
Minutes

Agenda item: 2
Drafted: 23.03.16

Minutes of the Policy Committee meeting held on 23 February 2016

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Present

Members

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

Guests

Ben Plowden	Director of Surface Strategy and Planning, Transport for London (Items 7-10)
Peter Bradley	Head of Consultation, Transport for London (Items 7-10)
Mark Evers	Director of Customer Strategy, Transport for London (Item 13)
Gabriel Barton	RMT (Item 13)

Secretariat

Tim Bellenger	Director, Policy & Investigation
Janet Cooke	Chief Executive
Richard Freeston-Clough	Communications Officer
Susan James	Casework Manager (Item 13)
Sharon Malley	Executive Assistant
Vincent Stops	Policy Officer (VS)
Chris Wise	Policy Officer (CW)

Minutes

1 Chair's introduction and pre-meeting announcements

The Chair welcomed those present to the meeting and made standard safety announcements.

2 Apologies for absence

There were no apologies for absence.

3 Declarations of interest

There were no declarations of interest in addition to the standing declarations available on London TravelWatch's website.

4 Minutes

The minutes of the Policy committee on 15 December 2015 were agreed and signed as a correct record, subject to the following amendment: In Item 5, it was the Chair and not the Director, Policy and Investigation, who would write to the Transport Minister.

5 Matters arising (PC072)

The Director, Policy and Investigation, said that the Transport Minister had agreed that it would be useful for information on right time arrivals to be broken down between peak and off-peak periods and that an app was in development. It was agreed that the Chair of London TravelWatch would reply and would link the concept to the National Rail performance report and the need to obtain better performance information. This should also include London TravelWatch's list of achieved outcomes.

Action: Director, Policy and Investigation

It was noted that the Policy Officer (KB) had investigated the existence of alternative crowding measures but had not been able to find any new sources of data. She would continue to check for new measures and would incorporate them as available.

It was noted that Govia Thameslink Railway had asked Network Rail to provide disaggregated data about its three main services and that London TravelWatch would also like performance information to be disaggregated. The Chief Executive said it was difficult to obtain this information from the Office of Rail and Road. It was agreed that this issue would be included in the letter to the Minister.

Action: Director, Policy and Investigation

6 Key activities (PC080)

The Director, Policy and Investigation, reported that the South East Quadrant task force, chaired by the Minister for Transport, had been a lively discussion about the performance of Southern Rail, with many members of Parliament attending for the whole duration of the meeting. The operator and Network Rail gave presentations about the franchise and many MPs representing constituencies in the Southern franchise area voiced strong concerns.

The Director, Policy and Investigation, said that the meeting with Network Rail's long term capacity planning team had been to look at issues likely to affect the Kent route 15 to 20 years in the future. It enabled the beginning of planning of interventions that would be needed to cope with demand. The Policy Officer (RN) said that he had shared London TravelWatch's long-term aspirations for the London end of the route.

The Chief Executive said that the meeting with London Overground had covered issues including performance and recent reductions in passenger satisfaction, relations with Network Rail, rolling stock and preparations for the next concession period. It was important that London Overground did not adopt a scorched earth approach to the end of its franchise.

It was noted that there would be planned blockades of the Overground later in the year. The Director, Policy and Investigation, said that TfL would be signposting to alternative transport routes and that journeys should not cost more but could take longer. It was agreed that London TravelWatch should consider this in more detail at a future meeting.

Action: Executive Assistant

The Director, Policy and Investigation, clarified that the meeting with the Royal Society for Public Health had been via phone rather than in person.

He also said that the meeting described as being with Peter Bradley had actually taken place with Mark Evers and been attended by the Policy Officer (CW) with the Director, Policy and Investigation, calling in via phone.

The Director, Policy and Investigation, confirmed that London TravelWatch had responded the Which? supercomplaint about problems experienced by passengers when claiming compensation.

It was noted that Ruth Thompson and Richard Dilks had both attended the Centre for London event on rail devolution although Richard Dilks did not attend in his London TravelWatch capacity.

7 Survey of bus users (PC081)

The Chair welcomed Ben Plowden, Director of Surface Strategy and Transport, and Peter Bradley, Head of Consultation, both from Transport for London, to the meeting.

The Policy Officer (VS) presented an interim report on bus passenger priorities and trust in operators. He said that the report updated a 2010 survey on bus

passenger priorities and set out the most interesting findings. More work and commentary would be produced when the final version of the report was published.

The Policy Officer (VS) said that 87% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that bus services were important to their area. This was an important message that London TravelWatch should continue to stress. Overall, the findings generally were positive.

Members asked whether bus passengers had raised complaints about short-turning. The Director, Policy and Investigation, said that this had not been raised, which may be down to the design of the survey. The Policy Officer (VS) said that passengers did ask for fewer cancellations.

Peter Bradley said that buses were only curtailed when absolutely essential. IBus information allowed TfL to review data on how often buses failed to complete their planned routes and schedules were continually reviewed to improve reliability. Curtailing routes led to bus companies completing reduced mileage, which was closely monitored by TfL.

Mr Bradley said that drivers were trained to allow passengers who appeared unsteady on their feet to sit before driving off. However, it was important to strike a balance as waiting too long would lead to delays on the route. Training focused on giving drivers the skills to make good judgements.

The Chief Executive said that there was no current definition of what constituted a bus station and no minimum standards for bus stations. Leon Daniels, the Managing Director of Surface Transport at TfL, had indicated a willingness to investigate this. Members noted that they had visited White City bus station and information provision had been very poor. The Chief Executive said London TravelWatch was keen to be involved in discussions about bus station standards for passengers.

The Policy Officer (VS) said that bus performance was declining as a result of increased traffic levels, reductions in carriageway space for motor vehicles and a reduction in ability to enforce against illegal parking in bus lanes. Mr Plowden said that congestion was a serious concern and that long term solutions such as tunnels or pricing would need to be considered. Congestion was also worsening as a result of current works but this would hopefully be temporary.

Members asked whether bus ridership levels were changing. Mr Plowden said that levels were beginning to soften and that on routes affected by serious congestion, such as at the Elephant and Castle gyratory, there was evidence that ridership was reducing. He said that some of the biggest highway schemes should be completed in the next three to four months and the network should settle to its new normal levels. Mr Plowden said that people who had shifted from the bus were moving to walking, cycling, tube and rail. There was no evidence that they had shifted to using cars.

In response to questions about bus priority, Mr Plowden said that TfL had done work to identify pinch points for the bus network and was putting mitigation measures in place. More substantial work was planned for 2016-17.

The Policy Officer (VS) asked whether active traffic management schemes, in which cars were held at signals in outer London to reduce congestion in the centre, had an impact on bus services. Mr Plowden said he thought that the net effect would be small.

A member noted that it may be worthwhile to rethink the bus network more generally and look at whether it was currently fit for purpose. Mr Bradley said that people made housing and employment decisions based on existing bus routes and making changes could disadvantage people. He wanted to take an evolutionary approach. However, he would look at changes to the network following the introduction of Crossrail and other significant transport initiatives.

In response to a question, Mr Plowden said that pedestrianisation of Oxford Street was a priority for both Labour and Conservative mayoral candidates. He noted that Crossrail would have a fundamental impact on travel patterns in the Oxford Street area.

Mr Bradley said that every bus route was surveyed every five years to obtain data about passenger numbers and destinations. In addition, Oyster card data shed light on travel patterns so that it was possible to get a good feel for where and when routes were at their busiest.

8 London road and bus safety (PC083)

The Policy Officer (VS) presented a report on road and bus safety. He said that there had been a general reduction in the number of people killed and seriously injured on roads over the last 25 years. He said he hoped to obtain funding to investigate the rate of injuries occurring in relation to buses, which was an area where London TravelWatch could add real value.

Mr Bradley said that TfL's major concern was that vulnerable road users – motorbike riders, cyclists and pedestrians – now formed a very high proportion of those killed or seriously injured because the other modes had become much safer. TfL was looking at ways of addressing the sources of danger, such as driver inattention.

On the issue of seeking funding for research into bus safety, members noted that London TravelWatch was well placed to view this from the perspective of passengers and that research might reveal any element of under-reporting. The research should look at both bus safety and the perception of safety. It was agreed that London TravelWatch would seek this funding.

Action: Policy Officer (VS)

9 Gyrotories systems update (PC084)

The Policy Officer (VS) said that London TravelWatch had called for an end to gyrotories in 2012 and this position was now largely accepted. Many gyrotories had now been reviewed and some had been or would be replaced. He noted, however, that the driving force for review was often regeneration rather than transport. London TravelWatch needed to continue to highlight the potential transport benefits to replacement of some gyrotories.

It was agreed that not all gyratories should be removed and that decisions should be taken on a case by case basis. For example, some gyratories had contraflow bus lanes and might be better left alone. The recommendation in the report would be amended to reflect the support for removal of gyratories when it was in the interests of bus users, pedestrians and cyclists.

10 Transport for London performance report (PC085)

The Policy Officer (VS) presented a report on the performance of TfL modes. He noted that there was a delay in obtaining information from TfL about the performance of TfL Streets. Leon Daniels had promised to provide the data within six weeks of the end of each quarter but this was not generally happening. Mr Bradley said he would look into this on London TravelWatch's behalf.

11 National Rail performance report (PC086)

The Director, Policy and Investigation, reported on London TravelWatch's assessment of National Rail performance for the period October to December 2015. He said that the performance of Govia Thameslink Railway (GTR) and other Go Ahead franchises was poor.

The TfL Rail franchise between Liverpool Street to Shenfield was performing well and its performance was markedly increased since being taken over by TfL. The improved performance was achieved using the same rolling stock and timetables but with greater focus on right time departures, more staff on platforms to manage passenger flows, better management of incidents and improved management of the relationship with Network Rail. The improved performance of this franchise had been achieved without detriment to other rail operators.

The Chief Executive noted that the leaders of Crossrail MTR and London Overground had a culture of attention to detail and high expectations. In addition, their franchises included financial incentives to focus on issues of importance to passengers. This led to significant improvements in performance. The culture at the top of GTR appeared different and problems often seemed to be blamed on outside factors rather than issues within its own control. It was important that GTR be held to account over its performance.

The Director, Policy and Investigation, highlighted issues relating to the c2c franchise, which had introduced timetable changes in December. The change resulted in more services stopping at stations such as West Ham, to accommodate the increasing number of passengers who travelled to Canary Wharf and Stratford rather than Fenchurch Street. This led to significant overcrowding on some parts of the route as services were being used for increased numbers of local journeys. In response, some services were withdrawn from some inner London stations, which generated a large number of complaints. The position was still under review by c2c and members welcomed their attempts to respond to changing passenger demand.

12 Casework report (PC087)

The Casework Manager presented a report on performance related to casework for the period October to December 2015. She said it had been a challenging period and the casework team had not been able to exceed targets as they usually did. The team had accommodated an increase in contacts by the public, the updating of the complaints database system and extra work required by two ticket office closure consultations. She said she had reviewed the data closely but could not find any single explanation for the increase in contacts.

Members welcomed the work of the casework team to maintain performance during this busy period. Members noted that it would be useful to revise the passenger feedback questionnaire in order to obtain better data about passengers' experience of using London TravelWatch's services. Members also suggested formalising the measurement of outcomes so that outcomes for passengers could be categorised as, for example, satisfactory or good.

The increase in phone contacts was creating additional workload for the casework team but many of the calls did not relate to casework. Officers were considering ways of improving the management of phone calls, such as reducing the number of open lines on incoming calls. It was important that the quality of London TravelWatch's response to phone calls was at least as good as that called for from transport operators. It was agreed that this would be reviewed again in future.

Action: Executive Assistant

13 Ticket office closure consultations (PC088, PC089)

The Policy Officer (CW) presented a report on various consultations undertaken by London TravelWatch about proposed changes to rail ticket offices. In relation to the Great Western Railway (GWR) consultation, he said that all the proposed changes related to periods when transaction levels were lower than 12 per hour, except at Langley and Slough. GWR had now withdrawn the proposals relating to those two stations. The Chief Executive said that London TravelWatch considered a range of issues before reaching its views on ticket office closures, including transaction levels, local concerns and issues specific to the location.

In relation to GTR, the Policy Officer (CW) said that the proposals were for reductions at 81 stations and London TravelWatch proposed to carry out consultation on this.

Gabriel Barton from the RMT said that the train operator had made errors in the consultation by putting up posters that did not refer to London TravelWatch. The Director, Policy and Investigation, said that the posters had been withdrawn immediately he brought it to the attention of the GTR lead officer. It was agreed to be important that the consultation was carried out correctly and with full co-operation of GTR.

The Director, Policy and Investigation said GTR had now given London TravelWatch formal notice of its proposals and the consultation period was underway. It was agreed that London TravelWatch would allocate resources to support a full consultation as this was an important issue for passengers.

It was agreed that the Director, Policy and Investigation, would review this further to ensure that GTR's posters and website were correct and to confirm the consultation dates. The outcome of the consultation would be considered at a future meeting.

Action: Director, Policy and Investigation

The Policy Officer (CW) said London Underground was proposing the closure of ticket offices at the former Silverlink stations. This item had originally been intended for the confidential session but a response had now been received from TfL and it was appropriate to consider it in public.

The Policy Officer (CW) said London TravelWatch had received a lot of objections to the proposals and a handful in support. Many objectors had assumed that ticket office closure would lead to absence of staff in the stations, which was not the case.

The Policy Officer (CW) outlined the mitigations TfL had offered, which included keeping ticket offices open until new ticket machines were installed. They also proposed a monitoring period of two months following the installation of the machines at stations where transaction levels were higher than 12 per hour to see whether they reduced below the threshold.

Mark Evers, Director of Customer Strategy at TfL, said that London TravelWatch had supported TfL in understanding passengers' concerns. He said that the closure of ticket offices in other Underground stations had led to an increase in passenger satisfaction and he hoped the mitigation measures offered in this case would allow London TravelWatch to support the proposals.

The Director, Policy and Investigation, said that since the closure of most other ticket offices on the Underground there had been an increase in levels of ticketless travel and also a shift to ticket sales at National Rail ticket offices.

The Chief Executive said that passengers continued to equate ticket offices with staffing and TfL should do more to make people aware that staff would still be available following the closure of the offices.

Gabriel Barton said the RMT had submitted a detailed response to the consultation. He said that the union was sceptical about the ability of ticket machines to fulfil all the services currently provided by staff and that there had been difficulties in this area at other stations with closed ticket offices.

It was agreed that officers would proceed with work on these consultations in line with comments agreed at the meeting.

Action: Director, Policy and Investigation

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 discussed casework signposting and complaint handling protocols and also reviewed financial or reputational risks posed by the meeting.