, though allowing the customer to have a choice was paramount. She remarked that there would likely be a generational gap between younger passengers who were used to travelling without a paper ticket and older commuters, who were reassured by having a physical ticket.

Jade Matthews, Customer Experience Lead at TfL, stated that her organisation had been providing public transport services for commuters in and around London for over 100 years. Despite this longevity, there continued to be new problems that needed to be solved for passengers, some of which had already been raised by previous speakers. However, as mentioned by Shashi Verma, TfL's number one priority was to provide a service that was as safe to use as possible.

Ms Matthews remarked that she had been interested by what Janet Cooke had said around whether it was appropriate for all people to be directed to use a lift, as if such advice was adhered to there would likely be associated problems as a consequence of that. The point that small hand luggage was easy to pull along and could quite comfortably be taken on escalators was well made, and as a result would free up space for passengers that had a genuine need to use the lift.

Ms Matthews stated that across their network TfL was looking at stations that could be made more accessible for users. New infrastructure had been put in place at Victoria and a new ramp would be available for passengers at South Woodford in the coming month. Linked to the improved accessibility was the organisations work on improving signage at stations and improving the visibility of lifts on the platforms/concourse as had been raised previously.

She remarked staff working across TfL stations are now wearing red reversible tabards. These had been brought about following feedback from London TravelWatch that the previous blue colour was difficult to spot in crowds of commuters, leaving passengers searching for assistance with their journey.

Ms Ricketts commented that one thing the industry could improve on was giving passengers enough information so they could plan their journey accordingly. She suggested that more should be done to enhance the end to end journey experience for people. Arthur Leathley stated that he was interested in how confident passengers were in using public transport as a means to get to the airport. He remarked that it would be those travellers, who would be the key market in increasing its usage.

Philippa Jackson from the London Borough of Camden said that more should be done to celebrate members of staff that went out of their way to provide excellent customer service to passengers. She remarked that too often the industry was focused on where things were going wrong rather than rewarding those who had were doing things right. Kerri Ricketts replied that it was a valid point and added that as part of GWR's internal workshops they also celebrated what was successful as well as what had gone wrong

Charles King from East Surrey Transport Committee said that it was time that people in South London had a train route to Heathrow. He remarked that the current system involved too many interchanges which put people off using public transport as a means to get to the airport. On a separate point, he suggested that signage on some parts of the District line and at London Bridge was 'appalling', with passengers often getting lost. Jade Matthew replied that she would take the point away and relay it to the relevant teams at TfL.

James Bradley from Network Rail remarked that it was often the last mile of peoples' journeys that was looked at as a means to improve the ease of using public transport. However, for those travelling to the airports, it would often be the earlier part of the journey that people would want reassurance was reliable and could get them to where they needed to go. He remarked that it was that uncertainty that pushed travellers towards the private hire market. Ms Matthews replied that TfL had some data on why passengers were choosing to use taxis over public transport to get to the airport, which she would be happy to share.

Dominic West from the London Borough of Hackney raised an issue around airports that were in operation 365 days a year whilst public transport was not. He suggested that this was not the case in most European cities, so tourists from outside the country would likely not be aware when travelling on such days, i.e. Christmas Day. Ms Ricketts commented that there was an obvious balance to be made between when engineering works could be done at the quietest time on the network, and when passengers expected services to be running.

Mr West raised an additional point around coach services, which he suggested were a competitive means of travel to London's airports. However, he remarked that these services rarely ran on time and their communication with passengers left much to be desired. There was also an issue that coach services did not run in the middle of night, which was usually a peak time for travellers.

Murad Qureshi from Cogitamus agreed with the point made by Mr West with regards to the competitiveness of coaches as a means to get to the airport. However, he said that the services were not well publicised and very few people were aware of it. On a separate issue, Mr Qureshi stated that he agreed with a previous remark for a need for rail investment in the south of London in order to promote a direct route into Heathrow. He suggested that this would be essential in reducing the numbers of private vehicles used to get to the airport. James Bradley stated that Network Rail continued to engage with the Department for Transport with regards to a southern rail link to Heathrow. A market sounding exercise had been done which would be followed by a report, which Network Rail was very keen on seeing.

Jerry Lewis recalled a trip to Luton airport where he had decided to use a bus for the first leg of his journey rather than using the car. Upon doing so he had been left waiting a significant amount of time for his bus to arrive, and no information had been relayed to explain that it was delayed. Mr Lewis remarked that there were particularly problems on the Green Line route going into London. With regards to Heathrow, Mr Lewis suggested that a car park could be developed a few miles away from the airport and a shuttle service put in to get travellers into the airport. Doing so, he suggested, would provide a great benefit of relieving congestion around Heathrow.

Karishma Shah from the RNIB stated that due to a medical condition she could not use public transport and instead relied on taxi services to get around. She was unhappy that if she hired a taxi on the day she would be charged around £100 but if she had pre-booked the fare would be around £50. She thought that this should be looked into.

Bob Houghton remarked that passengers were becoming more 'promiscuous' in terms of flying into one airport and then travelling back from another. He suggested that public transport operators could step in to take advantage of this. Jade Matthews agreed that it was a great opportunity and could further assist with encouraging travellers away from using their cars and onto the public transport network. Ms Ricketts agreed and suggested the industry needed to do more to ensure that passengers were aware of the various public transport options open to them which at present lacked complete transparency.

6 Closing remarks from Shashi Verma and Arthur Leathley

Shashi Verma thanked the panel for a 'great' discussion and said that he was encouraged by the level of ambition to improve the customer experience for passengers. He concluded that making changes that make a positive impact on the transport network was a 'hard slog' that required patience from those advocating for a new approach. However, with greater collaboration from the industry, he suggested that some of the ideas that had been shared during the talk could be brought to fruition.

Arthur Leathley thanked Mr Verma and the panellists for their time and contribution to the seminar. He also extended his thanks to the staff from City Hall that had helped make the event such a success. Finally, he referred attendees to the survey on travelling to London's airports that London TravelWatch had launched on its website and encouraged those present to complete it. Kerri Ricketts said that she had access to over 7,000 passengers that used GTR services and would be happy to direct them to the survey. Mr Leathley thanked Ms Ricketts for the suggestion and closed the meeting.