

424 bus route – proposed changes in Putney and Fulham: 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 restructure of route 424 and introduction of new route 454.

We make the following comments:

The reasoning for the change

TfL say that these proposals will address the reliability issues that route 424 faces due to congestion on Putney High Street. The proposed new routes 424 and 454 would no longer serve this area, which should lead to improved reliability of the bus routes in the areas that will continue to be served. TfL add that the proposed alignment of route 454 will allow larger single deck buses to be used than those currently on route 424.

Breaking a route in the name of reliability

We recognise TfL’s dilemma caused by congestion on Putney High Street and the need to improve reliability, but the major problem in this proposal is that the mitigation chosen to deal with it will affect so many passengers, not least because the key retail, work and leisure location on the 424’s current route - Putney High Street - would no longer be served. We fear that in attempting to make the route more reliable, it will also become less useful for passengers. London TravelWatch believes that buses need to go where people need them most.

We ask TfL what they are doing in conjunction with Wandsworth Council to address the issue of congestion on Putney High Street. We appreciate that there is no easy way to resolve this problem, but our concern is that if the situation does not improve - or indeed worsens - other bus routes serving Putney High Street will be vulnerable in future to also being withdrawn from that road.

Having to change buses

The impact of broken journeys

The Equality Impact Assessment (EqIA) for this proposal states that 196 trips per weekday on route 424 would be broken. Although TfL do not state what percentage this is of passenger numbers, by calculating from figures on the number of trips on weekdays elsewhere in the EqIA, it would mean that a significant 18 per cent of route 424 passengers would be affected by the changes.

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 at night 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 important - and worrying - to note that the consultation reveals that 30% of passengers using route 424 on weekdays are 'Older Person's Freedom Pass' holders.

Safety concerns

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 period as it can feel it invites opportunities for people to take advantage when no one else is around.

Unlike in most TfL bus consultations, this consultation does not provide details of a specific assessment of the impact on safety of women during hours of darkness (18:00-06:00), and so we must presume that one has not been undertaken. This may be because the 424 operates no later than 20:30 on any day but we would still have welcomed seeing some safety assessment. This is both because this proposal will cause a considerable number of broken journeys and because the EqIA repeatedly references safety concerns 'particularly late at night or where it is dark and isolated.'

Increasing patronage?

With passengers due to lose direct connections with Putney High Street from both north and south, it is difficult to have too much hope in TfL's claim that reliability improvements 'may also lead to increased patronage.' On face value, it feels more likely that the changes will lead to reduced patronage.

In the case of the restructured 424, this may be exacerbated by the proposed reduction of the route's frequency to just one bus every 45 minutes. It is hard to see how this will increase the number of passengers using what would in future be a very short and less useful route. Should passenger numbers then reduce further, we fear that TfL will decide to withdraw the route completely.

On the current section of the 424 which would become the 454, the option of reducing the frequency to every 45 minutes is something we oppose. We believe that the option of running the service to a slightly improved frequency of every 30 minutes will be better for current and future passengers, many of whom will already be inconvenienced by the route no longer serving Putney town centre.

Changing the routeing

It is regrettable that some passengers in Fulham would need to walk up to a not inconsiderable 300 metres to access alternative bus routes in future, whilst some passengers in Sands End will lose direct connections with Fulham Broadway and

Townmead Road. We recognise, though, that the rerouting will benefit passengers on roads in those areas which it will serve instead.

In Sands End, the revised route 424 will also run closer to Imperial Wharf station, which will improve transport connections in that area.

In Putney, Carlton Drive would be newly served, which will benefit those residents who do not currently have a direct bus service albeit that it will only be on a shortened route.

Omissions in the consultation publicity

The 'Changes to journeys' section of the consultation explains how some passenger's journeys may change if the proposals go ahead, along with three maps. This includes a map called 'Routes connecting Putney Bridge and Putney High Street'. However, with disappointing carelessness, seven of the proposed alternative bus stops mentioned in the website text do not appear on that map. We ask why TfL were unable to produce a map with those bus stops on them.

If TfL decide to proceed with this proposal

The interchange locations

The EqlA explains that there is public lighting at the suggested interchange locations, which should help to reassure passengers of their safety when having to change buses, especially at times of darkness. There are shelters too at most locations, but we urge TfL to install shelters at those stops where there are not yet shelters.

However, the EqlA does not say which interchange bus stops have Countdown screens. The absence of Countdown is always a disadvantage to those without access to digital devices, whilst even people with digital devices may not want to use them at bus stops, particularly in hours of darkness. We urge TfL to install Countdown at those stops without it, where possible (prioritising, if needed, the busier stops and/or those more isolated from other facilities).

For passengers who will need to walk or wheel between bus stops to continue their journey, 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.

The proposed route numbers

It is curious why it is proposed that the long section of route 424 north of the Thames should be renumbered 454 whilst the short section south of the Thames will retain the 424 number. It would make better sense to swap that numbering around, as keeping the 424 number north of the Thames will assist with familiarity for the passengers on that much longer section of the route compared to what will survive in the Putney area.

Ensuring sufficient capacity

We support TfL's statement that they will monitor the loadings of bus routes in the areas where route 424 currently operates and propose increasing the frequency of those routes and routes 424 and 454 if the demand came close to meeting capacity.

Publicising the route changes

As these are 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 route 424 and, wherever possible, also on the hail and ride sections.