
Minutes

Agenda item: 4
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Minutes of the Policy committee held on 11 June 2013 at Dexter House, Royal Mint Court, London EC3

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Present

Members

Josephine Channer, Richard Dilks, Glyn Kyle, Stephen Locke, Abdikafi Rage, John Stewart (Chair), Ruth Thompson

Guests

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| David McNeill | Director of Public Affairs and Stakeholder Engagement, Transport for London |
| Paul Blackwell | Dial-a-Ride General Manager, Transport for London |
| David Canham | Chief Engineer, London Underground |
| Paul Coote | Upgrade Delivery Manager (Operations), London Underground |

Matt Winfield Stakeholder Engagement Manager, Transport for London

Members of the public including representatives of the West London Line Rail Users Group

Secretariat

| | |
|----------------|----------------------------------|
| Tim Bellenger | Director, Policy & Investigation |
| John Cartledge | Safety Policy Adviser |
| Janet Cooke | Chief Executive |
| Sharon Malley | Executive Assistant (minutes) |
| Vincent Stops | Policy Officer |

Minutes

1 Chair's introduction and pre-meeting announcements

The Chair welcomed members, officers and guests to the meeting and made the standard safety announcements.

2 Apologies for absence

There were no apologies for absence.

3 Declarations of interest

Glyn Kyle reported that he had been appointed to the Board of the London Ambulance Service. There were no other declarations of interest beyond those standing declarations available on the London TravelWatch website.

4 Minutes

The minutes of the Transport Services committee of 12 March 2013 were agreed and signed as a correct record, subject to amending Item 3 to read as follows: "Ruth Thompson and Richard Dilks declared that they were members of the London Cycling Campaign. Stephen Locke and Ruth Thompson declared that they were members of Sustrans. Abdikafi Rage said he regularly used transport services in the Stratford area."

5 Matters arising from previous meeting (PC005)

5.1 Casework satisfaction survey

It was noted that as the changes to the casework satisfaction report were of a minor nature, it would be acceptable to report them to the Chairs' Group rather than the Governance Committee.

5.2 Casework report

It was noted that complaint levels for individual operators were contextualised in the National Rail performance reports, which showed how many complaints each operator received per 100,000 journeys. It was agreed that it would be useful to include this information in the Casework report in future.

Action: Casework Manager

5.3 Performance of Tramlink

It was noted that Tramlink's performance is reported in the Transport for London (TfL) performance report, not the National Rail performance report.

6 Actions taken (PC006)

The Director, Policy and Investigation, said that the UK Rail Opportunities Day had been useful and had given him the opportunity to discuss London TravelWatch's work with several potential new bidders.

In response to a question, the Director, Policy and Investigation, said that his meeting with First Capital Connect had not discussed the question of rolling stock procurement but that this was something staff would be monitoring in the future.

7 Rail devolution and safeguards for passengers (PC007)

The Director, Policy and Investigation, said that unfortunately the TfL representative who had been scheduled to make a presentation on this topic was unable to attend. He said that London TravelWatch had held several discussions about rail devolution with TfL, focussing on the needs of passengers including those travelling outside the Greater London Authority (GLA) area.

London TravelWatch and Passenger Focus had together developed seven principles for devolved franchises to guarantee the rights and interests of passengers within and beyond the GLA boundary. The Director, Policy and Investigation, set out the seven principles, which members discussed.

In relation to the first principle, relating to the equality of track access, it was agreed that even-handedness was a better term than equality as the overall objective was not mathematical equality but fair treatment for all parties. It was noted that a process existed between Network Rail and the Office of Rail Regulation to respond to any disputes relating to track access and TfL had said they had no intention of taking track from long distance providers.

The Director, Policy and Investigation, said that the only potential area of conflict might relate to freight movements on the North London line. TfL were keen to increase passenger services on the line but this was constrained by the amount of freight movement that has been guaranteed to freight operators. Peter Twigg of the Association of Train Operating Companies (ATOC) said that track access had provoked minor disputes from time to time but he had never known them to be seriously problematic. He said there had now been some precedent for the resolution of problems relating to Mayoral concessions.

The Director, Policy and Investigation, said that the second principle was important as passengers needed operators to work together to provide them with seamless information. It was important that the division of the franchises should not lead to fragmentation of information provision for passengers, especially during periods of disruption.

Mark Balaam, Chair of the West London Line Rail Users Group, set out some of the concerns held by his group.

Members agreed the third principle, that operators should agree to work together in the interests of all passengers.

It was noted that the fourth principle, that fares baskets should be separated for the franchise and concession to avoid unintended negative consequences, was pertinent in

relation to Southeastern. Southeastern had recently had annual fare rises of RPI+3%, whereas Oyster fares had risen by only RPI+1%. This meant that the London fares increased by RPI+1% but some Kent fares had risen by 5% or 6% above RPI to compensate. The proposed principle would break the link and would avoid fares outside the London area needing to increase to compensate for lower rises within London. Members agreed this principle.

The fifth principle called for meaningful consultation with London TravelWatch and Passenger Focus on issues affecting passengers. The Director, Policy and Investigation, said that in the past train operators had been better than TfL at consulting London TravelWatch. If devolution to TfL were to take place, it would be important for TfL to come up to the levels reached by train operators.

It was agreed that there should be an additional principle requiring TfL as a concessionary franchise holder to consult with London TravelWatch even though it was not, unlike train operating companies, required by statute to do so.

Members agreed the sixth and seventh principles, relating to working with local authorities and committing to transparency of data. It was noted that the principles were useful when assessing franchises generally, not just those devolved to TfL.

It was agreed that London TravelWatch should 'seek' these commitments from TfL rather than 'demand' them. It was agreed that they should be amended in line with the above observations and then circulated as appropriate.

Action: Director, Policy and Investigation

8 Future funding at Transport for London

David McNeill, Director of Public Affairs and Stakeholder Engagement at Transport for London, gave a presentation on the organisation's possible future funding arrangements. He said that he had heard that TfL would be facing a disproportionate funding cut in the forthcoming settlement, based on assumptions that TfL would save money in ways that were not actually possible. He feared that TfL would literally run out of cash within a few years and so had been seeking a more generous funding settlement that would provide stability for the longer term.

Mr McNeill said that London's population growth would quickly erode the infrastructure and capacity improvements already made, leaving the transport network no better off than currently. London was very productive and economically valuable to the country as a whole. TfL had already faced cuts commensurate with other public organisations.

Mr McNeill said that if TfL's funding were not cut it could be running at zero operating subsidy by 2021. Stable investment led to reduced procurement costs and allowed suppliers to invest in jobs and apprenticeships. He said that TfL had several projects worked up to an advance stage that would be ready for investment either now or in the next three to five years.

Mr McNeill said that bus usage was very high and benchmarking studies showed that London had one of the best and most efficient services in the world.

TfL's infrastructure projects generated significant income for manufacturing businesses across the country. Its supply chain was lengthy and cutting funding to TfL would have a knock-on effect on those businesses who had contracts with it.

Mr McNeill said that he was trying to demonstrate to government that transport in London had a voice and would use it, even if that meant becoming political and possibly unpleasant. TfL had had financial stability in recent years that had led to significant improvements for passengers. He feared that if cuts were of the level being discussed, TfL would be unable to keep up with population growth and congestion would inevitably increase.

In response to questions, Mr McNeill said he had the support of the Mayor of London and the Assembly. He said he thought it would be wrong if cuts in investment affected more deprived areas rather than wealthier ones.

Mr McNeill said that the Mayor of London had made the case for investment to government but it was important that those making the decisions were aware that TfL's supply chain went well beyond London. It was noted that transport users in Lewisham had approved of TfL's support for manufacturing in the rest of the UK.

It was noted that commercial growth in central London was only sustainable if employees were able to travel to the jobs from their homes in outer areas. It was important that deprived areas had good transport links to the commercial centres so that people could access employment opportunities.

Mr McNeill said that the process was iterative and he was unsure how the final negotiations would play out. He believed that the Mayor of London was currently more influential within the Treasury than the Department for Transport, who were experiencing some difficulties with funding relating to High Speed 2.

Mr McNeill said he hoped to be able to put TfL on a sustainable, long-term funding programme as that would help provide stability for their contractors in the UK. Members thanked Mr McNeill for the presentation and agreed to support TfL where possible. It was agreed that the London TravelWatch would write to members of Parliament in London to ask them to use their influence in the forthcoming spending review to call for the protection of TfL's funding.

Action: Chief Executive

9 Dial-a-Ride and co-ordination of transport services (PC008)

Paul Blackwell, General Manager of Dial-a-Ride, gave a presentation on the development of the service and the challenges it faced in the future. He said that currently Dial-a-Ride was completing nine out of ten requested journeys of under five miles and seven out of ten longer distance journeys. Around 60% of journeys were for regular bookings, the rest were ad hoc. There were around 430 drivers and 80 to 90 booking staff, with a total staff of 602.

Mr Blackwell said that there had been increases in demand in recent years but in 2013 there had been difficulties with weather and June saw 1,700 cancellations, as did the period of harsh weather in February/March 2013.

Mr Blackwell said that the busiest time for staff was immediately after booking lines opened in the morning and he was looking at improving service in that period by having booking officers working at home for 60 to 90 minutes from 9.00 am.

He said that the service saw a high level of cancellations, averaging around two cancellations for every thirteen bookings. This meant that the reservationists deliberately double-booked services and this sometimes led to the need to use taxis to supplement the main vehicles.

A member noted that the Dial-a-Ride service offered users a very important service that contributed towards their independence and was to be welcomed, operational problems notwithstanding.

In response to questions, Mr Blackwell said that the taxicard scheme was run by London boroughs separately to TfL but TfL made a contribution. He said that demand for Dial-a-Ride had increased by 12% over the last three years and the number of trips had increased considerably since the early 1990s. He said that Dial-a-Ride handled complaints in a robust and supportive manner. It was noted that users often had to wait for several minutes when calling the service for their calls to be answered, and this seemed unacceptable to members.

Mr Blackwell said that the majority of Dial-a-Ride members were over 75, whereas the taxicard age profile was much lower. 82% of members qualified for automatic membership and the great majority of members were female.

Mr Blackwell said that research two years ago found that 5% of members had access to computers. However, because Dial-a-Ride used 24,000 standard destinations, it was difficult to move to an online booking system. One-quarter of members had mobile phones but did not always use them.

In relation to cancellations, Mr Blackwell said that users should not be penalised for making occasional cancellations but that cancellations at the door were discouraged. In addition, a new policy had been introduced whereby repeat bookings could not be suspended for more than 12 weeks in order that slots could be allocated to other repeat booking requests.

The Chair thanked Mr Blackwell for attending and providing members with a useful briefing on the Dial-a-Ride service.

10 Safety at the platform edge

The Safety Policy Adviser gave a presentation about safety on the national rail network in relation to gaps between the train door and platform edge. This was followed by a presentation on the same topic but relating to the Underground network, given by David Canham, Chief Engineer, and Paul Coote Upgrade Delivery Manager, of London Underground.

The Safety Policy Adviser said that very few platform edge gaps were currently of a size that 90% of passengers would be able to use. The gaps were too wide, too high, or a combination of both too wide and too high. He said that the national rail network now had only three raised platforms, despite the fact that alighting and boarding of trains was quicker and more efficient when gaps were smaller.

The presentation covered specific instances of passengers falling between gaps at stations and research on acceptable standards for gaps.

Mr Coote said that the gap between the train and the platform was London Underground's greatest risk and measures were in place to minimise accidents, including staff training and equipment checking. London Underground sought to keep gaps between platforms and trains as small as possible and had introduced sensitive strips on train doors to alert drivers to trapped items.

London Underground had analysed the gaps at platforms and were considering bespoke solutions to address gaps at each location, including vinyls on the platform to identify specific risk areas.

London Underground's progress on the issue was welcomed, and it was noted that Network Rail appeared to find it more difficult and expensive to solve the problems presented by gaps. It was noted that new franchises, with their emphasis on the passenger experience, may like to consider including reference to reducing platform gaps in their specifications.

It was noted that it was harder for Network Rail to solve the gaps problem as many platforms on the network were served by trains of different heights and with different door configurations. In addition, the risk posed by the train striking the platform edge would be considerable so some clearance would always be necessary.

Mr Coote said that London Underground and Network Rail shared their experiences on a regular basis. The Safety Policy Adviser said that London Underground's work was influencing the industry in this area.

The Chair thanked Mr Coote and Mr Canham for their presentation and for their work on improving safety on the Underground.

11 Safety update (PC009)

The Safety Policy Adviser presented his report on safety on the transport network. It was noted that the safety issues contained in the report had many causes, which meant there were no easy fixes. However, the major problems that used to appear such as signals being passed at danger and track failure now appeared to be much less significant.

12 Casework report and update (PC010)

The Casework Manager presented the report on London TravelWatch's casework function for the period January to March 2013. She said that the format of the report had changed to emphasise operator performance rather than caseworker performance, although any anomalies identified in casework performance would be analysed and addressed.

The Casework Manager said that there were various reasons for the transport operators delaying their responses to London TravelWatch, with issues such as poor weather affecting different operators in different ways. The nature of the cases remained unchanged and some recent good results for passengers had been a good morale boost for the team.

Members approved the new reporting format.

The Casework Manager said the data from the Casework Report was discussed at meetings with transport operators.

It was noted that poor weather should not be accepted as a reason for failing to meet targets and that operators should accept some responsibility for the resilience of their systems.

It was noted that London TravelWatch's contact details were still in the process of being updated on posters and information sheets. London TravelWatch did not have the resources to check whether all information on London's transport system was accurate but did follow up when a problem was identified.

13 Feedback questionnaire report (PC011)

The Casework Manager presented her report about feedback from complainants about their experiences of London TravelWatch. It was noted that many of the people most dissatisfied with London TravelWatch's service were those who had been issued penalty fares that London TravelWatch could not overturn and that satisfaction levels were always likely to be low in such cases.

Various ways of increasing the response rate were considered, including sending out forms earlier and following up with prompts, although it was noted that London TravelWatch attained a similar response rate to Passenger Focus.

14 Any other business

There was no other business.

15 Resolution to move into confidential session

The meeting resolved, under section 15(b) of schedule 18 of the Greater London Authority Act 1999, that by reason of the confidential nature of the next following item/s, that it was desirable in the public interest that the public should be excluded from the meeting.

In confidential session, members reviewed the meeting.