

# ► London Councils' submission

## ► Transport Select Committee Inquiry into the Rail Passenger Experience

London Councils represents London's 32 borough councils and the City of London. It is a cross-party organisation that works on behalf of all of its member authorities regardless of political persuasion.

### Information provided to passengers before, during and after journeys

Londoners, just like people living in the rest of the UK, want clear, accurate information at the right point before, during and after their journey. All stations should display live running information but this is no substitute for staff at stations who can provide further information or instructions about alternative journey routes in the event of delays. Train operating companies should not assume that travellers can rely on smartphones, apps or the internet to access the information they need; not only do not all travellers have smartphones, use of them requires an internet connection, signal or battery life. Station staff must be well informed, provided with adequate training and the appropriate tools (for example smart phones or tablet computers) to be able to carry out their roles effectively.

On board trains, all trains should have a minimum of automated announcements and electronic sign boards notifying passengers of the next station. This is particularly important for deaf or blind passengers. Thameslink is currently one London train operating company that does not provide any of this information to its passengers, and we expect to see this rectified in planned upgrade work. When information is provided, it must be accurate and kept up-to-date.

Explanations for train cancellations and delays should be given to passengers as a minimum, and train operating companies should be more forthcoming with this information, either through driver announcements on running services, or through electronic signboards or announcements made at stations. Passengers should not have to request this information from the nearest member of staff, and nor should they have to find this information on National Rail Enquiries, which may offer more up-to-date information.

Information given at stations should include how to seek assistance, especially for passengers requiring assisted travel.

Typically, when passengers change trains at a station, they alight from one train looking for information about which platform their next train departs from. This information is often not provided on each platform or pair of platforms, or only popular departure information is displayed. Equally, providing information only about the end destination of the route and not the intermediate stations is unhelpful for passengers trying to ascertain whether a train stops at their station, especially at stations where there is a choice between fast services and stopping services that ultimately have the same destination. This occurs at stations across the UK. This means passengers have to ask the nearest member of staff, or return to the main entrance of a station where platform information is given. This inconveniences passengers and adds time to their journeys, especially if they have to walk in a different direction to where their departure platform is. At major interchange and popular stations this is not an adequate situation, and we want to see all of these stations displaying far greater electronic information about the

trains departing from other platforms where space allows. This can be achieved by hanging sign boards from buildings or suspending them over platforms.

## Ticketing, including overcoming obstacles to widespread delivery of “smart ticketing” and part-time season tickets

London already has a system of smart ticketing, using both Oyster and contactless bank cards. We support efforts to roll out smart ticketing in other parts of the UK, although we encourage these systems to learn from each other and be compatible. In London, London Councils continues to work with TfL to ensure that an extension of Transport for London operated services beyond the boundary of London to parts of Kent, Surrey and Hertfordshire does not increase the cost to the London boroughs who pay for the London Freedom Pass for older and disabled Londoners. Whilst we recognise the potential service improvements and convenience for passengers of ever-greater expansion of the TfL rail network into London's commuter belt, the London Freedom Pass, which is paid for by Londoners for Londoners, must continue to be protected.

Recent research commissioned by London Councils, Trust for London and London TravelWatch about the costs and affordability of travel for low-paid workers found that 22 per cent of low-paid workers wanted travel tickets to accommodate working from home or off-peak usage and 21% wanted a part-time season ticket that offered lower prices for travelling fewer than five days a week. Greater awareness of the Jobcentre Plus Travel Discount is also needed so that unemployed workers seeking work can travel more cheaply to job interviews and in the first three months of a new job.

In London, a part-time season ticket could work as follows.

- Users would make use of Oyster cards and contactless cards.
- Technology calculates over a seven day period whether the user has travelled for four or fewer days, in which case a part time weekly season amount is charged. If the user has travelled for five or more days, a full time weekly season amount is charged. Alternatively, the default option could be to charge a full time weekly season, a portion of which is refunded at the end of the seven day period when the person has not travelled for four or more days.
- The seven day period could be constantly evolving, and so the technology can calculate the ‘best price’ for that user at any given point; for example a person working shifts may work only three days on one week but five on the next. Depending on the spacing of those shifts, the technology may calculate this as two part time weeks of four days; or one part time week and one full time week.
- Passengers using Oyster cards with online accounts could have the option of selecting which day they want to start their week on, if they want to retain some control over how the technology calculates their travel. This could lead to higher prices in some instances.
- In addition to the part time or full time weekly season ticket, there could also be an off-peak price and a peak-price, further incentivising off-peak travel. This would be flexible, calculating travel costs based on individual journeys, meaning that an individual working an early shift on one day would not be penalised for then travelling in the peak period the following day for a later starting shift.
- The same approach could be applied to a monthly season ticket. Individuals working seventeen or fewer days in a calendar month could be charged a part-time season amount and individuals working for more than seventeen days in a calendar month could be charged a full-time monthly season. Individuals could opt to purchase this ticket in advance and have it uploaded to their Oyster card or contactless card, or the technology could calculate costs based on the past month, and refund the difference in the case of part-time tickets. This would give people maximum flexibility in their travel for a month. Where a part-time monthly ticket is purchased in advance, the technology would charge individuals for any journeys taken above this as normal Pay As You Go (PAYG) journeys.

- At an annual level, it would seem that applying the same calculations for monthly tickets over a 12 month period would be possible. A part-time annual ticket should be based on weekly and monthly usage and not be a ticket that allows for daily travel for only half of the year, for example.

London Councils believes the technology exists in London to consider in greater depth the role of part-time ticketing. Whilst we do not believe it will provide enough of a shift to encourage part-time working or working from home to significantly reduce congestion on London's rail and tube services, we do believe that this can contribute in a small way, which is beneficial both to the capital and wider commuter areas. We want to see the Transport Select Committee encourage TfL to progress further with smart and part-time ticketing.

At a UK as well as London level, we believe that consultation amongst users, especially regarding what should 'count' as a part-time week, and the level of discount applied, would bring legitimacy to the process.

London Councils also supports the use of smart ticketing in helping passengers undertake multi-modal journeys. We support the announcement by the new Mayor of London that a one hour bus ticket will be introduced in London, initial allowing two journeys per hour and in 2018 unlimited journeys. We believe that this could be extended to when bus journeys are combined with tube journeys. At present users of the bus for a portion of their journey are penalised if the equivalent journey could be taken by tube, if that person that uses the tube for a second or further part of their journey. Especially in the peak travel period, encouraging modal shift by combining tube and bus fares, would go some way to promoting bus use and supporting low-paid workers.

## In train facilities

The standard of train facilities is variable dependent on operator and route. We note that long-distance operators such as Chiltern, Virgin Trains and Cross Country already offer Wi-Fi and in some cases power sockets on their trains. Wi-Fi access varies between even those operators that provide it, as to whether the customer has to pay to use the service. Whilst we acknowledge that London's metro services operate over shorter journey distances, we believe consideration of facilities such as Wi-Fi and power sockets should be part of franchising conditions and new train specifications.

London Councils also believes that toilets should be provided on trains as standard as well, especially in the specifications for new trains. Assuming that people will use toilets at stations is not adequate, especially for longer journeys and older and disabled people. Station toilets can be unclean, have limited opening hours, or not exist at all at some stations. With an increasingly ageing population and financial pressures on local authorities to close public toilets, especially due to instances of anti-social behaviour, London Councils feels new train specifications should include toilet facilities and that stations with toilets should be encouraged to retain them.

London Councils is also concerned that to achieve ever greater capacity on trains on commuter routes, fewer seats are being provided. Whilst we acknowledge that more people can stand in the same space as they can sit, fundamentally people want to sit down on a train and we are concerned about this approach.

## Performance measures in relation to passenger experience

London Councils believes that people deserve transparency about their train service. Train operating companies hold a wealth of data about their passengers, and should make greater use of contacting passengers for their views on their service, as well as making greater efforts to alert them to disruptions or service changes. Train operating companies should be required to report in greater detail about all delays, not just those over 30 minutes, including explanations for this. We acknowledge that some operators work with ageing infrastructure, extremely limited capacity and in the context of major infrastructure upgrades. Nevertheless, we believe that passengers still deserve to understand why staff shortages and train faults lead to delays and cancellations. London Councils wants to see greater use made of passenger surveys on trains and electronically.

## **Mechanisms to hold operators to account for poor performance and spread best practice across the industry**

London Councils understands that franchises need to be sufficiently long enough for companies to make investment in their operation and reap the financial benefits. However, we do believe that there needs to be greater ability by passengers and organisations such as London TravelWatch and Transport Focus to challenge poor performance during a franchise and secure improvements, or else that train operating companies should risk losing the franchise. We are not convinced that the culture of blame and payment for delays from one part of the rail industry to another is necessarily a good use of, ultimately, public money, and it deprives the rail network of improvements funding. London Councils wants to see the different parts of the rail industry working together to reduce delays, and we want to see payments for delays paid from one part of the rail industry to another guaranteed for use in joint improvements works so that the public benefit is not lost. We expect rail operating companies to come together and share best practice, regardless of the competition that exists between them. Examples of where this happens in other industries, such as the water and telecoms industries, could provide a useful basis for this. We believe commuters and regular users could also have a role here, especially where they use different operators and can therefore provide passenger feedback on what other operators do better.