
Minutes

Agenda no : 3
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**Minutes of a meeting of the Consumer Affairs Committee
held on 8 July 2009 at 6 Middle Street London EC1**

Members : David Barry, Terry Bennett, Daniel Francis, Sophia Lambert, Teena Lashmore, Sarah Pond (Chair)
Ex Officio : Sharon Grant (London TravelWatch Chair), Lorna Reith (London TravelWatch Deputy Chair)

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Present

Members

Lorna Reith; Daniel Francis; Sarah Pond; Sophia Lambert (from 11.45am); Teena Lashmore;
Terry Bennett

Guests

| | |
|---------------|---|
| Matt Winfield | Manager, Stakeholder Engagement, Transport for London (TfL) |
| Beverley Hall | Head of Communications for Surface Transport at TfL |
| Simon Mouncey | Surface Transport Liaison Manager, TfL |

Staff

Director, Public Affairs; Senior Committee Administrator (minutes)

Minutes

The public meeting was preceded by a members' only session from 09.30 until 09.45. The meeting began at 09.45 hours and was open to the news media and public until a resolution to move into private session was passed in respect of specific agenda items.

1 Chair's introduction, pre-meeting announcements and apologies for absence

Apologies were received from David Barry and Sophia Lambert for arriving late. David Leibling and Lorna Reith were welcomed as observer and ex-officio member respectively.

2 Declarations of interest

There were no additional declarations of interest.

3 Minutes

Minutes of the Casework Committee meeting held on 22 April 2009 were agreed and signed for the record.

Regarding minute 10 the Director, Public Liaison, informed the meeting that a Department for Transport (DfT) consultation on consumer affairs was imminent and would be circulated to members for comment as soon as it was available.

Action : Director, Public Liaison

4 Matters arising (CA007)

A progress report on matters arising from previous meetings of the Committee was considered. Members requested that a leaflet entitled 'How to Complain' be included in the Casework Review as a milestone, with a date for completion.

Action : Chief Executive

On the Committee workplan (Annex B of the report), it was agreed to remove references to young people for the remainder of this year.

Action : Committee Services

On paragraph 2.5 (time limit for Oyster refunds), a member raised a personal case which was agreed to process via the members' enquiry system.

Action : Lorna Reith

Minute 8 annex B 22.4.09, on third party online ticket sales, it was agreed that whilst this issue does not pertain to all Transport Operating Companies (TOCs) but should be pursued at the highest level with the Association of Train Operating Companies (ATOC) and DfT in the first instance.

Action : Director, Public Liaison

5 Actions taken (CA008)

This report detailed recent work pertinent to the Committee undertaken by the secretariat on public consultations, public affairs, consumer rights and other non-case specific matters.

A member noted the omission of a meeting held between London TravelWatch and TfL regarding the automated response for online complaints. A record of the meeting would be circulated to members and included for public record in the next Actions Taken report to this committee.

Action : Committee Services

Members also requested that the complaint handling review report by Passenger Focus be included in the workplan for this Committee.

Action : Chair/Committee Services

Regarding the Annex to this report, which listed a meeting regarding access and ticket gates at Lewisham Station (13 May 2009), members requested a formal note of the meeting and an update on outcomes.

Action : Director, Public Liaison

6 Casework team recent performance report (CA009)

The Director, Public Liaison, introduced the report which covered a period when the focus had been on acknowledging receipt of complaints. It was also a period which had seen significant staff shortages with two team members on long term sick leave, their work being shared by the remaining team members. This had clearly impacted on the overall number of cases left open on the system, but the Director was confident that a marked improvement would be seen in the figures for June and July 2009.

In the light of this, members requested that monthly reporting on casework workload and targets be presented at the next meeting, covering each month from this meeting.

Action : Director, Public Liaison

The Chair suggested that the Committee should decide what reporting it would like to see from October 2009 onward, when the new Casework team database system was installed.

Action : Chair/ Director, Public Liaison

The Chair requested that items 6 and 7 item be presented in the opposite order in future.

Action : Committee Services

7 Casework team 6-monthly Casework report (CA010)

This report covered Casework team performance for the six months to date. Specific targets in the report were considered.

Target 1

It was noted that customer satisfaction levels were higher than previously - likely due to the team having improved its response times. Members requested details of the mechanism within the current system which monitors whether responses were sent out within five working days. The Director, Public Affairs, undertook to provide this within a week of this meeting.

Action : Director, Public Liaison

Target 2

There were no comments on this target.

Target 3

Members were concerned at the discrepancies between the deadlines of transport operating companies (TOCs) and London TravelWatch for responding to complaints and appeals. The industry standard was 20 working days, but the report indicated that four operators (c2c, National Express East Coast, London Midland and Southern) took consistently longer. It was agreed to write to these to ask what deadlines they worked to, and, if this was longer than 20 days, ask why.

Action : Director, Public Liaison

Members noted that such issues were often channelled through regular meetings between TOCs and the Chief Executive of London TravelWatch. The Chair requested that a record of these discussions be made available to members on a regular basis. Members also suggested that cases and appeals forwarded from London TravelWatch to TOCs should include a receipt request and indication of the likely response time (if not already known). When an operator's target response time was known, it should be included in the London TravelWatch response to appellants informing them that their case has been forwarded. All three suggestions were upheld and the Chair asked that they be acted on and, where appropriate, included in the Casework review and set up of the new database.

Action : Director, Public Affairs

Members were pleased to note that customer satisfaction with London TravelWatch's work was at the highest ever, and asked that their thanks to the team be passed on.

8 Policy issues arising from casework (CA011)

Three matters of policy arising from recent casework and the secretariat recommendations on them were presented for consideration by the Committee.

- a. Missed train due to tube delays led to need to repurchase ticket
Members were asked to consider whether the current refund policies of London Underground and other train operators were appropriate, and whether London TravelWatch should be arguing for a less rigid interpretation of the rules.

In the meeting, members agreed that TOCs would not lose out by simply allowing the passenger to board the next train. Members acknowledged that consistency was needed, but had to be balanced against setting rules that were too rigid, meaning passengers lost out. It was agreed that London TravelWatch should argue that if a passenger missed a train owing to verifiable delays on the Underground, any ticket upgrade necessary to catch the next train should at least include credit from the ticket already in hand, if not a full ticket transfer.

Action : Committee Services

- b. Ticket machines issuing discounted Railcard tickets prior to 0930
Members were asked to consider the problems caused to holders of Railcards when unable to purchase discounted tickets from ticket machines prior to 0930.
Members were also asked whether the Committee should seek a more passenger-focused approach from operators by allowing passengers to purchase discounted tickets from ticket machines in advance on the day of travel.

Members said that ticket machines should be programmed to issue tickets between 0900 and 0930 for off peak travel. The secretariat was advised to inform passengers that London TravelWatch would write to TOCs recommending that ticket machines emulate ticket offices and sell off peak tickets in advance.

Action: Directors, Public Liaison and Research and Development

- c. Short-formed train service leading to overcrowding

Members were asked to consider whether it was appropriate for an operator to reduce train lengths thus increasing the level of overcrowding on its services.

Members agreed that this was wholly at the cost of passenger comfort and value for money, and supported the escalation of the matter. It was recommended to pursue any local press coverage on the matter.

Action : Rail and Underground Officer and Communications Officer

9 Transport for London Bus complaints handling (CA012)

The Chair welcomed Beverley Hall and Simon Mouncey to the meeting for this item on bus complaints processes and data at London Buses.

Several points were raised, covering TfL website's handling of bus complaints; the speed of responses (with particular reference to appeals lodged by London TravelWatch); CCTV evidence; the early termination of bus services; bus stop stopping rules; the use of an 0845-number, the demographic of complainants and the possibility of London TravelWatch audit of TfL's complaints procedure. The two organisations had met to discuss the website complaints issue, and TfL undertook to check to ensure that the reference numbers were being given to complainants when they logged their complaint.

Action : Committee services

Ms Hall explained that target response times for complaints varied depending on the bus operator concerned. A complaints code of practice was negotiated into each bus operator's contract, with some handling complaints directly and the remainder via TfL. Generally, TfL closed the case once it was answered or forwarded, but operators were expected to return a copy of the case resolution, and to cooperate promptly and thoroughly on the matters. There was some debate as to whether TfL should keep cases open until the operator copy was received, but in any case TfL did not inform complainants that their complaint had been forwarded.

There was also an overarching code of practice, applied to all operators, which had recently been updated to include timescales for responses. This code formed part of the Framework Agreement and, further to the Committee's request, would be made available to view (subject to TfL's confirmation that it was not confidential). However, Ms Hall asked the Committee to note that the code of practice did not cover appeals.

Action : Committee Services

A standing agreement had been made between London TravelWatch and TfL (and other transport operators) that appeals would be responded to within twenty days. This was clearly slipping at TfL, with the following three issues having been identified:

- Complaints sent via TfL which were then forwarded to bus companies took longer or were lost
- Responses from bus companies were delayed when coming back through TfL
- TfL closing cases once they were forwarded or answered, which caused a new case to be opened with any subsequent correspondence.

Ms Hall advised that TfL was working on its reporting methods and assessing issues such as these.

The issue with CCTV evidence was that the Casework team regularly received cases which were reliant on footage that had been overwritten by the time TfL assessed the appeal. Ms Hall responded that TfL was considering a trial of live CCTV which would be discussed

further with operators. However she agreed that it would be better to strengthen the reporting processes and move more quickly in these cases.

On the early termination of bus services, London TravelWatch acknowledged that specific parts of a route may be worse than the route overall, but that complaints are received on the specifics. For example buses were terminated early at Tottenham High Road on football match days which, from the passenger's point of view, meant an incomplete journey. Ms Hall indicated that TfL watched for patterns in complaints: if evidence became clear then action was taken. She gave the example of a recent case with a pattern of buses being turned away from Walthamstow bus station; the operator was informed with the result that its control strategy was adjusted and the issue resolved.

The Chair raised the issue of TfL's advertised helpline beginning with 0845 rather than a London number. This resulted in many initial complaints coming into London TravelWatch's local number (advertised on the same poster), having to be redirected to the 0845 number in order to further the complaint. The consensus was that people chose to call London TravelWatch as it was perceived to be cheaper, particularly if calling from a mobile phone. Given this, the Chair asked what TfL's rationale was for keeping an 0845 number.

Ms Hall replied that, firstly, 0845 numbers charged a flat rate to callers from landlines regardless of location, giving those who use TfL services but live outside the London telephone area the same cost information line as those within it. Secondly, she believed that 0845 numbers offered the most stability in terms of business continuity, as they were easy to transfer to other buildings if necessary. TfL runs 24 lines on its 0845 number and it would be expensive to move them all as landlines (if moving business address), and virtually impossible to move suddenly in case of emergency. However, Ms Hall also said that TfL was planning to analyse the use of this number, including the volume of calls from outside London and the total number made from mobiles, as well as considering what the costs of returning to a landline number might be. Ms Hall offered to report back to the Committee on this work at its next meeting in September.

Action : Committee Services

The Chair asked that if TfL chose not to alter its 0845 number, London TravelWatch would value suggestions as to what might be done to reduce the number of initial calls coming through to the Casework team.

There was also a discussion about driver discretion with regard to passenger capacity and loading at bus stops. Every stop is now compulsory, with the driver responsible for slowing down to check for passengers at each stop. Where this did not occur, complainants were advised to note the number of the following bus, aiding the identification of the first through the schedule at the garage. Ms Hall underlined the importance of driver discretion in all cases.

A member asked whether TfL had demographic data on complainants. Ms Hall responded that this was not done formally or consistently. However TfL had previously done some research on this and also found a tendency for written complaints especially to come from more affluent areas, which clearly did not represent the population of the travelling public in London. This work had not been updated but would be made available to London TravelWatch for information.

Action : Committee Services

There followed a short discussion on the possibility of London TravelWatch auditing London Buses' complaints handling. Ms Hall suggested that London TravelWatch would benefit from

information already available from a number of recent and current audits. Ms Hall would provide more details on the range of audit data available at the next Committee meeting.

Action : Committee Services

A member asked about how serious incidences were monitored. Ms Hall answered that this was done through the main control centres and disseminated to press officers and communications centres. Where possible, countdown signs show emergency information which would in future go via online account management systems.

The Chair thanked Ms Hall and Mr Mouncey for their contributions to the meeting.

10 Casework team review update (CA013)

The Committee considered the report from the Chief Executive on the recent review of systems and procedures. The Deputy Chair of the Board recommended that under 'Capacity and Resources' (Box 2), the leaflet / letter she had recommended, outlining how best to complain should be included, with a deadline for publication. The Chair asked that members email further points on this paper to her.

Action : Members

11 Any other business

There was no other business.

12 Resolution to move into confidential session

The Committee resolved, under section 15(b) of schedule 18 of the Greater London Authority Act 1999, that by reason of the confidential nature of the next following item/s, it was desirable in the public interest that the public should be excluded from the remainder of the meeting.

In confidential session, the committee discussed the tender process for the new software system for the Casework team, the Casework performance reports in more detail, and the forthcoming workplan for the Committee.