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**Minutes**

Agenda item: 5  
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**Minutes of the Policy Committee meeting held on 20 March 2018**

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**Present**

Members

Jackie Ballard, Alan Benson, Richard Dilks, Glyn Kyle, Arthur Leathley, John Stewart (Chair)

In attendance

Chris Vinson                      Senior External Communications Manager, Southeastern Railway (Item 4)

Secretariat

|                         |                                       |
|-------------------------|---------------------------------------|
| Keletha Barrett         | Policy Officer                        |
| Tim Bellenger           | Director, Policy & Investigation      |
| Gytha Chinweze          | Governance Officer                    |
| Janet Cooke             | Chief Executive                       |
| Richard Freeston-Clough | Operations and Communications Manager |
| Susan James             | Casework Manager                      |
| Vincent Stops           | Policy Officer                        |

## **Minutes**

### **1 Apologies for absence and declarations of interest**

Apologies for absence had been received from Abdi Osman.

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

### **2 Chair's introduction and pre-meeting announcements**

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

### **3 Minutes**

The minutes of the Policy Committee of 19 December 2017 were agreed and signed as a correct record.

### **4 Passengers stranded on trains in south east London on 2 March 2018**

The Chair welcomed Chris Vinson, Senior External Communications Manager (Southeastern), to the meeting. The Chief Executive introduced the item by saying that passengers had been stranded for a period of over four hours on 2 March 2018 in south east London and there had been a lot of disruption. She had contacted Southeastern who had given her as much information as they had available at the time. She said Southeastern had freely acknowledged that the situation had been awful for passengers. They had commissioned a review and invited London TravelWatch to comment.

The Chief Executive said that she had attended a quarterly meeting with Arriva Rail London on 7 March at which she had been informed that they had evacuated 30 passengers from a stranded train in Crystal Palace. It had been a relatively straight forward evacuation. She had sent information about this to members as background information.

Chris Vinson said that he had updated the information on the disruption at Lewisham, given previously at a meeting attended by the Chief Executive on 5 March. He said what happened was the result of unusual easterly winds which brought extremely cold air, causing heavy snow, freezing rain and sub-zero temperatures which then had an impact across the network.

Chris Vinson said that in week commencing 26 February, it had been forecast that there would be severe weather. Southeastern put out contingency plans for this to improve its resilience. He said that Network Rail had run specialist snow and ice treatment trains across the network and "Ghost trains" had run overnight to keep rails clear of ice. They had attached heaters and insulation to points and conductor rails to reduce the risk of freezing and carried out snow clearance at stations. He

said that they had also lengthened trains to increase the resilience of the power supply from the conductor rail in icy conditions to prevent trains from getting stranded because of loss of power.

Chris Vinson said that Southeastern had used all available information channels to keep passengers updated and to provide travel advice including 24/7 Twitter, on train announcements, platform announcements and information screens, passenger database update emails, station posters, proactive broadcast media interviews, stakeholder updates, regular proactive media statements and GSM-R (remote on-train announcements from their Control Centre).

Chris Vinson said that as weather conditions worsened Southeastern agreed with Network Rail to implement a contingency 'Key Route Strategy' plan from Wednesday 28 February to Saturday 3 March which aimed to focus their combined resources on ensuring a more reliable train service. This strategy included an amended timetable with fewer services, no trains on selected routes, trains not calling at some stations, replacement buses where road conditions allowed them to run safely and speed restrictions.

Chris Vinson said that on Friday 2 March there was a forecast of significant snowfall and freezing rain. Southeastern issued "Do not travel" advice to passengers. In the morning, 21 trains lost power and became stranded in East Kent. Freezing rain caused severe ice on conductor rails and a snow drift at Lenham blocked the line.

Chris Vinson said that all stranded trains were rescued by early afternoon. However, freezing rain continued and the lines in East Kent were impassable by mid-afternoon. As freezing rain headed west into London, the Sidcup line was closed because of ice. Nine trains were stranded at Lewisham after trains blocked lines due to ice and there were multiple self-evacuations by passengers. The tracks were cleared and all trains were moving to their original destinations by 10pm.

Chris Vinson showed a timeline of the disruption in the Lewisham area which explained that the incident began at 17:40hrs and ended at 21:36hrs. He said unauthorised self-evacuations occurred seven times; the tracks were cleared and were ready to go on five different occasions but trains were delayed each time by passengers self-evacuating onto tracks.

Chris Vinson showed members three maps of the locations of nine stranded trains and the trains not at the platform; the five locations where the unauthorised passenger self-evacuations occurred and the area where power was lost, covering stations from East Nunhead to Blackheath and New Cross to Ladywell.

Members asked Chris Vinson why passengers had not been evacuated by staff. He said that they had looked at different options but the weather conditions and lack of power had made this difficult. He said that the options would have been to get another train to tow the broken down train or evacuate to another train either behind or alongside a broken down train but there was no power to do this. The final option would have been to use an evacuation ladder which would take approximately 10 seconds per passenger to evacuate. With the numbers of passengers on the trains this would have taken one to two hours. It would have

required staff to man the ladders, help people on to the platform and guide them out.

Chris Vinson said that Southeastern had announced an independent investigation into the disruption, in partnership with Network Rail. The interim findings will be announced by the end of March, with a full report planned for the end of April. The Rail Accident Investigation Board (RAIB) had been notified, in line with normal procedure.

He said that Southeastern was offering double 'Delay Repay' compensation to passengers disrupted from the Tuesday to Friday; additional compensation was available for those stranded on trains on Friday.

Chris Vinson said that a normal Sunday service was running from 4 March and a normal weekday timetable was running from Monday 5 March. He said, however, that the damage to the fleet as a result of ice and snow meant that whilst most of the trains are running, they are more fragile than they would usually be. This could mean occasional short-formed services and the potential for cancellations over the coming weeks. He said the recent bad weather did not cause additional damage to the trains.

Chris Vinson said that he completely understood that the conditions were very poor and uncomfortable for passengers and apologised for this.

Members asked how many passengers self-evacuated or were properly evacuated.

Chris Vinson said that he did not know the numbers as they came from individual trains and were not guided to the stations. He said it was a minority of passengers and that most passengers followed the request to remain on board the trains. He said one train that was close to the station was evacuated when it became obvious that a number of passengers had got off. People with mobility issues and luggage were advised to stay on the train. He said that that the best option was always to keep people on trains.

Members asked what communications was like on the trains and whether staff had the ability to make announcements on trains.

Chris Vinson said that as long as they had power, staff made announcements. He said the P.A. system works for a period of time depending on how much battery life it has. He said some passengers were happy but others did not get as much information as they would have liked. He said that the frustration for passengers was that they were not getting any new information or information about when they were going to be getting out of the trains. He said that all the drivers on the trains communicated with passengers throughout the incident; whether it was enough and the tone was right will be looked at in the coming investigation.

The Director, Policy and Investigation, said that the information on Twitter was not very good.

Chris Vinson in response said Southeastern were the first to introduce a Twitter function with Network Rail and Southeastern staff. He said they had over 175,000 followers and it was very popular with passengers. At the height of the disruption

they had nearly 10,000 tweets, which was a ten-fold increase on a normal weekday and they were unable to respond to each one individually.

In response to a question about whether people had been blocked on Twitter, Chris Vinson said that on the whole their team are, by nature, thick skinned; that there are terms of use for people who engage with social media; only a minority of passengers use abusive behaviour and only these would be blocked if necessary, because of their duty of care to staff.

A member asked how much information is shared within the industry. He said that the (then) Association of Train Operating Companies (ATOC) had produced a 47-page document as a guide for operators in these situations. He asked how often training was carried out and whether it was just a huge tome that people couldn't take in. He asked if there was a contingency plan and how much leeway it had.

Chris Vinson said that Southeastern have a detailed plan. The guideline produced by ATOC are intended as an aspirational document for operators to use to create their own guide. For example, information contained about making the use of the buffet car free of charge is not appropriate for everyone.

Chris Vinson added that all trackside staff have had two years' extensive training on how to deal with an evacuation, especially Network Rail staff who are lead responders.

Members asked if the results of the investigation would be made public.

Chris Vinson said that they would be made public and the Rail Standards and Safety Board (RSSB) will share the outcome with other operators.

The Policy Officer (VS) said that it made some people nervous when train companies put up vinyls on how to evacuate from trains.

Chris Vinson said that advice is important, for example, in circumstances when a train catches fire and that on balance giving people the information is probably sensible but he would pass this on to his colleagues to think about.

A member asked whether most of the trains which were stranded were driver-only trains and whether guards on trains would have made any difference to the situation.

Chris Vinson said that he did not know whether guards would have made a difference. He said that fundamentally the incident was due to the impact of the weather on infrastructure and passengers getting onto the tracks. He said that drivers did go through trains to reset the door systems and talk to passengers but some trains were too busy for them to walk through.

Chris Vinson said that they were looking at everything that could have been done differently and whether they should have run a train service at all.

Chris Vinson confirmed in response to a question from a member that trains were disrupted at 17:40hrs and got going at 21:30hrs making it roughly a four-hour stretch.

The member said that it should have only taken two hours to evacuate the train and that four hours was an exorbitant time for passengers to be on trains without toilets. He said operators have to recognise that passengers have the option to self- evacuate and they can force the hand of operators and get on the tracks. He said keeping people on trains depends on the conditions on the train.

Chris Vinson said with nine trains on 2.5 miles of track, even evacuating two trains at a time, it would have taken five hours to evacuate passengers because of the limited numbers of staff compared to the number of passengers.

Chris Vinson said the operation team made the best decision at the time to keep passengers as safe as possible. He said that four people were treated by the ambulance service because they injured themselves on the track.

A member asked whether the driver could lock the doors to prevent evacuation.

Chris Vinson said he was not sure if they would want to do that.

The Chair thanked Chris Vinson for attending and reminded members that the report will be out in a couple of months.

## **5 Matters arising (PC130)**

The Chief Executive, in response to a question said that Dial-a-Ride had been invited to attend the Policy Committee meeting on 11 September 2018.

## **6 Key activities (PC131)**

It was noted that members would receive an update at the April meeting on the Fares and Ticketing Roundtable event. The Chief Executive said that there was a will for people to push for change and London TravelWatch would facilitate this on a quarterly basis.

Members asked if Govia Thameslink Railway (GTR) was proposing significant changes to its timetable and whether it would be detrimental to passengers.

The Director, Policy and Investigation, said that the timetable changes will probably be the biggest timetable change in the UK and that approximately 20% of trains will have changes to their timetable.

Members asked whether the Executive team was confident that London TravelWatch had done its best to publicise the impact of this on passengers.

The Director, Policy and Investigation, said that he was confident about this. It had been planned over a long period and officers have been able to highlight things that would have been detrimental to passengers and have had those resolved.

Members said it was important to publicise what we have done for passengers, in an appropriate way.

Members asked what progress had been made regarding the bus stop issues at Bromley.

The Policy Officer (VS) said that he had attended a good meeting with Bromley officers who are now in the frame for making their bus stops accessible. The officers had more support for this because of a change in the borough's leadership. The Policy Officer had connected the Bromley officers with Transport for London (TfL).

Members congratulated the Policy Officer (VS) for this progress and for facilitating change through action with targeted boroughs.

They asked whether, given they now had a positive approach to bus stops, there had been a change to advertising boards in the borough.

The Policy Officer (VS) said that there had been no change to this.

Members asked whether there was an outcome from the meeting with Shashi Verma, Chief Technology Officer and Director of Customer Experience, TfL.

The Chief Executive said that it had been a general update meeting.

The Policy Officer (VS) said that he had been very impressed by partnership working between Network Rail and the train operators at the Alliance Board meeting he had recently attended, in place of the Director, Policy and Investigation.

## **7 National Rail performance report (PC132)**

The Policy Officer (KB) presented a report on the performance of National Rail for the period October to December 2017 and highlighted the key trends in the report.

Members congratulated the Policy Officer (KB) and the team on enhancing the quality of the graphs and the narrative of the report.

Members noted that passenger satisfaction for TfL had seen a massive drop even though the numbers of cancellations and right time arrivals had only had small drops in performance. They asked whether it was because people expected a lot more from TfL.

The Policy Officer (KB) said that passengers are used to expecting high standards from TfL and so there is a big drop in satisfaction if anything goes wrong.

Members observed that recently, it was noticeable that a train operator had a high level of cancellations; lots of trains had speeded up on the Thameslink route because stations from North London to the end of the line had been taken out part way through a journey. This had caused passenger confusion because the train changed its calling pattern between Farringdon and Blackfriars and the messages to passengers had been unclear. Members noted overall that adherence to specific timetables were not necessarily important to all passengers, in a 'turn up and go' urban context. They just want to get to where they are going. They asked whether this was reflected in the figures.

The Chair responded that it was hard to pin this down.

Members noted that Gatwick Express and Greater Anglia are consistently under-performing and asked what London TravelWatch could do about this.

The Chief Executive responded that London TravelWatch had been pushing for change for three years and challenging the operators.

The Director, Policy and Investigation, added that the attention London TravelWatch is paying to this is right, and he did not think anything more needed to be done.

## **8 Transport for London performance report (PC133)**

The Policy Officer (VS) presented a report on the performance of Transport for London modes over the period October to December 2017. He said that the team rely on TfL for information to produce the report. He said that the report was an incomplete draft because TfL are no longer producing a stand-alone 'Streets Performance Report'. However, they will still be providing the data and this will be presented for members' consideration when it is available and put on the website.

Members said that they were pleased to see TfL's Board make changes to the way it receives its reports if it means it is more convenient, helpful and streamlined.

### **Action: Policy Officer (VS)**

Members noted that the information so far showed a marked deterioration in journey time reliability on streets which is worrisome.

It was noted that excess waiting time figures for buses were improved and that Transport Commissioner had been emphasising this and a rise in bus journey speeds. The Policy Officer (VS) thought the improvement to waiting times interesting but wondered whether it could be explained, in part, by the change in the way that buses are managed. Passengers were now waiting on the bus rather than at the stop! He believed the traffic commissioner was overstating the improvement of bus speeds and this remains an issue.

The Policy Officer (VS) said he was concerned that TfL had previously downgraded their target for roads in need of repair and we need to understand what is going to happen to maintenance. He stated that not undertaking major road improvement repairs is not sustainable. He said that TfL blames the Government for the lack of funding. This should be a concern for members.

He said that performance of all other modes remained the same as the previous quarter.

The Chief Executive said that her meeting with Shashi Verma led to a useful discussion with the Chairs of the Board and Policy Committee. She had informed them that the Policy Officer (VS) had been invited to attend TfL's weekly meetings with its managers on bus data. Also, a visit had been planned for members to look at some streets to better understand the issues.

Members said that it is important to think about communication provided to passengers if bus stops are closed or moved due to street works. They suggested



that passengers should be allowed to alight at a convenient place for them but this will require flexibility and communication with passengers.

The Policy Officer (VS) said that he understands why passengers are not allowed to get off buses where streets are not designed to let them down and how this must be frustrating for passengers.

The Chief Executive said that bus drivers have been given the discretion to open doors to let people off buses in some instances.

Members said that they need to see the evidence that reduction in maintenance funding is causing deterioration in roads so they can make a case and register their concerns on behalf of passengers as this will inevitably have an impact in London.

The Policy Officer (VS) said that this was not about pot hole repairs but more about major repairs. He said he had asked for a list of those works on streets which have been put on hold.

Members said that sometimes buses wait a couple of minutes at the stop to catch up on the timetable but most people rely on apps not the timetables when they travel.

The Policy Officer (VS) said that passengers were changing their behaviour and using apps more.

The Director, Policy and Investigation, pointed out that in times of disruption, the apps are not real-time and can revert to the scheduled time.

The Chair said that this is a whole new area that members need to keep abreast of, as technology increases, including the numbers of passengers who use these apps.

## **9 Casework performance report (PC134)**

The Casework Manager presented a report on operators' performance in the handling of casework during the period October to December 2017. She said that appeals were getting more complicated and the numbers of appeals are higher this time of the year because of winter and so they take longer to resolve. Some of the issues passengers are coming to the casework team about include constant delays and the cost of tickets.

Members asked whether these complex cases were valid. The Casework manager said it was difficult to know until they had worked out what the issue is and who is responsible.

The Casework manager said that TfL had had issues with staffing changes but are proactive about engaging with the casework team. She said that Board members had been on a visit to TfL's contact centre with the casework team, which had been a big success.

Members asked whether there had been a change to claims for compensation for consequential loss. The Casework Manager said that passengers can claim but at

the moment there was no obligation on the operator to pay; only a court of law can force an operator to act but that depends on circumstances.

In response to a question, the Casework Manager said that the casework team allowed 20 days for the operator to respond and did not chase them until after this date, though operators are generally good at coming back to the casework team.

Members asked whether the issue of passengers not being able to print tickets using their credit card once the card had been re-issued was a big issue. The Casework manager said it was not.

Members thanked staff for the report and for the visit to the TfL contact centre which they said they had found useful.

## **10 Any other business**

The Policy Officer (VS) presented a report on London's bus stations. He said that he had carried out a survey of about 50% of London's bus stations from the largest (Stratford) to the smallest (Chingford). He said the nicest and newest station was West Croydon. He said he looked at the local environment, cleanliness and so on; accessibility; whether information was conventional and real time; signage; levels of management and staffing and other facilities such as seating, toilets, retail, cycle parking, shelter from the weather, greenery and water fountains.

He said that all the bus stations he visited were clean. A few could have been a little better. On the whole, London's bus stations are cleaner and better maintained than its national rail stations.

The Policy Officer said that all of the bus stations he visited were step free – they had appropriate dropped kerbs and tactile paving in the locations one would expect. The kerbs were always at the correct height above the carriageway. He said that only Hounslow West would benefit from two additional dropped kerbs on pedestrian desire lines. There were some signs indicating hearing loops at information kiosks, for example at West Croydon, but this was not universal. He felt that the availability of audio information would benefit everyone.

He said that all of the bus stations he visited had appropriate posters such as spider maps and timetables in the locations one would expect. Legible London posters are posted at some stations, but not all. Some poster sites were positioned at a height that wheelchair users could use, some were a little higher. TfL's bus station Countdown facility is becoming widely available and is located appropriately. He said this is a good improvement and will be welcome. He noted that these systems have their limitations at bus stations where buses start their journeys.

The Policy Officer said that there are some information kiosks at the busier bus stations, but generally the staff member is out and about the bus station. Some kiosks are now closed (Hounslow) or the hours appear to have been cut (Kingston, Fairfield). At a small number of bus stations the P.A. system is shared with the adjacent Underground station. He said help points, Wi-Fi and particularly longline P.A. could potentially fill the gaps where staffing is not feasible and enhance the customer experience.

The Policy Officer said that signage was an area where there was greatest variability in terms of provision. Most bus stations were sufficiently small to have a reasonably intuitive layout and it would not take long to find ones stop. Most bus stations had at least one totem with a London buses roundel. This is an area where there are deficiencies. For example, West Croydon could be improved with a projecting sign or similar to give a better street presence and announce the bus station. Some bus stations had a large bus stop letter and destination served sign from the particular stop. This is useful, particularly for less confident passengers. Legible London mapping on 'infoliths' is available at some bus stations, but not all. At Hounslow, there were Legible London fingerposts. At some bus stations there was directional signing to local landmarks such as to Excel from Canning Town.

In terms of other facilities, the Policy Officer said that every bus station he visited has at least bus shelters and seats. Some were much better with seating in clean, dry, enclosed areas. The larger bus stations had toilet facilities, but at some, notably Stratford, these had been closed and converted to driver-only facilities. There were a good number of retail outlets which is welcome as they provide some level of reassurance. At West Croydon the café was the 'guardian' of the toilet facilities during the day. He said that although there will be limited demand for linked cycle and bus trips it would seem appropriate that where it can be provided, transport land is utilised for cycle parking facilities. The only bus station where any consideration had been given for landscaping, trees and the like was at Shepherd's Bush. He said that this is disappointing given the nature of the land ownership. There were no water fountains at any bus stations but he thought that there should be.

The Policy Officer said that overall London's bus stations are well-managed and provide many of the facilities passengers want. However, there is scope for bringing all up to the best and innovating new ideas. This would improve passenger experience and welcome new and less confident passengers to London's bus services.

He noted that longline P.A. systems in London's bus stations would allow bus passengers to be informed of problems on their services or further along their journey. This, along with hearing loop technology should be a priority for London TravelWatch.

He said destination signage is useful where it is provided and would help, particularly for infrequent passengers. He said Bus station Countdown should be generally installed at appropriate locations in all bus stations. Editable screens that can be updated by control staff would be really helpful.

He said that staffing and an information kiosk will always be welcome, but it is difficult to conceive of the service expanding. There should be strategies to address the lack of staff and information for less frequent and confident passengers at every bus station. Retail should be encouraged wherever possible, though again it will not be universal. Similarly toilet provision should be implemented wherever possible, perhaps in partnership working with local authorities. He added that greenery, proper seating, cycle parking, Wi-Fi and water fountains should form part of the basic infrastructure of London's bus stations because they are important places in their own right.

Members asked whether on street bus interchanges such as Brixton and Elephant and Castle should be considered as bus stations. The Chief Executive suggested

that these could be called dispersed bus stations. Members said that some stations were not laid out in a way that suits passengers, for example Walthamstow and Vauxhall, which appear to be design-driven rather than passenger-driven and this needs to be acknowledged in the report.

Members asked whether there was a plan for rolling out more Countdown facilities. The Policy Officer said that there a plan to do so.

They commented that landscaping has value for non-passengers too and that this report should be used as a campaigning tool for this.

The Policy Officer said that TfL had expressed that it would like to work with London TravelWatch.

The Policy Officer said that he would carry out a few more visits and send an updated report to members. The Chief Executive said that the report would be useful for London TravelWatch's aspirations for the next mayoral term.

**Action: Policy Officer (VS)**

## **11 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 reviewed financial or reputational risks posed by the meeting.