

Barnes bus services – proposed changes: London TravelWatch’s response

London TravelWatch is London’s independent transport watchdog, using evidence to campaign to improve journeys, and advocate for all people travelling in London.

It is in this role that we are responding to TfL’s consultation about the proposed changes in Barnes. We make the following comments:

The reasoning for the change

TfL explain that as it is unlikely that Hammersmith Bridge will reopen in the near future, they want to formalise arrangements for the bus network in the Barnes area, to provide customers and residents with greater certainty about their services. TfL expect that their proposals will improve the reliability and efficiency of the bus network in the Barnes area, which we welcome, although they do not explain why this will be the case. In the interests of transparency, and to demonstrate to passengers that their services will improve, we would encourage TfL to provide more information on how these changes will improve reliability and efficiency.

The impact of broken journeys

While we welcome the new links provided by route 485 between the area east of Putney and the area west of Station Road, TfL acknowledge that more widely some passengers will need to change buses to complete their journey and that this may cause some concern. London TravelWatch knows that passengers don’t like changing buses. Time spent doing it is involuntary because having to change is always second best to using a direct service. Changing buses adds extra time to a journey and an uncertainty of timing of the journey. Changing buses can also potentially mean an additional cost for passengers if they go outside of the 60-minute Hopper fare window while waiting for their second bus, particularly in early mornings and late evenings when buses are less frequent.

Interchange can also be inconvenient and stressful, especially for passengers such as older and Disabled passengers or those with children or luggage, who choose the bus because it is easier for them to use. In this context, it is striking that such a high proportion of passengers hold the Older Person’s Freedom Pass for each of the four routes in this consultation. This is especially the 22% who use route 533 and the 31% who use route 485. We also note that Barnes Hospital and Viera Gray House Care Home are near all four routes.

How many people will be negatively impacted?

TfL do not say how many people will be impacted and need to change buses - we ask why this is the case. All we know is that this proposal will break ‘a relatively low number of passenger links compared to other options considered,’ which is of limited use. And so, we are unable to gauge how severe the impact of this proposal will be

on passengers. That TfL only sometimes rather than always provide the figures for the number of affected passengers (either as a raw number or percentage, or both) give us concerns about their consistency when preparing Equality Impact Assessments (EqIAs).

Concerns about information and safety

TfL's helpful document explaining how affected passengers will need to alter their journeys states there will be same stop interchange for journeys where a change of bus will be necessary. However, TfL don't say if those stops have Countdown screens. They do say that they will investigate installing Countdown at key bus stops. We ask that this be done as a matter of urgency because the absence of Countdown is a disadvantage to those without access to digital devices.

Neither do TfL say in that document if shelters, seating and public lighting are available at each of the stops. There is only a vague reference in the EqIA that 'Most bus stops in both directions have shelters, seating and public lighting in place.'

This availability is important for a variety of reasons. Some people require places to sit and rest, for example those with certain mobility impairments, so seating contributes to a more accessible and inclusive service. Additionally, passengers can be concerned for their safety whilst waiting at bus stops, especially at night, when perpetrators of crime have the benefit of dark streets and fewer bystanders. People don't want to be alone for an extended time as it can feel it invites opportunities for people to take advantage when no one else is around. In this context, the absence of Countdown means that even people with digital devices may not want to use them in these locations, particularly at night. In these situations, Countdown and public lighting are even more important.

TfL refer to an assessment of the impact on safety of women during hours of darkness (18:00-06:00), saying that any passengers travelling in those hours who need to change bus would be impacted by the proposals. However, unhelpfully, TfL do not state how many women are affected. Similar to our example about not having figures for the overall number of passengers negatively impacted by these proposals, the absence of numbers here contrasts with consultation examples when they were provided (such as the recent one for routes 287/687). This again speaks to an inconsistency in preparing EqIAs.

We also note that some passengers may in future need to walk for approximately an additional ten minutes to complete their journey, a not insignificant amount of time.

Taking these two points together, to provide further reassurance to passengers we urge TfL and, where necessary, the local councils to ensure that street lighting by bus stops and on affected walking and wheeling routes is made as good as possible. Pavement quality between stops must also be good to make the journey as accessible as possible.

Capacity and frequency

TfL are confident that the proposed services match demand appropriately. However, we note that some passengers will see a reduced frequency. We therefore call on

TfL to carefully monitor this (not least because some roads will see fewer buses in future) and to further increase the frequency of any routes if required.

Reinvesting savings

TfL have said that these proposals 'have a strong business case with a cost saving.' Whilst it is important to put these savings back into the network, TfL also need to be transparent and communicate with passengers about what it has done and what it has achieved.

Provision of information at bus stops

Finally, as these proposals are such significant changes, should they go ahead, TfL need to ensure that there is clear information about the alternative bus routes at all current bus stops for routes 209, 378, 485 and 533.