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Dear Caroline

London Assembly Transport Committee report: Broken Rails – a rail service fit for passengers

Thank you for your letter of 26 November 2018 and the work that you have led with the London Assembly Transport Committee to produce the 'Broken Rails' Report. As you will know, a Government-backed independent national rail review, led by Keith Williams, is currently underway so these recommendations come at a particularly good time to contribute to the debate.

As part of the Mayor's Transport Strategy, we are committed to bringing major improvements to the rail network. Too often Londoners are not having the quality of experience that they are entitled to expect: issues on our rail network such as unreliability and overcrowding are creating stress for customers and make the public transport network less attractive. At the same time, the Mayor has set a target that by 2041, 80% of journeys will be made using sustainable transport options, including rail.

We therefore fully agree that a single holistic rail strategy for London would be beneficial for passengers and would help to deliver the improvements that are desperately needed. Delivery of an improved rail network, functioning as a suburban metro with higher capacity, frequency, and reliability, has the potential to unlock growth across London.

We have already demonstrated what this could look like: since the introduction of the London Overground in 2007 we have delivered vital improvements for passengers and increased ridership by over 600 per cent, decreased delays by 30 per cent and increased in customer satisfaction by 10 per cent. The benefits of the London Overground operating model for passengers are clear and we would welcome the chance to bring these benefits to more passengers in the London and south east region.

Please see our response to the individual recommendations in the report below.

Recommendation 1 - Effective small-scale interventions

Network Rail needs to deliver a plan to enable more frequent and longer trains to run on existing infrastructure across London, using a series of strategic, targeted upgrades. The Mayor and TfL need to press the Department for Transport and Network Rail to deliver these priority projects urgently.

We agree that targeted, small scale interventions can make a big difference to passengers and we have made these sorts of incremental changes on the London Overground where possible. For example, we have included changing service frequency on the North and West London Lines to match the growth in demand in the West London Line; increased the length of trains from 3 cars to 4 cars and then to 5 cars to match growing demand; and introduced additional early and late services. This model should be rolled out across other parts of the network; however, there is currently no incentive for franchise operators to do so unless it is commercially viable.

Our model of working with operators using a concession contract provides incentives to improve services, often by making incremental changes to respond to fluctuations in housing and employment and local demand factors. This contrasts with the traditional franchise model, under which it is expensive and time consuming for the franchising authority to change service levels due to the uncertainty around the impact on revenue and the renegotiation that has to take place. This model may be suitable for longer distance services but does not work for urban railways where operators are not incentivised to respond to changing housing and employment needs.

We continue to make these points to the Department for Transport (DfT), most recently through our initial evidence to the Williams Rail Review.

Recommendation 2 - Healthy Stations

The Mayor and TfL should produce a Healthy Stations Charter based on the principles of their Healthy Streets Approach. The aim should be to deliver a drastic improvement in how stations can be accessed by cyclists and pedestrians, including by passengers with disabilities. Every station should be assessed against the Charter in partnership with passengers using that station.

We are embedding the Healthy Streets Approach in everything we do and we agree with the Committee that improving access to stations for cyclists, pedestrians and people with disabilities should be a priority. We already include access to stations in our Healthy Streets Check for Designers to ensure opportunities to improve station access are identified in the earliest stages of designing changes to streets. We also have actions related to this in our Walking Action Plan and Cycling Action Plan.

Our Cycling Action Plan acknowledges that supply of cycle parking at major stations does not meet demand and this is a priority for us. We will work at our own stations and with Network Rail to provide more cycle parking at stations, including exploring opportunities to deliver more secure cycle parking hubs. This builds on the success of the hubs already in place at Walthamstow Central, Edmonton Green and Finsbury Park stations.

Our Walking Action Plan commits to delivering exemplar 'Active Travel Hub' TfL stations, including:

- Early delivery of ‘trial stations’ by 2019, boosting the walking experience through enhanced active travel information and promotion, staff training, and better public realm
- Wider roll-out of programme across TfL stations from 2019, depending on the results from trial stations.

We would welcome the opportunity to work with Network Rail to further embed the holistic Healthy Streets Approach in the design and management of stations and their interface with the surrounding streets and connecting transport services.

Recommendation 3 - A new approach to passenger engagement

TfL, Network Rail and Train Operating Companies need to recognise that passengers care about their local stations and the services they can access there. For every station in London, regardless of its management, there should be dedicated passenger engagement with a specific station user group for people using that station.

We agree that passengers should be at the heart of everything we do. For too long the railway network has been structured around the movement of trains, rather than of customers. We know that passengers care about their local stations and services and as mentioned above we are committed to making small improvements that make a tangible difference to customer journeys. Devolution of further services to TfL would result in us applying our approaches to station staffing, ticketing, information and data, and facilities standards which we know from experience will lead to higher passenger satisfaction.

It is worthwhile to note that we already undertake a large amount of public engagement and scrutiny. Examples of this include engaging with local communities; scrutiny by London TravelWatch; passenger surveys, including a customer satisfaction survey; and a dedicated complaint process through our customer service centre. This, coupled with the high level of democratic accountability for our services, ensures that passenger engagement is at the centre of our service.

We believe that careful consideration will need to be given to the proposal for user groups for every station, especially regarding the benefits that this will bring to passengers above and beyond those provided by existing engagement.

Recommendation 4 - A single rail strategy for London

London has no rail strategy. TfL and Network Rail should produce a rail strategy for London that all parties will commit to implementing, which will improve rail services for passengers in London.

We agree that a single holistic rail strategy for London would be beneficial for passengers. While we already have a detailed strategy for growing public transport use more broadly in future – the Mayor’s Transport Strategy (MTS) puts forward a vision for transport in London, including plans to reduce crowding and improve rail services – it is important that everyone commits to an integrated multi modal strategy in which rail plays a key part. We work with Network Rail continuously to develop London’s rail strategy to support this overall policy direction.

We would be happy to report back to the committee on these discussions later in the year.

Recommendation 5 - Improving accessibility

The money available for accessibility upgrades, so that everyone can get to the trains they need, is far too small. The Department for Transport needs to reconsider the amount of Access for All funding available and ensure all priority upgrades are delivered in the next five years. The Mayor and TfL should strongly press the Department for Transport to increase funding.

The vision set out in the MTS is a transport system for all Londoners. Accessibility remains a key priority for us and for the Mayor, and important infrastructure and service changes that we have made reflect this: for example, around half of the London Overground's 112 stations are step free from street to platform. This is coupled with a 'turn-up-and-go' service that improves accessibility for customers with reduced mobility.

Despite this, we agree that more funding needs to be made available for improved accessibility upgrades across the whole of the transport network and will continue to make this case to the DfT.

Recommendation 6 - Increase funding for London's rail network

TfL should consider all options to increase funding for London's rail network. This includes funding Network Rail schemes where necessary, and contributing to projects outside of London's boundaries, such as freight routes, where this will enable the provision of more frequent and bigger trains for passengers in the capital.

In line with the MTS, we are pressing the DfT and Network Rail to upgrade rail freight routes outside London so that non-London freight can be taken around the capital. As you state this would free up rail paths through London for additional passenger services. We want to see full use of existing rail paths between Felixstowe and Nuneaton and electrification of the corridor to allow more freight services to avoid London. A new line linking the ports around Tilbury with the Great Eastern Main Line would allow freight traffic from the Essex Thameside route to access the Felixstowe to Nuneaton corridor without the need to pass through London.

We would be happy to meet with you to discuss how we can deliver improvements for customers across London's rail network. I would also be happy to share our response to the William's Rail Review, which provides further insight into how TfL is proposing to improve customer experience on our rail network.

Thank you again for giving us the chance to respond to your recommendations.

Yours sincerely,

Mike Brown MVO