

Transport Committee site visit – TfL control centres, Palestra

Date: Wednesday 27 July 2016

Attendees: Caroline Pidgeon MBE AM
Keith Prince AM
Florence Eshalomi AM
Navin Shah AM
Alison Bell – External Relations Manager
Richard Berry – Scrutiny Manager
Jonathan Hollis – Conservative group researcher

Overview of visit

As part of the Committee's ongoing investigation into traffic congestion, Members were invited by Transport for London to view the Surface Transport and Traffic Operations Centre, the central hub where TfL monitors traffic conditions on London's roads and manages the bus network. Members were also invited to view the London Underground Control Centre, which is also located at Palestra.

Surface Transport and Traffic Operations Centre

Members had an initial introduction Leon Daniels, TfL Managing Director of Surface Transport, before a tour of the Surface Transport and Traffic Operations Centre (STTOC).

The STTOC combines several different activities. It houses the London Buses Command and Control Centre (CentreComm), London Streets Traffic Control Centre (LSTCC) and the Metropolitan Police Service Traffic and Safer Transport Command Control. In addition, the London tunnels control room – for instance, monitoring traffic in the Blackwall Tunnel – is currently being migrated to STTOC.

Traffic data

STTOC can access 5,000 CCTV cameras in order to monitor traffic; 1,300 of these are TfL cameras. TfL also follows social media to learn about incidents, noting that information is transmitted rapidly through social media.

TfL publishes real-time traffic data for anyone to use, for instance in the development of traffic apps for smartphones.

Managing bus movements

TfL manages 650 bus routes from CentreComm. It works with 30 iBus centres, which are localised control centres run by bus operators.¹ CentreComm receives around 1,200 calls from drivers every day about service delivery issues.

Dashboards in CentreComm show staff the status of all bus routes. From the centre, TfL can make interventions to alleviate incidents. Information is also passed on in real-time to passengers. For instance if a bus stop is closed, TfL's online journey planner will be updated to remove this stop.

Members asked TfL about an instance where the operator Go-Ahead had recently asked for a route curtailment in response to traffic congestion, which was not agreed by TfL. TfL stated that all bus routes have pre-agreed curtailment points, and operators have autonomy to make decisions on whether to use these. In some instances operators may be reluctant to use other curtailment points if they believe they may face a financial penalty from TfL.

The iBus system allows TfL to track bus movements, including which are on time, running late or early. The system was designed specifically for TfL. There are proposals for an upgrade to an 'iBus 2' system, but this would be an expensive, bespoke upgrade. Proposals are currently going through TfL's business planning process.

Congestion

TfL acknowledges that carriageway interventions (roadworks) have become more severe over the past 18 months, and this has increased congestion. TfL has taken away carriageway space to implement its Road Modernisation Plan, for instance new Cycle Superhighways. Other developers have also done this, including Network Rail.

There has also been an increase in traffic from private hire vehicles and delivery vans, with an increasing amount of personal shopping deliveries to central London offices.

TfL has used traffic signals to hold traffic outside central London to prevent build-up of congestion. However, this creates bottlenecks around the centre.

Events

STTOC houses an event liaison facility, in a dedicated room. This allows coordinated responses to major events taking place in London that will affect roads. It was used for the 2012 Olympic and Paralympic Games. In the weekend following the Committee's visit, it was due to be used for the Ride London cycling event.

¹ Members visited the iBus centre managed by the operator Go-Ahead in Stockwell earlier on 27 July.

Bus emissions

TfL is looking to cut emissions from buses. The oldest TfL bus in London is a Euro 3 standard vehicle. TfL is aiming to have all buses at Euro 6 standard by 2020. Older buses are being replaced, while those at Euro 5 standard are being retrofitted.²

London Underground Control Centre

Members received a presentation from Mark Wild, Managing Director of the London Underground, and Richard Jones, Head of Network Operations, before a tour of the control centre.³

The role of the London Underground Control Centre (LUCC) is to monitor services across the tube network, and take direct control of any major incidents. There are seven control rooms across the network, in addition to the LUCC. Other centres control operations on specific lines. Over time, TfL is looking to introduce greater integration between the centres.

British Transport Police (BTP) officers are also co-located with LUCC – here is a Duty Inspector present 24 hours a day, seven days a week. Network Rail staff are also based there, complementing operations at their main control centre in Milton Keynes. There is close contact between LUCC and the control centres for the London Fire Brigade and the London Ambulance Service.

The ‘contingency and response’ activities of the LUCC including leading the response to major events, severe weather conditions, industrial action and unplanned incidents. The LUCC manages volunteers who help people at stations following major disruptions.

Some events LUCC must respond to are routine, such as spectators travelling to Wembley Stadium. Others are less predictable or present other challenges, for instance:

- New Year’s Eve has become easier to manage since the fireworks display in central London has been ticketed.
- The Notting Hill Carnival is difficult because TfL limited station infrastructure in the area struggles to cope with the number of attendees.
- The poppy display at the Tower of London created a huge amount of unanticipated demand – TfL had to mobilise quickly in response and sustain a higher level of resource while the display was on.

The London Underground network information board is managed from LUCC – this information is put onto the TfL website and is automatically update across the tube

² For more information on emissions standards please see: https://www.theaa.com/motoring_advice/fuels-and-environment/euro-emissions-standards.html

³ Slides delivered by Richard Jones are attached.

network. Similar to the STTOC, the LUCC also monitors social media for updates on service problems.

From the LUCC, TfL directs a number of vehicles that can attend incidents on the network. Although these vehicles are operated by TfL, they are branded as British Transport Police. TfL also controls power networks across the tube from the LUCC.

A large amount of engineering work is carried out on the tube overnight. This is also overseen from the LUCC, with engineering works managers based in the centre overnight while work is taking place.