

Improving door-to-door transport in London

Next steps

January 2015



Chair's foreword

Without adequate door-to-door transport services, many thousands of Londoners would find it very difficult or impossible to get around the city. Door-to-door services run by Transport for London, London boroughs, the NHS and others are there to ensure that those with mobility problems can enjoy a similar level of access to London as anyone else, which is vital for their health, wellbeing and quality of life.

The Transport Committee has been investigating this topic for several years, following complaints from users that door-to-door services were performing poorly. These complaints relate to most forms of door-to-door transport, including Dial-a-Ride, Taxicard and NHS Patient Transport, and include reports of journey requests being refused, vehicles arriving late or not at all, and problems with getting through to call centres. We also know that services are poorly integrated with each other, and that there is evidence that they could be delivered much more efficiently.

In this report the Committee provides an update on the situation and considers what priority actions should be taken. Our findings are based on the latest performance and financial data, and meetings with both service users and representatives of organisations delivering and commissioning services. Overall, it is clear that while some improvements have been made to these services, there remain serious issues to be addressed.

TfL has recently launched another review of door-to-door services, to which this report is the Committee's formal submission. We approach this with a degree of scepticism, as the previous review of this topic produced some innovative proposals but no substantive change. The opportunity we have now to deliver improvements cannot be missed.



Caroline Pidgeon AM
Chair, Transport
Committee

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Members of the Transport Committee

Caroline Pidgeon (Chair)	Liberal Democrat
Valerie Shawcross (Deputy Chair)	Labour
Victoria Borwick	Conservative
Tom Copley	Labour
Darren Johnson	Green
Onkar Sahota	Labour
Navin Shah	Labour
Richard Tracey	Conservative

Executive summary

Door-to-door transport services offer vital support for many Londoners with mobility problems, who are less able to get about on other forms of transport. This makes them a small but absolutely essential part of London's public transport system.

There are multiple types of door-to-door service operating in London. Transport for London (TfL) operates the Dial-a-Ride minibus service, as well as funding the cab-based services Taxicard (jointly with boroughs) and Capital Call. Boroughs also provide door-to-door transport as part of social services provision, and NHS Trusts provide Patient Transport for some patients. Alongside these are a myriad of community transport providers operating at a local level.

Thousands of Londoners use these services, and for many this is a positive experience. However it is clear that, collectively, they are not delivering the quality service that users deserve. The key concerns raised during our investigation were:

- The **performance of Dial-a-Ride** has improved since 2009 but is still below required levels, with a recent rise in complaints and booking refusals, and there has been no increase in efficiency.
- Dial-a-Ride's policy of **limiting journeys to five miles** places an arbitrary restriction on its members' mobility.
- There has been a significant **underspend in the Taxicard budget** for the past two years; higher costs have been imposed on passengers and usage of the service is falling.
- The highly-regarded **Capital Call service is facing closure** by TfL, but as yet there is no clear plan for alleviating the effect of this or reinvesting savings.
- **NHS Patient Transport services** are below expected standards in many parts of London, and need to be reviewed urgently.
- It is likely there is **unmet demand** for door-to-door services, and demand is set to grow as London's population changes, in particular as the number of older people increases, but TfL has no plans to increase provision.
- There has been **no progress toward integration** of different door-to-door services, which is required to deliver a better, more efficient service for users.

TfL is currently undertaking a review of door-to-door services. This is not the first review of these services in recent years, but it needs to be the last. This report constitutes the Transport Committee's submission to the review, highlighting a series of short, medium and long-term measures that TfL and its partners should implement in order to improve services for Londoners.

Previous work on door-to-door services

The Transport Committee has investigated the state of London's door-to-door services several times in recent years.¹ In 2009 we wrote to TfL about ongoing problems with Dial-a-Ride, following a large number of complaints from service users. We carried out an investigation the following year, conducting a survey of door-to-door users and holding a public meeting at City Hall to gather their views.

In our report following the investigation, we highlighted a number of serious problems. These included inefficient practices at Dial-a-Ride, difficulties for service users trying to book journeys, and inappropriate methods of capturing user satisfaction data. We also called for greater integration of door-to-door services and improved coordination of different door-to-door services.

London Councils led a review of door-to-door services in 2009, in consultation with TfL and other partners.² This led to the publication of a new strategy for London, which included several new measures on service coordination, and led to the establishment of a multi-agency project board to deliver changes.

Unfortunately, the proposals from the 2009 strategy were not delivered. Transport for London has now embarked on another review of door-to-door services, known as the Social Needs Transport Review.³ This review is specifically considering the expected rise in demand for door-to-door services, and the extent of currently unmet demand. Output from the review was due to be published in Spring 2014, but has been delayed.

In November 2014 the Transport Committee held another hearing on door-to-door services with TfL, London Councils, the Community Transport Association and representatives of service users. We also held a separate meeting with around 20 service users to gather their views. This report summarises the findings of our meetings and the latest available information on service performance, and seeks to influence TfL's ongoing review.

Dial-a-Ride performance

In previous investigations, the Committee has heard about problems with the availability, responsiveness and punctuality of Dial-a-Ride, the minibus service operated directly by TfL. These remain concerns for some Dial-a-Ride members we have heard from. The Committee is particularly concerned to see that there has been a sharp rise in complaints from Dial-a-Ride members recently. In the first quarter of 2014/15, there were 159 complaints per 100,000 journey requests. This is considerably higher than other TfL services, and also represents a 66 per cent increase on complaints from the same period last year.⁴

The biggest source of complaints to TfL is booking refusals, which account for about one-third of all complaints. Refusals have increased slightly in the past year. Dial-a-Ride has a target to accept 90 per cent of all trip requests: so far in 2014/15, 89 per cent of requests were accepted, down from 91 per cent last year.⁵ TfL told the Committee at our meeting that the increase in complaints was driven by the use of taxi services. Dial-a-Ride often books taxis for

passengers it is unable to transport by minibus; Leon Daniels, Managing Director of Surface Transport at TfL, said the rate of complaints was eight times higher for journeys delivered by taxi rather than minibus.⁶

In evidence received by the Committee, the concern raised most frequently by users was Dial-a-Ride's policy of limiting journeys to five miles. This is seen as an arbitrary limit that does not take into account geographical variations, for instance lower population density in outer London, which means destinations are more likely to be too far away. At our meeting in November we heard from Joan Hunt, a Dial-a-Ride member from Lambeth, who explained how this rule restricted her travel and quality of life:⁷

I do live in central London, but I cannot even get to the West End or anywhere that is slightly beyond the five-mile limit with Dial-a-Ride, which I would love to do.

In our previous report, we highlighted the apparent inefficiency of Dial-a-Ride, which has a much higher cost per trip than similar services. The latest figures from TfL suggest this remains unchanged. In 2013/14, Dial-a-Ride cost £25.90 for every trip made,⁸ with total expenditure of £34 million.⁹ This compares poorly to the equivalent service in Manchester, which costs £7.26 per trip. It is clear that the financial commitment made to Dial-a-Ride by TfL is not going far enough, and that operating in a more efficient way could allow the service to support a greater number of people.

Taxicard budget and usage

The Taxicard service provides subsidised transport for disabled people by licensed taxi or private hire vehicle. It is commissioned by London Councils on behalf of boroughs, with Transport for London providing the bulk of the funding for the service.

The Committee has learned that there is a significant underspend in the Taxicard budget. In 2013/14, £1.7 million of Taxicard's £13.9 million budget was not spent (13 per cent). For the current year, London Councils has projected an underspend of £2 million (15 per cent).¹⁰

Although membership of Taxicard is increasing, usage is falling. The number of journeys delivered has fallen every year since 2010/11. An average of 170,000 trips per month were taken by users in 2010/11, compared to 110,000 last year.¹¹ The fall in usage was precipitated by the Mayor's decision to cap TfL's funding contribution, and thereafter by many boroughs placing more of the financial burden on service users. A number of boroughs increased the charge for usage from £1.50 to £2.50, reduced the subsidy they provided for each trip, and/or banned the practice of double-swiping, which allowed users to take longer journeys without being charged excessive fares.

London Councils accepts that these changes are the chief reason for the drop in Taxicard usage, although it should also be noted that usage has continued to fall even after the new charging regimes have stabilised. Spencer Palmer, Director of Transport and Mobility at London Councils, told the Committee there may be a number of reasons why Taxicard usage is declining:¹²

The likely reasons are that perhaps [users] consider it to be unaffordable now and perhaps they are shifting across to Dial-a-Ride, which is a free service. Perhaps it is because of improvements in bus accessibility and public transport accessibility... There are a number of possible reasons, but we have not carried out any detailed work into finding out why exactly journeys are declining.

Although it is possible that Taxicard users have decided to rely on Dial-a-Ride in order to avoid the higher charges incurred using Taxicard, it is clear this is not a sustainable solution. There has been no corresponding increase in Dial-a-Ride usage – the number of journeys has fallen slightly in the past two years¹³ – so if users are switching to Dial-a-Ride then this must be having the effect of squeezing availability for existing users. Although the Committee understands the extremely difficult financial circumstances facing London boroughs, it is unacceptable that budgeted expenditure on Taxicard is not being spent.

Another serious concern with Taxicard raised during our investigation was about accessibility. The Committee heard that although licensed black taxis providing the service are fitted with wheelchair ramps, these are sometimes not in working order. We also learned of instances where drivers have refused to transport disabled passengers.¹⁴ These issues are discussed in more detail in the Committee's recent report, *Future Proof: Taxi and Private Hire Services in London*, where we recommend measures to improve the accessibility of London's taxi and private hire services.¹⁵

Proposed closure of Capital Call

Capital Call is a door-to-door service operated on much the same basis as Taxicard. It is funded and commissioned by TfL, and is available in ten London boroughs where there are traditionally fewer numbers of licensed taxis available. In early 2014, TfL launched a consultation on proposals to close Capital Call.¹⁶

TfL's primary justification for this proposal is that Capital Call is no longer needed as a supplement to Taxicard. This is because the availability of Taxicard in the ten Capital Call boroughs has increased, particularly as more Taxicard journeys are now delivered by private hire vehicles rather than licensed taxi. TfL has stated that 95 per cent of Taxicard trip requests in these boroughs are fulfilled, and that there are significantly more Taxicard users than Capital Call users.

Although users have highlighted problems with Capital Call, it is clear that it is a highly valued service. Capital Call offers its users greater flexibility than Taxicard, specifically because it allows users to swipe their membership card up to five times for one journey. This allows users to take longer journeys at the subsidised rate. Joan Hunt told the Committee:¹⁷

I am passionate about Capital Call. To me, it is by far the supreme service. There is always availability. You are never turned down. The cab arrives on time, both taking you and bringing you back. It just has everything.

The Committee understands TfL's rationale for proposing the closure of Capital Call. If Taxicard is now able to meet user demands in the Capital Call boroughs, this would justify making the change.

However, the case is not yet proven. To date, there have been no proposals from TfL to ensure that the flexibility offered by Capital Call will be replicated by Taxicard in the future; without this, there will be a clear diminution of service for users. Furthermore, the current expenditure on Capital Call – £470,000 in 2013/14, equivalent to about four per cent of Taxicard spending – should be reinvested in door-to-door services rather than removed from the system. Most importantly, it would be inappropriate to proceed with the closure before the outcomes of the Social Needs Transport Review are known and a future strategy for door-to-door services formulated.

NHS Patient Transport

NHS Patient Transport is a door-to-door service for transporting patients to non-urgent hospital appointments. It is commissioned by individual NHS Trusts, with a wide range of public, private and voluntary service providers operating in London. The Committee has heard from a number of users about problems with the availability and reliability of services.

A recent survey of Patient Transport users conducted by the disability charity Transport for All found that:

- In the past two years, 47 per cent of respondents had been late for a hospital appointment and 37 per cent had missed an appointment because of problems with Patient Transport.
- 57 per cent of respondents were not informed of the availability of Patient Transport when they booked their hospital appointment.
- 49 per cent of respondents had waited over two hours for Patient Transport to take them home from the hospital after an appointment, and 30 per cent had waited over three hours.

Although some Trusts in London deliver excellent Patient Transport services, standards are variable, and it is clear many Trusts are failing patients. This is very distressing for some of the most vulnerable people in London, and where appointments are missed this is likely to negatively impact their health as well as wasting NHS resources. While in the long-term these issues could be addressed by integrating Patient Transport with other door-to-door services, there is also a need for the NHS to take more immediate action.

Demand for door-to-door services

The number of people in London eligible for door-to-door services is almost certain to grow in the future. For instance, the number of older people in London is projected to rise substantially: As stated in the Mayor's London Plan:¹⁸

The number of people over 65 is projected to increase by 34 per cent (nearly 300,000) to reach 1.17 million by 2031. The over 90s are expected to almost double

in number, to 96,000, as medical advances, improvements in lifestyles and new technologies support improved life expectancies.

There are also concerns about unmet demand among the existing eligible population. As TfL noted in a written submission to the Committee, in relation to Dial-a-Ride:¹⁹

However, broader concerns exist amongst the wider customer and stakeholder community in relation to the cost and appropriateness of the service provided. In particular, whether Dial-a-Ride is truly meeting the needs of all those who need to make use of such services. Although Dial-a-Ride currently meets around 90 per cent of requested trips, concern exists that there is significant unmet/latent demand from eligible customers who, for whatever reason, don't currently request trips they would like or need to make.

We heard that increasing the accessibility of mainstream public transport could affect demand for door-to-door transport. The Committee has previously made recommendations to the Mayor and TfL about improving accessibility, and welcomes any investment aimed at achieving this objective.²⁰ However, we cannot assume that door-to-door services will become less essential. TfL accepts that improving accessibility will not suppress demand for door-to-door services, but generate capacity for new users. The Committee would support a more holistic approach to transport for people with mobility impairments, whereby they could make journeys both by public transport and door-to-door, as discussed by Faryal Velmi of Transport for All:²¹

What about a system where we can get people from their houses using Dial-a-Ride to a local accessible Crossrail stop, for example, or a local Tube stop for that matter? It is joined-up thinking and getting door-to-door services to merge with those parts of the public transport network which are actually accessible.

Despite London's changing demographics and the recognition of both growing and latent demand for door-to-door services, neither TfL nor the boroughs are currently planning to increase provision. TfL has no target for increasing the number of Dial-a-Ride journeys it delivers, and has proposed closing the Capital Call service altogether. Meanwhile, Taxicard usage has been falling for several years, with no plans to address this decline yet announced. Without any clear strategy to meet demands for door-to-door services, it is likely that services will need to be rationed ever more strictly, and this risks impairing the mobility and quality of life of many Londoners.

Service integration

There has been consensus for a number of years that different door-to-door services need to be integrated, either wholly or partly. At present, different services have different eligibility criteria, application processes, booking processes, and journey restrictions. They are commissioned and funded by a range of different organisations. We know that there is a large crossover in membership between different services, but there may also be many people who use one service without being aware of others.

Leon Daniels of TfL summarised the current situation at the Committee's meeting in November:²²

It seems to be completely ridiculous that there are different sets of vehicles and staff being used on discrete groups of transport for children, for patients and for people who cannot use mainstream public transport with some artificial restrictions in them about where they can go and what they can do. The problem of course is that it is a cross-government department activity; it is transport, health and education... We would certainly reinforce the fact that in the current economic climate we ought to be making best use of all of the resources and getting people to where they want to go as opposed to artificial distinctions between them.

London Councils' report in 2009 made a number of recommendations aimed at integrating services.²³ These included common eligibility standards and assessment processes; a single, pan-London call centre for door-to-door services; and the potential introduction of individual travel budgets for service users. A multi-agency project board was set up in 2010 to take forward recommendations, although there has been no tangible progress to date.

The Committee believes that integration can help ensure better services for users, as it should mean users get the right kind of service delivered to them, according to their needs and the type of journey they are making. It should also help to make services more efficient by reducing duplication; this releases resources that can be reinvested in more and better services.

We do not necessarily support the idea that integration must mean centralisation. London's centralised door-to-door services have sometimes been found to fail users because of a lack of local knowledge, for instance when journeys are being booked. It is conceivable that services could be integrated at a more local level, with a single commissioner for each borough or sub-region in London.

For the immediate future, we agree with Peter Blake, Director of Service Operations for Surface Transport at TfL, who told the Committee, the priority for London is to identify a series of incremental steps toward integration.²⁴ To this end, the Committee has made a number of short, medium and long-term recommendations in this report.

Recommendations

The necessary reform of door-to-door services cannot happen overnight. The system is complex, with a large number of different funders, providers and commissioners. The history of failed attempts at reform tells us that decision-makers need to agree a plan with incremental steps toward a more integrated service that meets users' needs. We have therefore identified changes that can take place in the short, medium and long-term.

Short-term

These measures can be taken within the next six months in order to deliver immediate improvements in the service provided to door-to-door users.

- 1. TfL should review its policy of limiting the distance of Dial-a-Ride journeys to less than five miles. Any new distance limit should take into account differences in population density across London.**
- 2. TfL and London Councils should investigate why Taxicard usage is falling and why expenditure is significantly below budget. Any underspend from 2014/15 should be reinvested in measures designed to ensure Taxicard reaches all users who need the service.**
- 3. TfL should delay any decision on the closure of Capital Call until after the conclusion of the Social Needs Transport Review. If the closure goes ahead, TfL should reinvest the Capital Call budget in other door-to-door services and work with London Councils to ensure that Taxicard offers the same service standards and flexibility as Capital Call.**
- 4. NHS England London should instigate a review of the provision of Patient Transport services by NHS Trusts in London, with the objective to define and enforce minimum service standards.**

We recommend that TfL, London Councils and NHS England London write to the Committee by the end of March 2014 to set out their intention to implement these measures.

Medium-term

These measures would be important first steps in the integration of door-to-door services, and could be introduced within the next 1-2 years.

- 5. Consistent eligibility criteria should be established for Dial-a-Ride, Taxicard, Capital Call and NHS Patient Transport, and a single application process for people wanting to become users of these services should be introduced.**
- 6. A single customer feedback system for Dial-a-Ride, Taxicard, Capital Call and NHS Patient Transport should be established. This would enable complaints about all**

services to be directed to the same place. User surveys should also be integrated across these services.

We recommend that TfL include these measures as early actions in the report of the Social Needs Transport Review, and work with boroughs, London Councils and NHS Trusts to deliver them.

Long-term

These measures would deliver substantial integration of door-to-door services, and could be introduced over the next 3-5 years.

- 7. A single booking process for Dial-a-Ride, Taxicard, Capital Call and NHS Patient Transport should be established. This would enable service users to request journeys from any of these services at a single online source, or from local call centres covering all services.**

- 8. All door-to-door services should be commissioned jointly by TfL, boroughs and NHS Trusts. Commissioning should take place at a local or sub-regional level. Commissioners should seek to deliver a mix of regular and on-demand services, operated by public, private or voluntary sector providers. Funding would be provided by TfL, boroughs and NHS Trusts according to existing expenditure levels. The introduction of individual travel budgets for service users should also be considered.**

- 9. TfL should review the structure of Dial-a-Ride, as part of the changes proposed under Recommendation 8. TfL should continue to provide the Dial-a-Ride service for the foreseeable future, but it should be commissioned locally rather than operated as a centralised, London-wide service.**

We recommend that TfL develops detailed proposals for the implementation of these measures following the Social Needs Transport Review, and consults stakeholders and service users on these plans.

Notes

- ¹ For further information please visit: <https://www.london.gov.uk/mayor-assembly/london-assembly/publications/door-to-door-transport-services>
- ² <http://www.londoncouncils.gov.uk/policylobbying/transport/transportservices/doortodoorstrategy.htm>
- ³ <http://www.tfl.gov.uk/cdn/static/cms/documents/stp-20140218-open-item04-managing-directors-report.pdf>
- ⁴ <http://www.london.gov.uk/moderngov/documents/s40082/Annexe%20D%20-%20TFL%20Quarter%201%20report.pdf>
- ⁵ Written submission from TfL, November 2014
- ⁶ Transcript of Transport Committee meeting, 12 November 2014, page 3
- ⁷ Transcript of Transport Committee meeting, 12 November 2014, page 2
- ⁸ Written submission from TfL, November 2014
- ⁹ http://questions.london.gov.uk/QuestionSearch/searchclient/questions/question_276096
- ¹⁰ http://www.londoncouncils.gov.uk/committees/agenda.htm?pk_agenda_items=5640
- ¹¹ http://www.londoncouncils.gov.uk/committees/agenda.htm?pk_agenda_items=5640
- ¹² Transcript of Transport Committee meeting, 12 November 2014, page 10
- ¹³ Written submission from TfL, November 2014
- ¹⁴ Transcript of Transport Committee meeting, 12 November 2014, pages 7-8
- ¹⁵ To read the report visit: <https://www.london.gov.uk/mayor-assembly/london-assembly/publications>
- ¹⁶ <https://consultations.tfl.gov.uk/assisted-transport/capital-call>
- ¹⁷ Transcript of Transport Committee meeting, 12 November 2014, page 11
- ¹⁸ <https://www.london.gov.uk/priorities/planning/london-plan>
- ¹⁹ Written submission from TfL, November 2014
- ²⁰ To read the report visit: <http://www.london.gov.uk/mayor-assembly/london-assembly/publications/accessibility-of-the-transport-network-in-london>
- ²¹ Transcript of Transport Committee meeting, 12 November 2014, page 16
- ²² Transcript of Transport Committee meeting, 12 November 2014, page 34
- ²³ <http://www.londoncouncils.gov.uk/policylobbying/transport/transportservices/doortodoorstrategy.htm>
- ²⁴ Transcript of Transport Committee meeting, 12 November 2014, page 23

Further information

Views and information received

The Committee met the following guests on 12 November 2014:

- Leon Daniels, Managing Director of Surface Transport, Transport for London;
- Peter Blake, Director of Service Operations, Transport for London;
- Spencer Palmer, Director Transport and Mobility, London Councils;
- Ewan Jones, Deputy Chief Executive, Community Transport Association;
- Faryal Velmi, Director, Transport for All; and
- Joan Hunt, door-to-door transport service user.

The transcript of the discussion is available at:

<https://www.london.gov.uk/moderngov/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=173&MId=5434&Ver=4>

Following this meeting, the Committee held an informal meeting with door-to-door services users. We are grateful to Transport for All for their help in organising this meeting.

Committee contacts

For further information about this report, to order a copy, or for media enquiries please contact:

Richard Berry, Scrutiny Manager
scrutiny@london.gov.uk
020 7983 4000

Alison Bell
Alison.Bell@london.gov.uk
020 7983 4228

Online

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