

London TravelWatch response to TfL's Capital Call service review 2025

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 on the proposal to withdraw the Capital Call service.

The need for accessible, flexible transport

Accessible transport is essential infrastructure that supports everyone (including but not limited to disabled people and older Londoners) to travel freely, connecting them to work, family, and their communities.

The Capital Call service was created to supplement the Taxicard scheme, helping people who needed this travel option in boroughs where there were not sufficient Taxis operating. While Capital Call may account for a relatively small number of journeys overall, for some disabled people and older people, it can serve an important role in supporting their journey.

London TravelWatch understands and recognises TfL's drive to make sure public money is used efficiently and equitably and acknowledge TfL's rationale for proposing the closure of the Capital Call scheme, particularly given the reduction in the service usage (58% drop since 2019-20). However, any changes to accessible transport services must be carefully planned, with necessary mitigations in place to prevent negative impacts on users. This includes supporting users with any changes and making needed improvements to alternative schemes such as Dial-A-Ride and Taxicard. It is essential that if the service is withdrawn it does not create more barriers to travel.

The impact of closing the scheme

It is important to acknowledge that removing any source of flexible, door-to-door transport may have negative consequences for those who rely on it. While the overall number of trips may be low and it has been closed to new registrations since 2015, the impact may still be significant for individual users. The equality impact assessment (EQIA) indeed notes that there may be negative impact for some people, including older people and women. In particular this may be the case for those who:

- Rely on the flexibility and availability of Capital Call
- Live in areas of London where access to accessible public transport is limited, particularly in outer London

The EQIA also notes that disabled people are the group "most affected of all to any changes to this service". It is concerning that TfL holds incomplete data on the disability profile of Capital Call users, as this limits the ability to understand the full

impact of any changes to the service, and if the alternative options are suitable and accessible for them.

However, we note TfL's rationale for closing these services given significant and continuing decline in its usage, with just over half the number of trips made in 2023/24 compared to 2019/20, and half the number of active users. Current trends show a continued fall in demand. This somewhat limits the scale of the impact on passengers, and the closure will provide TfL the opportunity to use the resources gained by the closure to invest in services that can serve as an alternative.

If the scheme is closed it is vital that this funding is used to continue to improve and invest in schemes like Taxicard, which can provide similar travel options to passengers that use Capital Call. Investing in other services like Dial-a-Ride can also support those who may be impacted as services like these fill critical gaps, especially in outer London boroughs that continue to have limited public transport options.

Mitigations

If TfL proceeds with closing Capital Call, the following mitigations will be essential to avoid negative impacts:

- **Transitional support for passengers:** Passengers who use this service should be offered one-to-one support/mentoring to help them understand and navigate alternative options, including guidance on booking journeys, eligibility, and how to escalate concerns if they face barriers.
- **Ring fence savings:** It is necessary that any funding saved through the closure must be reinvested directly into improving and promoting assisted transport schemes. Transparency on how these savings are used will be key to maintaining trust with those who have been impacted.
- **Monitoring and review:** TfL should commit to monitor the impacts of closure over at least 12 months, with the ability to respond to any unintended consequences for passengers who used Capital call.

Improvements to alternative schemes

While both Taxicard and Dial-a-Ride play a crucial role in mitigating barriers to travel for many disabled people, older Londoners, and other passengers with mobility requirements, there are issues with the services.

It is important to maintain the level of accessible transport service availability, so no one faces detriment due to the changes. Therefore we call for ongoing improvements on accessible transport services including the following.

Taxicard

- Exploring the option of allowing "triple swiping", so members can choose to use more subsidies in one trip to reduce the cost of longer journeys

- Increase the number of taxi drivers who can access and accept Taxicard bookings to improve the service for passengers through increased availability and reduced wait times to make sure there is consistent availability in all boroughs
- Continue raising awareness and understanding of the service with passengers
- Simplify and streamline booking systems, including accessibility improvements for those who may be digitally excluded
- Improve training for drivers to make sure they have the right understanding of how to support passengers with access needs

Dial-a-Ride

- Reduce booking lead times, which currently limit last minute trips
- Expand service hours, particularly evenings and weekends (especially as Capital Call currently runs on a 24-hour bases, seven days a week). This should also be considered in relation to personal security so already vulnerable people are not left in potentially unsafe situations at night
- Review eligibility criteria to make sure no one who relied on Capital Call is excluded or at a disadvantage
- Improve reliability and passenger information, including real-time updates and clearer service expectations.

Other options

We are glad to see that TfL are committing to investing money on marketing initiatives to build awareness around their accessible transport services offer. In addition to this TfL could also explore:

- Community transport partnerships with local disability and older people's organisations
- Prioritise services in boroughs with identified gaps, informed by feedback from current Capital Call passengers

Engaging with passengers who may be impacted

Clear and accessible communication is essential to make sure those impacted can have their say in this consultation, to make sure their needs and experiences are fully considered. We are glad to see that TfL has done the following to make sure people can have their say:

- Direct communication with existing Capital Call passengers, including but not limited to drop- in events, online communications, telephone helplines, and postal engagement

- Information has been provided through accessible formats, including Easy Read, large print, BSL and audio files
- Commitment to ongoing updates beyond the closure date, to help passengers adjust to changes and resolve any ongoing difficulties

However, we believe there is room for more outreach. For example, much of the engagement is via digital channels, which will not necessarily be accessible to the digitally disadvantaged and excluded (who are more likely to be disabled and older, similar to the profile of Capital Call users). And while we welcome in-person drop in events they both located in central London, which may not be easy for people to travel to (particularly users living in outer London). More targeted events, such as in the boroughs where Capital Call services currently operate, could be more effective.

It is vital that any changes are made in conjunction with meaningful engagement with people who are most likely to be impacted.