LONDON
TRAVELWATCH

Members event 25.09.24 Minutes

Drafted: 03.10.24

Author: Michael Roberts, Chief Executive

Attendance

Members
Tricia Hayes (Chair), Richard Hebditch, Priya Khullar, Eddie Lynch, Lara Sonola, Susan Stockwell

Apologies
Tiffany Lam

Secretariat
Sonya Dallat, Susan James, Shahid Mohammed, Michael Roberts, Alex Smith, Emily Bastin

There were no new declarations of interest.

1. **Chair's introduction**

Tricia Hayes (TH) welcomed Richard Hebditch, Eddie Lynch and Lara Sonola to their first meeting since their appointment as Board members had been formally confirmed.

2. **Minutes & Matters Arising from Public Board meeting 24.07.24**

Minutes approved and actions under matters arising noted.

3. **CEO Report & Business Plan update** (LTW755)

Michael Roberts (MR) said that progress across several of the business plan priorities had slipped, the one on improved casework operations being an exception. With the team shortly back up to full strength, the hope was that some of the ground would be made up.

MR explained that it was also time to start thinking about the 2025/26 business plan. Possible themes and outputs would be discussed at the November Board meeting,

ahead of a short business plan paper being presented to the Assembly's Transport Committee for endorsement at its December meeting. The team would then come back to the Board with a more detailed version of the plan to approve for the start of the new business year in April.

Points made in discussion:

- some of the themes in the current plan were very broad and risked taking on too much – though equally we would not want to be too narrow in our approach;

- the eight themes were good ones and effectively set out an agenda over the four-year life of the current Assembly. The trick was to bring more focus to what we were trying to achieve in-year under each theme;

- planning for our in-year priority deliverables should also allow for any tactical interventions which London TravelWatch might need to make or to enable us to support the work of the Transport Committee. Committing c.80% of our team resource to planned deliverables felt about right;

- ideally we should test our ideas for next year in some way with the wider public. This would not be feasible ahead of the Transport Committee session but could be an option for the more detailed work thereafter.

TH proposed that Board members have at least one conversation with the team ahead of the November meeting about the themes, both to consider the work done to date and to look ahead to next year. Members picked the following priority themes:

- Eddie Lynch (EL):   2, 4, 5, 7;
- Lara Sonola (LS):   2, 5;
- Priya Khullar (PK):   7, 8;
- Rick Hebditch (RH):   1, 6, 8;
- Susan Stockwell (SS):   3.

ACTION: London TravelWatch leads on each business plan priority to speak to Board members in time for the November Board meeting.

4. **Business Plan priority 1: More seamless journeys** (LTW756)

MR presented the paper as an attempt to scope an approach which set individual issues regarding connectivity within a big picture view of the topic, resulting potentially in a set of site-specific, as well as more generic, recommendations for action.

Board members questioned the approach, and particularly the merits of using the picture derived from PTAL as a way into the topic. The measure did not say anything about people's actual expectations in terms of the quality of connectivity; it seemed to have several specific limitations (eg about connectivity by time of day or usefulness of the destinations served by public transport); and overall, the approach risked trying to address too many issues.

Members did not feel that a system-wide entry into the issue of connectivity was the right way to go. They favoured instead a more targeted approach: suggestions included looking at new housing developments (by engaging with social housing charities, housing associations and for-profit developers providing affordable homes to identify problem areas) and looking at connectivity specifically to the rail network.

ACTION: MR to follow up member suggestions for a more targeted approach to our work on more seamless journeys.

5. **Transport in London monitor** (LTW757)

Members felt the highlights and linked sources of information included in the paper provided a useful snapshot of recent developments on the transport system.

In response to a couple of specific questions, Susan James (SJ) clarified that the national policy of a minimum £2 bus fare does not apply to London, where the fare is £1.75; and that the TfL data on passenger satisfaction and on complaints essentially measure different things.   Problems with the Dial-a-Ride app had driven increased numbers of complaints with that specific service, but the number of cases handled by London TravelWatch had dropped away since TfL addressed the issue.

Member views were sought on how London TravelWatch might best decide which developments to engage with alongside its business plan priorities. It was suggested focusing on issues on which London TravelWatch had been active in the past; significant issues arising from our appeals casework; and prioritising instances of service failure where the provider's response has been poor (the introduction of new DLR trains was cited as an example).

Sonya Dallat (SD) explained that our set of statements and positions on a range of issues was being refreshed: it was agreed that when ready this should be made accessible to members.

There would also be times when important issues would arise requiring substantive new positions to be developed, in some cases with the involvement of the Board. Oxford Street pedestrianisation being one example.

ACTION: London TravelWatch team to draft a position on micromobility and send to Board members for comment.

ACTION: SD to send set of London TravelWatch statements/positions to Board members when ready.

6. **Casework Report** (LTW758)

SJ explained that the paper differed from the usual report as the timing of the Board meeting occurred before the end of the quarter and so the usual data on our appeals casework was not yet available.

SJ highlighted the recent improvement in satisfaction with our casework service provision, based on survey responses from appellants. The 80% satisfaction score was particularly good given the nature of some of the cases handled, and the improvement was due to us being more transparent at the outset about the limitations to our powers, thus setting more realistic expectations about what we could achieve. TH congratulated SJ and her team on this improvement.

Slight changes had been also made to the survey (with thanks to PK) which now provide the team with more useful (albeit anonymised) information about how they handle cases.

SJ said that we handle about 1,200 London TravelWatch appeals a year (total customer contact numbers are higher than that) and last year we secured financial awards worth over £40,000 on behalf of passengers. There were a number of current hot topics related to Eurostar services, such as the delay to the introduction of visa requirements for passengers and concerns about their accessible travel policy.

7. **Campaigns & Advocacy Report** (LTW759)

Alex Smith (AS) highlighted the delay to implementing the latest phase of Project Oval (the extension of pay as you go/contactless payment to rail stations in South East England) due to the recent cyber-security breach at TfL. A further phase of the roll out

is due to follow and it had recently been announced that Stansted Airport station would be included in that.

Other areas covered by AS included the email request from Sasha Langeveldt for Board member expressions of interest in helping with our digital exclusion mystery shopping and a request for any suggestions on public transport pain points for London TravelWatch potentially to focus on.

The bus report, discussed at the previous Board meeting, was being redrafted. A new version should be available shortly to share with members and the hope is to publish it in the next few weeks, once we have been able to check some of the figures used in the report with TfL.

EL raised questions about accessibility issues with trains on the Elizabeth Line and safety problems at Ealing Broadway station. AS said we had raised the issues with TfL and TH urged us to continue to press for a satisfactory outcome in both cases. EL also asked if we had a strategy for engaging with mobility fora in areas other than Kensington and Chelsea: AS said it might be possible to do more of that, but we would not have the capacity to do so in every case.

In response to a question from LS, AS explained that the planned personal security summit will come on the back of research we have previously published on this topic. We are working with TfL (which has done good work in this area) to put on the event: the aim now is to hold it at the end of November and we will let members know the date once confirmed.

ACTION: London TravelWatch team to contact TfL for an update on progress to address safety issues at Ealing Broadway and push for more/faster action if needed.

8. **Communications Report** (LTW760)

SD explained that, having recently started in post, she was now looking to take a more proactive role in our communications work than had been possible in recent months, including building relationships with key journalists. While our social media approach was currently focused on X and Linked In, SD would also be considering Facebook as a potential way to engage consumers.

SD noted that on our website the highest traffic was on pages with travel-related information, probably as a result of how London TravelWatch's name is picked up by

search engines. She was keen to see how we could capitalise on it and hoped to give an update at the next Board meeting.

SD had re-designed the newsletter which goes out to our digital community and created a regular schedule so that it will go out on the first Tuesday of every month. There were options to try and increase the size of our digital community, for example, through advertising on social media; the representativeness of that community was also something we needed to look at. EL suggested that we should consider using our casework customer base as another way of increasing our digital community, for example, by asking them to opt out of receiving our newsletter rather than opting in.

SD had also developed a new London TravelWatch communications calendar and was planning to do a bigger piece of work on strengthening our brand, focusing on our tone of voice.

EL asked whether we should be doing more to improve signage at Stansted Airport to reduce the risk of contactless and Oyster passengers being unfairly penalized, pending the extension of pay-as-you-go to the station. TH asked for a short note of the issues involved to be prepared for the Board, and for the team to consider what more might be done to help passengers.

ACTION: London TravelWatch to consider using our casework customers as a way of increasing our digital community.

ACTION: London TravelWatch to prepare a short note for the Board on the issues regarding the use of contactless payment and Oyster by passengers to Stansted Airport, and to consider what more might be done to help passengers.

9. **Finance Report** (LTW761) & **Annual Accounts**

Shahid Mohammed (SH) highlighted that the management accounts were on track compared with budget up until 31st August, including an underspend on staff costs due mainly to the Head of Communications vacancy (now filled).

EL queried why the year-end forecast had not been adjusted to take account of the lower than planned expenditure on staff costs. SM said that this was because we were planning on the basis that the available headroom would be used to pay for any additional support we were able to bring in before the end of the business year. MR added that as we get closer to year end we might need to account for this as an underspend.

MR confirmed that, from recent conversations with the GLA, he was confident that if London TravelWatch ended the year having underspent against budget, it would be able to retain that funding.

SH informed the Board that, in compiling our draft annual accounts, our auditors had found no significant errors and had suggested no significant adjustments. MR said he had been through them and, apart from some very minor points, believed them to be accurate. The Board approved the draft accounts.

ACTION: SH/MR to consider re-profiling the year-end budget forecast to account for any underspend on staff costs in the next management accounts presented to the Board.

ACTION: SH to incorporate minor amendments to the draft annual accounts for 2023/24 identified by MR and MR to sign the final accounts.

10. **Risk register**

MR highlighted the key changes in the register compared with the version reviewed at the previous Board meeting. What had previously been risk 7 ("Labour Government committed to new watchdog with unclear implications for London TravelWatch") had been removed and a reference incorporated under the mitigations' comments against risk 3. The post-mitigation rating for risk 1 had gone down (from 6 to 4) and that for risk 3 had gone up (from 4 to 6).

TH asked whether the register was helping the Board to have the right strategic discussions about the risks facing the organisation or whether (without creating additional workload for the senior team) a different approach was needed. Points made in discussion:

- the risks identified were mostly categorised as operational, raising the question whether there were other categories, such as legal or environmental, which should be included;

- it might be more useful for MR to frame future Board discussions about risk and the register in terms of the management team's current top concerns in running the organisation (similar to the discussion earlier in the meeting about delivering the business plan);

- it felt odd that risk 5 conflated external and internal issues about diversity and inclusion.

ACTION: London TravelWatch management team to revise risk 5 and consider whether other categories of risk should feature on the risk register: and MR to frame future Board discussions about the risk register in terms of current top concerns in running the organisation.

11. Any other business

There was none.