

Transport Committee - 10 November 2015**Transcript of Agenda Item 9 – London TravelWatch**

Valerie Shawcross CBE AM (Chair): Can I welcome our guests from London TravelWatch, Janet Cooke, the Chief Executive, and Stephen Locke [Chair of London TravelWatch]. We received your report last time but for a variety of reasons we were not able to talk to you at that point and so we just have a couple of questions. Welcome, Janet and Stephen.

Is there anything that you want to just quickly bring us up to date with on TravelWatch's work?

Stephen Locke (Chair, London TravelWatch): First of all, I am very pleased to be here and I am sorry that we could not make it last time. The business plan for 2016/17 was approved by the Committee last month, which we are obviously very grateful for, although we now have to do the work, which is another matter yet again.

We will also be submitting to the Committee one of our regular progress reports for the December meeting. That will be an opportunity to update on what we are doing, particularly in relation to the impact for consumers and impact for passengers, which is the key measure as far as we are concerned. You will have a progress report at the next meeting, which will be an opportunity to discuss our work in more detail.

If you would like me to give a quick, broad-brush summary of things that are currently on our plates I am happy to do so, but I realise that time is of the essence.

Valerie Shawcross CBE AM (Chair): Yes, we are over time, unless there is something you are really bursting to tell us?

Stephen Locke (Chair, London TravelWatch): One thing I would just like to say, following up from the previous discussion about surface access to airports, is that that is an issue we have pushed extremely hard on at London TravelWatch. We published our own detailed report earlier this year that we submitted to the Davies Commission, and we are very pleased indeed that this has now been taken up by the House of Commons Transport Select Committee. We have already submitted our own detailed evidence to the Select Committee and we have noted that, at least in the first session, a lot of the questioning from the Committee followed some of the issues that we have been pursuing, particularly in relation to the quality of transport interchanges. The surface access to airports issue is clearly high on our list at the moment and will continue to be so.

Valerie Shawcross CBE AM (Chair): Yes. Very good. Thank you for that. Darren had a couple of questions.

Darren Johnson AM: Yes. This was on bus collisions and cycling, which I have had representations on. I know you have had some correspondence as well.

Firstly, obviously, there is a balance between ensuring an efficient and effective bus service and ensuring a safe street environment for pedestrians and cyclists. Things have moved on a lot in the city in recent years. Public opinion has moved on a lot in recent years. Do you think TravelWatch has kept pace with that?

Stephen Locke (Chair, London TravelWatch): We are always open to being informed by developments. We are never closed, in terms of our minds, on these issues. Road capacity is an incredibly difficult issue generally because there is not enough of it, there are lots of different users and everybody wants their piece of it. There is no perfect solution that meets everybody's needs. As you say, Darren, those needs are changing over time and so too are public norms and public concerns. We are very much alive to that. After all, we are here to represent passengers, consumers and users of roads, and we need to make sure that all those interests are properly taken into account.

On the specific issue of bus safety in relation to cycle collisions, again, we are open to views about what needs to be done here. We are very concerned about all aspects of road safety. That is something that is very high on our list. We have done a lot of work on it in the past and a lot of work specifically on cycling. There is also a huge mutual interest, not just from London TravelWatch and from the Assembly but from Transport for London (TfL) and indeed from bus operators to ensure that safety standards are raised and then effectively maintained. If there are any issues there that need to be sorted out, we are very much alive to them.

As I understand it, the really big issue is one of driver training and that is clearly a fluid issue. It is one that can continue to be developed over time. Again, we are very much open to any arguments or questions that need to be considered.

Darren Johnson AM: In so many areas I have been very pleased with the work of TravelWatch in recent years, but this is something that you possibly do need to have a fresh look at. All of us on the Committee, I think, have had representations on issues like analysing data and statistics on bus collisions, on some of your consultation responses on Cycle Superhighways and Quietways and so on --

Valerie Shawcross CBE AM (Chair): Darren, before you come in on the cycling, Dick wanted to come in on the buses quickly.

Richard Tracey AM: I just wanted to follow up the point about more transparency in the reporting of this. I wonder what your view is. In our bus report that we had two years ago, we did deal with this whole question of bus accidents and we were calling then, I seem to remember, for reporting of black spots. Did we mention that at the time? Sometimes the TfL reporting is a bit too complicated for anybody, even engineers in the boroughs, to understand. I hear that from the boroughs I represent. They cannot really follow it on the TfL website. Do you think it would be better if there was rather more transparency in this reporting?

Stephen Locke (Chair, London TravelWatch): I cannot claim we have looked at that particular issue in detail but transparency is the consumer's friend and there is no question that clarity about what is happening is needed for any intelligent debate about what needs to be done in future. If there is a need for greater transparency, we would very happily back it.

One of the things that we have reflected on and that we think we could probably do more of - and this reflects back on Darren's question to some extent - is that when we do our regular monitoring reports on different aspects of TfL in relation to performance targets, there is probably a bit more that could be done on safety performance. There is probably something we can do there to help with that transparency. It is something that is quite widely accessed by members of the public and so it is something that can influence things. If we can get some more data in there that will give a bit perspective and particularly show key trends, it would be a useful contribution.

Richard Tracey AM: Indeed.

Darren Johnson AM: I have had similar concerns expressed to me about TravelWatch's take in the various consultations on Cycle Superhighways and Quietways and so on, which has been fairly critical. Again, I ask if you would reflect on that given the huge growth in popularity that cycling has undergone in recent years and the big increase in public support for segregated measures and other cycling infrastructure. I am not sure if your traditional position in terms of responses, as a body, is reflecting changing public opinion.

Stephen Locke (Chair, London TravelWatch): We would take that on board, of course. In terms of Quietways, we have been strong advocates and indeed were from very early on, from 2009 when we published our own report on cycling and when we gave evidence to the Assembly in 2012 just before I took over as Chair.

On the Cycle Superhighways, we have not been opposed in principle but we have said that there are issues there of monitoring and assessing the use of scarce road capacity and that issue is coming to the fore now with the implementation. We are not in any sense opposed in principle to measures in that direction and we are very happy to take on board changes as they occur and, indeed, changes in people's views.

Darren Johnson AM: Possibly, Chair, on both this issue and the issue of bus data, transparency and so on, if we could send a letter to TravelWatch, it may help clarify some of these things.

Valerie Shawcross CBE AM (Chair): Is the Committee happy to delegate power to me to put that together with consultation? Yes?

All: Yes.

Darren Johnson AM: Thank you.

Valerie Shawcross CBE AM (Chair): OK. We will do that. Anything else from the Committee? No? Thank you very much.