

# **London TravelWatch's response to the London Assembly Transport Committee investigation into the state of London Underground**

**May 2011**

**London TravelWatch** is the official body set up by Parliament to provide a voice for London's travelling public.

Our role is to:

- Speak up for transport users in discussions with policy-makers and the media;
- Consult with the transport industry, its regulators and funders on matters affecting users;
- Investigate complaints users have been unable to resolve with service providers, and;
- Monitor trends in service quality.

Our aim is to press in all that we do for a better travel experience all those living, working or visiting London and its surrounding region.

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## Executive Summary

London TravelWatch welcomes this timely investigation by the London Assembly into the state of London Underground.

London Underground's operational performance has taken a significant downturn in recent quarters, with a number of high profile failures. Passengers are frustrated by this particularly given the amount of resources that have been expended on the upgrade programme and the significant levels of disruption that they have to endure over a significantly long period of time.

Passengers are also frustrated by the current cumbersome methods of compensation paid under the Passengers Charter and would like to move to payment directly either to their Oystercards or the credit/debit cards that they used to buy their ticket.

London TravelWatch recommends that London Underground should :-

set itself more ambitious targets to improve overall customer satisfaction with its services that are seen to be independently monitored and verified.

Make a concerted effort to reduce the need for weekend and evening closures of the network where at all possible.

Improve communications with passengers both on trains and at stations.

Where closures and alterations to passenger access to stations are required that these are accompanied by pre-consultation, extensive passenger communication and provision of information on alternative means of travel.

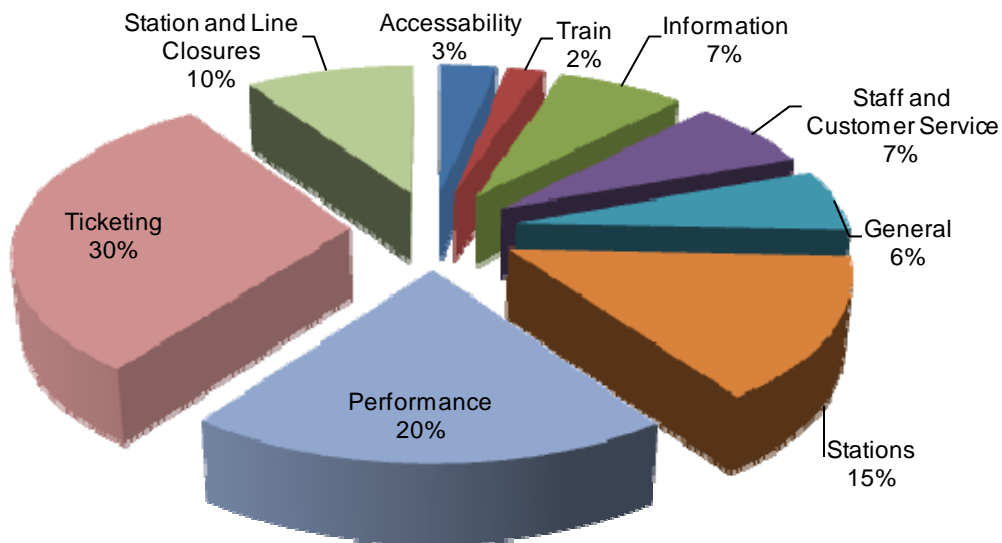
# 1 Introduction

London TravelWatch is the statutory watchdog representing transport users in London.

The London Underground network serves around 3 million passengers per day, which is equivalent to 1.1 billion passenger journeys a year. As such it is a vital component of London’s economy and social fabric. A system which is effective and efficient for passengers is therefore a major component of London’s economic and social well being.

As the statutory appeals body for complaints about London Underground we received 268 out of 3895 appeals which were related to London Underground from January 2010 to January 2011.

**Graph 1 – London TravelWatch London Underground Appeals by Category January 2010 to January 2011**



Graph 1 shows the appeals we have received which are related to London Underground from January 2010 to January 2011. The graph evidently shows that the major issues of appeals we receive from passengers are ticketing and performance. This includes issues such as delays, cancellations, compensation etc. Stations were also a significant issue for appellants regarding station specific appeals about the standard of facilities at stations.

London TravelWatch also collates and publishes quarterly performance monitoring reports of all Transport for London modes including London Underground. These are useful in identifying trends in reliability and also in holding operators to account in respect of the quality and quantity of the services they are providing on behalf of passengers.

Please find below the link to our latest Transport for London quarterly performance monitoring report:

<http://www.londontravelwatch.org.uk/document/13907/get>

In addition London TravelWatch is also consulted by and meets regularly with London Underground on a range of policy and operational matters to represent the interests of passengers.

This submission responds to the questions the Committee has posed in its call for information to the letter of the 19<sup>th</sup> April 2011 regarding the state of London Underground.

## 2 London Underground: priorities for passengers

As part of its ongoing passenger engagement work, London TravelWatch invited Howard Collins, Chief Operating Officer from London Underground, to attend its Board meeting on 22 March 2011. Members of the public were invited to put questions to Mr Collins about the operation of the Underground, with questions on the following subjects being representative of those that were submitted:

- The wording of public address announcements on trains and stations, and the use of the phrase 'good service';
- Concern about ongoing weekend closures of the District and Jubilee lines;
- The need for so many weekend closures, across so much track, on several lines at the same time;
- How staff were deployed at stations and whether staff could be moved to more customer-serving roles;
- Why escalator replacement works take so long, compared to other engineering projects;
- How trains were routed at the eastern end of the Central line;
- How passengers could claim refunds;
- Whether train information at Edgware Road station could be improved;
- Whether there could be better communication about problems on other lines at interchange stations.

From this and other correspondence that we receive from our appeals casework, it is clear that there are **three principle strands of concern amongst London Underground passengers** at present on the operation of the network. These are:

- The performance of the network in normal Monday to Friday operation
- The number and need for weekend and evening closures on the network;
- The means and utility of the different streams of communications with users both before they start their journey and during it.

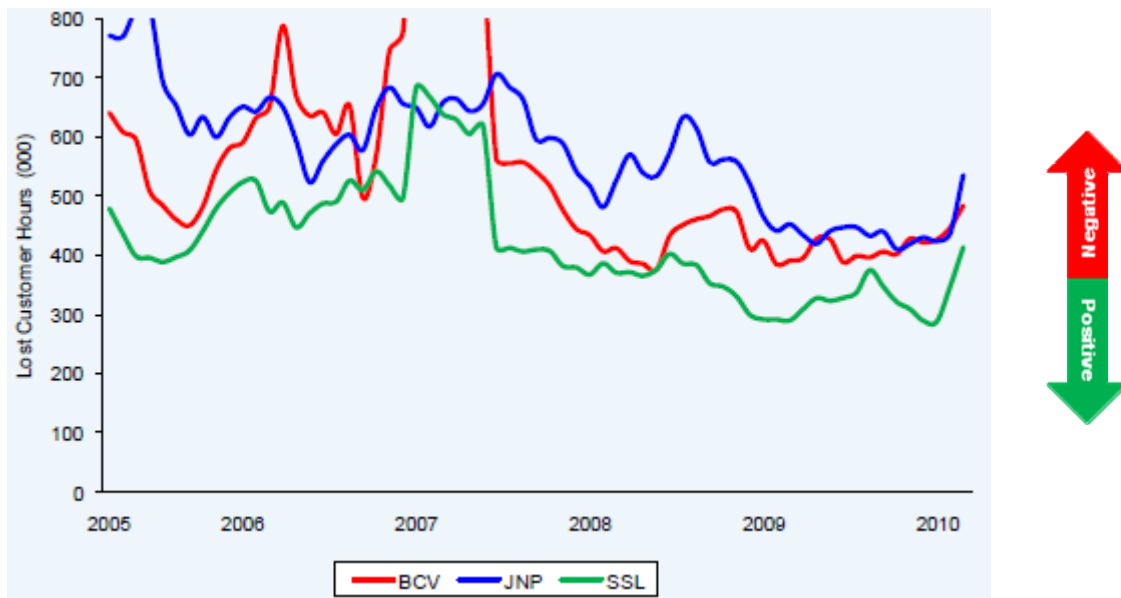
### 3 London TravelWatch’s analysis of London

#### Underground performance

London TravelWatch’s Performance Report monitors whether London Underground infrastructure is available for passenger service. This measure includes periods of planned closure as well as unplanned disruption

The measure counts all service disruptions lasting more than two minutes and takes into account the duration, location and time of day of the disruption to estimate the total cost in terms of customer time. This is expressed as ‘Lost Customer Hours’. This is shown in Graph 1 below this is taken from the Public Private Partnership report. The 6 period rolling average has increased across all lines in the latest period of the third quarter 2010/11 meaning passengers are facing increased disruption to journeys. Higher availability of the infrastructure means lower levels of disruption to passengers.

**Graph 1 - Availability – P8 2010/11 Lost Customer Hours 6 Period Rolling Average<sup>1</sup>**



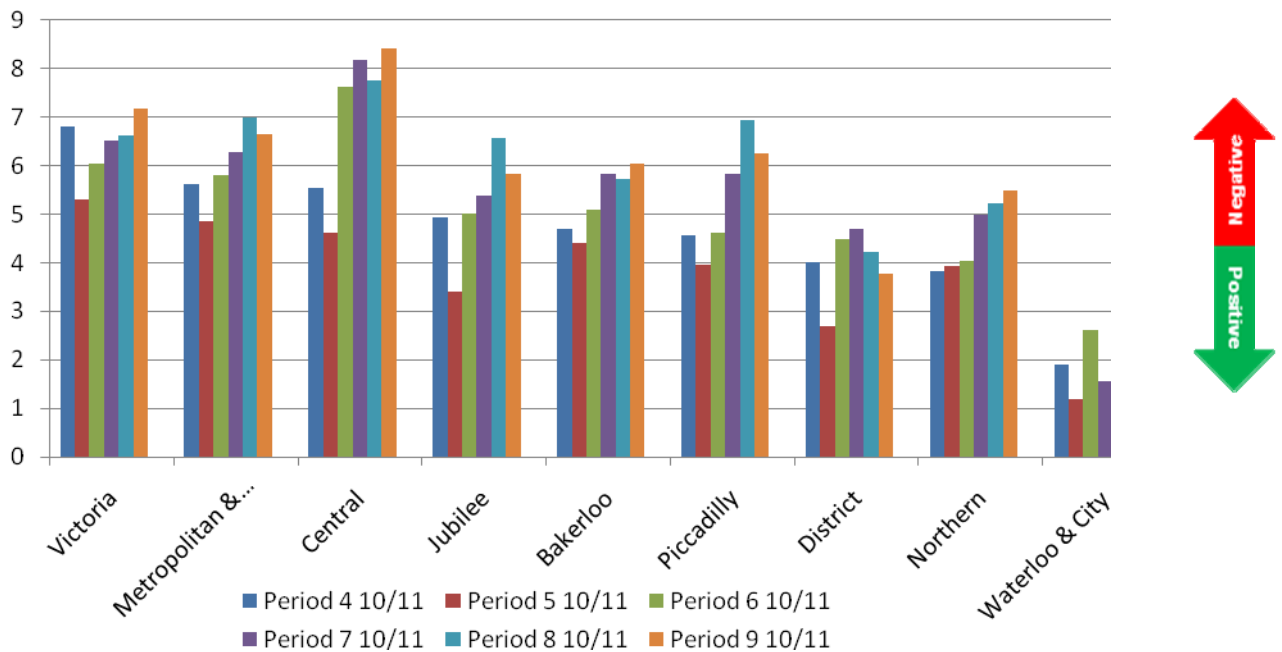
<sup>1</sup> JNP – Jubilee, Northern, Piccadilly lines, SSL – District, Circle, Hammersmith & City and Metropolitan Lines, BCV – Bakerloo, Central and Victoria lines.



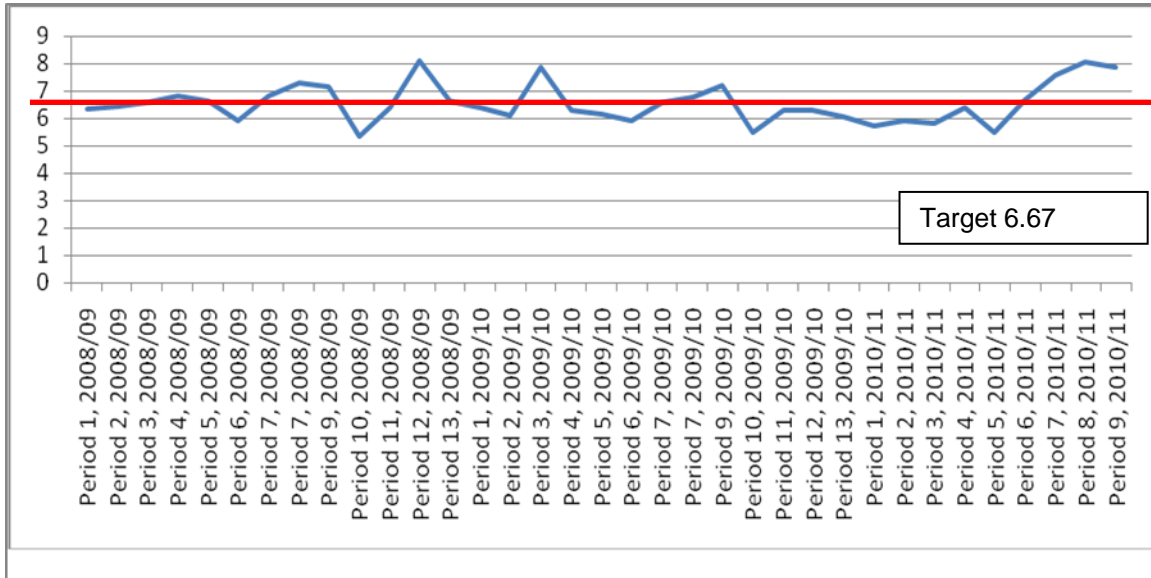
Graph 2 (which is published by Transport for London under London Underground customer metrics) overleaf shows Excess Journey Time (EJT) which measures the number of additional minutes added to a total journey as a result of disruption to the Underground network. This is shown for each line on the Underground network, over the last 6 periods, as well as for the network as a whole which is shown in Graph 3 (extracted by London TravelWatch from London Underground customer metrics). London Underground performed worse than the network target set in the TfL 2010/11 Business Plan. TfL suggests that strike action is the main cause, though record passenger numbers (leading to greater overcrowding at peak times), and asset problems (old equipment failing and new equipment not performing as well as anticipated) contributed to the poor performance.

The network wide score for quarter 3 is poor and is in excess of TfL’s business plan target. Although some of the reasons are outside of the control of the Underground passengers have nevertheless been poorly served. London TravelWatch *sought* (will be seeking) reassurance from Underground management that corrective action *would be* (is being) undertaken.

**Graph 2 – P4 to 9 2010/11, Excess Journey Time by Line in minutes**



**Graph 3 – P1 2008/09 to P9 2010/11, Network Excess Journey Time in minutes**

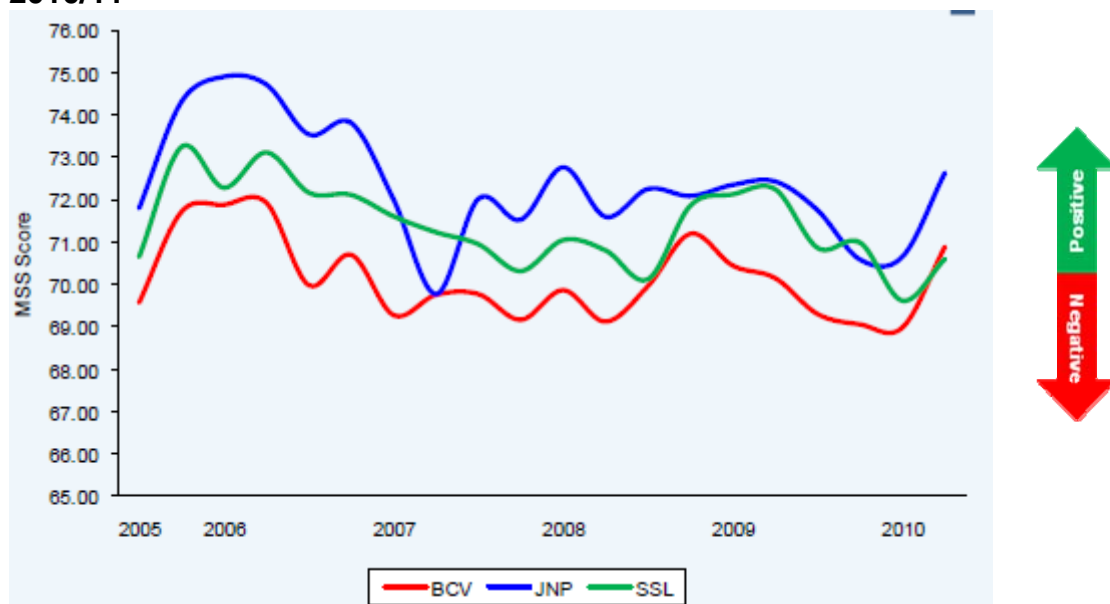


Note: The network wide score is a weighted average that takes account of the fact that 40% of Underground journeys include two wait elements.

Graph 4 shows the ambience measure which reflects the value that passengers place on their travel environment by measuring the quality of the travelling environment on trains and in stations. A quarterly Mystery Shopping Survey (MSS) conducted by an independently-accredited survey organisation assesses various aspects of the service, including the condition of train seats, cleanliness of surfaces and train exteriors and levels of litter and graffiti. This information is published separately in the annual report on the performance of the Public Private Partnership.

Ambience scores have improved on all the LUL ex-PPP contracts in the most recent periods of quarter 3. Only Whitechapel station was below the TfL target.

**Graph 4 - Ambience Quarterly Mystery Shopper Survey (MSS) Score P8 2010/11**



London TravelWatch has been a regular participant in the work of London Underground advisory panel on closures. This panel comprises representatives of passengers and businesses in London. There is also regular officer contact with regard to forward planning of the closures programme. Two examples of where London TravelWatch has been able to successfully influence this programme were the reduction in the proposed evening and weekend closures of the Northern Line in 2010 and the arrangements for the refurbishment of the Victoria Line escalators at Victoria in 2011.

In the case of the Northern Line, under the previous Tube Lines arrangements an extensive programme of early evening and long weekend closures had begun in early 2010. This was the cause of significant passenger complaint – particularly where the alternative augmented bus services did not necessarily function as correctly as they should have done. We took this up with London Underground and they then decided that with a revision to the timing of the work being undertaken the length and scale of the closures could be scaled back considerably whilst at the same time achieving the desired upgrade.

At Victoria in early January 2011, London Underground consulted us on its programme to refurbish the escalators at Victoria which link the main ticket hall with the Victoria line. We advised London Underground that as they stood at the time, the plans for this were inadequate because there was an insufficient communications campaign and resource, the total loss of all ticket issuing facilities between 1600 and 2000 Monday to Friday was unacceptable and that by providing advice on alternative routes and modes that passengers could use overcrowding at the station could be avoided. London Underground took up our

suggestions, and the resulting 40% reduction in usage of Victoria underground station was achieved – far exceeding London Underground’s expectations. So much so, that within two weeks of the works commencing it proved possible to reopen the District line ticket hall ticket office and vending machines between 1600 and 2000 Monday to Friday. In addition, it proved possible to complete the work of refurbishing the first escalator early in time for the Royal wedding on the 29<sup>th</sup> April 2011, such that the station was able to operate normally during this event which produced very large crowds over a sustained period of time. We had specifically asked that London Underground should try and achieve this so as to as to minimise disruption on this day.

In both these cases these results would not have been achieved without the intervention of London TravelWatch, both by channelling passenger concerns received through casework, but also because our in depth know ledge and experience of working across modes enabled us to anticipate passenger requirements.

London TravelWatch also monitors London Underground’s performance at meeting its own targets, as set out in its business plan. According to the most recent figures London Underground met both targets for customer satisfaction and excess journey time. However, the target for scheduled services operated was missed reflecting, in part, the impact of strike action.

**Table 1 – Q3 2010/11 London Underground TfL Business Plan KPIs**

KPI	Target 2010/11	Current Performance Level
Customer Satisfaction – Overall	79	79
Excess Journey Time	6.67 minutes	7.8 minutes
% of Scheduled Services Operated	96.3%	93.3%

It is worth noting that whilst London Underground is currently meeting TfL’s Customer Satisfaction targets overall, and has done so roughly since 2005/06, and a marginal increase in satisfaction is projected in future (to 81 by 2013/14), the targets themselves have largely remained static. This may be realistic given the amount of work being carried out as part of the upgrade, but given the scale of the upgrade it should also not be beyond the bounds of possibility that general customer satisfaction could be improved by more than a few percentage points.

A more challenging target has been set by TfL in relation to Excess Journey Time which requires a reduction from a target in 2011/12 of 6.2 minutes (and a current performance of 7.8 minutes) to 5.6 minutes by 2013/14.

## 4 Outcome of recent meetings with London Underground

At the meeting in March 2011 with London TravelWatch it was said that a confluence of small difficulties had combined to cause a much larger set of difficulties. The root causes of these could be attributed variously to:-

- poor drafting and delivery of contracts under the Public Private Partnership arrangements,
- the Rail Maritime and Transport (RMT) workers overtime ban causing delays to inspections to safety critical components,
- some assets being so elderly that despite previous best efforts at life extension failures becoming more common place and record numbers of passengers turning up to travel.

In addition it was noted that the system for making claims for compensation under the Passengers Charter were often seen to be rather cumbersome, and also was often subject to dispute. London TravelWatch asked LUL to reconsider its approach to payment of compensation under the Passenger Charter arrangements. In particular, we believe it would be better for passengers if compensation payments could be made directly to Oystercards or as monetary payments rather than the current system which involves the passenger having to redeem a paper voucher. This is borne out by recent research we have conducted jointly with Passenger Focus on national rail passenger charter compensation which suggests that passengers would prefer these methods rather than the more cumbersome present method.

The Passengers Charter arrangements are taken up by only a proportion of the actual numbers of passengers likely to have been delayed by incidents on the tube network. Therefore, even if significant numbers of claims are received they will not necessarily reflect the full picture of disruption to passengers journeys or passenger dissatisfaction with the network. TfL do also from time to time where very extensive disruption occurs on an unplanned basis, make exceptional refunds of fares paid to Oyster Pay As You Go customers who have touched in or out at stations subject to severe disruption of train services. A recent example was that of the Jubilee line, which was disrupted by signal and power failures.

## 5 Conclusions

It is noteworthy that London TravelWatch's performance monitoring reports are the only published source where all the monitored indicators are brought together at a single point. Data is otherwise contained in various TfL and Public Private Partnership documents, but which singularly do not make reference to each other.

Publication by an independent body such as London TravelWatch also ensures that TfL and London Underground can be called to account for their performance or practices. As a result changes can be made to the benefit of passengers.

However, London TravelWatch would like to be able to discuss with the Transport Committee at its meeting a number of options for improving analysis and data on passenger satisfaction and priorities for improvement.

Performance has taken a significant downturn in recent quarters on London Underground, with a number of high profile failures. Passengers are frustrated by this particularly given the amount of resources that have been expended on the upgrade programme and the significant levels of disruption that they have to endure over a significantly long period of time.

However, it is noticeable that where extensive communications have been undertaken with users, and where consultation has included significant 'listening and responding' by the operator promoting or implementing the upgrade that passengers have responded in a much more positive way to disruption or the need to change their journeys. An incidental by product of this is that for the operator often projects are delivered in a more efficient and cost effective way.

London TravelWatch recommends therefore that London Underground should :-

1. set itself more ambitious targets to improve overall customer satisfaction with its services. These need to be seen to be independently monitored and verified.
2. Replace the current arrangements for providing compensation under the passengers charter by paying compensations either through Oyster or by directly to passengers credit or debit card accounts.
3. Make a concerted effort to reduce the need for weekend and evening closures of the network where at all possible.
4. Improve communications with passengers both on trains and at stations.

5. Where closures and alterations to passenger access to stations are required that these are accompanied by pre-consultation, extensive passenger communication and provision of information on alternative means of travel.





