

# Transport for London

Our ref: TFL101959



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25 January 2010

Dear 

## **TfL's response to the snow on 21 December 2009**

Thank you for your letter of 8 January.

In terms of overall communications strategy, our telephone help line is one of a wide range of services we provide to ensure that customers have up-to-the-minute travel information.

Sourced directly from our operational control centres for the Tube, buses, streets and rail, we deliver this via the TfL website and through rapid syndication to the media, including the BBC and commercial stations and widely used websites. Media outlets, supported with briefing from our Press Office, then use our information for their own travel information broadcasts and web pages, which means that, for the vast majority of our customers, information is proactively 'pushed' to them. This results in the widest possible reach and allows customers to obtain information in the way that best suits them.

Our busiest day recently was Wednesday 6 January. Over 10 million pages of travel information were viewed through 1.6 million visits to our website. The key service sought was the 'Live Travel News' section which was updated every minute. This also provided links to the websites of national rail companies given the significant disruption on those services.

The table overleaf sets out the total number of calls to our telephone service during the recent period of bad weather, including on 21 December, and the average waiting time for callers electing to speak to an agent. Given difficulties with national rail services and information provision, our experience was that as many as one in three calls actually related to services provided by operators other than TfL.

<b>Date</b>	<b>Total number of calls to TfL helpline</b>	<b>Average waiting time for callers electing to speak to an agent (seconds)</b>
<b>21 Dec</b>	15,348	103
<b>22 Dec</b>	18,879	99
<b>5 Jan</b>	15,157	13
<b>6 Jan</b>	36,093	220
<b>7 Jan</b>	21,430	150
<b>8 Jan</b>	15,408	11

The poor weather coincided with the first few days of operation of a new automated telephone service that enables customers to obtain information immediately without having to wait for a call centre agent, of which inevitably there will always be a limited number, to become available. In addition, the previous telephone service could only take a maximum of 60 calls at any one time. Customers trying to get through over and above this will have received an engaged tone. The automated system handles an unlimited number of calls and, rather than making callers wait for an agent to become available, provides instant access to journey planner and other information. Customers also have the option of holding for an agent if that is what they would prefer.

Around 24% of calls on 21 December were not progressed. On 6 January, our busiest day recently, this was 35%. Given the unlimited capacity of the new service, this reflected customers choosing to opt out of the automated service rather than being unable to get through. The average wait time to speak to an agent on 21 December was 103 seconds and on 6 January 220 seconds, which some callers will have decided was too long. Regrettably, major disruption does push up waiting times for call agents and this has been one of the main reasons why we have introduced the new automated service. On the basis of the initial recorded information provided, some callers will have opted to visit the TfL website instead. In addition, a number of callers seeking information on national rail will have hung up when it became clear that our telephone service provided information on TfL services only.

The new service is still in its very early days – as mentioned it became available more or less exactly at the same time as the poor weather hit – and there has yet to be full promotion of it. We are pleased with its performance so far as this early experience has enabled us to satisfy at least 25% more calls during times of heavy disruption than would have been possible with the previous service. We are confident that with further promotion and development and as customers become familiar with its capabilities, usage will continue to grow further.

In terms of other information provision, we also provide live access to our traffic cameras around London directly to the media and via our website which, in the case of the recent bad weather, gave a real-time view of road conditions. Travel

information is also provided to staff so that customers can be kept informed while actually travelling. Information was also made available to users of iGoogle, Yahoo and Netvibes and syndicated to hundreds of other websites including those of the train operating companies, company intranets, shopping centres and business groups. By flagging up in advance to customers that potentially disruptive cold weather was forecast, we were also able to promote our SMS travel alerts service which sends a warning to a customer's mobile telephone of any disruptions on their specific regular Tube or DLR journey. During this cold weather period, over 13,000 subscribers were added to the service taking the total number of subscribers to over 250,000.

We are always looking at better ways in which to keep our customers informed and, as a matter of routine, examine how we can improve in the light of day-to-day experience and as a result of periods of disruption. In recent weeks all of our information services remained accurate and robust in the face of huge volumes and, we believe, compared favourably to the quality, timeliness and availability of information provided by other transport operators.

We would be happy to arrange a visit for you and your colleagues to see first hand how our travel information services work. Please contact Jamie Peters (email: [JamesPeters@tfl.gov.uk](mailto:JamesPeters@tfl.gov.uk) or phone: 020 7126 4659) if this would be of interest.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'Peter Hendy', written in a cursive style.

**Peter Hendy**