

Val Shawcross AM
Greater London Authority
City Hall
The Queen's Walk
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SE1 2AA

20 December 2013

Dear Val,

Following up the Transport Committee's report on Bus Services in London

I thought it might be helpful to update you on how London TravelWatch is proposing to follow up your Committee's report on bus services. As you know London TravelWatch was pleased to have the opportunity to contribute to this important scrutiny, and we are grateful for your acknowledgement of our contribution to this work.

We discussed the recommendations in detail at our Policy Committee meeting on 10 December. As well as welcoming the general emphasis of the report, we considered how we might add most value in the follow up, We identified the following main areas:

i) Bus reliability, journey time and overcrowding (Recommendations 1, 2 and 8)

We know from our research how much importance bus passengers attach to reliability and journey time. Given the forecast growth in population it is likely that crowding may become an increasing passenger concern, and the data presented in your report is compelling. There is also often a connection between reliability, journey time and overcrowding as an unreliable and/or slow service can lead to overcrowding. Overcrowding can also increase journey times.

Bus reliability measures are well developed, but we think more needs to be done to measure journey times. Meanwhile measurement of crowding levels – as you identify in the report – is rudimentary and one hopes could be improved upon. We are presently in detailed discussions with TfL regarding improved performance indicators in these areas, following discussion at the London TravelWatch Board in October (which in turn arose out of our concern to see improvements in the organisation's regular TfL Performance Reports). The aim is to allow much better tracking of problem routes and times, and to make it easier to identify what needs to be done to improve services to the public, including management of the services themselves and also the important question of bus priority measures. Our understanding is TfL are actively working on better measures of both bus journey times and crowding, the former being more advanced than the latter. We will continue with this work and will let you know how we progress.

ii) Better consultation processes (Recommendations 3 and 4)

The need for improved consultation with both users and non-users of bus services is also an area where significant improvement is needed. As well as developing the processes for securing user input, there is a need for greater transparency,

particularly in explaining the reasons behind decisions once taken. As we see it, the need is not so much for generalized commitments to openness and transparency – which are easy to make – but to change actual day to day practice. So we are pursuing the need for improvements as part of the engagement we have with TfL on the more important live consultations for particular routes or clusters of routes. We are making some progress with this insofar as TfL tell us they are now committed to more face to face meetings with stakeholders to explain their proposals in more detail. But much will depend on just how this is done. One important challenge is to identify good consultation practice – whether in transport or other sectors – and build this into work on London buses.

Our aim in this is to persuade TfL to target bus users and non-users more systematically, but also to explain more plainly the reasons and for their decisions. Again, we will keep you informed of progress in this area.

iii) Bus access to NHS facilities (Recommendation 5)

London TravelWatch has made this a major priority over many years, and has in the past devoted significant resources to it. We can claim a good understanding of the issues, but can claim only limited success in changing the culture within the health service, where public transport access comes a long way down the list when facilities are set up or re-organised. The scope for a strategic approach within the NHS was reduced by the demise of the commissioning Primary Care Trusts, yet the need for a clear and proactive strategy is all the greater given the major re-organisations of services that have become a continuing feature of the hospital sector.

One way forward could be for this issue to be tackled through the London Health Board, chaired by the Mayor of London. This is an area where we think the London Assembly may have more influence than London TravelWatch, given the Assembly's much broader remit than ours. We would, of course, be very happy to support the Transport Committee in this, if the Committee decides to take it forward.

London TravelWatch has gained a lot from working closely with the Assembly on the buses issue, and I hope that this collaboration will be the first of many. If there are any points in our proposed follow up that you would like to discuss further, I would be more than happy to do so.

Yours sincerely



Stephen Locke
Chair