



Progress report to the London Assembly Transport Committee

22 July 2020

1 Summary

This report updates the Transport Committee about London TravelWatch's work since the 2020/21 business plan was submitted in October 2019.

2 Recommendations

1. That the Committee notes London TravelWatch's annual performance and the financial position as at 31 March 2020, puts questions to invited guests and notes the discussion.
2. That the Committee agrees a one year extension to the period of appointment for the three London TravelWatch Board members whose terms of appointment are currently due to expire on 31 December 2020, as set out in the report, subject to satisfactory performance reviews.

3 Background

A lot has happened since the Business Plan was submitted in October last year. Interim Chief Executive Joanna Simons handed over the reigns to me in January; the Collaboration Agreement with Transport Focus was signed by both Board Chairs; I refined and prioritised the Business Plan; and adapted and re-prioritised our work when covid 19 struck.

Like everybody else, we are all working at home for the first time, with limited opportunities to experience our current public transport system first-hand. But London Travelwatch staff have adapted well to the situation and we believe we are making a considerable difference for those who are currently using public transport. The pandemic has created unique opportunities for London TravelWatch and Transport Focus to work more closely together. And it has also given us the chance to work more closely with TfL and the Transport Committee in representing users at a crucially important time.

4 Update and Progress against the 2020/21 Business Plan

Key successes since October 2019

1. **Built a new, more productive relationship with the GLA and with TfL**
2. **Cemented the working relationship with Transport Focus** which has brought benefits for London's transport users including providing access to passenger insights and expertise. Cost savings will follow in the next year.
3. **Developing different and innovative ways of engaging with London's transport users** – we're setting up a new digital community of transport users which will give us deeper insights into the transport issues facing Londoners.
4. **Responded to the coronavirus pandemic** – quickly re-oriented the organisation to deal with the new situation, with significant benefits to passengers in terms of ticket refunds and better provision of information to transport users.

Strategic collaboration with Transport Focus

As the Transport Committee knows, at the beginning of the year, London TravelWatch signed a Collaboration Agreement with Transport Focus. The goal was to agree 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 a difference for transport users and delivering better value for money for sponsors and funders.

Teams made up of staff from both organisations are now working on common transport user issues so that there is better co-ordination of user representation activities. This shared service approach will reduce costs and duplication, and streamline the back office further, allowing a greater focus on front line issues. As part of the agreement, London TravelWatch now process Transport Focus complaints, which has benefitted both organisations in terms of streamlining resources.

Notable successes since the agreement was signed include:

- Because of the partnership, London TravelWatch can now be contacted for general enquires (but not help with complaints) 24 hours a day, most days of the year (not including Christmas or Boxing Day).
- Pre-lockdown, London TravelWatch was able to use a London 'cut' of the Transport Focus National Rail Passenger Survey (NRPS) data, which showed increased passenger satisfaction at London Bridge and Victoria Stations.

- London TravelWatch has benefitted from data coming from the Transport Focus 'Transport User Panel' during the crisis, which has helped us to better understand the travel patterns and needs of transport users.
- London TravelWatch has been able to suggest questions and then use and distribute insights gained from the weekly omnibus survey results that Transport Focus have been running during the crisis. This has helped to raise the media profile of London TravelWatch and also deepen our relationship with TfL, with whom we share the data every week. We've also shared the results with the Transport Committee each week.
- London TravelWatch and Transport Focus have recently conducted a joint, Chatham House rules seminar with Transport operators to discuss and share ideas on how to avoid a car-based recovery from the pandemic and how transport operators can improve the level of transparency and honesty with their customers as they start to return to public transport.
- Meetings with Train Operating Companies (TOCs) have been divided up between the two organisations, reducing duplication of effort. A joint approach to appraising TOCs' Accessible Travel plans has also been happening.
- Staff members take part in daily joint meetings with Transport Focus to discuss how to respond to the pandemic and to share intelligence.
- The two organisations are collaborating on a horizon-scanning exercise on current and future transport trends during the pandemic. This information is now being shared with London Assembly members on a weekly basis.
- Information and expertise on improving our external communications is being shared in both directions.
- The finance function of London TravelWatch is now led from Transport Focus.
- London TravelWatch has been able to benefit from the expertise of the Transport Focus organisational team, including in areas such as: IT support; insurance advice; staff well-being initiatives (including coaching); conducting London TravelWatch's first staff survey; updating our risk and opportunities register and developing a 'return to work' plan, in line with Government advice. Full IT migration which will allow London TravelWatch to fully harmonise with Transport Focus should be complete by the end of the summer.

- I am a member of the Transport Focus Management team, Head of Casework Susan James sits on the Transport Focus Business Improvement team, and Operations and Communications Manager Richard Freeston-Clough has joined the Transport Focus Information Strategy Group enabling further cross-fertilisation of expertise.

Both organisations consider the new collaboration to be working very successfully. We are working on plans to be able to share office space in the New Year, which will further deepen our relationship and reduce costs.

Campaigns and major policy work

The Business Plan identified three main areas for campaign and policy work this year. Here is an update on these areas:

Boosting levels of Delay Repay compensation

This is an area where we've been able to benefit from Transport Focus running a major communications campaign, aimed at encouraging passengers to claim a refund where it is due.

We've been able to share communications assets such as digital image assets and a video produced by Transport Focus, to help increase awareness amongst passengers of the ease of claiming.

DfT data on the numbers of people claiming a refund are not yet available so the success of this campaign cannot yet be measured.

Penalty Fares Compensation

Following a London TravelWatch Casework Team investigation, we discovered that not all penalty fares were being calculated fairly. After raising this issue with the Government, and achieving progress towards a correction of this anomaly, our intention was to follow up on this investigation by checking to see if TOCs were now calculating penalty fares correctly and fairly. However, covid 19 has delayed us from being able to do this at present, especially as the issuing of penalty fares has been suspended.

Digital communication

Instead of updating 'London on the Move', we have decided to produce shorter, more digitally-based communications that have the potential to reach a wider and more diverse audience. For example, we experimented with using short videos to communicate our policy ideas during the abandoned Mayoral Election Campaign, one of which had a record number of views for a London TravelWatch tweet.

It's possible that post-pandemic, we will want to put our ideas down on paper about how we think the future transport system best serves transport users. We are also considering organising a webinar on this topic in the Autumn, as our first webinar was so successful.

After starting at London TravelWatch in January, I spotted an opportunity to progress the interests of bus users. TfL told me that they would be putting a greater focus on the bus this year, and we saw an opportunity to address the long-standing issue of decreasing bus ridership, caused by slower bus speeds, due to increasing levels of traffic congestion. Decreasing bus ridership is a key threat to the Mayor's target for a shift to more sustainable modes of travel.

We worked up a campaign plan on this issue, which we were about to talk to Transport Committee members about, but lockdown then happened. We've put this campaign on hold for now but we did achieve one success just before lockdown. In my first meeting with Heidi Alexander, I raised the issue of TfL's very unambitious target for average bus speeds in London. Together with a suggested Mayoral question submitted by the Transport Committee Chair, this resulted in TfL raising the target from 9.2mph to 9.3mph on its annual scorecard, in time for it to be agreed by the TfL Board the following week.

We've been told by Gareth Powell at TfL that they are working on ways to give buses greater priority, to reduce journey times. This was also one of our demands.

Some other successes

- We progressed our Loughborough Bus safety research by organising two discussions with TfL and bus operators about which measures could be taken forward, in order to reduce the number of injuries in the future. We recently discussed these issues with Gareth Powell at TfL and a further meeting is being set up with his bus safety team.
- We had planned a joint project with Transport for All to improve communication to passengers when lifts and escalators are out of order. This work has had to be put on hold because of the pandemic.
- We met with the Williams Rail Review team and talked to them about the benefits of extending the London model of rail franchising to the rest of the UK. Recent indications from the Secretary of State for Transport are that this is the direction of travel and the DfT is working with TfL to devolve the Great Northern Moorgate to Stevenage route, which we have been calling for.
- Following a presentation that London TravelWatch made to the Council, a stretch of road in Bexleyheath will now have a consultation about whether it should change from Hail and Ride to fixed bus stops. We were also

pleased to see that TfL are proposing to replace the Hail and Ride section of bus route 233 on Longlands Road in Sidcup with fixed bus stops. This will mean the service is accessible for everyone. A plan to release our completed Hail and Ride report has been put on hold because of the pandemic.

- The NRPS released in January showed increased passenger satisfaction with seating in London Bridge and Victoria stations, and increased satisfaction with toilets in Victoria station. This follows previous work done by London TravelWatch to convince Network Rail to make toilets free and to improve seating at those stations.
- We had excellent feedback from the Mayoral candidates who met with us about the quality and usefulness of our Transport User Priorities report.
- Following previous lobbying by London TravelWatch, The City of London agreed in March not to permit A Boards on the public highway. The education and enforcement measures will come into action once business activity has returned to normal.
- After a customer complaint, we were able to clarify that passengers who have purchased an off- peak through ticket to Heathrow Airport can travel on the Heathrow Express without having to buy a special Heathrow Express ticket.
- On the Kings Cross re-modelling and East Coast Main Line Upgrade, we were able to persuade Network Rail and train operators to revisit a proposed major blockade and restrictions in capacity planned for early 2021. This would have had a major knock on impact on travel throughout north east London, and as a result the rail industry has devised a much better, more workable and less costly plan to achieve these works with less disruption to passengers.
- We were able to influence Network Rail's future station design competition to better reflect the needs of passengers. By participating in the design process we got them to incorporate our *interchange matters* research into their thinking.
- We were able to secure changes to the development process for Paddington Square to ensure passengers had access to the London Underground lines there throughout the construction process and to provide step free access to the Bakerloo line at Paddington.
- We pressed TfL to upgrade their response to temporary road closures. This had a very big impact on bus passengers with better information provided and a coordinated approach introduced at main line terminal stations.

- We conducted a successful ticket office closure consultation for c2c, ensuring that passengers were not unduly disadvantaged and that other ticketing arrangements were available.
- The Southern Access to Heathrow strategic objectives published in November 2019 by The Department for Transport drew extensively on recommendations we made in our 'Way to Go' report on improving surface transport access to London's airports earlier in the year.
- We contributed to the work behind TfL's innovative new bus sound for its electric and hybrid buses that has been trialled on London's latest zero-emission bus routes, including the 100, the C10 route and the P5 route.

Rebuilding the relationship with the Transport Committee

Top priority is being given to rebuilding the relationship with, and approach to, the Committee. After an interruption because of the Mayoral and Assembly election being postponed, regular meetings are being re-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 plans and activity with the Assembly's officers. This includes regular contact between the Assembly's officers and our Head of Casework.

We have also increased the frequency of email communications to members and staff in order to increase our usefulness and value.

We don't get things right every time, but on the whole, the feedback that we've had from Assembly Members has been overwhelmingly positive and we believe that our value to the Transport Committee has increased.

One outstanding project from the Business Plan is to conduct a satisfaction survey amongst Assembly Members. This is currently being planned.

Other key relationships

A stated aim in the Business Plan was to develop a different way of working with TfL, making the relationship more strategic, and linking it better to different parts of the business planning cycle.

We now have much closer contact with TfL than we have had previously and we are better able to spot opportunities for making a difference to transport users than we were before. Being able to share the weekly omnibus polling results with TfL has enabled the relationship to develop because information is now being shared in both directions.

Regular meetings during the pandemic have resulted in London Travelwatch being able to put concerted pressure on TfL about the poor quality of information

given out to passengers on the TfL website and journey planner. This has resulted in significant improvements being made such as a new feature which shows users how busy a station will be at 15 minute intervals of time.

The Rail Ombudsman

A stated aim in the Business Plan was to make sure that:

- Rail passengers are informed about the complaints process as soon as possible
- That the new scheme produces high quality data that can be used to help improve services
- That all operators inform passengers of their right to appeal in a clear and timely way

Alongside Transport Focus, London TravelWatch continues to monitor the performance of the Rail Ombudsman, through our membership of the ADR Scheme Council, who oversee the Ombudsman. We have invited the Managing Director of the Rail Ombudsman to appear at our September Board meeting, to answer questions about their performance.

Strengthening the transport user voice

A stated aim of the Business Plan was to strengthen the transport user voice, largely by sharing the insights gained by Transport Focus in the NRPS and via their Transport User Panel. This goal has clearly been achieved but in my view it does not go far enough.

London TravelWatch must reach out to more transport users so that our work is better informed by their views, and that we have a better understanding of their needs.

This is why we are prioritising the establishment of a digital community of transport users who we can go to for insights, and who can help us to focus on improvements for users. We have just started working with a Digital Engagement Strategist, who is helping us to create a digital engagement strategy which will help us to reach out to a diverse range of Transport Users. The advantage of having a digital pool of transport users (compared to say, convening the transport user groups in London), is twofold. Firstly, it's pandemic-proof. We'll be able to talk to Transport Users all the time, because we don't have to meet them face to face. And secondly, it will enable us to reach out to a much wider demographic of transport users than we currently do.

New work during the pandemic

Like everybody else, we've adapted our Business Plan to meet the needs of transport users during the pandemic.

At first, we focused on helping passengers to get refunds on their season tickets, including persuading transport operators to improve the information that they were giving to customers about how to claim a refund.

We then moved our focus onto the safety of passengers who were using public transport at this time. Our aim has been to try and mitigate any negative effects of transport changes during the pandemic. And to capitalise on any positive changes, for example the initiatives to encourage active travel.

Notable achievements and initiatives include:

- TfL making significant improvements to their website after repeated requests from us. TfL have now introduced a feature which tells you how busy your station is at every time of day. And in time for the 4th July re-opening of pubs, restaurants and hairdressers, they took our advice and issued guidance for people returning to public transport for the first time (a replication of the 'Guide for Transport Users' which has been on our website throughout the pandemic). TfL have now improved their website so much that we've been able to take our Guide off the London TravelWatch website.
- A joint audit of TOC websites with Transport Focus resulted in TOCs hugely improving the information that they now give customers about what to expect when they travel, and how to stay safe. All TOCs now have full marks for their website information.
- Following lobbying of the Rail Delivery Group by London TravelWatch, a new app has been brought in as part of National Rail Enquiries, which tells rail passengers how busy their train is, in real time.
- TfL set up a covid 19 refund page on their website as a direct result of our lobbying.
- We secured a new commitment from Eurostar for passengers who have accepted vouchers and had their train subsequently cancelled to be able to exchange their vouchers for a refund.
- Our meetings with TOCs in this period have played a part in getting them to take greater responsibility for passenger safety. We were very plain-speaking when we saw deficiencies and were able to spread good practice between TOCs. We've noticed a huge improvement since our

meetings early in the pandemic; for example operators are taking more proactive measures to help passengers socially distance.

- We have lobbied TfL about restricting passenger numbers to help with social distancing. This is a consistent desire from passengers that we've picked up from the Transport Focus insights work. TfL have since restricted passenger numbers on London buses. We also asked TfL to provide 'bus full' flip boards for drivers to use and they have introduced this.
- Passenger demand has not been as actively managed on the Underground and we have repeatedly asked TfL to consider skipping stops at busy stations if there is a social distancing safety concern. TfL have recently told us that skipping stops is now one of the measures included in the control plan for each station.
- After requesting that TfL ask bus drivers to allow people to sit down before setting off (and allow people to carry on sitting down until the bus stops again), TfL have told us that they have included this request in their recent briefings to bus drivers. This will enable passengers to have less contact with handrails, which could reduce the transmission rates of covid 19, and also reduce the number of slips, trips and falls.
- Following our suggestions at the Travel Demand Management Board, TfL have built on their advice to business, providing additional advice to retailers about staggered opening times. They are also advising that people walk or cycle from mainline stations instead of using bus and Underground services.
- We held a webinar on 'emerging from lockdown' to try and establish what transport users' needs were, with Heidi Alexander as a key note speaker. The meeting was attended by 200 people and has been watched online by over 1,000 people. This is much more engagement than we would usually have had with a face to face seminar in City Hall.
- We produced a guide for passengers on what to expect if you are travelling for the first time, adding further to the information on TfL's website. And we were praised by disabled campaigners on Twitter for including the full list of face mask exemptions, rather than just a hyperlink to the Government website.
- We raised the issue of how the pricing of Santander bikes is advertised, due to complaints from new and longer distance hirers. As a result, TfL agreed to change the information they provide on their website.
- We've recently been meeting with Youth Councils from around London to talk to young people to better understand how they will be impacted by the

proposed Zip Card changes. We also want to find out what the modal shift implications might be.

- The weekly omnibus polling results have allowed us to have much better insights into the passenger experience during the pandemic. Publication of the results has also helped us to raise our media profile, with the Director appearing five times on the BBC TV during this period and being quoted twice in the Daily Mail.
- We met with TfL's Director of Strategy, Shashi Verma, to talk about how to ensure that fares rises in January don't impact negatively on lower income Londoners. We have a follow up meeting planned for the end of September when TfL will have a better idea of how the Government wants TfL to implement the fare rises.
- Finally, we're preparing a new project on active travel. The result of which will be to share good practice with councils who have received streetscapes funding, and to create a guide for citizens which tells them who to talk to at TfL or their local council if they want to make a suggestion about making the changes even more inclusive. We'll be using this project to start to grow our new digital community of transport users. And Transport for All will be our accessibility partner on this project.

5 Financial update

Due to lower than anticipated accommodation costs, the outturn for the last financial year resulted in a revenue surplus of £2,000 which was transferred to reserves leaving a closing reserve balance of £49,000.

We are in discussions with the Assembly Secretariat about what proportion of cost savings we can make this year.

6 Board recruitment Update

The terms of office for three members of the London TravelWatch board – Jackie Ballard, Alan Benson as Deputy Chair, and Abdi Osman - are due to expire on December 31 2020. It is proposed to extend their contracts by one year, subject to performance review and approval from the Transport Committee.

7 Going forward

London TravelWatch is going to have to continue to be nimble and responsive as the pandemic plays out, adapting our work plan accordingly.

When the next round of Government funding for TfL is negotiated and agreed, there are bound to be changes for Transport users which London TravelWatch will need to address on their behalf. We would welcome the opportunity to work with the Transport Committee and Assembly members to seek guidance on our priorities, and to look for opportunities to work together to achieve better outcomes for transport users.

London TravelWatch needs to carefully think about the unique role that we can play in the emerging transport world and what public value we can deliver.

We need to be ahead of the curve in understanding what the future of transport in London will be, and in helping Londoners to understand how it has changed.

8 Conclusion

London TravelWatch hope that you agree that our work so far this year has been valuable. And we look forward to shaping with you what we do next, in the spirit of collaboration.

Emma Gibson
Director