

Proposed changes to bus routes 192, 341, 444, 476 and W8 to serve Meridian Water – 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 at Meridian Water.

We make the following comments:

The rationale for the changes

TfL say that their proposals aim to ensure that public transport keeps pace with the growth of Meridian Water, so that residents and businesses are well served and can access the bus network. They add that unless there are changes, parts of Meridian Water will be more than 400 metres from the bus network. TfL say that providing new direct bus links will connect local centres, amenities and opportunities for onward travel via other bus routes and public transport modes, to help support modal shift away from car use. TfL have also reviewed how existing services are used and identified opportunities to improve efficiency and better match capacity to demand.

Bus routes serving new developments

We support adjustments to bus routes to ensure services operate where passengers need them most. And so, we hope that new route N341, and changes to routes 444, 476 and W8 will bring benefits to passengers at Meridian Water and those who travel through the area using new bus links. We share TfL’s hopes that these changes will support modal shift away from car use and encourage more people to use the bus.

Having to change buses

However, these proposed changes are not without downsides for some bus passengers. TfL have provided a detailed breakdown and analysis of the number of broken links associated with this proposal. (Incidentally, we hope that this degree of information will now be provided for all future bus consultation of this type). Within this information we can see that 1,698 passengers (3.4% of all daily trips) will in future need to change buses to complete their journey.

The impact of broken journeys

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, looking at the route where most passengers will be affected (route 192), it is important - and worrying - to note that 15% of passengers using the 192 are 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.

When undertaking consultations with changes to bus routes, TfL often provide an assessment of the impact on safety of women during hours of darkness (18:00-06:00). However, we could find no such assessment as part of this consultation. We ask why one has not been provided for this set of proposals.

Interchange locations

Given the concerns about needing to change buses, it is critical that changing between buses is as seamless as possible. TfL have provided details in the Equality Impact Assessment (EqIA) of suggested interchange locations, which we will discuss further below.

In terms of the specific bus route proposals:

Routes 192 and W8

We note that passengers travelling between Town Road and Tottenham Hale will benefit from an increase both in bus frequency and the capacity of the buses (by replacing the single deck 192 with the double deck W8). It is also positive that the W8 will run through the heart of Meridian Water and provide new links including to the leisure, retail and transport hubs of Edmonton Green and Tottenham Hale.

TfL state in the EqIA that if a new bus stop were to be installed on the newly served section for route 192 on Montagu Road it would expand the catchment of people close to high frequency bus services as it could be served by a combined frequency across the 192 and W8. We support this but there doesn't appear to be a commitment by TfL elsewhere in the consultation to install this bus stop – we urge TfL to do so should the proposals proceed as planned.

On the negative side, 209 daily trips on route W8 and 987 daily trips on route 192 will in future require a change of bus, which will be inconvenient and add to journey time. There is, though, some reassurance for affected passengers that they will be able to change buses at the same stop within Edmonton Green bus station, where there is seating and shelter. It is unclear if any Countdown screens are available in the bus station; should there not be, we urge TfL to install them at each stop there.

We also note that replacing the W8 with the 192 will mean that passengers using three existing stops on Pickett's Lock Lane and Pickett's Lock Centre will have a reduced bus frequency.

Routes 341, N341 and 476

We believe it is sensible to extend route 476 to Meridian Water, which will provide a slight increase in frequency and replace route 341 on this section. We are reassured that TfL believe the extension can be accommodated without compromising reliability. By contrast, pulling back route 341 to Northumberland Park should help maintain its reliability, not least because it is already a very lengthy route.

We support the proposed N341 night bus service. This will both retain the existing night service on the 341 between central London and Meridian Water and provide a helpful new extension for passengers further into Meridian Water.

For passengers who will in future need to change to/from routes 341 and 476, TfL highlight the stops at Bruce Grove station where same stop interchange can be made. These stops offer shelter with seating and are in a well-lit, overlooked environment with heavy footfall. There is a Countdown screen at the southbound stop, and we support TfL's plan to install Countdown at the northbound stop too.

Route 444

The rerouting of the 444 will provide a range of new links to/from Meridian Water towards Chingford in the east and Edmonton and beyond in the west.

We note that eastbound passengers changing between the 444 and the 34 in future will be able to do so at the same stop, using one of four stops between Silver Street and Montagu Road, albeit that only the stop at Angel Corner / Silver Street station has a shelter with seating, lighting, a Countdown screen and is an area of high footfall. Passengers to/from the 444 and SL1 will also be able to interchange there.

The choices for westbound passengers are less convenient and more time consuming. For those willing and able to, they will need to walk or wheel for approximately 250 metres between the 444 stop on Harbet Road and the route 34 stop at Harbet Road / Cooks Ferry. As this journey will include the need to cross two roads, we support TfL's proposed action of providing a crossing at Harbet Road. Passengers who would prefer to change buses at the same stop (Montagu Road for the 34 and Angel Corner / Silver Street station for the SL1) will need to remain on the 444 as it travels through Meridian Water and criss-crosses the North Circular Road, which will add several minutes to their journey.

Conclusion

Taking all matters into consideration, London TravelWatch supports the proposed changes to bus routes for Meridian Water.

If TfL decide to proceed with this proposal, we call on them to focus on the following:

Monitoring and evaluation

TfL have said that capacity requirements and reliability of all routes would be reviewed on an ongoing basis, to ensure that all services have enough resource and levels of service. We welcome this continued monitoring and urge TfL to be ready to take swift action if needed to address any issues as they arise.

Publicising the changes

As these are such significant changes, should they proceed, TfL need to ensure that there is clear information about the changes online and in-person including at all current bus stops for routes 192, 341, 444, 476 and W8. We also support TfL's plans to provide maps, journey planning tools and travel mentoring to help passengers understand the changes and adapt journeys as needed.