
Minutes

Agenda item: 4
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Minutes of the Consumer Affairs Committee meeting held on 10 September 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

Keith Gardener	Bus Policy Manager, Transport for London (Item 8)
Anthony Smith	Chief Executive, Passenger Focus (Item 11)
Ian Wright	Head of Research, Passenger Focus (Item 11)
Peter Twigg	Head of London Support, Association of Train Operating Companies
Wilco Chapels	Association of Train Operating Companies

Helen Deakin Strategic Communications Officer, Transport for London

Members of the public and representatives from the transport industry

Secretariat

Tim Bellenger	Director, Policy & Investigation
John Cartledge	Safety and Policy Adviser
Janet Cooke	Chief Executive
Richard Freeston-Clough	Communications Officer
Sharon Malley	Executive Assistant (minutes)
Susan James	Casework Manager (Items 7-9)

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

Richard Dilks declared that at Which?, his employer, he had previously worked on the train operating survey but this interest did not prevent him from taking part in the debate on the National Passenger Survey.

4 Minutes

The minutes of the Policy committee on 11 June were approved and signed as a correct record, subject to noting that John Cartledge's job title was Safety and Policy Adviser, not Safety Policy Adviser.

5 Matters arising (PC012)

Members questioned why the changes to the Passenger Focus survey made it unlikely that London TravelWatch would be unable to amend its own customer satisfaction survey to enable closer comparison between the two organisations. It was agreed that the Casework Manager would respond on this issue outside the meeting.

Action: Casework Manager

Members questioned why train usage data could not be disaggregated to match the data provided in the Casework report. The Safety and Policy Adviser said that the figures provided for train usage were divided up by operator and not by region, so it would not be possible to say how many journeys per operator were within the London TravelWatch area and how many were not. It was agreed that officers would give some further thought to how the comparative size of operators could be included in the Casework report and respond to members outside the meeting.

Action: Casework Manager

It was agreed that Transport for London's (TfL) adoption of London TravelWatch's recommendations for safeguarding passengers in the event of devolution of services to the Mayor of London was a substantial achievement for the Committee.

It was noted that the letter written to London members of Parliament about the proposed financial settlement for TfL had been well received. The final settlement was not as challenging as it might have been, and London TravelWatch's work in this area might have played a part in this.

6 Key activities (PC013)

The Director, Policy and Investigation, presented a report on key activities undertaken since the previous meeting. It was noted that the development work at Victoria station was making access for passengers very difficult. The Policy Officer said that the current configuration was better than some of the earlier layouts but more could be done in relation to signage and wayfinding. He said that he had discussed the problems with the site manager, who had stressed the need for passengers to understand the scale of the works and to treat the area as an active building site.

The Chief Executive said she and the Chair of London TravelWatch had attended a meeting of the Travel Demand Management board and had discussed wayfinding at London Bridge station, where extensive works were also taking place. An expert wayfinding company was working at London Bridge station on an ongoing basis to assist passengers. This might also be useful at Victoria station.

The Policy Officer said he had submitted a response to the London Assembly's scrutiny of London Buses that had included a request for London Buses' decision-making to be more transparent. He was due to attend a meeting shortly to discuss this and would report further to members in due course.

Action: Policy Officer

7 Highway obstructions (PC014)

The Policy Officer gave a presentation on the work undertaken by London TravelWatch to promote the clearing of pavements of obstructions. He said that clear pavements benefitted both the able-bodied and those with vision and mobility impairments, as well as older people. There was a general acceptance among highway authorities about the need to remove clutter from pavements but a very low level of enforcement against infringements. He contrasted photographs of Kingston, which had a zero-tolerance policy towards pavement clutter, and Havering, where A-boards were causing obstructions for pedestrians.

The Policy Officer said that TfL carried out enforcement in some high-profile locations, such as Tooley Street, and had promised to do more in future. However, many examples of pavement clutter remained, some of them causing significant difficulties for pedestrians.

The Policy Officer said that highway authorities had a duty to enforce against infringements but individuals had no mechanism to force authorities to undertake that enforcement work. Enforcement was currently very patchy.

London TravelWatch had hosted a round-table stakeholder event to discuss pavement obstructions the day before the Committee meeting. The Policy Officer said that some stakeholders supported a complete ban on clutter, whereas others saw some scope for

discretion. All agreed that more should be done. The Policy Officer said that he intended to edit his report in light of the previous day's meeting and publish it, subject to approval, as a final version.

In discussing the report some members expressed concern that limiting the use of, for example, A-boards might have a detrimental effect on the vitality of struggling local high streets. The Policy Officer said that the business representative at the round-table had said that small businesses did value A-boards but agreed that they should be placed close to the shops rather than dotted across the pavement. The difficulty came in enforcing this position, which led to the current largely unregulated situation.

It was also noted that while some blind people navigated by tapping a stick along the side of the kerb, others navigated by tapping against the building line. This meant that any position for A-boards would cause difficulties. A reading of the law suggested that it was illegal to place obstructions on the pavement without lawful excuse and therefore they should be removed.

It was noted that if one small business used an A-board all its competitors would want to use them as well. A zero-tolerance policy may therefore be better and easier to enforce. A member questioned whether highway authorities might face liability for damages caused by obstructions that they had permitted to remain on the highway.

It was agreed that the information in the appendix relating to enforcement by borough would be updated to include the date the information was obtained.

It was agreed that the report should include in greater detail the specific reasons for advocating a zero-tolerance approach to pavement clutter.

Helen Deakin from TfL said that enforcement against clutter would fit with the work underway as part of the Roads Task Force.

It was agreed that the Policy Officer should clarify the legal position and his interpretation of it within the report. He should amend the report in line with the comments above and circulate it to members before it was formally adopted.

Action: Policy Officer

8 Cashless buses (PC015)

The Director, Policy and Investigation, presented a report on proposals by TfL to withdraw cash fares, and the ability to pay by cash, from buses. He said that only 1% of transactions were currently paid in cash, which amounted to around 60,000 transactions per day. TfL had researched the reasons for paying by cash and found that 38% of people had insufficient cash on their Oyster card, 31% had forgotten their Oyster card and 18% lived outside London.

The Director, Policy and Investigation, had created a map showing the geographical link between bus routes with higher levels of cash transactions, routes that cross the London borders and those with few opportunities for buying or topping up Oyster products. It was noted that there were no Oyster agents in Dorking at all.

The proposals would save TfL in the region of £24 million, mainly as a result of their bus garages no longer needing to carry cash. However, London TravelWatch noted that the ability to increase the number of Oyster agents was limited and that ticket machines on the Croydon Tramlink did not offer Oyster functionality. It was suggested that for routes travelling to garages that would continue to carry cash, such as at Dorking and Redhill, arrangements could be made to enable the TfL buses to continue to accept cash.

Members discussed the problem of vulnerable passengers being stranded because they lacked the means to pay a fare once cash were withdrawn. It would require drivers to exercise considerable discretion as to which passengers could be classified as vulnerable. It was also noted that some vulnerable passengers would assume that as they did not have means to pay the fare they should not bother to try to board a bus and would instead try to walk to their destination, possibly putting themselves in unnecessary danger.

It was noted that it was difficult to top up an Oyster card at night time as many of the Oyster agents would be closed. This was the time that vulnerable passengers might most need to use bus services.

Keith Gardner, Bus Policy Manager at TfL, said that the demographic of cash buyers was white, fairly wealthy and male, and that most poorer passengers had already bought Oyster cards. He said that the research showed that the biggest reason for buying a cash ticket was having insufficient balance on an Oyster card. To address that problem, TfL would be moving to allow one additional journey to be made even if it took the card into debt.

He said that contactless card payments now accounted for 0.5% of transactions and that frequently a contactless payment followed a failed Oyster payment when the Oyster card had insufficient balance. This suggested that some passengers were being encouraged to use contactless payments when they did not have enough money on their Oyster card. The greatest increase in the use of contactless payments was at night time, when Oyster agents were more likely to be closed.

Mr Gardner said that Oyster agents worked on a commission basis, which meant that in some areas where Oyster was not considered profitable, there were gaps in Oyster provision. He said that most overseas visitors did use Oyster cards rather than cash.

He said that if cash were to be retained on buses, it may be necessary to increase the premium for a cash fare above the current level of £1.

The consultation on the proposals ran until October, then TfL would make a recommendation to the Mayor for possible inclusion in the 2014 fares announcement. However, the earliest implementation date for the removal of cash would be summer 2014, by which time contactless payments would be accepted for all TfL modes of travel.

Mr Gardener noted the comments made by London TravelWatch in relation to vulnerable users and suggestions about retaining the ability to pay by cash on some routes and increasing the availability of Oyster agents. It was agreed that members would discuss this matter further in the confidential session and use those discussions to inform London TravelWatch's submission to the consultation.

Action: Director, Policy and Investigation

9 Casework report and update (PC016)

The Casework Manager presented her report on the casework performance for the period April to June 2013. She noted that although TfL was not meeting its targets for responding to enquiries within 10 days for some individual cases but the averages show that the 10 day targets are being met. Her team was building good relationships with customer service staff at TfL, which assisted in resolving problems quickly. She noted that penalty fare cases often took longer to resolve but could sometimes result in very good outcomes for passengers so were worth taking time over.

The Casework Manager noted that she was seeing a high number of complaints relating to penalty fares issued on journeys from Gatwick and was looking into this further.

She noted that collecting pre-paid tickets from a ticket machine sometimes caused problems and when this happened there was often no staff member available to help. Even when the problem could be resolved at the station, it might not be done in time for the passenger to board the booked train. Also, there could be problems when passengers had changed the payment card they booked their tickets with. Some train operating companies (TOCs) were responsive to these problems but some were not.

The Casework Manager said that some passengers hoped for compensation for consequential loss following problems with transport services, for example when they sought refunds for the cost of a flight if they did not arrive at the airport in time to board. Although London TravelWatch might be successful in obtaining a goodwill gesture, this would not usually be anywhere near the cost of the flight, which impacted on levels of satisfaction with London TravelWatch's services.

The Casework Manager said she had seen TfL's newly designed website in its beta state and she thought it would be more useful for passengers than the current version.

Members noted that some operators appeared to have considerably better response times than others. The Chief Executive said that occasionally when problems with operators were identified they were escalated and raised during director-level meetings.

A member asked whether complaints that were made online could be printed off by passengers. The Casework Manager said that generally this was possible although not on the current version of the TfL website. This may change with the introduction of the new site.

It was agreed that the question of dispensing paid-for tickets at ticket machines should be considered in more detail in future.

Action: Executive Assistant

10 Value for money on London's transport services: what consumers think

The Director, Policy and Investigation, presented his report on research into how passengers viewed value for money and detailed how the industry had responded to the findings. He said that TfL had done some work in relation to improving passenger awareness of what discounts and offers were available. For example, it had emailed

Oyster card holders with information about obtaining refunds and had experienced a significant uplift in the numbers of people registering their Oyster cards as a result.

Members discussed the substantial discount available for those buying annual travelcards. It was noted that this discount was most likely to be used by people with secure jobs whose employers offered loans for buying annual travelcards. The possibility of recommending that the discount be reduced and savings used to offset the costs of shorter period travelcards was considered to be largely unwelcome as the cost of travelling was already considered very high.

The Director, Policy and Investigation, showed members a poster that TfL had produced following London TravelWatch's previous piece of research. The poster included fares information specific to the station it was placed in. More information was being given to passengers about Oyster and advance fares. It was agreed that TfL should be asked whether it would consider producing the poster in leaflet form.

Action: Executive Assistant

In response to the findings of the value for money research relating to the need to make buying tickets easier, TfL said it would consider the possibility of allowing one-day travelcards to be bought on Oyster cards.

Many of the other findings of the research were longer term and would feed into the general work programme.

It was agreed that the research was useful and successful and over the next few months London TravelWatch would consider whether there were any other opportunities for targeted research. If London TravelWatch was unable to carry out the research itself it would be well placed to persuade other organisations to conduct it.

Action: Director, Policy and Investigation

The Chief Executive said that London Underground had recently begun to publish its value for money scores and it may be possible to include them in the TfL Performance Report.

Action: Director, Policy and Investigation/Policy Assistant

11 National Passenger Survey and London stations

Anthony Smith, the Chief Executive of Passenger Focus, gave a presentation on the role and responsibilities of the organisation. He said that Passenger Focus was a consumer body sponsored by the Department for Transport (DfT) but operating at arm's length. Passenger Focus used research to drive change for the benefit of consumers. One of its most significant pieces of research was the National Passenger Survey, which was funded by the DfT. Work was also underway on ensuring the passenger voice was heard more clearly in rail franchising decisions.

Passenger Focus handled around 2,500 appeal cases a year, with a similar function to London TravelWatch's in areas beyond London. It also undertook an annual survey of bus passenger satisfaction of 30,000 passengers, the findings of which were used to call for

improvements in the bus industry. Passengers regularly prioritised greater punctuality of buses but this was proving very difficult to achieve.

Mr Smith said Passenger Focus had worked on decriminalising recipients of unpaid fare notices and welcomed the new appeals process now being run by the Association of Train Operating Companies (ATOC). He was hoping to introduce a tram survey in the future and wanted to include London's tram system within it, if TfL supported the move and funding could be identified.

Ian Wright, Head of Research at Passenger Focus, gave a presentation on the National Passenger Survey. He explained that surveys were handed to passengers at stations throughout the country, at times throughout the day and evening, including weekends, asking for views about the passengers' most recent journey. At least 27,000 questionnaires were returned for each wave of surveying, with a response rate of around 33%.

Mr Wright said that the proportion of stations within the London authority area sampled overall was higher than the national average and the proportion of small London stations sampled was considerably higher than the national average.

Mr Wright outlined some of the findings and said that in relation to stations, passengers were most satisfied with how staff handled questions, the provision of information and connections to other public transport. Passengers were most dissatisfied with general facilities and services, facilities for car parking and the availability of seating. In relation to trains, passengers were most satisfied with journey time, ease of getting on and off, and punctuality and reliability. They were most dissatisfied with value for money, how well delays were dealt with and toilet facilities.

Mr Wright said that information on station usage came a number of sources including data provided by the Office of Rail Regulation (ORR) and the TOCs themselves. Some stations were too small to survey. The Director, Policy and Investigation, said that the ORR data did include Oyster data but not data derived from freedom passes. Travelcard use was based on a survey completed in 2001, since when travel patterns had changed considerably, with more journeys now taking place that did not go through Zone 1.

Mr Smith noted that some of the responses relating to value for money and satisfaction could be seen as contradictory. However, passengers could hold different views about different aspects of travelling; their last journey might have been satisfactory but their views about the industry more generally might be unsatisfactory.

It was noted that overcrowding did not generate as much dissatisfaction as had been expected. This might be explained by the fact that sampling took place throughout the day and most overcrowding occurred only at peak times.

It was agreed that Passenger Focus would consider whether it would be possible to separate the statistics relating to London Metro services, to give a snapshot of views in the London area.

Action: Director, Policy and Investigation

In response to a question, Mr Wright said that he was looking into improving the online version of the questionnaire in order to increase the response rate, particularly among

younger respondents. It was noted that the demographic of travellers in London was younger than average and so it was important that younger people responded to the survey to get an accurate picture of their views. Mr Wright thought that perhaps eventually a mobile version of the survey could be introduced.

Mr Wright said that he had not done a great deal of work with non-users as the focus was intended to be on consumers of the service. However, some work was done four years ago with ATOC where non-users were asked to make train journeys and then report back with their views. The general feedback was that while the train journey itself was satisfactory, the barriers at each end of the journey, such as getting to the station, finding a parking space and so on, were difficult.

The Chief Executive said that the Policy team made good use of the data from the National Passenger Survey and would welcome seeing further work on the London Metro services. She would also like to see further discussions relating to stations that had never been surveyed as there appeared to be a correlation between un-surveyed stations and stations that were not very well kept or managed.

Action: Director, Policy and Investigation

12 Any other business

There was no other business.

13 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 considered research on passenger attitudes to the travelling environment and the government review of fares and ticketing and also reviewed financial or reputational risks posed by the meeting.