
Secretariat memorandum

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Winter and Autumn Rail and Underground resilience review

1 Purpose of report

- 1.1. To advise members on the impact on passengers of poor service reliability due to adverse winter and autumn weather conditions

2 Recommendation

- 2.1. Members are recommended to note the contents of the report

3 Background

- 3.1. National Rail and London Underground train service performance is monitored closely and there are seasonal variations to this associated with the prevailing weather conditions and the operators preparedness for this.
- 3.2. Performance reports for both National Rail operators and London Underground show that there is a seasonal dip in performance in quarter 3 (October to December) associated with the onset of autumn and winter, followed by quarter 4 (January to March) with winter and early spring. Principle causes of this include leaf fall reducing railhead adhesion, storm damage and equipment failure at low or varying temperatures. These have an affect on train service performance, as services need to operate at either different speeds or use a different operational method to ensure safe operation. Passengers therefore suffer from delays and disruption as a result of these. Quarter 3 is also the busiest period of the year for passenger numbers associated with preparations for Christmas and also the impact of a new academic year for students, and consequential changes to employment and leisure patterns. This means that more passengers are impacted by delay and disruption at the point in the year when performance is more difficult to maintain.

4 Autumn and Winter 2017/18

- 4.1. Quarter 3 on the National Rail did show a similar seasonal reduction in performance across all operators, and with exception of London North Western Railway, there was an improvement against the equivalent period in previous years. Similarly, on London Underground there was a significant improvement, particularly on the Piccadilly line.

- 4.2. This better performance can be attributed mainly to the milder weather compared to previous years. However, the enhanced programmes of vegetation clearance by both Network Rail and London Underground will have also contributed substantially to this improvement particularly on the Piccadilly line and on services by operated by GTR. Other measures will have also contributed to this improvement such as the introduction of new trains with better rail adhesion characteristics and more reliable door operation (class 700 Thameslink trains), the addition of sanding and de-icing equipment to existing trains, and more use of heating devices to keep points and third rail electrification operating effectively.
- 4.3. Quarter 4 was more varied in its weather patterns and saw a number of weeks where train services were severely impacted by snow and its associated aftermath. In this period operators in some cases chose to operate emergency timetable with reduced service levels. Network Rail also chose to operate in some areas a 'Key Route Strategy' where only certain routes were kept or declared open, resulting in a reduction in service on a number of routes. However, performance in quarter 4 overall was no better and no worse than the same periods in the equivalent quarters in the previous two years.
- 4.4. It was during this period that there were a number of instances of trains stuck at various locations with varying numbers of passengers on board. In the case of trains stuck between London Bridge and Lewisham there were multiple instances of passengers 'self-evacuating' due to the length of time and crowded conditions during the incidents. These instances are subject to an investigation by the Railway Accident Investigation Bureau.

5 Areas of concern

- 5.1. Key route strategies. Some Network Rail routes, notably Anglia, adopted a Key Route Strategy whereby only certain routes were kept 'open' during the disruption. Unfortunately, this was applied at a route level and meant that some services (e.g. London Overground's Stratford – Richmond trains) were affected even though there was no adverse weather in the area, and trains could have operated normally.
- 5.2. Emergency timetables. Some operators (notably Southeastern) implemented emergency timetables on the basis of forecast adverse weather communications in advance of those weather conditions coming to pass. This resulted in reduced frequencies, and in some cases the introduction of 'skip-stop' service patterns at short notice. This was a major concern of passengers affected.
- 5.3. Passenger communications – self evacuation from stranded trains. There were incidents involving passengers on stranded trains taking action to get out of these trains in the absence of a controlled process by the operator to do so in an orderly fashion. This then led to further delay. However, similar incidents of stranded trains elsewhere did not result in these kinds of actions. Contributory factors include the volume of passengers involved and poor communications to the passengers involved.
- 5.4. Vegetation and litter / rubbish management. Both Network Rail and London Underground have continued to expand their programmes of vegetation management to reduce the impact of this on train service performance, particularly in the autumn and winter, and there is some evidence that this is bringing positive

results. However, litter and rubbish management is an area of concern, particularly on Network Rail, because of the impact that items such as plastic bags, tin cans and plastic bottles can have on railway equipment such as pantographs, overhead line equipment, conductor shoes and conductor rails for power supply: point mechanisms and signalling systems. It remains to be seen whether initiatives outside of the rail industry such as charges for the use of plastic bags, the sugar tax on drinks and snacks, discouraging the use of single drink coffee and tea cups and the introduction of a deposit scheme on cans and plastic bottles will have on rail and underground performance if the 'supply' of rubbish is reduced. This is because, particularly on Network Rail the amount rubbish and litter already present trackside is significant, and will without a concerted effort to reduce the amount of this already present rubbish and litter continue to present problems as a result of wind and other movement, such as flooding or animal activity. These are more likely to occur in the autumn and winter.

- 5.5. Graffiti and trespass. Whilst these are not specifically autumn and winter related the effects of these incidents can be made worse during winter and autumn, when performance of services is already under significant pressure from other factors. Graffiti on trains can often lead to cancellation of services and reduction in capacity, causing delay and crowding on other services, it also makes for a very unpleasant travelling environment for passengers. Trespass and associated trackside graffiti also causes delay, because trains have to run at lower speeds to reduce the risk of serious injury to the people trespassing and of damage to the trains. In quarter 4 there was a significant rise in the instance of graffiti on trains especially those operated by Southeastern, which was exacerbated by a need for them to put in place better facilities for cleaning such trains. This came about following a successful prosecution of that operator for failings under Health and Safety law, which resulted in the death of a worker.

6 Equalities and inclusion implications

- 6.1. The evacuation of people with reduced mobility from stranded trains is an area of concern that needs to be addressed more thoroughly.

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).
- 7.2. Section 252A of the Greater London Authority Act 1999 places a duty upon London TravelWatch (as the London Transport Users Committee) to keep under review matters affecting the interests of the public in relation to railway passenger and station services provided wholly or partly within the London railway area, and to make representations about them to such persons as it thinks appropriate.

8 Financial implications

- 8.1. There are no financial implications for London TravelWatch arising from this report.