

Our Ref:
Your Ref:

21 February 2006

The GLA Review
ODPM
10th floor
Riverwalk House
157 – 161 Millbank
London SW1P 4RR

Dear Sir/Madam

The Greater London Authority: The Government's proposals for additional powers and responsibilities for the Mayor and Assembly

I have received the undated letter from David Miliband MP and Jim Fitzpatrick MP inviting comments on the above-mentioned consultation paper. The contents of the paper have been considered by the members of London TravelWatch (the operating name of London Transport Users Committee) – the statutory body appointed by the London Assembly to represent the interests of transport users in and around London. London TravelWatch's response is set out below.

London TravelWatch is established under provisions contained in sections 247 – 252 of the GLA Act 1999. Its remit is derived principally from provisions in that Act, as amended by the Railways Act 2005 (the 2005 Act). It is the only organisation sponsored by the London Assembly. Since London TravelWatch's remit relates wholly to representing the interests of the users of transport in and around London, its response to this consultation is limited to those matters that have a bearing on that remit.

London TravelWatch considered whether, given that its transport remit and geographical area are significantly wider than that of the GLA, it would be appropriate to suggest a change to sponsorship arrangements. After considering all apparently sensible options and discussing them with the current Chairman of the London Assembly's Transport Committee, London TravelWatch has concluded that there should be no change to its sponsorship.

From time to time suggestions have been made that the geographical area covered by London TravelWatch should be amended. It is, however, not felt that now would be an appropriate time to consider any such change. Paragraph 5.1.3 of the consultation paper refers to a forthcoming consultation document on possible additional powers for the Mayor in respect of railways in an area slightly bigger than Greater London – something which London TravelWatch would support. It would seem sensible to await the outcome of that consultation before considering any possible change to the London TravelWatch boundary. The Committee strongly believes, however, that there should be no automatic presumption that a change to the Mayor's remit in respect of the national railways should result in it having a boundary co-terminus with the area of the Mayor's involvement. There are sound user reasons for rail services to all London's airports to be within the remit of the London-area transport consumer body and the Committee's existing boundary has a number of merits in respect of mirroring railway operation and the majority of commuter demand. There should also be no presumption that any change to the Committee's boundary would necessarily involve retrenchment. There may be good arguments to extend the boundary at some time in

the future; for example to bring the whole of the proposed Crossrail service within the Committee's remit.

Until the passage of the 2005 Act it was possible to amend the London TravelWatch boundary by Ministerial Order. That provision was removed in the 2005 Act and a change to the boundary now requires primary legislation. London TravelWatch believes that it would be useful to take this legislative opportunity to restore the ability to change the Committee's boundary by Ministerial Order.

London TravelWatch has considered the specific transport-related questions in the consultation paper. It would support changes to the law to allow consent to land sales to be by letter and for powers to make minor orders to be transferred from the Secretary of State to the Mayor.

On the issue of membership of the Transport for London Board, London TravelWatch supports the status quo. It believes that the general exclusion of politicians (except for the Mayor) from the Board has had a positive impact on decision-making. The London Assembly has an important role to play vis-à-vis the scrutiny of the organisation and its decision-making processes. Politicians thus have a role to play at this level.

London TravelWatch does have one specific concern about the present powers of the Mayor vis-à-vis services provided by Transport for London. Fares are currently set by the Mayor in his right as Mayor, with no requirement to consult anyone prior to taking a decision to introduce changes. London TravelWatch believes that there should be some checks and balances introduced to this process. The Mayor should be required to consult a range of organisations, to have to consider any representations received in response to that consultation and to have to set out his reasons for rejecting points raised in the consultation process. His proposals should also be subject to ratification by the Board of Transport for London.

Finally, London TravelWatch has recently been made aware of problems the Mayor's office has encountered in persuading Network Rail to engage in discussions on possible section 106 agreements with the developers of substantial sites in the vicinity of the national railways. This seems to us to be a nonsense. London TravelWatch has raised the matter with the Chairman of the Office of Rail Regulation with a view to the ORR amending Network Rail's license to force them to engage as appropriate. London TravelWatch believes there may be a case to give the Mayor a power to require Network Rail, and indeed any relevant transport bodies, to engage in such discussions in respect of schemes that he has called in because of their scale/importance.

I hope these comments are helpful to the review process.

Yours sincerely

Rufus Barnes
Chief Executive

cc: Rt Hon Alistair Darling MP, Secretary of State for Transport,
Ken Livingstone, Mayor of London,
Roger Evans, Chairman, London Assembly Transport Committee.