



Progress report to the London Assembly Transport Committee

10 July 2019

1 Summary

This report updates the Transport Committee about action taken by London TravelWatch to respond to the concerns and comments made by the Committee since the London TravelWatch draft budget and Business Plan was last considered by Members on 18 November 2018.

Details of the current work programme are included, together with a process for developing a revised business plan and budget bid for 2020/21 which will be submitted to the Committee for approval in the autumn.

2 Recommendations

- i) That the Committee notes the action taken so far by London TravelWatch to respond to the Committee's comments on its previous draft Business Plan, notes the current work programme and endorses the direction of travel;
- ii) That consequent on this, the grant funding for London TravelWatch for the second half of this financial year be confirmed and released;
- iii) That, following further consultation over the summer, the Committee receives an updated and refocused Business Plan for the period 2020 to 2024 in the autumn, to be considered as part of the 2020/21 budget process; and
- iv) That subsequent to this, the Memorandum of Understanding between the Greater London Authority and London TravelWatch is reviewed and updated to ensure that current expectations are fully covered

3 Background

The London TravelWatch (LTW) draft business plan and budget bid for 2019/20 was rejected by the Committee in November last year.

Following this, authority was delegated to the Chair, in consultation with Party Group lead members, to make a recommendation to the Mayor in relation to the LTW budget. Funding for the first six months of this financial year was subsequently confirmed, with provision for the full amount being retained within the overall London Assembly budget. Further release of the budget remains subject to the Committee being satisfied with progress.

4 Issues for Consideration

Expectations of London TravelWatch

London TravelWatch was originally set up as the London Transport Users Committee, with a brief to represent the voice of transport users in London. Until 1999 it was one of many such regional committees with similar remits, all of which were funded by central government.

Upon the establishment of the Greater London Authority, responsibility for the committee passed to the GLA, and the name was later changed to London TravelWatch. The remaining regional committees were consolidated into one body, which is now operating as Transport Focus.

The relationship between London TravelWatch, the Greater London Authority and the Transport Committee is governed by a Memorandum of Understanding (last updated in 2014) which sets out clear expectations. It aims to ensure that both parties maintain an open and constructive relationship which recognises that whilst London TravelWatch is *independent from transport operators and providers*, the organisation needs to work *within the strategic framework that the Transport Committee sets*.

Protocols are set out for communication and joint working and, in 'searching for the maximum benefit', annual consultation is required on the provisional work programme for the following year to: identify opportunities for joint or complementary working; inputs to projects being undertaken by the other body; and information sharing opportunities or other measures to eliminate duplication.

This Committee has the authority to issue guidance and directions to London TravelWatch (s251 GLA Act 1999) and the MOU provides for the business plan process to be based on the broad objectives set for London TravelWatch by the Transport Committee.

The Mayer report

The London TravelWatch board acknowledged the concerns of the Committee and in December 2018 commissioned Anthony Mayer CBE, former GLA Chief Executive, to carry to a review of the organisation. This explored whether:

- i) The current management and governance structure was appropriate;
- ii) The organisation was well run with good governance and assurance processes in place;

- iii) The functions carried out meet its statutory obligations and the expectations of the London Assembly's Transport Committee.

Mr Mayer found that, whilst appropriate structures and assurance processes were in place, there was a need to refocus the organisation away from past tensions towards a more modern, cost-effective approach, targeting resources towards the core priorities agreed with the Transport Committee. The business plan should be strengthened and produced over a longer period in line with the Assembly electoral cycle but updated and reviewed annually.

Action was required by London TravelWatch to improve the relationship with this Committee and to update the approach to social media and engagement. In doing so, consideration should be given to reviewing the approach, and resources, devoted to responding to consultations. This should include agreeing a partnership arrangement with Transport Focus in relation to London TravelWatch's rail remit within the London rail travel area, to minimise the potential for duplication.

This latter recommendation was also previously made as part of the Committee's review of London TravelWatch in 2010.

Mr Mayer also recommended that the Transport Committee should issue strategic direction and guidance for London TravelWatch and that the Memorandum of Understanding should be updated to clarify current expectations and requirements. To improve coordination, it was suggested that an officer should be identified who could attend London TravelWatch board meetings and co-ordinate the annual alignment of the London TravelWatch and Transport Committee work programmes.

Rebuilding the relationship

The London TravelWatch board has accepted the recommendations of the Mayer report and wishes to improve the relationship with the Committee in order to improve the service provided to London's transport users and to add value to the work of both bodies.

Top priority is being given to rebuilding the relationship with, and approach to, the Committee. Regular meetings are being established and have started to take place at both officer and board level to increase mutual understanding, and for the London TravelWatch team to share their current work streams and activity with the Assembly's officers.

The organisation's need for independence from operating companies had, it appears, been taken to mean it should be independent from the London Assembly. To address this, the TravelWatch team is being encouraged to get to know their opposite numbers and links are being made more broadly, for example between the respective communications officers.

More remains to be done and it is recognised that this will take some time for this new way of working to become embedded as 'business as usual'. LTW is grateful

for the support being given from staff and members of the Assembly during this transitional period. Over the medium term it is hoped that improved joint working will build trust, increase effectiveness and identify opportunities for London TravelWatch to contribute more fully to the Transport Committee's work programme.

Strategic collaboration with Transport Focus

As indicated above, London TravelWatch and Transport Focus both exist to represent the voice of the transport user, to champion their cause when things go wrong and to get services improved, albeit with different (although overlapping) geographies and slightly different remits.

Following informal discussion with the lead Members of this Committee, the Board of London TravelWatch has commenced discussions with Transport Focus with the goal of agreeing a formal, strategic partnership where the two organisations will work more closely together to ensure that, both jointly and individually they are making more of difference for transport users and deliver better value for money for sponsors and funders.

How will a new partnership and better joint working be forged?

Both London TravelWatch and Transport Focus would retain their existing boards, governance and reporting arrangements to funders (the GLA and DfT respectively) but, in terms of day to day internal operations, staff will work together to make best use of the overall resources. There would be no change to current staff terms and conditions of employment.

It is proposed that a joint chief executive arrangement will be put in place – the Transport Focus chief executive will take on this role initially, and that the London TravelWatch team will report in beneath this. A new role will be created beneath this with specific responsibility for liaison and co-ordination with Assembly colleagues. Existing governance and reporting arrangements with and to the Assembly would remain the same and would be an explicit requirement for the new joint Chief Executive role.

Where appropriate, teams made up of staff from both organisations will work on common transport user issues and plans will be shared so there can be better co-ordination of user representation activities. This shared service approach should reduce the costs of the most senior leadership, reduce duplication and streamline the back office further, allowing a greater focus on front line issues.

The intention is to amplify impact in areas of common interest, whilst allowing more focus to be given to specific differences of the London travel area and the wider multi modal responsibilities of the London TravelWatch team.

Both parties recognise that there may be occasions where the geographic and policy interests of both organisations may differ and mechanisms will be built into any agreement to ensure that both parties retain the right to publish or comment on issues in a way that reflects the respective statutory and other duties of the

organisations – however, it is hoped that joint work and communications will be possible on many issues of joint interest.

How will this benefit transport users?

Both organisations will become more effective, able to make more of a difference as knowledge, information, skills and resources are pooled – the ‘marriage value’ of the new relationship is considerable. There will be more joined up representation on issues affecting transport users across London and South East which will benefit all users and joined up representation will simply look, feel and sound more effective.

How will this benefit sponsors and funders?

There will be early visible evidence of making more of a difference for transport users, with over time, more resource released for front line activities but no major changes to underlying sponsorship, financial, legal or other arrangements are envisaged. Both Boards will benefit from streamlined, joined up support and governance services plus a wider ranging look at issues affecting them.

Shared service arrangements between different organisations have become common place in the public sector over the last few years and there is a wealth of experience available to draw on to ensure that respective interests are protected, and benefits maximized.

What next?

This proposal is at an early stage and further discussion and consultation is required prior to any formal agreement between the two boards but it important that the Transport Committee gives indicative support to the approach prior to any more substantive developments.

5 The current work programme

Alongside action to respond to the issues raised by the Transport Committee, the day to day work of the organisation has of course continued. Beyond this the team are working hard to deliver benefits in the three main areas of passenger safety, accessibility and improvements to the customer experience. Key activity is as follows:

Passenger safety issues

Bus Passenger Safety research

This study by Loughborough University Design School has just been completed and was commissioned (with funding from the Road Safety Trust) to independently review and explore the causes of injuries to bus passengers on the London bus network that take place on buses, as opposed to third party collisions.

This work was prompted by the extent of incidents that occur that are not serious enough to be reported to the police (circa 6,000 verses 1500 reportable ones in 2015) and has taken a three stage approach to look at information over a five year period to derive a better understanding of the nature and circumstances of injuries and how they can be prevented and/or mitigated. Elderly women are disproportionately represented amongst the injured group.

As well as commissioning this work, London TravelWatch acted in a key role liaising between the operators and researcher to gain access to incident reports, CCTV packages and the injured parties. This was a substantial challenge due to confidentiality, data protection and other legal issues.

Quantitative and qualitative methods have been used including reviews of CCTV footage and semi structured interviews with passengers who have been injured. The final phase of the study involved identifying potential solutions to the problem of passenger injury and presenting these to stakeholders to identify priorities and to assess the feasibility of their implementation.

It was evident from the study that problems and solutions are not confined to one area but require a systems approach to achieving a reduction in bus passenger injuries. The next steps involve further dissemination and discussion with TfL and bus operators about which measures could be taken forward, in order to reduce the number of injuries in the future.

Improving passenger safety and evacuation procedures on 'stranded' trains

London TravelWatch has been closely involved in this area following the incidents at Peckham Rye and Lewisham, and in particular succeeded in influencing the outcome of the Lewisham report. Subsequent work with Network rail has helped to shift the approach to this from one of staff seeing these issues as technical problems to be resolved about trains to one that puts the passenger perspective at the heart of things with an onus on the people issues and managing a safe exit for passengers where necessary.

Accessibility

Highways obstructions

London TravelWatch has a particular remit to represent disabled users of London's transport networks. For many years, we have been working to clear unlawful obstructions from the pavements as we know from disability groups that clear pavements are really important. Local authorities, including TfL, have a legal duty to keep their streets clear of unlawful obstructions, and the powers to do this.

Last year this zero-tolerance approach was specifically included in the Mayor's Transport Strategy and last month the City of London adopted a similar proposal to clear their pavements of 'A' boards etc. We will continue to lobby until all London boroughs adopt and enforce similar proposals.

Interchange Matters

The next event in our successful 'Interchange Matters' seminar series will take place at City Hall, in London's Living Room, on Wednesday 24 July on the theme of accessibility. Members of the Transport Committee have been invited and would be very welcome if able to attend.

The passenger experience

Closure of ticket offices

In September 2018, LTW held a consultation on London Overground's proposals to close ticket offices at stations across much of the Overground Network, receiving over 6,500 responses from a range of organisations and individuals. Following the consultation, we formally objected to the closure of 24 ticket offices.

The Mayor announced on 18 April 2019 that 47 of the 51 ticket offices previously proposed for closure will be retained following our pressure. We also secured significant investment in ticketing and customer services as a result of our activity. Issues remain to be resolved at White Hart Lane and West Hampstead and we are currently meeting the operator and local groups to find an appropriate way forward.

Introduction of the Rail Ombudsman

Following the introduction of the new scheme in November, the LTW team has been working hard to ensure that rail passengers are informed as soon as possible in the complaints process about the existence of the Ombudsman. The volume of enquiries from passengers seeking help and signposting is gradually reducing, enabling the focus to move towards ensuring that the new scheme produces high quality data that can be used to help improve services.

Travel Demand Management Forum

We have brokered much more engagement from Network Rail in the travel demand management process, working with TfL. They now actively take part in the forum and have just moved their control staff into Palestra 24/7 alongside Underground controllers.

This is having great passenger benefits and we are confident will be built on in the future. The continuing operation of this group plays a vital role in coordinating all of the rail operators whose services terminate in London with TfL.

6 Reshaping the Business Plan for 2020 onwards

The London TravelWatch Board has recently been strengthened by a number of new appointments and work is currently underway with the new board to review the existing strategy and to reshape the Business Plan. Given the limited resources available, it will be important to ensure that the proposed priorities align with the Committee's requirements and consultation will take place with colleagues at the Assembly over the summer in line with the communications protocol prior to resubmission.

This work has involved a detailed review of the organisation's finances. This activity is on-going, and there are regular officer-level discussions with the Assembly's Secretariat and our accountant. It appears that there are some cost pressures for LTW that are not fully met from the existing resources. This needs further investigation, however, as this review work is at an early stage. This work will be completed in time for the submission of robust budget proposals to the Assembly in the autumn.

7 Conclusion

London TravelWatch recognises the need to respond effectively to the concerns of the Transport Committee. We hope that this report demonstrates that the Board and staff team are committed to strengthening the relationship and improving outcomes for London's transport users.

Joanna Simons CBE
Interim Chief Executive