

What do passengers want from public transport in outer London?

A note from the London Transport Users Committee to the Greater London Authority's scrutiny of public transport in outer London.

This paper is concerned with conventional rail, bus and tram services. It does not deal with specialised facilities such as dial-a-ride, mobility bus and Taxicard.

1. Why is the car the predominant mode of transport in outer London?

1.1 Use of the private car is much greater in outer London than in the inner and central areas of the city for a variety of reasons. These include :

- Development is less dense, so journeys are more likely to be too long to make conveniently on foot or by cycle
- There is higher car ownership
- Many streets (especially away from major arteries) are less congested
- Journey origins and destinations are more diffuse, so trips are less likely to be limited to defined corridors of concentrated demand which can be served cost-effectively by public transport
- The rail network largely caters for radial journeys to/from the centre, and is not aligned with the complex pattern of intra-suburban travel
- Bus frequencies are lower and the network is more sparse
- On the outermost fringe of London, there is easy access to the motorway network
- Car journeys are much less likely to be "trip end restrained" than in inner areas – i.e. those making them can do so because there will be legal and affordable parking space at their destinations.

2. What are the particular transport needs of people living and/or working in outer London?

2.1 To promote the use of public transport in outer London, it is necessary to begin by identifying the reasonable requirements of potential users and to assess the extent to which these are met by the services currently provided.

2.2 LTUC considers that the following are reasonable requirements, at both peak and off-peak periods and throughout the week :

- Frequent direct services to central London.
- Frequent direct services to outer (or out-of-) London interchange points, so that journeys to and from the suburbs can be made without travelling via the centre
- The ability to make cross-London journeys with a minimum number of changes
- Direct services to the major strategic centres, local hospitals, colleges and places of entertainment and recreation within each borough
- Direct services to major strategic centres in adjacent boroughs and/or neighbouring counties
- Local (hopper-style) services providing connections to local stations and smaller district centres
- Good orbital as well as radial links

- Adequate services to schools
- Attractive and secure interchange facilities
- Frequent services along strategic arteries throughout the night.

2.3 Examining each of these requirements in turn, it is evident that at present the level and pattern of provision is, at best, decidedly uneven.

3. Frequent direct services to central London

3.1 This need is primarily met by rail (including both the National Rail services, the Underground and the Docklands Light Railway – though the DLR does not currently penetrate outer London). But there are some localities where such a link is necessarily made in part by bus because of the absence of an adequate direct rail service, e.g. Collier Row, South Hornchurch, St Paul's Cray, Farnborough, Upper Norwood, Mitcham, Hanworth, Yeading, Harefield and Arkley. And there are locations on existing rail routes where additional stations are needed to serve developments which have come into being since the railway was constructed, e.g. Eastfields (in Merton), which is also close to Mitcham town centre, and Broadfields (in Barnet).

3.2 LTUC believes that, wherever practicable, there should be a metro-style service level (i.e. at least six trains per hour) throughout London and to contiguous towns around the Greater London border. These include Cheshunt, Epping, Brentwood, Dartford, Sevenoaks, Redhill, Epsom, Sunbury, Staines, Slough, Gerrards Cross, Rickmansworth, Watford, Boreham Wood and Potters Bar.

3.3 LTUC accepts, however, that in the case of the National Rail network there are capacity limitations on certain routes, e.g. where track is shared with longer distance passenger trains and with freight services. In such cases, the minimum level of service should be six trains per hour to stations within Travelcard zones 1 to 4, and four trains per hour beyond these. Exceptionally, a service of two trains per hour may be acceptable on routes with particularly low demand, e.g. the Epsom Downs branch.

3.4 In the case of the Underground and the Docklands Light Railway, this standard is now broadly met. But on National Rail lines it is commonly met, if at all, only during peak hours. Off-peak and weekend services to/from many destinations are relatively sparse. Examples include Palmers Green, Enfield Town, Ponders End, Rainham, Bickley, Coulsdon South, St Helier, Chessington, Isleworth, West Drayton, Northolt Park and Hadley Wood.

3.5 In the case of corridors with no direct rail service, alternative bus links may not reach further than the edge of central London. For example, from Upper Norwood route 468 terminates at Elephant & Castle, and from Hayes End routes 207 and 607 terminate at Shepherds Bush.

For further details, please see LTUC position paper on Franchising & Timetable Aspirations.

4. Frequent direct services to outer (or out-of-) London interchange points, so that journeys to and from the suburbs can be made without travelling via the centre

4.1 This requires adequate levels of service to such locations as Harlow, Romford, Shenfield, Bromley South, East Croydon, Gatwick Airport, Woking, Slough, Reading, South/West Ruislip, Watford Junction, Luton and Stevenage.

4.2 The current situation is broadly similar to that described in paragraph 3.4. There is a marked reluctance on the part of some longer-distance train operators to observe edge-of-London stops, notably at Slough, South/West Ruislip and Stratford (an inner London station, but with a similar function). And the Croxley Link project, which would facilitate such connections between north west London and places served by the West Coast main line has been stalled in administrative and funding limbo for a decade.

5. The ability to make cross-London journeys with a minimum number of changes

5.1 Except in corridors served by the Underground, such facilities are sparse. Of the three cross-London routes provided by National Rail which reach the outer boroughs, only Thameslink has an acceptable frequency. The South Central service via the West London line and the Anglia Crosslink service via the North London line are both sparse – especially the latter.

5.2 A number of major schemes have been proposed which would address this deficiency - i.e. Thameslink 2000, CrossRail, the Hackney-Merton route, and the East London line extensions. But only the last of these has the necessary legal powers to proceed, and none has fully-committed funding from either Transport for London or the Strategic Rail Authority.

6. Direct services to the major strategic centres, local hospitals, colleges and places of entertainment and recreation within each borough

6.1 In the past two decades, there has been a progressive concentration of medical, education and entertainment facilities on fewer and larger sites, with more extended catchment areas. At the same time, new styles of retailing have emerged, often at locations remote from traditional town centres and established public transport networks (found in their most extreme form at Lakeside and Bluewater).

6.2 Although there are examples of good practice (e.g. the University of East London's new campus sited adjacent to the Beckton branch of the Docklands Light Railway), the planners of such facilities appear too often to have assumed that access would be primarily by car, and little or no regard has been paid to the adequacy and viability of public transport connections with their catchment areas. This can create particular difficulties for people who are public transport dependent, many of whom may already suffer other forms of social exclusion.

6.3 Some journeys of this kind are made by rail, but for the vast majority the bus is more appropriate transport mode. In recent years, frequencies have gradually increased and new routes have been added to improve the connectivity of the network. But poor reliability (officially attributed to traffic congestion and staff shortages, but compounded by a lack of adequate supervision and systematic control) has undermined public confidence in the network. For some passengers, concerns about

their personal security are an added deterrent – not only after dark but also when required to travel in the company of large groups of school pupils, whose unruly behaviour is a source of real discomfiture.

- 6.4 The popularity of Tramlink has demonstrated the ability of the public transport system to win additional patronage, including travellers switching from their cars, but only because vehicle design, speed, frequency, reliability, waiting facilities and ease of access to stops are all of the necessary quality. Tramlink only came into being because of the sustained, cross-party commitment of its promoters in Croydon council, including a willingness to contribute significantly to the capital cost of creating it, and to give it their support throughout the long drawn-out and sometimes contentious process of obtaining the necessary legal powers. London Transport (now TfL) has canvassed widely amongst other London boroughs to determine the true level of support for similar schemes elsewhere. But although there is widespread in-principle sympathy for such projects, there is little evidence of active commitment at the level necessary to overcome the financial and procedural obstacles. As a result, only three further schemes in outer London are still on TfL's active agenda (in Barking, Greenwich and along the Uxbridge Road), plus some possible Tramlink extensions, and all of these are at best several years from becoming a reality.

For details of these “intermediate mode” proposals, see New Ideas for Public Transport in outer London – Development of Case Studies, published by London Transport Planning (1996).

7. Direct services to major strategic centres in adjacent boroughs and/or neighbouring counties

- 7.1 Administrative boundaries are of no relevance to the users of private transport modes, and should be of none to public transport users either. Happily, within London, network planning is undertaken on a city-wide basis, and rail and bus operation is largely unaffected by borough boundaries (though there may be corridors in which bus service patterns were slow to respond to the effects of the Greenwich judgement on school catchment areas). Similarly, the Freedom Pass is valid throughout Greater London, though individual boroughs apply their own rules regarding the eligibility of people with disabilities. London boroughs' power to buy in additional services to augment London Buses' network could be a potential source of difficulty, but in practice they have made very little use of this except in special niche markets such as park-and-ride operations to town centres during the Christmas shopping period.
- 7.2 But the situation with respect to travel across the outer boundary of London is more complex, especially for bus travel. London Buses has not, in the past, had a clearly articulated policy for giving effect to its statutory duty to meet the needs of passengers travelling to and from Greater London as well as within it. Neighbouring authorities have more limited powers (both with respect to frequencies and fares), and vary in the level of their interest in and support for public transport. Cross-boundary routes are operated under a number of different legal regimes (i.e. either under contract to London Buses, or by agreement with it, or under contract to a neighbouring authority, or wholly commercially), resulting in complex local variations in fares, Travelcard validity, and Freedom Pass acceptance. There are still examples of routes terminating at points which appear to be determined more by administrative convenience than passenger need.

- 7.3 LTUC welcomes the more positive approach to such services evidenced by London Buses' recent adoption of such routes as the 405 from Croydon to Redhill and the 406 from Kingston to Epsom. A comprehensive review of all cross-boundary links is now under way, in response to an LTUC report on this issue, and we await the outcome with keen interest.

For further details, please see LTUC report on Crossing the Border.

8. Local (hopper-style) services providing connections to local stations and smaller district centres

- 8.1 At one time, such local links were often combined with longer-distance trunk services within a single route. This theoretically maximised schedule efficiency, measured in crew and vehicle productivity. But delays caused by traffic congestion or for other reasons, at any point along the route, could result in poor reliability experienced over its whole length (exacerbated when buses were turned short of their planned destinations in an attempt to restore them to their scheduled slots).
- 8.2 In recent years, London Buses has sought to address this problem by shortening trunk routes and creating localised networks, often running mainly off main arteries. These are commonly operated with smaller and more manoeuvrable vehicles which can penetrate residential districts more easily, providing local connections with stations and smaller district centres. Such networks are relatively insulated from the effects of sources of delay elsewhere. Examples include the H network in Harrow, the E network in Ealing, the U Network in Uxbridge, the W network in Walthamstow, the R network in Orpington and the K network in Kingston.
- 8.3 One disadvantage of such route-splitting is that some through journeys which could previously have been made on one bus now entail a change, and for passengers travelling on ordinary tickets the cost of the journey is doubled. The former problem can be mitigated by designing-in a reasonable length of shared route, as most bus journeys are comparatively short. The latter problem would be solved if London Buses can be persuaded to introduce a time-limited transfer ticket of the type which is the norm in many other urban transport undertakings (using ticketing technology which is no more complex than that already fitted to London's buses).

9. Good orbital as well as radial links

- 9.1 Most journeys in London begin and end outside the central area. If public transport is to win a larger share of the total travel market, it must cater adequately for these.
- 9.2 The rail network is overwhelmingly focussed on catering for radial trips. There are few orbital lines, and on those which exist, service frequencies are low. The North London, South London, West London and Gospel Oak-Barking lines only have two or three trains per hour (and run principally in inner London). In outer London, apart from the short and distinctly unglamorous Romford-Upminster shuttle, only the Croydon-Sutton-Wimbledon-Kingston-Richmond-Hounslow corridor is linked by conventional rail – and even this involves no less than three changes en route if travelled end-to-end. But Tramlink has demonstrated the latent demand for a frequent, high-quality orbital rail connection.
- 9.3 On the bus network, the 726 (from Heathrow to Bromley) is the only extended orbital route remaining in outer London, following the curtailment of others such as the 107

(which once ran from Queensbury to Ponders End) and the 140 (which once ran from Heathrow to Mill Hill). Even the 726 has been truncated, as it no longer extends to Dartford. Its frequency is low and its reliability performance has often been lamentable. London Buses appears largely to have abandoned any attempt to cater for orbital movement other than over very short distances. And even here, the picture is patchy. In the case of Croydon, for example, the south and east of the borough have a number of orbitally-aligned routes connecting district centres, but the north of the borough has none at all.

10. Adequate services to schools

- 10.1 The proportion of pupils travelling to school by car has risen steadily in recent years, creating localised congestion which gives rise to widespread traffic delays as well as ill-feeling between schools and occupiers of neighbouring premises. The problem has grown as a result of the widening of school catchment areas and the rise in two-car households, as it is commonly the second vehicle which is used (sometimes exclusively) for the school run and similar escort trips.
- 10.2 Public transport services are needed to provide for journeys to schools that are not adequately catered for by the mainstream network, and/or to separate school children from other passengers on crowded routes. London Buses has sought to meet this need by providing 51 special schooldays-only routes (mainly numbered in the 6XX series), plus special schoolday variations on 17 other routes. Much publicity has been given to the initiative by FirstGroup, a transport conglomerate, to introduce yellow school buses into Britain on the model familiar in north America. But in their countries of origin, such buses are primarily used in rural areas where there are few if any orthodox public transport services. There is a continuing debate in Britain over the desirability of treating school travel as a separate market for which special provision must be made, independently of the conventional network – and over whether, if this was done, it would reduce or would worsen the behavioural problems which generate intense ill-feeling on the part of other passengers.
- 10.3 The problem of rowdiness and vandalism by school children is not confined to the bus network. Rail operators in several parts of outer London (Bromley, Merton, Barnet) have faced similar difficulties. Ordinary rail staff are unwilling to subject themselves to the abuse and defiance they commonly encounter. The behaviour of pupils in public places is outside the schools' formal jurisdiction, and teachers are in any case unwilling to be required to act in a policing role out of school hours. The transport providers are confronted with a societal issue with which they are ill-equipped to deal, and if some would prefer not to carry these passengers at all, their attitude is understandable. But if pupils are actively discouraged from using public transport, it sends an unfortunate message at a time when – quite rightly – public policy is to promote travel by train and bus in preference to the car.

11. Attractive and secure interchange facilities

- 11.1 Provision for interchange is widely regarded as an Achilles' heel of London's public transport system. Cars offer flexible routeing (and timing), and door-to-door travel. Public transport not only imposes the burden of accessing a stop or station at each end of the trip, and (often) of travelling at a predetermined time, but also frequently requires a change en route. Where this can be made within the confines of a single station, with adequate information, reasonable service frequencies, and acceptable

waiting conditions, the burden may not be unduly heavy. But this is commonly not the case – and if the change is to or between buses, it is almost invariably not.

- 11.2 At a seminar held in the course of a recent liaison meeting between LTUC and representatives of local transport user groups drawn from all parts of London, nobody present was able to volunteer an example of a good public transport interchange in London. If pushed, Hammersmith and Canning Town might be so regarded, but neither of these is in outer London. Very unfavourable comparisons were drawn with systems in cities overseas, which offer timed cross-platform connections as part of a “seamless” journey experience. Transport for London has itself recently acknowledged that “poor co-operation and differing priorities between [transport providers] can often result in barriers to interchange, and the creation of physical and organisational ‘tidemarks’ where passengers perceive a change in the level of service they receive as they pass between areas controlled by different organisations. This can make the journey felt difficult, complex and disjointed ...”
- 11.3 LTUC’s views on the requirements for improved facilities for interchanging to and from buses and the Underground have been developed in more detail in its submissions to the GLA’s scrutinies specific to these modes. Transport for London has set out its policies in policy document issued jointly with the Association of Train Operating Companies (ATOC), Railtrack and London Underground. In this, the sponsors of the document have jointly committed themselves “to work together in partnership to identify and implement opportunities to reduce the physical effort and uncertainty that passengers may experience when making an interchange in London. Our aim is to ensure that by minimising the barriers experienced by a passenger transferring between services and modes, the transport network is perceived as a coherent and integrated system.”
- 11.4 Some small but welcome steps forward have recently been taken, e.g. the much-improved area maps and bus information now appearing at Underground stations – though there is seldom anything comparable at National Rail stations. Physical integration of bus stopping arrangements with station entrances and exits, and the provision of real-time service information, leave much to be desired. Even where such integration exists, the ambience can be truly unappealing. What implied statement about the value attached by the operators to their users is made by the bus/rail interchange facilities at Mill Hill Broadway? Unfortunately, there appears to be no ring-fenced budget allocation for enhancing such arrangements, and the recent dissolution of TfL’s Integration Directorate is scarcely an encouraging sign.

For further details see All Aboard? (LTUC’s submission to the GLA scrutiny of Priority Bus Issues for London), and Going Underground (LTUC’s submission to the GLA scrutiny of The Tube – Moving On). For TFL’s aspirations regarding interchange improvements, see Intermodal transport interchange for London – Best practice guidelines (January 2001).

12. **Frequent services along strategic arteries throughout the night**

- 12.1 We are increasingly living in a “24/7” society. Private transport knows no time limitations, and public transport must adjust to match if it is to be relevant to those who need (or choose) to travel outside traditional operating hours.
- 12.2 Most rail and bus services run from around 0600 to around midnight, though frequencies can be low at the start and end of the operating day. But there are considerable discrepancies between individual rail routes, with stations on the

Underground being generally better served in the late evening than those on the National Rail network. Only a handful of suburban stations have an all-night service, notably East Croydon and Ealing Broadway. This appears to be the random result of past tradition in different parts of the railway, as the Strategic Rail Authority has (so far) adopted no coherent policy towards the matter. LTUC's predecessor, the London Regional Passengers Committee, has charted these discrepancies in a recent report.

- 12.3 The night bus service, in contrast, has grown remarkably in coverage and frequency in recent years. The majority of Londoners now live within a mile of an all-night service, and only a few substantial suburbs (notably Ruislip and Dagenham) are not yet served directly. Most services are radial from central London, but some orbital routes (the N140 and N285 from Heathrow) have started to appear. Growth in the usage of night services has been substantially faster than that of the daytime routes, and the night bus network now has the same fares as its daytime counterpart. The night bus network is one of the undoubted success stories of London's public transport, and one for which its champions within London Buses deserve full credit.

For further details of the pattern of late evening rail services, please see LRPC's report [Who goes home?](#)

13. **Fares, ticketing, personal security and information**

- 13.1 All of these are critical factors affecting potential passengers' propensity to use public transport, though none are unique to outer London in their effects. They have been covered in detail in LTUC's submissions to the GLA's scrutinies of buses and of the Underground, and it is not necessary to revisit them in detail here.
- 13.2 It is worth mentioning the particular value of the multi-modal Travelcard in this connection, though, because this is valid for a through journey, e.g. from an outer suburb to central London, involving both local access to a station by bus, a trunk section by rail, and an onward connection by Underground. For one-off trips, the forthcoming one-day all-day Travelcards will provide this benefit additionally to those who must travel before or during the morning peak period (though the incremental cost of such a ticket for zones 1-6 relative to zones 1-4 will be particularly high, and will probably result in the use of ordinary return tickets for the part of each journey made in zones 5 and 6).
- 13.3 LTUC has also welcomed the 70p flat fare for all suburban bus journeys, and the introduction of prepaid packs of single tickets sold at a discount. It has taken a cautious view of TfL's desire to move to "cashless buses" because there are parts of outer London in which local travel ticket outlets are sparse and the local rail stations are unstaffed and/or are operated by National Rail companies (which do not sell bus passes). The extension of London fares to cross-boundary routes adopted by TfL has generally resulted in a reduction in the cost of travel, which is welcomed by their users, although fares anomalies result where the cost of travel on parallel non-London Buses routes is set commercially.

14. **Overview**

- 14.1 The coverage and frequency of bus services in outer London have improved substantially over the past decade. TfL's "BusPlus" programme of new bus priority measures, coupled with enhanced enforcement effort, should bring improvements in

reliability, provided that the operators' difficulty in recruiting and retaining sufficient staff of the requisite quality can be overcome. The current review of cross-boundary services is a welcome initiative.

- 14.2 The network can be strengthened further by adding additional local services penetrating more deeply into residential areas, and the support of the Assembly in resisting "nimbyist" objections from some householders (too often supported by borough councillors whose commitment to improved public transport is proved to be disappointingly shallow, when put to the test) would be welcome. There is scope for additional orbital connections, and better frequencies on Sundays.
- 14.3 The Underground provides relatively frequent services throughout the week to those parts of outer London which it penetrates. There are five outer boroughs with no Underground service. Parts of four of these are now linked by Tramlink, which provides a frequent high-quality service throughout the week (except to Beckenham in the evenings and on Sundays).
- 14.4 The quality of the National Rail network is very much more variable. There are some lines with modern trains, well-maintained stations and frequent services. But there are others of which no such claim could credibly be made. The privatised train operators appear, for the most part, to be very much more interested in providing longer-distance services between central London and places beyond than in meeting the needs of London itself. Even the "Connex Metro" development, welcome in itself, has had only limited impact on the outer boroughs. There needs to be an acceptance by these operators (with the active encouragement of the Strategic Rail Authority, as part of the refranchising process) that they are an integral and important component of London's internal transport system, and not merely carriers to and from the capital. LTUC's proposals for standard minimum frequencies offer a basis for starting to redress the deficiencies.
- 14.5 Orbital connections remain the public transport networks' greatest weakness. Tramlink demonstrates the potential demand for such services, but there are few other rail links. Long orbital bus routes have been hampered by poor reliability, and have tended to be shortened, but some local services have enjoyed more success.
- 14.6 As everywhere in London, there is scope for considerably improved co-ordination. Some progress has been made in the field of ticketing (though so far primarily for period rather than ordinary tickets), but interchange facilities are too often inconvenient and unappealing. The comfort, reliability and economy of private cars are steadily improving. Public transport must match these improvements if it is to have any chance of winning back market share and fulfilling its potential.