

LONDON TRAVELWATCH Business Plan and Budget Bid 2010-11

Introduction

1. This business plan and budget bid have been prepared by London TravelWatch taking into account the guidance given by the parties' transport leads for the London Assembly. We hope it follows a slightly clearer format than that used in previous years and for the first time it looks forward to key areas of work over the next three years and more explicitly sets out London TravelWatch's strategic objectives.
2. In line with previous guidance, the total budget bid for 2010-11 and the total indicative figures for 2011-13 are based on those submitted in the 2009-10 budget bid, reworked to reflect changed circumstances and revised priorities. Within the overall budget we have identified net savings of 1.43% for 2010-11. The budget bid can be found in appendix A.
3. Our strategic objectives for 2010-13 are set out clearly in paragraph 9 and in paragraphs 17 to 26 we show the action we plan to take next year towards achieving these. In accordance with Annex E of the proposed new Memorandum of Understanding the performance targets against which London TravelWatch's performance during 2010-11 will be measured will be agreed during quarter four of 2009-10 as we develop our detailed workplan.
4. We are an independent, politically neutral, consumer organisation with a wide range of statutory functions. We have a wide remit, covering all those in London who use the buses, the Underground, taxis, the Docklands Light Railway, trams, Dial-a-Ride, and the principal road network; as well as the National Rail network in and around London.

Mission

5. London TravelWatch is the statutory body established by Parliament to be the official voice of transport users in greater London. It has a statutory role in the appeals and consultations process, and in putting the passenger view on transport issues

Values

6. London TravelWatch aims to be:
 - Independent – we will not bow to outside pressure
 - Authentic – we will have an evidence base for all that we do
 - Open – we will share information, and accept new ideas
 - Collaborative – we'll work with stakeholders
 - Inclusive – we'll represent all travellers in our area

Vision

7. That London TravelWatch is the acknowledged champion of the travelling public in London, putting their needs at the centre of decision making about travel in our area.

Corporate Strategy

8. The strategic priorities that underpin our work are:
 - to maintain an efficient system for handling appeals casework and for responding to consultations
 - to develop an independent evidence base of the views and needs of current and future travellers in London, especially those facing barriers to travel
 - to maintain awareness of current transport service and future policy issues in our area
 - to become influential advocates on behalf of travellers to policy makers, regulators and operators
 - to build effective partnerships with stakeholders where it is in the interests if travellers to do so
 - to ensure travellers feel their concerns are represented
 - to be an efficient and responsive organisation

Strategic Objectives for 2010 – 2013

9. Our strategic objectives for the next three years are:
 - To further raise the standard of our appeals casework service
 - To encourage transport operators to improve their complaints handling and approach to customer care
 - to gather the views and experiences of the travellers through research, and by networking with local authorities, user and community groups, especially of bus passengers, those in outer London, and those who are less able to travel
 - to monitor performance of services on behalf of passengers, particularly of the bus network
 - to engage with decision makers and service providers on behalf of passengers, with medium to long term strategic planning and to put the consumer perspective into the planning process
 - to respond fully to major consultations from the passenger perspective
 - to continue to develop constructive relationships with TfL, with the London Assembly, with Passenger Focus and with London Boroughs .
 - to continue to meet regularly with transport operators to put the consumer view
 - to raise the profile of London TravelWatch so that the transport users feel they are represented
 - Whilst continuing to work efficiently, explore ways of expanding our resources and income

Current Context

10. We are in a critical phase for London's transport infrastructure. The East London Line extension is due to open in 2010, with work beginning on phase 2 scheduled for completion at the end of 2012. Work on the Thameslink project and Crossrail has begun, and the extensive upgrade and enhancement work on the Underground is well under way, with major engineering work continuing, as well as improvements on the North London Line (linked to 2012 Olympics). Network Rail's route utilisation strategies and the franchising process set the framework for services for many years ahead.
11. Additionally, current economic circumstances means companies working on tighter budgets and we are already seeing an increase in statutory consultations as transport operators seek to save costs by cutting back on services to passengers. After years of growth on the bus network, with substantial increases in passenger numbers, it seems unlikely there will be further growth, indeed the service could be cut back.
12. As well as these major changes to infrastructure, capacity remains a key issue for London's travelling public. The Mayor's Transport Strategy and a new administration in central Government will bring new transport policies and priorities. London TravelWatch has a crucial role to play in ensuring that the interests of the travellers are safeguarded and promoted, both in the short-and long-term.
13. In a period of such change, we will face a growing challenge in maintaining the knowledge and expertise needed to respond effectively to consultations and events. This is especially important when putting the long view in responding to proposals such as rail route utilisation strategies, amendments to railway infrastructure or station facilities, or when considering new rail franchise arrangements. Our work in shaping the successful customer information programme for the current Thameslink upgrades is a testimony to the value of the knowledge base we have.
14. We have to accept that however hard transport operators try to minimise disruption, during major works, the patience of passengers is finite and we predict that public opinion may change. We are seeing evidence of this already with Jubilee Line upgrades.
15. Looking ahead in the run up to the 2012 Olympics London TravelWatch will increase its monitoring of the transport arrangements being put in place to ensure maximum passenger benefits accrue from the substantial infrastructure investment being made. This work programme will be developed in more detail next year but we envisage that some of our local engagement work in 2011 will be focussed in the east London Olympic boroughs to make sure we understand the transport needs and aspirations of local people. We will be concerned to ensure that inconvenience to ordinary London travellers is minimised, as well as to ensure that there is a positive transport legacy to the Olympics.
16. In keeping with its desire to focus particularly on those whose voice is least heard, this year the Board decided to focus particularly on bus issues and, where possible, to apply the key themes of outer London, the impact of the recession and social exclusion to their work. This emphasis will continue during 2010-11 and the organisation will look particularly to see what it can best do to champion the needs of bus passengers as well as to improve arrangements for passengers interchanging between different transport modes.

Strategic Objectives 2010/11 – 2012/13

17. Objective 1

To further raise the standard of our appeals casework service

In 2010 -2011 we will:

- Continue to improve our internal performance on casework handling in ways that were agreed as a result of our internal review and using our new monitoring software.

18. Objective 2

To encourage transport operators to improve their complaints handling and approach to customer care

In 2010 -2011 we will:

- Work with service providers to improve their response times to London TravelWatch appeals cases
- Conduct audits of the complaints handling systems of transport operators
- Promote best practice models in customer care
- Complete a project to promote greater awareness of passenger rights amongst the transport users
- Press for improved communications to passengers during service disruptions of all kinds

19. Objective 3

To gather the views and experiences of the transport users through research, and by networking with local authorities, user and community groups, especially of bus passengers, those in outer London, and those who are less able to travel.

In 2010 -2011 we will:

- Complete at least two research projects for the benefits of travellers
- Arrange two local passenger consultation events
- Establish links with 100% of London boroughs and make contact with county councils which border London as appropriate
- Further develop our understanding of the issues that affect bus passengers
- Continue to develop our data base of key local transport issues across London
- Expand the use of our new casework monitoring software to provide statistics on transport user concerns to inform our research
- Develop further our work to promote the transport needs of disadvantaged groups, particularly in outer London.

20. Objective 4

To monitor performance of services on behalf of transport users, particularly of the bus network

In 2010 -2011 we will:

- Regularly review the performance information supplied to us by TfL and other transport operators and make recommendations for action as appropriate
- Continue to monitor the impact of fares policies across London
- Monitor the impact on passengers of the London-wide roll out on the rail network of Oyster PAYG from January 2010
- Take up issues identified through our casework
- Monitor how transport operators manage service disruption and recommend improvements
- Maintain an overview of how bus priority measures are implemented and maintained across London
- Continue to monitor closely any proposals by operators to reduce services to passengers
- To continue to be flexible in planning our activities to enable us to respond to external events which can be unpredictable and necessitate prompt action.

21. Objective 5

To engage with decision makers and service providers on behalf of transport users , with medium to long term strategic planning and to put the consumer perspective into the planning process

In 2010 -2011 we will:

- Promote more widely the passenger benefits of good and well planned transport interchanges.
- Monitor the progress of the tube upgrade programme including the impact of closures and the provision of replacement services
- Monitor the progress of the Thameslink upgrade programme
- Monitor the impact of building Crossrail particularly in respect of its impact on bus passengers and the road network.
- Monitor the transport arrangements being put in place for the 2012 Olympics to ensure maximum passenger benefits accrue from the investment

22. Objective 6

To respond fully to major consultations from the passenger perspective

In 2010 -2011 we will:

- Continue to respond in a timely way to all requests from committees of the London Assembly for assistance with their scrutinies and the House of Commons Select Committee with its inquiries
- Continue to respond to major consultations from statutory and regulatory organisations on changes that will impact on transport users in our area
- Respond to consultations on Network Rail's route utilisation strategies (RUS) where they impact on passengers in our area
- Review and respond to proposals to amend timetables and bus services
- Continue to review local consultations and respond when we judge necessary

23. Objective 7

To continue to develop constructive relationships with TfL, with the London Assembly, with Passenger Focus and with London boroughs.

In 2010 -2011 we will:

- Contribute to London Assembly scrutinies into matters that affect transport users
- Liaise regularly to avoid duplication of effort between ourselves and the Transport Committee
- Consult regularly with Passenger Focus to identify opportunities for joint working and to eliminate duplication
- Develop a closer relationship with TfL on research into transport users needs and experiences
- Continue to develop a good working relationship with London boroughs on issues affecting passengers

24. Objective 8

To continue to meet regularly with transport users to put the consumer view

In 2010 -2011 we will:

- Continue to meet with senior staff of all transport providers in the London area at least once a year
- Continue day to day liaison with other transport provider staff as necessary

25. Objective 9

To raise the profile of London TravelWatch so that travellers feel they are represented

In 2010 -2011 we will:

- Raise our profile in accordance with the priorities set out in our revised communications strategy
- Implement a strategy to broaden awareness of our work amongst sections of the community who are under represented in our casework
- Hold at least two local passenger engagement events

26. Objective 10

Whilst continuing to work efficiently, explore ways of expanding our resources and income

In 2010 -2011 we will:

- Gain full reaccreditation of the Investors in People Award
- Invest in training and development for our staff and Board
- Explore through partnerships ways of working that will expand the resources available to us to do our work
- Implement a knowledge management strategy
- Explore a market for our services, consistent with our mission and values

Financial and Corporate Management

27. The relationship between London TravelWatch and Transport Committee has been reviewed and we look forward to closer working between us on future work programmes. In this spirit of clearer working, the Memorandum of Understanding between the two organisations has also been reviewed.
28. The key focus of London TravelWatch over the past year was to begin the difficult task of modernising the organisation. The staffing structure was reorganised to reallocate work previously done by unfunded posts; to build in better cover arrangements; and to improve the capacity and effectiveness of the organisation by enabling a greater focus on key areas of work and better delegation of responsibility. At the same time the offices were reconfigured to reflect new team structures and make better use of available space. Early in 2009 a more detailed review of casework was carried out to help identify ways of further improving performance and we continue to implement the actions arising from this.
29. London TravelWatch also reviewed the operation of the Board and its subsidiary bodies to make best use of member time and promote a more strategic and consumer-orientated approach. The number of Board meetings has been reduced from thirteen to six per annum with reduced agendas and fewer information items, and more work is carried out between meetings in committees. To ensure the work of these committees is co-ordinated their chairs, with the Chair of the Board, are members of the Executive Group which oversees the day-to-day governance of the organisation. The work programme of this group has been extended.
30. We work closely with Passenger Focus who are the national consumer body for rail passengers and will continue to do so, particularly as they develop their new role in representing bus passengers outside London. During 2009 a review of our relationship with Passenger Focus was undertaken to ensure that unnecessary duplication of effort is avoided and to maximise opportunities for joined-up working in ways that will achieve better outcomes for passengers in the most cost effective way. We will continue to explore this relationship.
31. As a responsible organisation we are constantly looking for ways to reduce our operating costs. This year, for example, we have managed to reduce our insurance costs by 25% by changing companies, we have investigated ways to deliver training more cost effectively and are systemically reviewing our various service contracts to reduce costs. We have managed to find efficiency savings of 1.43% against the budget submitted last year and the summary attached at Appendix A gives an impression of where we will achieve savings. However we will keep the position under review and may need to make virements during the year.
32. Any reductions beyond 1.43% would adversely affect our plans for the coming year and mean that we would have to scale back our research and communications activity to an extent that would severely impact on our ability to meet our strategic objectives
33. We need to address the agendas of other organisations, including the Assembly's own Transport Committee and the House of Commons' Transport Select Committee as well as the industry's operators and regulators. To be relevant our research must be rooted in the current concerns of transport users as, for example, when we needed evidence to support the case to maintain the rail service on the South London Line. Our business plan makes provision for such work in general terms,

but the actual projects to be undertaken will be identified by our Board during the lifetime of the plan.

34. Moving forward we will continue to seek medium term efficiency savings but we will also look further ahead to investigate possibilities for more substantial savings that might be achieved through moving to alternative premises where there might be the opportunity to achieve economies of scale through sharing support services with key partners. We will also explore other ways in which we might expand our resources.

Staff

35. Following our restructure we are investing in training and development to help improve the organisation's capacity and, once we have had time to consolidate these changes, they will lead to improved effectiveness.
36. The past year has inevitably been one of change and challenge for the organisation and it was therefore not surprising that a recent review by Investors in People found that we did not meet all the indicators within their standard for reaccreditation at this time. However they were confident that the systems we are putting in place will have the desired outcomes and we will retain recognition status. We are fully committed to implementing the action plan within the time scales agreed with our assessor.
37. Our staffing budget supports our work as follows (on the basis of the staff expected to be in post as of 1.4.10):

	£ '000
• Research, policy development and consultation responses	257
• Committee administration	65
• Casework and public liaison	350
• Communications	77
• Financial control, personnel and premises management	175
• Corporate management	144

Staffing costs (exc. members) **1,068**

Details of our staffing structure are shown in appendix B.

Risk Assessment

38. We have a comprehensive risk policy and regularly review and update our systems according to changing circumstances. During the year our risk management arrangements were reviewed by internal audit and given a "substantial assurance" rating and we have put in place the recommended changes.
39. Similarly we have a business continuity plan and regularly review and update our systems to reflect changes in personnel and to learn lessons from events such as the 'snow day' in February when lack of public transport meant that we had to close the office at very short notice.

40. An important new risk that we face is the loss of expertise and organisational memory due to the retirement of several key staff in the past eighteen months. We have already put in place mechanisms to ameliorate this risk but are developing a knowledge management strategy during 2009-10 and next year we will implement this. In 2010/11 we hope to build on the benefits of information sharing and work programming that our new casework monitoring software will bring and extend these to other areas of activity throughout the organisation.
41. We have identified two particular risks that may affect the delivery of our business plan commitments and budget submission:
 - An unexpectedly high surge in casework could require the use of temporary staff or the redeployment of other staff away from their planned work
 - We may be called upon to respond to a major policy consultation or to carry out our functions in relation to rail closure proposals which might necessitate the use of consultants or temporary staff.

Reserves

42. The substantial capital expenditure to implement our new casework management system will impact on the reserves over the years 2010/11 – 2015/16 by an increase in the depreciation charge. This will be offset to some extent by a reduction in depreciation on assets acquired in earlier years.
43. Our reserves policy says the reserves should be maintained at a sufficient level to ensure that London TravelWatch's core operating activities can continue during periods of unforeseen difficulties involving exceptional levels of unplanned expenditure.
44. In accordance with this policy we do not propose to make any further call on our reserves during 2010-11, or during 2011-13. However, should the risks identified in paragraph 40 occur, then further calls may become necessary.
45. London TravelWatch reviews its reserves policy annually.