

# **Transport Select Committee Inquiry – Railways Bill**

## **Evidence submission from London TravelWatch**

### **Introduction**

London TravelWatch is the statutory transport watchdog for London. Officially known as the London Transport Users Committee, we were established in our current form in 2000, though our roots go back to the 1947 Transport Act and beyond.

We represent the interests of all those who use the bus, Underground and rail services in and around the city as well as users of Dial-a-Ride, trams, taxis, cable cars and river transport, and those who walk, cycle and wheel in the city. Our remit also covers matters related to the capital's principal road network. We are funded by and accountable to the London Assembly. We work in close partnership with our sister watchdog, Transport Focus, which covers issues outside the capital.

Our response offers seeks to address the themes noted in the Transport Select Committee's call for evidence, with a particular focus on improving rail travel for passengers and devolution.

### ***A. Improving rail travel for passengers***

Overall, we welcome the Railways Bill. It sets out a series of changes to restructure the industry to deliver the long-standing consensus that responsibilities for track and train need to be brought together. We understand and support the key reform principle of bringing track and train together.

However, while the Bill makes provision for new industry structures, functions and processes, it does not show how in practice these reforms will improve the user experience, and what better outcomes the public should expect over what timescale because of the changes. We believe that, alongside the Bill, the Government should make a commitment to a clear set of improved outcomes which it expects the reforms to deliver – covering but not limited to punctuality, reliability, accessibility, fares and ticketing, safety and security – to inform passenger expectations and improve accountability.

### **Passenger representation**

We support the commitment to stronger representation of the interests of the consumer through the Passengers' Council, which we understand will be built upon Transport Focus. We therefore welcome the provision of stronger powers for the Passengers' Council, including powers to obtain information and make representations to the rail industry and policymakers. As we know accessibility is a key area of underperformance across the sector, it is also positive that there is a requirement on the Passengers' Council to consider the interests and needs of disabled people when exercising its rail functions.

The Passengers' Council, like Transport Focus today, will be an Arm's Length Body (ALB) of the Department for Transport – as will GBR. In our April 2025 response to the pre-legislation consultation, we expressed our concern that this common reporting line could risk compromising the independence of the new body, making it more difficult to say uncomfortable things about industry performance. As a minimum, we suggested that the new body should be given clear protections in statute which give it bankable protection from day-to-day political oversight. We added that potentially, a different accountability model could be considered, perhaps offering a direct line to Parliament rather than Government.

### **Passenger representation in London**

In London, the existing arrangements provide an opportunity for scrutiny which is truly independent of government. We believe that there is an important continuing role for London TravelWatch, funded by the London Assembly, as part of the London system, to champion and support the interests of people who travel in London.

Over decades, the work of London TravelWatch has demonstrated the benefits of having representation for consumers which reflects devolved responsibilities, and the specific issues which are faced by consumers in particular parts of the country. We believe that rail travel into London must continue to be an important part of our remit given the importance of rail to London's economy and society and how it interacts with other parts of London's transport system.

We therefore very much welcome measures in the Bill to give London TravelWatch the same powers and general duties that the Passengers' Council has in relation to the collection and protection of information, investigations, actions that can be taken following an investigation, and reporting for matters in our geographical remit. This will help ensure consistency of passenger advocacy across the country, and make sure the interests of people within the London Network are represented.

We note that there are multiple references in the Bill to requirements for industry bodies such as GBR, the Secretary of State and the ORR to consult with the Passengers' Council on various industry processes, but where no mention is made of consulting London TravelWatch. Given that some 70% of all rail journeys start, end or go through London, we think it is important that London TravelWatch has sufficient opportunity to provide input to major rail industry plans or decisions, particularly where they affect passengers in the London area.

While we would expect to continue working closely with Transport Focus, we think there may be some scope for the Bill to reflect explicitly our role as a consultee; and we would welcome the Government setting out more fully how in practice it sees London TravelWatch being proactively engaged in rail industry decision-making in future.

## ***B. Network access***

We believe there is a need for operational safeguards around network access. To run its services, TfL needs effective access to some assets which in future will be managed by GBR, with access allocated by GBR. We will need to ensure that TfL continues to get the access to assets that it needs. While we expect GBR to be fair and transparent in their decisions about which services will be granted access, as a safeguard it is positive the ORR will retain an independent appeals role, with TfL (and other operators) having an appeal right to ORR if it feels it is not being treated appropriately.

## ***C. Devolution***

We welcome the support for different models of devolution, with a commitment to safeguard existing devolution settlements and strengthening of the role of Mayoral Combined Authorities in England. Enshrining a statutory role for devolved governments and mayoral strategic authorities will help make sure that both national and regional strategies are considered in GBR's decision-making. In our pre-legislation consultation response, we said we would like to see the responsibilities given to the Mayor of London going beyond a right to be consulted, setting out a clear role in decision making on key issues affecting London's rail users.

We also welcome the legislative mechanisms to devolve passenger services. This will strengthen the devolution settlement, building on the benefits the current settlement has offered to London's travelling public. Transport Focus data shows both the London Overground network and the Elizabeth Line among the top performing operations for user satisfaction. Non-legislative guidance setting out a clear process to request devolution is a step in the right direction, but we would like to see strong safeguards in the legislation itself to ensure transparency in the decision-making process.

Finally, there is clear consensus that industry (including wider supply chain) needs greater certainty of its financial environment – so we strongly support a five-year funding model for all the bodies that fund rail. TfL specifically has been hampered in recent years by short term funding settlements unlike Network Rail and Highways England. The four-year funding settlement between TfL and the Government as part of the July 2025 Spending Review was a welcome move in the right direction and we hope that multi-year settlements for TfL, mirroring arrangements in rail, will continue to be the norm in future.