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## Secretariat memorandum

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Agenda item 10  
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### Reduction of bus services along Oxford Street

#### 1 Purpose of report

- 1.1 To brief the Transport Services Committee on Transport for London's implementation of proposals to reduce bus numbers on Oxford Street and to make recommendations as to London TravelWatch's response to this.

#### 2 Recommendations

- 2.1 That officers consider members views and seek a meeting with TfL to discuss :
- The rationale for deciding on which routes to curtail or divert;
  - How TfL is to review the impact of these changes on passengers and how they access Oxford Street, particularly the disabled;
  - What traffic management proposals TfL may be considering in response to KPMG's comments noted above.

#### 3 Background

- 3.1 Transport for London (TfL) plans its bus services according to its Service Planning Guidelines which London TravelWatch generally supports. These are based on a whole host of criteria, but generally seek to respond to changing passenger demand for bus services and seek to deliver best value for money within a given budget.
- 3.2 In recent years there have been concerns regarding the number of buses moving slowly along Oxford Street and the impact of these buses on the local environment.
- 3.3 Demand for road space on Oxford Street is clearly high. Buses, taxis, north / south general traffic and pedestrians are all competing for limited road space. London First, an organisation representing large businesses in London, has actively campaigned for the removal of buses from Oxford Street. Other groups have supported this variously proposing a pedestrianised Oxford Street, trams replacing buses etc. The London Assembly recently conducting a scrutiny into the issue and recommends :

“that a reconsideration of the long term operation of transport in the area should be undertaken and should include consideration of a comprehensive reconfiguration of the bus network to take the pressure off the area. This would

open up other radical options which have the potential to enhance the streets in the West End. In particular, the Committee recommends that two options should be considered in more detail: a shuttle bus to replace the major bus routes travelling up and down Oxford Street and pedestrianisation of the short area between Oxford Circus and Bond Street.”

(See <http://www.london.gov.uk/sites/default/files/uploads/Oxford%20Street%20-%20final%20version%20for%20publication.pdf>)

- 3.4 TfL has responded to London First and others by proposing to remove 10% of the buses in Oxford Street this year and 10% next. The most significant so far being the curtailing of the 113 near Marble Arch rather than Oxford Circus.
- 3.5 As part of this year’s 10% reduction TfL are consulting on changes to bus routes 15 and 159 and very recently service 25 (with a consultation comment deadline of 5 March 2010) where it is proposed to terminate at two different locations in central London (Holborn and Oxford Circus) contrary to TfL’s Service Planning Guidelines on simplicity of services. This consultation is complicated due to the need to operate many more double-deckers to replace the present articulated bus service.
- 3.6 We understand from the Assembly Scrutiny report that there are other proposals under consideration regarding the 8, 25 and 55.
- 3.7 A recent study commissioned by TfL and undertaken by KPMG noted :

“Further service reductions

Should further reductions in bus frequencies be pursued the implications we note above should be evaluated. It should also be noted that any release of capacity as a result of bus service reductions will require careful management to ensure that the released capacity is not absorbed by vehicles returning to Oxford Street or by general growth in traffic. If any released capacity were to be absorbed any improvement in bus speed would be eroded and accordingly any improvement in stakeholder perception reduced. As such complementary traffic management and enforcement measure are likely to be required to secure any benefits associated with a reduction in Oxford Street bus frequencies.”

In layman’s terms it is expected that any reduction of bus numbers would be negated by increasing taxi and other vehicle use of Oxford Street.

## **4 Discussion**

- 4.1 The statistics of travel on Oxford Street from various sources are :
  - 167,000 passengers get on and off of buses in Oxford Street every day (Westminster study);
  - 138,000 pedestrians use Oxford Street per day (TfL commissioned, Jan Gehl study);
  - There are numerous local general traffic journeys across Oxford Street, though we have not been able to find any figures;
  - Of the total road capacity, only 42% of all the movements in Oxford Street are by bus; 37% are taxis and there are parts of Oxford Street which get

taken up by private cars. Whilst taxis are 37%, they only carry 1% of all the passengers (Statement by the Managing Director of TfL Surface Transport to the Assembly scrutiny on Oxford Street).

- 4.2 Clearly demand for travel along and around Oxford Street is high and the impact of motor vehicles on local environmental quality is significant.
- 4.3 Curtailing buses will inconvenience several thousand of passengers every day. Some of them will have difficulty interchanging, particularly if they are disabled or encumbered by shopping.
- 4.4 There may well be displacement onto the Underground if the bus service becomes less convenient or more expensive. The proposals for route 25 is a retreat from TfL Service Planning Guidelines aspiration for simplicity : the 25 will have two terminals in Central London instead of one.
- 4.5 The bus is clearly an efficient user of road space and it must be questionable as to whether there is a transport case for this approach to addressing Oxford Street's congestion issues as KPMG point out it is likely that a reduction in bus numbers may well result in a rise in other motor traffic.
- 4.6 TfL was invited to attend the Committee, but have declined.
- 4.7 TfL have consulted London TravelWatch following their decision as to which routes to curtail, but not on the rationale as to which route should be considered for curtailment.
- 4.8 There are further calls to reduce bus numbers beyond 20%.

## **5 Equalities and inclusion implications**

- 5.1 The removal of buses serving passenger objectives in Oxford Street will have an impact on all bus users, but particularly those that use them as a cheaper form of public transport to travel to central London. Passengers that cannot access the Underground because of mobility impairment will also particularly find these changes problematic.

## **6 Legal powers**

- 6.1 Section 248 of the Greater London Authority Act 1999 places upon London TravelWatch (as the London Transport Users Committee) a duty to consider - and where it appears to the Committee to be desirable, to make recommendations with respect to - any matter affecting the functions of the Greater London Authority or Transport for London which relate to transport (other than of freight).

## **7 Financial implications**

- 7.1 There are no financial consequences for London TravelWatch.