LONDON
TRAVELWATCH

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Artificial Intelligence (AI) and London TravelWatch

Purpose of paper

The purpose of this paper is to support an initial discussion among Board members about the opportunities and challenges presented by AI to our organisation. It combines a description prepared primarily by the Communications team of some of the relevant activities already in play at London TravelWatch, with a section of AI-generated content about some of the ways we could make best use of AI. We hope the discussion prompted by the questions at the end of the paper will provide a steer to the team on next steps.

Background

Over the past couple of years, as AI tools have become more widely available and advanced, several members of the London TravelWatch team have been using them to help them in their day-to-day work. The most regular users have been the Communications team who have used a variety of different AI products to help them create content. These platforms range from the paid version of ChatGPT, Adobe Firefly for video frame, animation and audio generation, Canva Pro, Shutterstock and Google's Nano Banana for image generation, ElevenLabs for voice generation and many more.

Comms are not the only team to use AI tools in their work. The Campaigns and Advocacy team have used both Google Gemini and Chat GPT to help draft consultation responses and identify sources of information for us to further review. Casework uses Copilot's AI summaries in Microsoft Dynamics CRM for cases and are now recording calls with the public using an AI platform called Dialpad which can record and produce a transcription of calls. The Casework team have also noted an emerging use of AI in the drafting of appeals and Freedom of Information (FOI) requests, sometimes resulting in longer, more complex submissions which require extra time and effort to process.

We asked AI to outline some of the ways we could best use AI within London TravelWatch – this is what it told us…

Artificial intelligence offers London TravelWatch an opportunity to reduce routine workloads and strengthen its work on behalf of passengers. Staff already use AI for content creation, case summaries, call transcription and consultation research. The wider opportunity is to bring evidence together more effectively, freeing colleagues to investigate problems, build relationships and press for change.

Across campaigns and advocacy, AI could summarise reports and legislation, support consultation drafts and prepare stakeholder briefings. In casework, it could organise

correspondence, highlight missing information and identify recurring problems in anonymised records. These insights could help London TravelWatch spot emerging passenger issues and strengthen the evidence behind its campaigns.

For communications, AI can help turn approved research into press releases, website copy, newsletters, social posts and accessible summaries. It can also support creative production and content planning. Research and administration could benefit from assistance with survey analysis, spreadsheets, finding organisational records, drafting minutes and tracking actions.

These benefits depend on clear safeguards. AI can produce inaccurate information, miss context or generate inappropriate wording. Staff must check facts, sources, figures and tone before relying on outputs or publishing material. Personal and sensitive information requires strict controls, and any tool's privacy, security and data-protection arrangements need scrutiny. Decisions involving casework remit, vulnerability, safeguarding, policy positions and external approval must remain with accountable colleagues. AI should support professional judgement, not replace it.

Current work to develop our AI capability

We have recently rolled out Copilot Premium across the team and are starting to test its capabilities.

Copilot Premium, unlike a web browser based method of accessing AI like Gemini or ChatGPT, is fully integrated into the Microsoft system and available in any app produced by them including Outlook, Word, Excel and Powerpoint. Users can access Copilot any time by clicking on the little logo in the bottom right of the screen and ask it questions about anything they like. Because it is integrated into the system, it can access any file we have, look through old documents, pull up emails and remember certain instructions if told to.

At present we are still at the very early stages of making use of its full potential, but the small things we have got it to do so far have been highly promising. These include creating a briefing for us ahead of a stakeholder meeting and then turning that briefing into a podcast with two speakers, improving our communications calendar to include RAG ratings plus an automated email sent out each day reminding us of what's on the schedule. We have also been training it to understand our tone of voice, policy positions on particular issues and how we go about writing responses to consultations.

With the roll-out of Claude by the end of the year, staff will be able to prompt Copilot and get a response from both ChatGPT and Claude at the same time. This could be useful when needed to fact-check specific things and understand complex areas of the transport regulatory world.

In addition, individual members of the team have taken part in training on AI and issues arising from its use. We have started identifying external consultants who could be commissioned to come in for a one-day on-site advisory and discovery session, allowing them to review our organisation, identify quick wins and propose practical next steps.

If fruitful, a build on the one-day session could take the form of a more substantial "AI Readiness Sprint" lasting typically one to two weeks at a cost of up to £7,500 to get a comprehensive roadmap to implement an integrated AI optimisation plan.

On the specific issue of FOI and Subject Access Requests, Rick Hebditch has made us aware of a service provided to public sector clients which uses AI to process submissions, but which we have not yet approached.

Risks

As with any new tool or technology, there are risks. Perhaps the greatest is that staff become too reliant on AI, thus reducing the overall quality of our work and taking away a more human element. This could lead to work being obviously AI-generated, whether that is emails, reports or images – this can lead to a lack of credibility or, in more serious cases, inaccurate information being shared externally, whether to passengers, the media or others.

Therefore it is always vital that people do not fully trust AI and check facts, rewrite work to give it a more personal touch and exercise caution when using AI. AI should be a tool that helps us and not one that does our work for us. To this end, we plan to write a guide for staff on the best ways to use AI tools, and are looking into training options so we all understand how best to use these new tools.

More generally, the warning from GCHQ this month that the UK faces an unprecedented rise in AI cyber-attacks in the coming months is a reminder of the broader risks posed to us in common with many other organisations. These relate to the resilience of our own IT-based systems – thankfully the responsiveness of our website provider meant we were unaffected by last month's PHP software flaw which temporarily closed down sites globally – as well our reliance on wider services such as power or transport on which we depend for our day-to-day operations. Most attacks stem from known vulnerabilities (eg theft of login credentials): it is the increased speed and scale with which they can be exploited by AI which is new.

Points for discussion

What do you consider to be the major opportunities for or challenges to LondonTravelWatch associated with the emergence of AI?

Do you know of any organisations from whom we could learn in terms of the effectiveness with which they have embraced the development of AI?

Do you support London TravelWatch commissioning external advice and support of the sort referred to in this paper, and if so, can you recommend anyone for us to approach?