
Minutes

Agenda item 5 (a)
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**Minutes of a meeting of the London TravelWatch Board
held on 10 February 2009 at 6 Middle Street**

Contents

- 407 Chair's introduction and apologies for absence**
- 408 Declarations of interest**
- 409 Chair's activities and report from Passenger Focus Board**
- 410 Minutes**
- 411 Matters arising**
- 412 Action taken**
- 413 Information items**
- 414 Department for Transport's decision on South West Trains' ticket office opening hours**
- 415 First Capital Connect consultation on ticket office opening hours**
- 416 Christmas period services review**
- 417 London transport network closures on 2 February 2009 due to snow**
- 418 Heathrow Airport Runway 3 : Public Transport access**
- 419 Future meetings**
- 420 Any other business**
- 421 Resolution to move into confidential session**

Present

Board members

David Barry	
Onjali Bodrul	
Kevin Davis	
Gail Engert	
Daniel Francis	
Sharon Grant	Chair
Sophie Lambert	
David Leibling	
Lorna Reith	Deputy Chair
Sarah Pond	
Andrew Probert	

In attendance

Bryan Davey	Director, Public Liaison (minute 415)
Tim Bellenger	Director, Research and Development
Carmel Cannon	Senior Committee Administrator
John Cartledge	Safety and Policy Advisor
Janet Cooke	Chief Executive Officer
Jo deBank	Communications Officer
Jerry Gold	Rail and Underground Transport Officer (minutes 415-418)
Graham Larkbey	Committee Clerk
Vincent Stops	Streets and Surface Transport Officer 9minutes 415-418)

Speakers

Mike Noakes, General Manager, British Airports Authority (minute 418)

Public Gallery

Matt Winfield, Stakeholder Engagement Manager, Group Public Affairs, Transport for London (TfL); Karen Boswell, Customer Services Director, First Capital Connect (minute 415); 12 members of the public

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407 Chair's introduction and apologies for absence

The Chair welcomed members, speakers and guests and in particular new members of the Board. Apologies were received from Terry Bennett for the morning session and David Leibling for the afternoon.

408 Declarations of interest

No additional declarations of interest were made.

409 Chair's activities and report from Passenger Focus Board

The Chair had had another very busy period, continuing the induction of new board members, and had met all of them individually, as well as one of the two planned induction days. One induction day had been postponed due to the bad weather on 2 February, and was to be rescheduled. Meanwhile work had continued on the new internal committee structures.

The Chair had opened the new ticket office at Liverpool Street station, visited Croydon Central Control Centre (with the Chief Executive Officer and the Director, Research and Development). The Chair had also given evidence at the House of Commons Transport Select Committee on 4 February, and had been active in the press regarding fares increases and office closures.

The Deputy Chair reported on a successful and fascinating night visit, with members and staff, to London Underground's Leicester Square control room, then on to the old Brompton Road station. The journey home was of particular interest as it illustrated well the popularity of the night bus services, which in this case were seen to be serving all areas required and performed well.

David Leibling was congratulated on his appointment to the board of Passenger Focus. At the time of the meeting he had yet to attend a Passenger Focus board meeting, but would provide a report for information to the Board on a regular basis.

410 Minutes

The minutes of the London TravelWatch Board meeting held on 16 December 2008 were approved and signed for the record, with the following amendments :

Dr Tim Dempsey should read 'Dr Tony Dempsey'.

On page 4 :

In the first paragraph, "Rail Accessibility Investment Branch" should be "Rail Accident Investigation Branch".

And in the third, it is specifically the London edition of its newsletter on the front of which Passenger Focus has agreed that the London TravelWatch logo should appear.

The minutes of the Executive group meetings held on 13 November and 11 December 2008 were noted, as were the minutes of the Casework Committee held on 19 November 2008.

411 Matters arising (LTW 281)

The report was noted, with the following to be taken forward as separate pieces of work:

Minute 325 : It was agreed that the proposed Access to Transport Committee would take forward the overall issue of signage on the underground network.

Minute 378, on the surface interchange between Euston and St Pancras International stations. It was agreed that the Rail and Underground Policy Officer would develop a proposal for solving these issues for approval by the Board.

Minute 397, on TfL's information line opening hours over the Christmas period : the Board did not accept the given response and requested that London TravelWatch pursues this further with a formal request for the line to be open at least later on Christmas Eve and earlier on Boxing Day, if not throughout the period, so that passengers may plan for travel in advance.

Action : Secretariat

412 Action taken (LTW 282)

The report was noted.

413 Information items (to be taken at 10.50)

The following reports were received for information :

- (a) Neighbourhood Policing Project Board minutes (LTW 283)
- (b) Police and Community Team meeting minutes (LTW 284)
- (c) Croydon Public Transport Liaison Panel minutes (LTW 285)
- (d) Lewisham Public Transport Liaison Panel minutes (LTW 286)
- (e) Parliamentary Advisory Committee on transport Safety minutes (LTW 287)

Members requested some clarity on what was expected of them regarding the production of information reports on local issues. The Chair indicated that this would form part of the Deputy Chair's forthcoming report on London TravelWatch's work with external stakeholders such as councils and user groups.

414 Department for Transport's decision on South West Trains' ticket office opening hours (LTW 288)

The Director, Research and Development introduced the report, which detailed the Department for Transport (DfT)'s decision on South West Trains' ticket office opening hours, looking at the differences and any anomalies station by station. Members were asked to note that the Office of Rail Regulators (ORR) was at the time of the meeting in negotiations with South West Trains (SWT) to check whether its destination list breaks regulations, and that there was as yet no full agreement on Oyster Pay-as-you-go (PAYG) inclusions.

The director highlighted a particular issue at Wandsworth Town station, where the recorded high volume of sales from the Ticket Vending Machines (TVMs) was due more to the location of the booking office (on an island platform and up a set of stairs, on the Reading-bound platform) rather than passenger choice. There were plans to install a new, fully accessible booking office and possible gating scheme at the front of the station, which, in addition to the station's town centre location and high footfall would suggest that the booking office opening hours would need some reconsideration. The LTW288 report recommended therefore that the proposed opening hours be renegotiated between SWT and DfT, looking particularly at the Saturday closure proposal (to which the DfT had not objected).

The decisions on New Malden and Ashford Stations were also queried, with the latter being listed as being open longer on Sundays than during the week. This was not the only such anomaly in the report, and the Director, Research and Development, suggested that they were probably due to a blanket application of DfT criteria where there insufficient data had been supplied, with a default answer being entered rather than bespoke.

The Board agreed that London TravelWatch would write to the DfT to query these anomalies, and to make further recommendations on the conditions of queuing at unsheltered TVMs at stations where there would be no open booking office, and on the servicing of TVMs to ensure that tickets and change would be available at any time the booking office was to be closed. The Chair also asked that the recommendations make clear that oyster products must be available through TVMs; and that information on booking office opening hours must be clearly posted outside the station.

Action : Director, Research and Development

The Chair thanked the Director, Research and Development for his detailed report, and noted that this was a good example of London TravelWatch's influencing operational practice.

415 First Capital Connect consultation on ticket office opening hours (LTW289)

The Director, Research and Development introduced the report, which considered London TravelWatch's response to First Capital Connect (FCC)'s proposed ticket office closures. The Director reminded members that, in responding to the proposals, the key criterion was 'access to rail products'.

It was clear that FCC had made somewhat more sophisticated proposals than SWT, for example by acknowledging the importance of the availability of Oyster PAYG, and several other recommendations that London TravelWatch had made to the previous SWT consultation.

As per the previous item, the question of maintenance of machines was raised. FCC asserted that each machine had a capacity of more than 4,000 tickets before needing refilling, as well as being managed remotely with alerts to a central TVM management system to warn of problems with particular machines. However, no guarantees could be given as regards the speed with which TVM malfunction could be addressed.

The Board was concerned that station staff would be absent when the booking offices were closed, and the Chair contended that 'access to rail products' includes access to information about rail products. FCC conceded that only larger stations would have staff on hand at all times. The Board reiterated that staff need to be visible and available to passengers, both for the provision of information across a broader range than available from a TVM, and for a sense of security.

Further questions of the legibility of TVMs for the visually impaired, the issuing of child tickets, and whether Help Points would be multi-lingual were also discussed as having a significant effect on the 'access to rail products'. However it was the Thameslink booking office closures which caused most concern, in that they were listed as temporary, but would in effect be permanent. It was suggested that a compromise could be reached by setting the Thameslink stations aside from the main list, to be covered by a separate report which clearly stated temporary nature of the closures.

With this, the Board agreed all the recommendations at point 10 in the report, with the following amendments :

- 10.1.2 add that if the office is closed and staff are on duty, that they are available to passengers.
- 10.1.4 add that conditions of queuing at unsheltered TVMs need to be addressed.
- 10.1.5 add 'of specifying booking office times'
- 10.1.6 add that information is included and available on ticket types. That help points are available in various languages, and that ticket type information (e.g. child tickets) is clear and useful.
- 10.1.5 add that these are temporary closures.
- 10.4 change to specification of 12 transactions per hour criteria
- 10.5 becomes 'Members are asked to consider whether, in the light of the above, there are sufficient grounds to submit a formal objection to the Department for Transport.'

The Chair thanked the Director, Research and Development and the Director, Public Liaison, for their work on these consultations.

Action : Director, Research and Development

416 Christmas period services review (LTW 290)

The Director, Research and Development introduced the report, which reviewed the operation of services by transport providers within London TravelWatch's remit during the Christmas period 2008.

The first comments from the Board regarded the discrepancies of information available from DLR over the period. After some discussion, the Board recommended that TfL needed to work more closely with Network Rail on provision of information prior to and over the Christmas period. The Secretariat would take this forward with TfL, in submitting its response under minute 411, above.

Action : Secretariat

417 London Transport network closures on 2 February 2009 due to snow

The London Assembly had requested that London TravelWatch submit evidence to its meeting on 12 February to consider the management of transport infrastructure on 2 February 2009, when London had been subject to severe snowfall.

In preparation to answer this request, the Board considered informal reports from the Research and Development team on how the rail, road and bus networks had performed throughout this day. The looked at:

- Service provision
- information provision
- website capacity
- clearance of snow and ice from passenger areas on railway property
- reimbursement arrangements for tickets bought in advance, such as where passengers were unable to complete or undertake their journey or in the case of Season Ticket holders no service was provided.

Rail

This was particularly hampered by new-design trains which had a faster safety-cut out point when electrics became wet (or snow-laden) than older designs, with the effect that services were disrupted sooner than may have happened in previous years (eg in 1991, when the older-style trains did keep running, albeit a patchy and infrequent service).

Roads and buses

Where rail services were not disrupted, commuters into London had been stranded at interchange stations due to disruptions on London Overground and the complete shut down of the bus network. London TravelWatch recognised that the weather conditions in this case were unusual, and that operating public transport services in such conditions was problematic and probably dangerous. However, it was agreed that the following questions need to be put to operators and the highway authorities to ensure that lessons are learnt for the future :

- i) Whilst recognising that there was some benefit in terms of clarity in not running any buses across the whole of London, we would like to understand why this happened as circumstances would have been different across London. Could you tell us why bus services were suspended across the whole of London, at what level the decision was made and the time at which the decision was made?
- ii) We have heard in the press about the difficulties of getting buses out of their garages to the start of their routes. Was this the case? If so, are there any arrangements for bus garages to be prioritised for snow clearance by local highway authorities?
- iii) Does TfL have a list of priority bus services that it attempts to keep running in such circumstances? Further, does liaison with borough highway authorities allow TfL to plan to keep bus routes running or does TfL rely on local decision making by each borough?
- iv) Has the privatisation of bus services in London led to the siting of bus garages in locations more remote from their routes, and so exacerbating the issue of buses getting out of their depots to the start of the route?
- v) It often seems that large vehicles actually keep roads open when there is snow and that taking services off meant that conditions deteriorated more than they would have had buses (particularly night buses) been maintained in service. Can you comment on this?
- vi) What was the impact on the services of bus drivers and essential staff not being able to get to work? What proportion of the bus workforce managed to get into work?

Information

It was clear that information provision was a key component during the day, and the team reported that operators' websites had been unable to deal with the number of extra visits. Statistics from the National Rail Reservations site indicated that it had had 148,000 simultaneous visits – 16 times its designed capacity. It was also reported that on that day there were 9 times as many telephone enquiries, 8 times the usual number of train tracker requests and a seven-fold increase in text message update requests.

Reimbursements

It appeared that there were discrepancies between operators as to how these were to be managed. It was agreed that this particular matter needed some monitoring as customers applied for refunds in the weeks to come.

Members were reminded that the Board had previously requested one highways management body for buses – originally to look at bus priority, but it would have been an appropriate management body in this case. Clearly there was a need for contingency, particularly on red routes. The location of bus garages was also an issue, as some had been unable to use local access roads which had not been gritted – another case for greater liaison between local authorities and bus operators.

The key questions the Board raised were

- Why was the decision taken centrally and at what time?
- Are buses stored further away from their routes?
- Were there arrangements to prioritise clearance of key routes?
- Suggest a post mortem of handling?

David Barry commented that at least the simplicity of the blanket closure statement was clear and useful. Kevin Davis added that as this was a one-off event London TravelWatch would be wise to be circumspect and balanced in its reaction.

The Board agreed that the above points would be given as evidence to the Greater London Authority transport Committee, and thanked the Research and Development team for their work on researching and reporting the matter.

418 Heathrow Airport Runway 3 : Public Transport access (LTW 291)

The Chair welcomed Mike Noakes to the meeting to present on the integration of Tube, rail and surface transport networks to Heathrow Airport Runway 3. This presentation is available in full on the London TravelWatch website.

Following the presentation, members asked Mr Noakes about orbital links to the airport, and those from central London and across the country. Bus services discussions were still in the early stages, and, like all surface transport issues at the airport, were seen as easier and faster to deliver than rail options. Even at present, Heathrow is a significant coach hub and this was acknowledged area for possible development, as with road access in general.

With some 55,000 airport staff plus associated businesses, the question of how to persuade them to use public transport instead of cars was raised. Clearly the key issue was that public transport did not cover the unsocial hours of most shift patterns.

The Chair thanked Mr Noakes and invited him back to brief the Board on progress in six months' time.

419 Future meetings

The Board would next meet at its awayday on 25 February. The next public Board meeting was 17 March 2009, taking the theme of recession. Members asked for clarification on job cuts in train operating companies.

420 Any other business

It was noted that Sarah Pond was the new Chair of the Casework Committee, with Daniel Frances as Deputy Chair, voted in at the most recent meeting of that committee.

421 Resolution to move into confidential session (to be taken at 12.50)

The meeting resolved, under section 15(2)(b) of schedule 18 of the Greater London Authority Act 1999, that by reason of the confidential nature of the item(s) to be discussed, it was desirable in the public interest that the public should be excluded for the remainder of the meeting.