

Investigation into TfL customer service: handling complaints and information requests

Transport Committee

Introduction

The London Assembly Transport Committee is beginning an investigation into how TfL handles customer enquiries, and how improvements could be made as a result of organisational and technological change.

Aim of the Investigation

The investigation, which will be led by Valerie Shawcross AM as rapporteur to the Transport Committee, will aim to assess how effectively TfL deals with Londoners who approach the organisation to request information, make a complaint, or make suggestions for improvements. The Committee would assess how successfully TfL currently is in meeting its targets, and identify any internal obstacles to improvements. It will also examine what data TfL collects on customers and how this is used within the organisation. Finally, the Committee will look at how Project Horizon, the current organisation-wide restructuring project within TfL, might affect customer service in the future.

The terms of reference for this investigation are:

- To assess TfL's effectiveness and efficiency in dealing with customer enquiries, identify any difference in standards across its service and assess how it uses such customer feedback to develop its services; and
- To investigate how Project Horizon and other organisational changes might affect TfL's customer service in the future and make recommendations which aim to increase the quality of customer service.

This paper provides information on the background to the investigation, the issues we will consider and details of how you can contribute.

Background

TfL's Customer Feedback and Complaint Policy (CFCP) states that dealing with customers is "central to our service and reputation",¹ and defines four areas of customer engagement:

1. **Complaint** – which is any expression of dissatisfaction with TfL's service, staff or policies.
2. **Query** – which could be a general or specific request for information.

¹ TfL Customer Relations: Customer Feedback and Complaint Policy, page 2

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3. **Commendation** – an expression of approval for TfL or its services.
4. **Suggestion** – an idea submitted to TfL with the aim of improving our services.

To avoid confusion, the term 'enquiry' shall be used throughout this report as a catch-all term for these four areas.

The CFCP also outlines the principles under which TfL addresses customer enquiries. These are:

- Easy to access.
- Timely.
- Informative and simple.
- Fair and effective.
- Monitored and acted upon.
- Confidential²

These principles do not contain targets from which success or failure can be measured, though TfL may have internal targets that it expects to meet. The document does contain a commitment to respond within 10 working days,

² TfL Customer Relations: Customer Feedback and Complaint Policy, pages 3 and 4

and to update within 15 working days if a query is complex.³

Many services for which TfL is responsible have published customer charters which outline additional promises for how customer issues will be addressed. For example, Surface Transport will acknowledge all enquiries within two working days, and produce an answer within 15. London Overground is more ambitious, with a target of providing a full response within seven days. However, at present, River Services do not appear to provide any specific targets beyond what is included in the CFCP.

Issues for the Committee to consider during the investigation

1. Easy to Access

The complexity of TfL may make it difficult for people to access information and to find out who to contact should something go wrong. This could act as a deterrent to customers approaching the organisation. For example, there have been complaints that TfL's switch to a 0845 number in 2009 may act as a disincentive to those wishing

³ TfL Customer Relations: Customer Feedback and Complaint Policy, page 3

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to make an enquiry, particularly complaints and refund requests. For example, in some cases the cost of calling the line from a mobile phone may exceed the refund.⁴ The Committee could also assess the range of data sources which are provided by TfL and examine how TfL measures the accessibility of its information sources.

2. Timely

London TravelWatch has agreed a target with TfL for 66 per cent of all enquiries referred to them to be dealt with in 10 working days, and 100 per cent within 20 working days. The investigation would assess performance against this target and ask for and assess internal performance data that measures TfL's success at meeting targets outlined in its customer charters.

3. Quality of response

The Committee could examine how effective TfL is in dealing with complaints and information requests. This would include looking at the internal processes within TfL and whether customers can expect a varying level of service depending on the area being accessed. It could also examine TfL's Customer Service Integration

⁴ Question to the Mayor - 0007/2011

Programme (CSIP), a database application designed to integrate TfL's customer relations activity across all its modes and services more efficiently. It has been in development for some years and was planned to have been online in 2008.⁵

4. Monitored and acted upon

The CFCP states that it will publish data showing how successful the organisation is in meeting its own standards. The only customer service metric currently published is the overall satisfaction figure for the organisation as a whole and each transport mode. Up to 2010, a Corporate Managing Director's report published some customer service data in relation to TfL's website and call centre. This project would look to bring post-2010 data into the public domain for analysis. The Committee would also examine how TfL ensures that issues raised are shared within the organisation to ensure that they are followed up and are used to improve service.

5. Confidential

TfL collect a great deal of data on passengers, through systems such as Oyster and congestion charging. The

⁵ <http://www.tfl.gov.uk/assets/downloads/corporate/06FandP.pdf>

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Committee would seek information on how long this data is kept and how it is used within the organisation.

6. The future direction of customer service within TfL

Speaking to the Transport Committee in June 2011, the new Deputy Mayor for Transport said that working with TfL to improve its overall communication to passengers was a key goal for her tenure. This included giving people more information on the context for decisions when answering enquiries, and improved knowledge on local issues to respond in a timely and satisfactory manner. Project Horizon is the name given to TfL's current programme of organisational re-structuring to improve service delivery and cut costs. It will lead to changes in how customer service functions are organised.

Questions for the investigation

During the investigation the Committee will seek to answer the following key questions:

- How well is TfL meeting its targets for responding to customer enquiries, and how does this compare to other transport providers?

- How easy is it for customers to access information from TfL?
- What is the route for enquiries through the TfL's system and how might this be harmonised and improved?
- Are there varying levels of quality in customer service across TfL, and if so, how can best practice be shared?
- Why has there been a delay in the implementation of CSIP and what are the expected benefits?
- How will Project Horizon affect the future direction of customer service in TfL?

The Committee wishes to gather the written views of a wide range of stakeholders. Key contributors may include:

- Transport for London
- London TravelWatch
- Passenger Focus
- Deputy Mayor for Transport
- Train Operating Companies and Network Rail
- Customer Service Excellence (Government body)
- Institute of Customer Service (trade organisation)

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Methodology

The Committee will work closely with London TravelWatch, drawing on their experience of TfL's customer service, as well as statistics and case studies based on their work with passengers.

TfL will be asked to provide performance data against each of the principles outlined in the CFCP. There may be an opportunity to work with other appropriate transport providers to provide benchmarking data (Passenger Focus and London TravelWatch could be used for this). The Committee will also request a paper from TfL about their plans for development under Project Horizon. It is also proposed that the lead Member for the investigation hold a meeting with the Deputy Mayor for Transport, Isabel Deding and representatives of TfL.

Timescale

July	Agreement at Transport Committee (14 th) and BMAC (20 th)
July/ August	Gather views, examine possibilities for benchmarking, and investigate relevant customer service standards.
September	Arrange meetings and any potential site visit (eg call centre?)
October	Publication of report.

How to contribute to the review

The Committee is inviting written views and information to its review. Submissions should aim to address the questions outlined above, and any other issues you consider important for the review.

To share your views, please send submissions to Ian O' Sullivan, London Assembly, City Hall, The Queen's Walk, London SE1 2AA, or ian.osullivan@london.gov.uk. We would welcome written submissions by Friday 17 June at the latest. Please phone 020 7983 6540 with any queries.

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About the Committee

The Transport Committee investigates issues of concern to Londoners in relation to transport. It examines and responds on behalf of the London Assembly to the transport strategies and policies of the Mayor of London and Functional Bodies. Its members are:

- Caroline Pidgeon AM, Liberal Democrat (Chair)
- Valerie Shawcross AM, Labour (Deputy Chair)
- Victoria Borwick AM, Conservative
- Roger Evans AM, Conservative
- Jenny Jones AM, Green
- Joanne McCartney AM, Labour
- Steve O'Connell AM, Conservative
- Murad Qureshi AM, Labour
- Richard Tracey AM, Conservative

Further information about the Committee's work can be found at:

<http://www.london.gov.uk/moderngov/mgCommitteeDetails.aspx?ID=173>

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