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**Secretariat memorandum**

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PC041

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Changing role of Highways Agency and implications for London

**1 Purpose of report**

- 1.1. To inform members of London TravelWatch's response to the government's consultation on changes to the Highways Agency and an analysis of the implications of those changes on passengers in London.

**2 Recommendation**

- 2.1. That members note the report.

**3 Information**

- 3.1. This Spring, the government consulted on changes to the constitution of the Highways Agency (details here: <https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/transforming-the-highways-agency-into-a-government-owned-company>)
- 3.2. London TravelWatch's formal response to the consultation is attached as an appendix to this report.
- 3.3. In Summer, the government published its response to the consultation, confirming its intention to go ahead with the proposed changes and create units within Passenger Focus and the Office of Rail Regulation to represent the interests of road users and monitor the company's performance.
- 3.4. As part of the preparation for taking on this work from Spring 2015, Passenger Focus has just appointed two specialist advisers to their Board for six month terms. One of these is David Leibling, who was on the Board of London TravelWatch for eight years, including two as Deputy Chair, and who also represented London on the Board of Passenger Focus.
- 3.5. London TravelWatch's analysis of the implications of this change on London passengers is attached as a second appendix to this report.

**4 Equalities and inclusion implications**

- 4.1. None – report is for information only.

## **5 Legal powers**

- 5.1. 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).

## **6 Financial implications**

- 6.1. None – report is for information only.

Our Ref: DfT  
Your Ref:

4 February 2014

Roads Reform Consultation  
Department for Transport  
Zone 3/23  
Great Minster House  
33 Horseferry Road  
London  
SW1P 4DR

Dear Sir or madam

### **Consultation on changes to the Highways Agency**

Thank you for consulting London TravelWatch and inviting our views.

London TravelWatch is the statutory watchdog representing the interests of all transport users in and around London.

London TravelWatch welcomes the proposal to give Passenger Focus the role of representing the users of trunk roads and motorways.

The area that is of most interest to London TravelWatch is the operation of the motorways that interface with the TfL road network, the TLRN. Some of these, though categorised as motorways, perform a local function. Changes to how they are managed, for example if tolling were introduced, would impact on the TLRN. A specific case could be if the charges imposed to use the Dartford Bridge were to be increased then that may well lead to displacement onto river crossings further west, i.e. the Blackwall tunnel.

Therefore it is important that London TravelWatch is consulted and its views taken into account where changes to the management of the motorways in and around London are proposed.

Yours sincerely

Vincent Stops  
Policy officer

## The relationship between London TravelWatch and Passenger Focus following the Government's proposal to extend Passenger Focus' role to cover the consumer interest in Highways Agency roads

In April 2014 the Government published its intention to set up the Highways Agency as a legally separate government-owned company, limited by shares, with the Secretary of State for Transport as the sole shareholder.

It also published its intentions regarding consumer representation for users of the UK's strategic road network. It stated that the Government:

Will create a 'Road User Focus' unit within Passenger Focus to represent the interests of users of the strategic road network.

In response to concern that there should be an independent body that specialised in road user issues the Government determined that:

At Passenger Focus, the organisation will form a separate roads team with its own independent branding. This 'Road User Focus' will carry out its own research within the organisation, and will be committed full-time to roads issues. There will be a dedicated board member, representing roads issues. Road User Focus will also host a stakeholder panel of major road-user organisations, to make sure that the priorities of the unit match with road users' experience on the ground.

There is no mention of either Transport for London, not London TravelWatch, nor indeed London. However, in response to some who wanted the organisation to have a remit covering local roads (controlled by County and Unitary authorities) there is an intention to allow Road User Focus to assist local highway authorities:

The Government intends that Road User Focus will be able to consider issues affecting local roads, where this is requested and paid for by local authorities.

It is suggested that the new company and therefore presumably the new watchdog would be in place by Spring 2015.



The National Strategic Road Network

## **A role for ORR**

Alongside the new Highways Agency the Government is to create a 'Strategic Road Network Monitor' unit within the Office of Rail Regulation, to ensure that the company delivers its commitments efficiently and effectively.

At ORR, the roads function will form a special unit – provisionally called the 'Strategic Road Network Monitor'. This unit will be responsible to a roads committee, under the leadership of a new non-executive director, appointed to the ORR board by the Secretary of State to handle roads issues. The committee will have clear delegated powers from the main ORR board to oversee and advise the Secretary of State on all matters relating to roads. The Strategic Road Network Monitor will consist of full-time roads staff, including engineers and network management experts recruited from outside ORR. They will be able to call on wider help from ORR on common issues, such as economics and benchmarking, as well as on back-office functions.

## **The impact on London's road users and on London TravelWatch**

The roads that are of most interest to London TravelWatch are TfL's Red Route network (TLRN) and those roads that London's bus services operate along. There is also a network of roads within London that is called the Strategic Road Network (SRN) which are those borough primary roads which are said to perform a strategic function but are controlled by the London boroughs. TfL has some statutory interest in these and can veto some changes to traffic management on them.

We have historically taken an interest in any proposed changes to those roads that make up the national strategic road network. For example several years ago we attended meetings of the 'Orbit Study' looking at options for the M25. We have taken an interest in the change in the charge for crossing the Thames at Dartford as changes in the charge will have an impact on the use of London's Thames crossings.

The main intention of these changes is to improve the efficiency of the Highways Agency. There may be different ways of working that in turn effect the operation of London's roads

There could be impacts on London's road network of changes to the national strategic road network. For example any proposal to toll sections of road (new or existing) would result in displacement onto uncharged roads. Increases and decreases in road capacity will have a similar impact as will short term operational problems that close sections of road. It has often been suggested that the national strategic road network could operate better if local traffic is limited in its access to these roads, by say closing an access slip-road at peak hours.