
Secretariat memorandum

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Agenda item: 7

PC032

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Representing the needs of bus passengers

1 Purpose of report

- 1.1 To provide background for the Board to discuss its business plan priority to further promote the needs of bus passengers as part of the 2014/15 work plan.

2 Recommendation

- 2.1 To note this report and consider the scope and content of the work plan bus passenger representation item

3 Background

- 3.1 London TravelWatch has always recognised the vital role of the bus to Londoners, but also that in many ways bus services can often be taken for granted. London TravelWatch remains concerned that the bus passenger voice is not heard as much as that of other transport users. The Board has agreed that for 2014/15 it would develop a comprehensive plan to see how best it can help promote the interests of bus passengers taking into account their views, existing research data and the work of the London Assembly Transport Committee's scrutiny of London bus services.
- 3.2 London's bus service is the only truly universal public transport system in London. It operates 24/7 services in all parts of London, and is fully accessible to almost all Londoners.
- 3.3 In 2009 the Mayor commissioned a strategic review of London's bus services. This study found that according to international benchmarking TfL operated at or above average compared to other similar large city bus services on a selection of indicators.
- 3.4 That said, our own research into passengers' priorities found that passengers still want to see improvements. Reliability, higher frequency services and the expansion of the Countdown real-time information system were the three top passenger priorities.
- 3.5 In October 2013, the London Assembly published its scrutiny report looking at London's bus services. The full text of the report can be found here: http://www.london.gov.uk/sites/default/files/Bus%20Services%20in%20London%20Report%20C%20Transport%20Committee_0.pdf At the heart of the report was a call for TfL to develop a long-term strategy for London's bus services.

- 3.6 TfL have been asked to respond to the London Assembly scrutiny, but have yet to do this. Their response is expected very soon.
- 3.7 Following consideration of the Assembly report members agreed to follow up some of the report's recommendations, particularly that TfL should develop an overcrowding metric and it should improve consultation with passengers.

4 Discussion

- 4.1 The challenge for London's bus services in the future is to carry more passengers with reducing non-fare-box funding.
- 4.2 London TravelWatch's priority for achieving this has been to make the case for prioritising bus services on all London's bus routes. In our contributions to consultations and scrutiny we always stress this and that by bus priority we don't just mean bus lanes, but everything from filling in bus stop lay-bys to removing obstructive parking, from more and longer operating hours for bus lanes to roads pricing. We have called for the re-establishment of a bus priority unit within TfL to progress bus priority.
- 4.3 However, whilst we have been successful in raising the awareness of bus priority this does not necessarily translate into bus priority schemes for a number of reasons. There is often opposition from local vested interests and at TfL the priority has shifted from bus priority towards policies to smooth general traffic flow and promoting cycling. Boroughs can have other local priorities, such as town centre schemes that de-prioritise buses by moving them away from passenger objectives or reducing bus priority in favour of other modes and 'place' improvements.
- 4.4 TfL's Roads Taskforce has emphasised the role of 'place' and investment in improving town centres and urban regeneration areas such as Elephant and Castle. There is support for improving cycling, walking and public transport and maintaining an efficient road network. There is now funding for bus priority in the latest TfL business plan. The London Plan suggests considerable population and employment growth. In TfL's latest update to its Surface Transport Panel (9 April 2014) it is stated that: "significant increases in road congestion can be expected".
- 4.5 Bus passengers are often not heard from. There are very few bus passenger groups and it is notoriously difficult to engage with individual bus passengers. However, we do know their general priorities through our own and others' research.
- 4.6 To achieve members' aspiration to represent passengers' desire to improve bus services, particularly performance and key priorities around interchange and information it is suggested that the Board considers that it:
- focuses on using journey speed information, that will soon be available, in order to focus passengers and highway authorities on improving London's slowest buses;
 - continues its work to ensure TfL consult bus passengers as well as frontagers about changes that might affect their journeys;

- develops a bus users' community using electronic and social media. Note: this would need considerable thought as to the scope and has some risks in terms of raising expectations and the scale of the workload it could generate.
- works with TfL to identify proposals on their, and the borough's, road network that if implemented may increase journey times or affect reliability of services.
- works to propose ideas for better marketing and service information for both existing and potential passengers.

5 Prioritisation criteria

5.1 This is a business plan priority

6 Equalities and inclusion implications

6.1 The bus service is the only public transport network that covers all of London, 24/7 and is fully accessible. It is therefore important that it operates effectively for all Londoners and particularly those without access to other modes.

7 Legal powers

7.1 Section 248 of the Greater London Authority Act 1999 places upon London TravelWatch (as the London Transport Users Committee) a duty to consider - and where it appears to the Committee to be desirable, to make recommendations with respect to - any matter affecting the functions of the Greater London Authority or Transport for London which relate to transport (other than of freight).

8 Financial implications

8.1 No specific financial implications for London TravelWatch arise from this report.