





Bus Service Research

Emerging Findings

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1 Introduction

Research commissioned by London Councils

- 1.1 London's bus network underpins the capital's transport system. It enables residents and visitors to access work, shopping, education and recreation facilities; and it provides links to and with other transport modes. Buses are convenient to use, and as a network provide comprehensive coverage. Whilst the services provided are the envy of many other towns and cities, there may be room for improvement to meet changing needs.
- 1.2 London Councils has commissioned JMP to help identify, understand and record issues that the London boroughs may have regarding the bus network in their areas. The aim of our work is to determine what concerns regarding the bus network are shared among boroughs/sub regions and whether there are additional issues relevant to particular boroughs or sub regions in order to arrive at a shared understanding of the key issues with London's bus network.
- 1.3 The scope of our research covers all aspects of the planning and provision of the bus network, including policy, guidelines, fares, service specifications and operational issues of route, frequency and times. It focuses on those matters that are important to users and potential users of buses.

Questions

- 1.4 In order to fully explore these issues, we have engaged with boroughs through a series of workshops and individual discussions. The workshops have provided an opportunity for JMP to discuss with borough representatives the issues and priorities relating to bus travel in their areas. It is intended that from these discussions a comprehensive list of issues at a region, sub-region and borough levels will be formulated.
 - How is the bus network viewed in your area? To what extent do services meet the needs of your residents? How satisfied are people with it (evidence based) and is this reflected by usage trends?
 - Does the network take account of the needs of users and non-users?
 - To what extent does the bus network respond to, and support, your borough's key policies and objectives? What are your priorities for bus services?
 - What opportunities do you have to shape bus services and to influence overall strategy for the bus network?
 - Is the consultation process sufficient to allow all interested parties to have a say in bus service changes? Does the balance of relationships between TfL, boroughs, operators and users need to alter; if so, how?
 - Are changes needed to the Bus Service Planning Guidance? Should additional factors be taken into account, such as air quality and environment, road space considerations and synergy with rail?
 - To what extent does the formulaic approach to determining service specifications help or hinder the meeting of local needs?



- What aspects of services should be given further consideration? These might include the complexity of the network; particular aspects of services (routes, points served, times, frequencies); types of services (orbital, limited stop); balance of service convenience and travel time; etc.

1.5 To provide an initial overview of the emerging findings from the discussions with the boroughs we have produced this report to set out a series of common themes to allow London Councils to record key issues to their internal group considering transport matters.

2 Summary of discussions

- 2.1 To facilitate our investigation we have undertaken three meetings with sub-regional grouping of transport officers from London boroughs. We have met with:
- North London sub-regional transport group, 18 July 2012;
 - Central sub-regional transport group, 19 July 2012;
 - West sub-regional transport group (West-trans), 26 July 2012;
 - We are meeting with the south sub-region's highways and accessibility planning groups on 7 September 2012; and
 - A meeting with the eastern sub-regional transport group has been delayed until the close of the Paralympics.
- 2.2 Individual discussions with a number of the borough's public transport lead officers have been held to follow up on points of detail and to confirm what each borough considers to be local issues that may be of wider importance.
- 2.3 We have also been supplied by contacts at TfL a copy of the latest (August 2012) TfL "Guidelines for Planning Bus Services". The lack of wide availability of this document has noted by several boroughs as a barrier to effective engagement with TfL on a range of service and planning issues.

3 TfL Bus Planning Guidance

- 3.1 The TfL “Guidelines for Planning Bus Services” (August 2012) provides a policy framework for bus routing and frequency decisions on the TfL bus network. The guidance sets out a series of general principles that seek to conform to the wider policy agenda set within the Mayor’s transport strategy. We understand that the majority of boroughs have now received this publication which overcomes the issues noted in paragraph 2.3.
- 3.2 The guidance notes six key aspirations for the bus network which reflect the Mayor’s transport strategy:
- Supporting economic development and population growth;
 - Enhancing the quality of life for all Londoners;
 - Improving the safety and security of all Londoners;
 - Improving transport opportunities for all Londoners;
 - Reducing transport’s contribution to climate change, and improving its resilience; and
 - Supporting delivery of the London 2012 Olympic and Paralympic Games and its legacy.
- 3.3 The guidelines consider ‘time’ to be the most important factor in passenger satisfaction but makes no assumptions as to the issues that current non-users perceive as barriers to bus travel and how these may be addressed.
- 3.4 The guidelines indicate the following requirements for the bus network:
- Frequent: with adequate capacity for the peaks;
 - Reliable: providing even service intervals when frequencies are high and running to time when they are low.
 - Simple: easy for passengers to understand and remember, and well-integrated with other public transport;
 - Comprehensive: providing service to all areas and recognising the needs of local people from all sections of the community.
- 3.5 The guidelines suggest that any proposal to change the network must be self financing (in fact more so by a ratio of 2:1 when benefits and costs are assessed) and be practical. It further indicates that ‘significant changes’ will involve consultation with boroughs but does not define what a ‘significant change’ is.
- 3.6 The guidelines discuss each of the four network requirements in depth, but treat these in isolation to each other. For example, the concept of the simple to use network – buses operating between the same termini on all days of the week may compete with the objective to provide frequent services matched to the capacity required. Examples quoted by individual boroughs of this effect include the 279 (Waltham Cross - Ponders End - Edmonton - Tottenham - Manor House) where very limited traffic is carried north of Ponders End and south of Seven Sisters Station but daytime frequency over the entire route is maintained at every 5/6 minutes.

- 3.7 Our overall view on the service planning elements of the guidelines is that they lack flexibility and offer a too rigid set of principles for planning a dynamic entity such as the bus network. It offers no view on the timescales envisaged to instigate service change nor indicates any process for reacting to proposals by non-TfL parties for network or route changes. Our final comment is that whilst the guidelines refer to 'network' matters this seems to be against the general trend which is to work at route specific level when planning route changes.
- 3.8 The key decision making tool set out in the guidelines is 'cost effective network' criteria. As stated by TfL representatives at the various sub-regional meetings the funding 'pot' for bus service provision is fixed and choices about allocation of this funding needs to be made on an objective basis. Whilst this should be welcomed the level of transparency in the calculation of benefits could be increased. For example, the assessment of benefits appears to relate directly to bus operational costs and benefits rather than linking to the socio-economic aims of the six key aspirations for the bus network and solely related to passenger benefits. This in our views fails to provide the support to evidenced based implementation of the policy. We would question whether the 2:1 ratio for funding service changes is still appropriate if this is based on previous government policy for the funding of transport interventions.
- 3.9 Our conclusions on the guidelines are twofold. Firstly the release of the document to boroughs is a welcome development that could bring greater clarity to engagement between boroughs and TfL. Secondly, the guidelines appear limited in scope and would benefit from (a) greater clarity on the 'operational' interaction between the guidelines for service planning and (b) greater detail on the assessment of non-financial benefits.

4 Emerging themes

Introduction

- 4.1 The emerging themes from our investigations highlight areas where boroughs consider that amendment and improvement to TfL processes or more fundamental work either by boroughs or TfL is required to allow the bus network to develop in an informed way.
- 4.2 At the outset it should be noted that as a general observation the bus network provides an effective tool to support the social fabric of London. The comprehensive coverage offered and the links to other modes of public transport created should be recognised as positives. One borough has confirmed that they have no fundamental concerns or issues with the bus network in their area and considered the coverage (routes and frequencies) to be satisfactory.
- 4.3 Areas of apparent good practice are also highlighted. In one borough an approach facilitated by the borough is for a public forum meeting to take place 4 times annually, this is subsequently followed by a joint member / officer / TfL / service provider meeting that seeks to action matters raised at the public sessions in the most pro-active way possible. Local TfL officials support this process which is claimed to deliver benefits in terms of engagement and the development of local solutions to bus and other transport issues. A further example of good practice is the joint development of a joint approach to analysis of 'strategic corridors' in the west sub-region that is at point of delivering initial results.
- 4.4 Our key emerging themes are grouped into four areas:
- Liaison with TfL;
 - Route planning and network issues, route consultation, creation of 'mini-Oxford Streets by lack of area / corridor coordination;
 - Street furniture issues; and
 - TfL interaction with planning system / regeneration proposals.

Liaison with TfL

- 4.5 All boroughs that participated in the detailed discussions have highlighted this is a key issue. Overall the observations indicate disconnect between boroughs and TfL. This also was the key issue raised at the sub-regional transport group sessions.
- 4.6 Our observations suggest that at a local operational level contact between TfL and individual boroughs is effective and where necessary pro-active across a range of micro-level issues. It was also observed that at the higher levels of policy formulation (e.g Mayor's transport strategy) level that liaison is held due to the need to provide context to the LIP development and funding processes. The silo approach of TfL to a range of matters was noted as a barrier to effective engagement but we would suggest that the interest in transport matters being taken by the London Council's leaders group could improve matters of high level engagement.
- 4.7 The key issue for engagement with TfL was therefore at the network planning and route consultation level. A further more detailed consideration of route consultation issues is given

below. If a single impression could be identified it would be broadly stated as TfL having a 'design and defend' approach to development of the bus network. Inflexibility, inertia to change triggered by external events and a lack of transparency in decision making have all been highlighted by boroughs at this level of engagement.

- 4.8 The view of boroughs is that TfL engagement at this middle level operates with differing levels of effectiveness. Examples of good practice include the joint approach to examining strategic corridors being taken in the West sub-region and the proposals for a similar approach in the north being promoted by TfL. In the central sub-region the view that TfL is unresponsive to borough agendas at this intermediate level is prevalent and that tough decisions on modal priorities will be required to manage increasing competition for road and kerb space. This is in contrast to the west sub-region where effective work on a series of 'strategic corridors' is starting to close the gap between borough and TfL priorities. The former LBP approach of joint working to deliver an agreed programme of bus priority measures was indicated to be effective at bringing the agendas of boroughs and TfL together.
- 4.9 Our initial view is that liaison at middle levels needs to improve. At a practical level, closer working between boroughs and TfL on borough and sub-region wide issues is seen as essential. The perceived mismatch between the Mayor's Transport Strategy setting LIP priorities and then boroughs being responsible for LIP targets that TfL are actually the delivery agent for should be considered as the fundamental driver for enhancing this mid level engagement.
- 4.10 The 'strategic corridor' based approach that considers a full range of movement issues such as that being followed in the west sub-region should be encouraged. Our rationale for this view is that the approach is evidenced based, allows a frank assessment of competing issues and interests and focuses on areas where pressure on the transport system is greatest.

Route planning and network issues, route consultation

Route Planning

- 4.11 By far the most significant issue in terms of frequency raised by the boroughs involve this area of engagement with TfL. A number stem from the perceived disconnect between boroughs and TfL discussed previously whilst other relate directly to the role of boroughs in shaping the bus network.
- 4.12 The boroughs have highlighted their role in the management of socio-economic development and spatial planning to which the bus network forms a key facilitating role. Boroughs indicate that the current route planning approach is too narrowly focused on micro-level issues relating to opportunities to consider the routing and frequency of individual routes at convenient times, e.g at the point of re-tendering. This approach has led to the creation of a series of 'mini-Oxford Streets' in some suburban centres where key destinations for bus passengers are in close proximity. One example quoted is between Wood Green and Turnpike Lane tube stations where buses are claimed operate in convoy. This focus on route by route planning and micro-level changes to the existing network is perceived to miss the opportunities that an integrated approach to route planning across a specific or corridor would bring.

- 4.13 Boroughs consider that the comprehensive approach to network coverage is in some areas counterproductive to the provision of services that reflected more accurately passenger needs over a wider area. In effect they argue that, whilst acknowledging the ‘fixed pot’ of funding available for network support, targeting this through a combination of more effective route planning and more consideration of the local (borough level) socio-economic picture would bring about a network with better ‘balance’. Boroughs are of the general view that on some corridors frequencies are too high and a slight reduction would generate savings that could be recycled into alternative provision e.g radial routes and express running. It was noted in the north sub-region that TfL has tabled proposals to examine orbital routes and take a corridor based approach to reviewing the network.
- 4.14 A further view put forward was that route planning needed to take into the changing balance required in terms of road space allocation. This was particularly the case in central London where existing environmental issues, the relative priority given to pedestrians and cyclists needed consideration as does the different socio-economic climate (limited numbers of residents, high level of commuters and tourists).
- 4.15 The planning of route changes and the consequential affect on street furniture was noted by boroughs as an issue that required greater consideration during the consideration of service changes. Examples were quoted of route changes objected to by boroughs on grounds of inadequate bus facilities (stops and stands) being implemented by TfL with the boroughs in question subsequently being required to provide the necessary street furniture despite highlighting this deficiency in the planning stages.

Fares

- 4.16 Given the role of boroughs in economic development and the social welfare of residents a number of boroughs has highlighted fares policy as a concern. The principle issue relates to the ability of lower income groups to purchase Oyster or Travelcard and the penalty thus imposed for interchange by cash fare payers. This was noted as a issue in some boroughs where large areas with high levels of deprivation were not directly connected to areas where services are located, leading to poor accessibility, despite the general high levels of PTAL scoring seen in many boroughs.
- 4.17 Our view on fares is that socio-economic indicators are a useful aid to network / route planning and should be reflected in assessments of network and route capability.

Bus Operator performance

- 4.18 Several boroughs raised issues with bus operator performance and supervision. Whilst important local issues relating to the unsocial aspects of bus operations were identified it is suggested that these are a matter for TfL’s internal and comprehensive contract management processes rather than an area for detailed examination by this work. Clearly though, some of these issues are directly relate to bus network planning matters – e.g. bus stand locations – and could be taken into the route planning process.

Route change consultation

- 4.19 The matter of route change consultation highlighted from the borough perspective the level of disconnect between TfL and boroughs at the network planning level. The current consultation process for route changes is focused solely on the (often very minor) changes proposed. The

network planning consequences of such consultations are claimed not to be laid out for informed responses by boroughs. The boroughs also consider that the process is not sufficiently transparent with no actual or predicted usage data supplied to support the reasoning behind the change and no explanation of the cost / benefit assessment implicit in the guidelines for bus service planning. Again, the limited nature of the consultations at the route specific level are seen as leading to unintended consequences in terms of the management of kerb space and 'over-bussing' on certain sections of key corridors.

Observations

- 4.20 As for liaison with TfL, many of these issues have solutions based around more effective and inclusive route planning and consultation. Studies to examine particular key areas of the network, give consideration to the route structure in those areas and to assess the level of capacity viz the patronage levels encountered would have merit as an evidence-based approach that could manage aspirations effectively. In other, less densely bussed, areas of the network use of current planning techniques when coupled with more flexible policy guidelines would allow a more responsive approach that captured wider effects of the bus network, for instance socio-economic factors, to be included in the decision making process.

Street furniture issues

- 4.21 The provision of street furniture away from the TLRN is the responsibility of boroughs. Issues that are pan-London are reflected in the outcomes of the route consultation process. Competition for kerb space at many locations and the fragmented approach to route planning result in what a majority of boroughs have indicated a situation of reacting to events rather than a proactive management of bus related street furniture. As noted previously, examples of unintended consequence and failures to engage are forthcoming from many boroughs as are examples of member pressure over specific locations or individual items of street furniture.
- 4.22 The timescales of providing bus related street furniture and the local sensitivities involved its delivery are indicated by the boroughs as a substantial claim on officer's time. At least one difficult case quoted by a borough has a life of (at the time of writing) 10 years. Although this would appear an extreme case it is considered by many boroughs that the reactive nature of provision of suitable bus infrastructure is something that requires change.
- 4.23 A further issue with bus street furniture provision is the requirements for public consultation. Boroughs have furnished us cases where street furniture is essential for bus operations but has been consistently blocked by negative public consultation outcomes.
- 4.24 A further consequence of route planning choices made is the level of interchange required to make the network effective. Whether bus to bus or bus to tube/rail interchange, the capacity of street furniture at interchange points is believed to lack consideration when route changes are planned. Examples quoted include many locations where perceived over-bussing occurs on radial routes but limited orbital services exist.
- 4.25 For street furniture issues we propose that the approach taken with the LBPN should be followed. Whilst LBPN was a large programme with a specific budget and staff, the principles of close TfL / borough working brought a clear way forward across the programme. This is to be

commended to TfL and individual boroughs and feed into the route planning / consultation processes.

TfL interaction with planning system / regeneration proposals

- 4.26 The critical need to use the bus network as a tool to support the economic development and regeneration of London is seen by boroughs as a fundamental basis for network planning and route planning matters to be proactively used to influence travel choices at source.
- 4.27 Again, inflexibility and inertia to change were highlighted as key pointers to borough perceptions of the TfL approach to engagement with the land use planning system. Large scale development without effective transport links was seen as counter-productive to the role of the bus in facilitating economic activity and social mobility.
- 4.28 The boroughs were critical of the time-lag between new developments coming on stream and bus service changes – for most developments take up of newly located services businesses or house units is phased but public transport is needed from day 1. Examples quoted include failure to re-route buses to a new major hospital site in north London and failure to consider the impact on the bus network of a significant new housing development in north-west London.
- 4.29 The use of planning gain from new development was noted by certain boroughs as a way of TfL ‘testing the market’ for new / amended services at little or no financial risk. However, again inertia was noted as was the suggestion of ‘not thought of here’ reactions from TfL.
- 4.30 The consensus view offered by boroughs is that the bus network should be seen as a catalyst for new development. The recent approach by TfL to planning of the bus network post Crossrail was highlighted as good step forwards in this regard.
- 4.31 Our view on this area of concern is that the planning strategies set by the Mayor and boroughs give a clear guide on the pattern of development and the expectations placed on the bus network to serve it. We would consider that for more developments a route planning exercise be conducted at the planning application stage to an appropriate scale to confirm bus network changes that may be needed. This would allow for faster implementation.

Route specific comments

- 4.32 During the course of our investigations a number of route specific comments have been made. Many were raised by borough officers in response to correspondence with individual elected members but do highlight the themes recorded above. A sample of these issues is set out below.
- 133 – extension from Streatham to Norwood, several years of campaigning for this new link has been undertaken by members and officers. Minimal evidence presented by TfL as to reasons for not pursuing this;
 - P5 – route change not liked by local users who would prefer the previous routing;
 - 255 – changes are finally being undertaken after significant lobbying;
 - 155 – cut back to Elephant from Liverpool Street Station; this has lost key link to the city from Clapham;

- 109 – ‘localisation’ in Brixton causing stand and interchange capacity issues;
- 42 – lack of link to key destination at Dulwich Hospital an issue;
- 121 – excessive frequency at ends of route;
- 279 – excessive frequency at ends of route;
- W8 – local management presence; and
- Fleet Street – all routes, over-bussing.

5 Summary of initial findings

- 5.1 Our initial findings are focused strongly on the way in which boroughs and TfL liaise. Common themes have been highlighted but all to a greater or less degree relate to the conduct of boroughs and TfL relationships.
- 5.2 Our view is that greater flexibility and transparency in a number of areas would allow more effective relationship and solutions to be developed. As was stated at the various sub-regional meetings it is clear that a micro-level study of bus operations on a pan-London basis is not a practical proposition but careful examination of a number of particular issues would allow a fully transparent and evidenced based approach to planning the bus network to be realised.
- 5.3 Our full report, due in October 2012 will make a further analysis of the issues highlighted here, the possible solutions put forward at this initial stage and also take into account the further discussions with other sub-regions and boroughs that are ongoing.