
Minutes

Agenda item: 5
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Minutes of the Policy Committee meeting held on 16 June 2015 at 169 Union Street, London SE1 0LL

Contents

- 1 Chair's introduction and pre-meeting announcements**
- 2 Apologies for absence**
- 3 Declarations of interest**
- 4 Minutes**
- 5 Matters arising (PC055)**
- 6 Key activities (PC056)**
- 7 Rail issues update (PC057)**
- 8 National Rail performance report (PC058)**
- 9 Transport for London performance report (PC059)**
- 10 Casework report (PC060)**
- 11 Feedback questionnaire report (PC061)**
- 12 Resolution to move into confidential session**

Present

Members

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

Secretariat

Keletha Barrett	Policy Officer (KB)
Tim Bellenger	Director, Policy & Investigation
Janet Cooke	Chief Executive
Richard Freeston-Clough	Communications Officer
Sharon Malley	Executive Assistant
Robert Nichols	Policy Officer and Safety Adviser (RN)
Vincent Stops	Policy Officer (VS)

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

Apologies were received from Chris Brown.

3 Declarations of interest

There were no additional declarations of interest.

4 Minutes

The minutes of the Policy committee on 24 February 2015 were agreed and signed as a correct record.

5 Matters arising (PC055)

It was agreed London TravelWatch should continue to press the Association of Train Operating Companies (ATOC) to ensure that the National Rail Enquiries website showed more clearly when Oyster fares could be cheaper than National Rail fares. The action should remain on the Matters Arising report until progress had been made.

Action: Director, Policy and Investigation/Executive Assistant

It was agreed that London TravelWatch should continue to press the Office of Rail and Road (ORR) for more detailed information about performance of rail services in peak hours as opposed to throughout the day.

Action: Policy Officer

6 Key activities (PC056)

Members welcomed the report and noted that it displayed the extensive amount of work that officers were undertaking on behalf of transport users in London. Members asked questions about some of the meetings listed in the report.

The Policy Officer (RN) said that the meeting with the ORR had led to a further meeting about performance statistics, including discussion on what information was confidential and what could be made public.

The Chief Executive said that the meeting with Gatwick Airport had been about surface transport access to the airport, as this was within London TravelWatch's remit.

In relation to the meeting with London Councils, the Director, Policy and Investigation, said that it had considered general rail policy, ticketing, compensation arrangements, and bus and cycle policy.

The Policy Officer (RN) said that the meeting with TfL about closures had been a regular briefing meeting to discuss blockades, weekend engineering works and planned closures.

The Chair of London TravelWatch said he had given evidence to the London Assembly on devolution of rail services to the Mayor of London and the quality of questioning by the Assembly members had been excellent. It was agreed that officers would circulate the web link to the session as the contributions from Kent County Council were particularly interesting.

The Director, Policy and Investigation, said that Transport Focus was undertaking a piece of work on whether passenger charters were valuable to users and he had met the researcher to pass on London TravelWatch's views. The Casework Manager said this was a difficult area as the ORR was seeking to move charters to a voluntary system but Transport Focus and London TravelWatch preferred a mandatory arrangement. She said that charters had become dry and that operators had a tendency to use them as a place to 'dump' contractual information, which could be problematic as operators should not seek to conceal important information. She was uncertain about what the outcome of the review would be.

7 Rail issues update (PC055)

The Chair welcomed John Gill, infrastructure services director at Network Rail, to the meeting. The Director, Policy and Investigation, said that recent performance of Southern and Thameslink networks had been poor and that London TravelWatch's report set out some of the causes such as problems with the London Bridge station redevelopment and shortages of drivers.

Mr Gill said that performance since Christmas had clearly been unsatisfactory and there was a need to improve customer experience at London Bridge station. He had been appointed as the single point of contact for issues relating to London Bridge and was hoping to halt the cycle of decline. There would be more staff available at the station and they would be identifiable by their magenta tabards. There would be information points and wifi for staff. He did not underestimate the challenges over the next 15-18 months, with platform narrowness meaning large crowds were difficult to manage. He said Network Rail was now able to use its database of stakeholders to get messages to commuters about disruption before they left work so they could make informed choices about travelling home.

Mr Gill said that Network Rail acknowledged that its modelling about the impact of works at London Bridge had been incorrect. Network Rail had now engaged separate security teams and assessed crowding and crowd management to avoid problems of congestion.

Members asked Mr Gill whether there had been no individual named point of contact prior to his appointment. Mr Gill said that it had previously been a more junior position that had been responsible for four stations in total.

Mr Gill said that Network Rail had reconfigured its network so that signallers and drivers now understood the layout better. But there was major engineering work planned at weekends and during holidays and it would be important for this to run to schedule as it involved removing track so had a significant impact if it overran.

Members asked whether the network was adequately resilient as even small, seemingly isolated incidents appeared to have knock-on effects on large sections of the network. Mr Gill said that the network was hugely complicated so there were impacts across a wide area when anything went wrong. He said Network Rail was trying to make the network as resilient as possible and to communicate better with

passengers. Train operators had traditionally viewed this as their role but Mr Gill thought Network Rail should communicate with passengers as well.

Members noted that Network Rail frontline staff did not always seem to have up to date information about disruption. Mr Gill hoped that this was improving with more focus on improving information flow between central control rooms and frontline staff. He hoped to be able to introduce full wifi coverage at London Bridge and Euston stations to assist with this.

The Chief Executive said that she believed that Network Rail could access plasma advertising screens in stations during periods of major disruption and this was welcomed. She asked about future projects such as linking the national control room to the Three Bridges control room to improve co-ordination, introducing a 'blue light' system to get spares to disruption sites quickly and creating an extra line through the Bricklayers Arms junction. Mr Gill said that if projects such as these were to be brought forward it would need to be at the expense of something else already planned.

In relation to failures at London Bridge caused by inaccurate modelling, Mr Gill said that Network Rail was looking at all aspects of passenger behaviour including management of angry passengers and improved staff training. He hoped Network Rail would learn from London Underground's approach.

Mr Gill said it would be useful to join the national control room at Milton Keynes with local centres such as the one at Three Bridges to assess how local incidents affected stations beyond the local area.

The Chair thanked Mr Gill for attending and contributing to the debate.

8 National Rail performance report (PC058)

The Policy Officer (KB) presented London TravelWatch's report on the performance of National Rail for the period January to March 2015. She said that the overall public performance measure had improved and that the report showed comparisons with the previous quarter and the same quarter one year ago.

The Policy Officer said that Chiltern's higher complaints figures were because they included delay repay data, unlike other operators. It was also noted that if passengers were aware that a particular train operator was generally poorly performing they would not bother to complain, which would give the operator a falsely enhanced complaints profile. Different train operator demographics would also alter the pattern of complaints by passengers.

Members noted that Southern continued to perform badly in comparison with other operators. The Chief Executive said that it was useful for London TravelWatch to be able to take part in the alliance meetings between operators and Network Rail in order to challenge from the passenger perspective, which she viewed as a sign that train operators were seeking to improve services.

9 Transport for London performance report (PC059)

The Policy Officer (VS) presented London TravelWatch's report on Transport for London's performance from October to December 2014. He said that the delay in publishing the report was due to lateness of receiving information on the performance of TfL Streets. Leon Daniels, the Managing Director for Surface Transport, had promised to improve turnaround times for this data in future.

The Policy Officer said that he had been asked to propose performance measures to better reflect passenger priorities for buses, such as measuring bus speeds or overcrowding and work was progressing on this. He hoped to be able to report overall lost customer hours on TfL's transport services in the next report.

The Policy Officer said that TfL's rail functions had performed well over the quarter but the performance of streets was disappointing. This had led to a knock-on deterioration in bus performance. The Policy Officer was concerned that TfL did not appear to be taking seriously enough the worsening trend in bus performance.

Satisfaction with Dial a Ride's booking service for ad hoc rides remained poor. The Policy Officer said that Leon Daniels had prioritised this area and he thought progress was being made.

It was agreed that London TravelWatch should write to Transport for London to set out its concerns in relation to bus performance.

Action: Director, Policy and Investigation

10 Casework report (PC060)

The Casework Manager presented a report on the performance of transport operators in responding to casework for the period January to March 2015. She said that it had been a difficult period as there had been a sudden spike in the number of cases received at the same time as the casework database was out of action for a period while being upgraded.

Members noted that TfL appeared to compare favourably with the train operators in relation to the length of time it took to respond to casework. It was noted that the response time was an average and that if an operator had only a small number of cases, it was easy for one or two lengthy cases to skew the average.

Members noted that some cases were lengthy because they were complicated and operators were trying to find a solution for passengers. However, some cases were lengthy because operators did not respond quickly enough. Members offered to write to any operators whose response times were becoming unsatisfactory.

The Casework Manager set out some of the issues causing casework, including disagreements over compensation payments, replacement bus services, and a case in which a train operator confiscated a season ticket because the passenger was not carrying a photocard.

She said that the Metropolitan underground line ran to a timetable, unlike other underground lines, and was therefore subject to the delay repay compensation

scheme. However, the current system did not issue automatic refunds for passengers.

The Casework Manager said that a passenger had complained that an absence of pink Oyster readers at some stations meant he could not touch in to prove he had not travelled via Zone 1. The Director, Policy and Investigation, said that some operators were concerned about potential fraudulent use of the pink readers and that there was also some complexity about the best location to site them. The Chief Executive said that London TravelWatch had had some success in relation to pink readers at Clapham Junction station and this might be something to take forward in relation to other stations.

11 Feedback questionnaire report (PC061)

The Casework Manager said that the recent increase in the number of cases received meant that sending feedback questionnaires to complainants at the conclusion of their cases had not been a priority. This had led to a decline in the number of returns.

She said that she was trying to increase the reach of the questionnaire through the use of electronic responses. Members discussed whether leaving a gap of several weeks before sending the feedback questionnaire reduced the response rate and whether it would be better to send the questionnaire immediately.

Members agreed that it would be important in future to try to raise the response rate above the current level, including exploring different ways to reach respondents. The Chief Executive said that the next year's business plan would include a review of the feedback questionnaire process.

12 Any other business

Members noted that roadworks in south London relating to the Cycle Super Highway installation were creating reliability and safety concerns for bus users in the area. It was agreed that London TravelWatch would write to TfL to set out concerns and seek clarification on timescales.

Action: Director, Policy and Investigation

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 discussed current issues facing transport users and updates relating to casework and also reviewed financial or reputational risks posed by the meeting.