

# LONDON TRAVELWATCH

## *Business Plan 2024-25*



*Working in Partnership with*

**LONDON**  
ASSEMBLY

transportfocus 

## Introduction

This paper proposes a business plan for London TravelWatch for 2024-25, for consideration and endorsement by the London Assembly Transport Committee.

It summarises the main things we have done during the current business year; sets out the priority topics on which we intend to focus next year; and proposes a headline budget to resource our work.

The year to date, as ever, has involved a mix both of own-initiative and reactive work, and of external-facing activities alongside internal operational developments. The dominating feature has been the successful delivery of our statutory role in managing the public consultation on proposed rail ticket office closures in our geographical remit.

Looking ahead to 2024-25, one important bit of context for our work will be the outcome of the Mayoral and Assembly elections on 2<sup>nd</sup> May. As before, we intend to refine and develop the objectives and activities under each of the priority areas proposed in this paper, in time for the start of the new business year in April 2024.

## Key achievements to date in 2023-24

We analysed nearly 230,000 responses to the public consultation on proposals by nine train operators to close **ticket offices** or change their opening hours at 269 stations in our area. In late October, following months of intense activity, we and Transport Focus (with whom we worked closely) formally objected to all the proposals. Almost immediately, the Secretary of State confirmed that the Department for Transport would be asking train companies to withdraw their proposals and not to proceed with the closures.

We successfully campaigned with others against a proposal by Transport for London (TfL) to withdraw the **Day Travelcard**, including signing a joint open letter to the Mayor asking him to save the Travelcard. In October, it was announced that Day Travelcards will be maintained after a deal was reached between TfL, train operators and the Government. The decision secures the future for a popular ticket providing affordable and flexible travel around London for rail travellers from outside the capital, albeit at the cost of one-off price increase on top of the next annual fares rise.

In November, we published new research into the extent of abuse, harassment and **violence faced by the LGBTQ+ community** when travelling in London. The report, *Out in London*, makes recommendations for action by transport providers and policing authorities, and it received good news and social media coverage. We have received a positive response from stakeholders and will be following up with relevant organisations to promote its findings.

We also published in June a scorecard ranking the capital's transport providers according to their approach to improving **personal security for passengers**. The highest ranked providers were Network Rail, LNER and TfL. The scorecard suggested that most transport providers take personal security very seriously, but London TravelWatch warned against complacency and called on the industry to share best practice.

In April, we followed up our earlier **digital exclusion** report by publishing a joint open letter to the Mayor and to Transport Minister Richard Holden MP, seeking their commitment to work with transport operators to address this challenge. We received a positive reply from the Mayor in June, highlighting the approach being taken by TfL.

Our work on **buses** through the Bus Alliance was recognised in May as Runner Up in the Sheila McKechnie Foundation Award for Best Consumer Campaign 2023. We have continued to submit responses to TfL bus consultations ahead of planned changes, following one of which TfL decided against permanently re-routing the southbound 344 bus via London Bridge (in line with our submission). We have also submitted responses to consultations on planned Superloop routes and we chaired the panel session at TfL's event marking the first anniversary of their Bus Action Plan, which London TravelWatch had been instrumental in instigating.

The London Assembly Transport Committee commissioned us to carry out a review of public transport provision in **outer London**, which we submitted in July. The report, which was well-received by the Committee, set out a mixed picture, with differences in post-pandemic provision within outer London. We also wrote in June to TfL seeking clarification about their approach to expanding ULEZ to outer London, which later came into effect. One issue we raised was whether the package of targeted financial support was adequate and how well it was being taken up by those who needed it most. In August, the Mayor announced an expansion of the scrappage scheme, so that grants would be available to all Londoners with a non-compliant car or motorcycle.

In May, we published the findings of our survey of over 500 passengers about their views on the **December 2022 Southeastern rail timetable**. These were accompanied by an open letter to the operator, which among other things highlighted that many respondents wanted to see at least some further change to the timetable (notwithstanding welcome service enhancements announced after December), and the importance of continuing with improvements to crowd management at London Bridge.

In the year to date (up to 31<sup>st</sup> October), our casework team received 450 initial contacts from the public and resolved 494 **appeals**. We cannot compel a transport operator to provide us with a favourable outcome, however:

- 44% of the appeals provided the passenger with a successful outcome and a further 15% of appeals provided an improved outcome
- 41% of penalty fare/revenue protection cases resulted in an improved outcome for the passenger (including 15% where the penalty was completely overturned)
- 73% success for non-passenger appeal cases (ULEZ, Congestion Charge, PCNs and TfL Santander Cycles).

## Our proposed priorities for 2024-25

We have identified eight priority topics for our work in 2024-25. The key features of our approach are as follows:

- most of our priorities focus on improving the passenger experience: our organisationally focussed ones help us to ensure that we can work successfully on their behalf into the future
- three of our priorities are newer areas of strategic activity for us to start or return to in 2024-25, while the others essentially build on some of our existing workstreams
- several important cross-cutting themes underpin our overall set of priorities. We want to ensure that, within the scope of our remit, our work adequately reflects the interests of transport users among marginalised communities and in outer London. Our continued advocacy for improvements to sustainable modes of transport aims to promote a better environment. We also want to give added prominence to the role of innovation in addressing the challenges faced by transport in London
- the success of our work, as always, depends heavily on partnership with other organisations. Although building alliances is not specified as a priority in its own right, it remains integral to the work we plan to do in all of our priority areas of activity
- the priorities do not reflect all the work we do. As in other years, there will be tactical issues for us to address, for example, as concerns which emerge from our appeals casework, or in response to initiatives taken by transport providers and policy makers. We also want to retain some ability to take on additional new strategic areas to support the priorities, once they take shape, of the new Transport Committee following the Assembly elections in May (see priority 6)
- for each priority set out below, we have described what success might look like. We will refine our thinking on the outputs of our work, the outcomes they are intended to promote, and the added value that we plan to bring to these issues alongside the work of others, in time for the start of the new business year.

**Priority 1 (new): More seamless journeys.** The proliferation of different forms of micro-mobility such as hire cycles and e-scooters in some areas, and their relative absence in others; the extent of pavement clutter, and the management of streetworks, are among the challenges that affect the experience of those who walk, wheel and bus in the capital. We will work with other organisations to understand better the effectiveness of TfL and borough approaches to addressing these challenges and where necessary make recommendations for change, including the role which innovation and technology can play in this space.

Success here would be commitment by all relevant parties to an action plan with clear milestones for achieving progress.

**Priority 2 (new): More accessible public transport.** Accessibility was identified as an area of proposed work in the 2023-24 Business Plan. Although the theme featured significantly in our work on proposed ticket office closures, the original intention was to await publication of Transport for All's survey of Disabled people's priorities in order to establish where best to focus our efforts. The survey is in fact due to be launched shortly, which should enable us to identify where we can work with others in 2024-25 to promote a more accessible transport system in London.

Success here would be improved transport outcomes for those with accessibility needs, based on a clear understanding about what progress might be possible and the area(s) where work by LondonTravelWatch can potentially add value.

**Priority 3 (new): Greater ambition by TfL in building trust among customers.** The Commissioner has said that TfL would like to set its sights higher in terms of the number of Londoners who agree with the proposition that the organisation cares about its customers. We want to ensure that the scale of ambition is realistic yet stretching and that any supporting customer strategy is well specified. Through a structured programme of senior-level engagement with TfL, our aim is to help shape its work in this area, identify any gaps in knowledge or information which need to be addressed and hold TfL to account for delivery against its strategy.

**Priority 4: Better transport services.** As TfL's Bus Action Plan heads towards the start of its third year, we aim to continue our work to showcase and promote the vital role of boroughs in working alongside TfL to deliver better bus journeys. Through the Bus Alliance, we will work to ensure that the Plan remains a post-election priority. We also plan to identify the most significant weakspots in tube and rail services, and to campaign for their improvement.

A successful outcome for this area of activity would be delivery against key milestones in the Bus Action Plan and a commitment by tube and rail operators to address the weakest areas of performance.

**Priority 5: Further action on inclusion in transport.** Over the last two years, London TravelWatch has successfully highlighted the concerns of transport users in London regarding issues such as personal security and digital exclusion. We feel there is more we can do here, for example, by producing a scorecard to establish how far transport providers have responded to our recommendations to address digital exclusion; to do a further piece of focused insight into another of the communities particularly affected by personal security; and/or to look at the broader challenges faced by other user groups, such as young Londoners, those from particular faith backgrounds or those on low incomes.

Success here would be greater awareness among transport providers and policy makers, and a commitment to act on any recommendations we might make.

A successful outcome for this area of activity would be commitment by TfL to progressively higher customer survey score targets over the medium term and material progress towards those goals.

**Priority 6: Closer working with the Assembly's Transport Committee.** We want to build on our strong working relationship with the political leads and officers of the Committee to enhance the impact of the Assembly's work. Following next spring's elections, we aim to support the new Committee in setting its agenda for the rest of the year, agreeing potential research projects for London TravelWatch to commission and mapping out the key themes for its work for the duration of the new Assembly.

A successful outcome under this priority would be more effective use of the combined resource and expertise of the Transport Committee and London TravelWatch in holding transport providers and policy makers to account.

**Priority 7: Improved casework operations.** Following the imminent award of a new contract to operate our contact centre, our priority will be to ensure the current high levels of service are maintained, and then to work with our service provider to identify potential efficiencies. Through our recently agreed Memorandum of Understanding with the Rail Ombudsman, we will also seek to develop greater insight about rail complaints which can inform our future advocacy.

Success in this area will be reflected in sustained high levels of service in handling initial contacts and appeals from members of the public, and action to address rail complaints driven by root cause analysis.

**Priority 8: Improved London TravelWatch insight.** We plan to survey Londoners about their priorities for transport in the capital (last done in June 2022) to refresh our insight into what matters most to them. We want to ensure that our research is more demographically representative of the travelling public and to develop our understanding of innovative approaches to the transport challenges facing London. We will deepen and widen our relationships with Assembly Members and London MPs to improve our understanding of their constituents' transport concerns. As well as continuing to develop our links with key stakeholders, we will work with the new management team at our sister organisation, Transport Focus, to strengthen how we work together on areas of common interest.

A successful outcome from this piece of work would be a post-election focus of the Mayor, Assembly and transport providers which resonates with what Londoners see as important, as revealed by the findings of our proposed survey.

## **London TravelWatch's budget for 2024-25**

Our budget has stayed relatively flat in cash terms for a number of years and stands at £1.145 million for 2023-24. This year's provision includes a small uplift on the

previous year’s budget to reflect the impact of the 2023-24 GLA pay award on London TravelWatch staff salaries.

For the budget in 2024-25, we propose a provision at this year’s level of £1.145 million, which:

- enables the organisation to cover the normal increase in staff costs as employees progress annually through their salary bands. Total staff costs account for c. 67% of total London TravelWatch expenditure
- reflects the scope for any savings in fixed and variable overheads, which account for c. 21% of total expenditure (of which property-related costs are the largest single element). London TravelWatch has agreed a new three-year lease on its current office accommodation at a lower headline rent than the old lease which ended in November 2023
- provides funding for projects (such as research) which support our work programme priorities. The precise allocation of funds will be determined before the start of the business year, but the total amount will be broadly similar to the amount budgeted this year (c. 11% of total budgeted expenditure).

In addition, we propose a budget which allows for additional provision to cover the as-yet unknown cost of a 2024-25 pay award for London TravelWatch staff at the same rate as any provided for GLA employees. This is in line with the recommendation made to the Oversight Committee, as part of the Assembly Budget Requirements 2024-25 paper noted at the Committee’s meeting on 1<sup>st</sup> November 2023.

Also in line with a recommendation in the Oversight Committee paper, we propose that the priority for any year-end underspend in 2023-24 should be to build up our financial reserve (currently around £100,000). This is consistent with the London TravelWatch Board’s view that in time the organisation should have a reserve of £250,000, equivalent to approximately 3 months’ annual expenditure.

<b>Grant in aid funding</b>	<b>2023-24</b>	<b>Bid for 2024-25</b>	<b>Comments</b>
Core	£1.145 million	£1.145 million + provision for GLA pay award	See Assembly Budget Requirements paper to Oversight Committee 1.11.2023

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