

TfL customer service

Next steps

March 2015



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Our investigation

The GLA Oversight Committee approved the appointment of Valerie Shawcross AM as a Rapporteur for the Transport Committee in July 2014 to undertake a follow-up investigation into Transport for London's customer service. The following terms of reference were agreed by the Transport Committee in September 2014:

- To explore TfL's progress in improving its customer service as per the recommendations in the Transport Committee's report *TfL's customer service* (January 2012);
- To consider TfL's passenger charters including the potential to develop an additional overarching customer charter and how TfL manages its staff use of the charters;
- To explore TfL's conditions of carriage including how it enforces them; and
- To make recommendations to the Mayor and TfL on any actions they could take to improve TfL's customer service further.

Foreword



Transport for London is undoubtedly an impressive public transport operator and has been successfully delivering improvements to London's tube, rail, tram and bus services over the last decade and a half. Coupled with this TfL has been paying attention to those support services which help passengers in enjoying convenient journeys, such as Oyster card and contactless ticketing, information, signage and better trained staff to deal with passengers needing special help or advice.

In my first report scrutinising TfL's customer services in 2012, I highlighted improvements that were needed to TfL's customer information, telephone and complaints systems. I am pleased that TfL responded very positively to the suggestions made in the report. In particular, their call centre operations were dramatically streamlined and improved for customers.

Nearly three years later, I am now checking on TfL's progress with its plans for improving customer services and examining what further steps they need to take now to make life better for passengers, including how they are applying advancing technology.

The remaining weaknesses in TfL's current customer services reflect the history of TfL as a number of different transport operators, which were brought together under one organisational roof. The single most important failing is one of overarching strategy. TfL does not yet offer a single customer charter for all of its operations. Despite often paying one fare to TfL for an entire journey, passengers' rights change with every mode used. For some it is not clear at all what those rights are. My strong plea is that TfL develops an overarching customer charter and uses this as a tool for training staff, informing customers and managing for improvement. Making complaints to TfL should not be a mysterious process – it should be visible, accessible and transparent.

In addition, TfL needs to be responding positively to European legislation which is advancing the idea that customers should have access to a reliable and independent arbitration process called an 'Alternate Dispute Resolution' system. In my personal view London TravelWatch would be well-placed to provide such a service.

To be effective, TfL's single customer charter needs a champion at Board level, who is able to maintain a detailed monitoring of customers' experiences, lead new developments and act as an advocate for passengers on the TfL Board.

TfL is an organisation that delivers a city of 8.6 million people with excellent public transport every day. With these small changes to the way TfL interacts with its customers it can provide even better services to Londoners.

Valerie Shawcross AM
Deputy Chair, Transport Committee

Executive summary

TfL's relationship with its customers is changing. The way customers pay for journeys is being transformed, with the introduction of contactless payment. On the London Underground, all station ticket offices are due to be closed. Meanwhile, the increasing use of social media and new regulatory requirements are creating new challenges.

The Transport Committee published a report on the standard of customer service at Transport for London in January 2012. Since then, TfL has made good progress in the way it informs and responds to passengers. In this follow-up investigation, we have identified further improvements that can be made.

We recommend TfL introduces a single, overarching customer charter. A number of different charters for some TfL services already exist, but the most heavily-used services have no charter. A new charter would set out the standards of service passengers can expect to receive from TfL, and how they can give feedback if these are not achieved. The charter should be backed up by robust customer service training for staff, based on the values it contains.

TfL should make it easier for passengers to complain. TfL has reduced the cost of calling its customer service centre and simplified menu options on its helpline, but an option to make a complaint needs to be added. Some flaws in the online complaint form also need to be ironed out, such as the inability of passengers to view their own complaint.

TfL needs to make certain it is dealing with feedback thoroughly and in a timely way. We propose an external auditor take a look at TfL's complaints handling to identify any necessary improvements. We also want to see positive engagement from TfL in ongoing discussions about setting up an Alternative Dispute Resolution body to consider unresolved complaints.

Sometimes, good customer service may need to involve managing tensions between passengers. We have seen this in disputes over access to the wheelchair space on buses. TfL has clear Conditions of Carriage and it must make every effort to see that these are known by passengers and enforced by staff.

Finally, customer service needs to be a priority for the people at the very top of the organisation. We want to see the TfL Board playing a more visible role in raising standards. Although some performance data on customer service is reported to the Board, a greater range of measures needs to be reported to give a fuller picture. This information should also be published so passengers can see for themselves how well TfL is meeting their needs.

1. Introduction

Transport users in London are right to have high expectations of Transport for London. In a recent comparative study of 15 major cities across the world, London was ranked as the city with the most expensive public transport network, but was only seventh for its ‘customer orientation’ behind Sydney, Tokyo, Zurich, Dubai, Paris and Singapore.¹ The high cost of travelling in London should be matched with high quality customer service.

The Transport Committee published a report on the standard of customer service at Transport for London in January 2012.² We called on TfL to develop a new passenger charter, make it easier for passengers to give feedback to TfL, and increase the level of transparency about how TfL is meeting customer service targets.

We have returned to this issue at a pivotal time. TfL has recently embarked on a programme, called Fit for the Future, involving the permanent closure of ticket offices at all London Underground stations. This, alongside other changes such as contactless payment and the rise of social media, will transform the way TfL relates to passengers.

In this investigation, led by Valerie Shawcross AM as a Rapporteur for the Transport Committee, we have considered the progress made by TfL since our previous report. We visited TfL’s customer service centre and, to find out about good practice elsewhere, the equivalent facility in Belfast. We have spoken to a wide range of stakeholders and received a number of written submissions.

First and foremost, customers want safe, punctual and reliable services that are reasonably priced. But they also need clear service standards and easy ways to complain when things go wrong. This report assesses the current position, and whether TfL – from Board level down – really understands customer service as it should.

2. A single TfL customer charter

Customer charters are documents that set out the standards of service that a customer can expect when using an organisation's service, as well as the organisation's missions and values. Such charters commonly include details of terms and conditions for refunds, response times for dealing with correspondence, staff conduct, and details of third party referral organisations such as industry watchdogs.

Over the course of this investigation, the Rapporteur has heard from several experts and stakeholders that producing a single passenger charter for TfL services would be worthwhile. It has been argued that a single passenger charter, if well-drafted and aligned with the quality of service that passengers receive, could be a vital document in ensuring that passengers have a clear understanding about the standards of service they can expect and the mission and values of the organisation.

The benefits of customer charters

We heard that a charter could give TfL customers the confidence to challenge the customer service they receive from TfL. We have heard charters can help tackle the phenomenon of 'under-complaining' on the transport system, whereby passengers fail to report problems they have encountered.³ This under-reporting is worrying, as transport providers such as TfL need to receive feedback so they can improve services. There may be various reasons for under-complaining, including a lack of knowledge about how to complain or a sense that it is pointless. Clear information about the process in a charter may help address this issue.

We also heard that a single passenger charter would give some vulnerable passengers greater confidence to travel on the transport network. This is a key objective for the Mayor, as set out in his and TfL's 2012 strategy for disabled passengers, *Your accessible transport network*.⁴ At our roundtable event in December, we were told by the Institute of Customer Service that trust and reputation are important factors for consumers: people use services that they trust.⁵ Transport for All reported that disabled passengers are less likely to use some stations at certain times of day because of a perceived lack of support. These users could benefit from more visible statements of service commitments, especially if these are specific to their needs.

Customer charters can improve standards, if the principles they contain become embedded in staff training. The Institute of Customer Service has argued that a charter's values should be aligned with the messages provided to staff, to ensure a high level of understanding and effective implementation. There is a risk, of course, that if this fails to happen then passengers will lose faith in the commitments made by the organisation in its charter.

The Rapporteur visited Belfast during this investigation to learn about good practice in customer service at Translink, Northern Ireland's public transport provider.⁶ We heard how Translink uses its single passenger charter as a quality assurance document to inform staff training, to help ensure that customer care is embedded throughout its operations. See the box below for more information.

Translink: The passenger charter as quality assurance

Northern Ireland's transport provider, Translink, was formed in 1995 by integrating a number of separate bus and rail operators. The network, covering the whole of Northern Ireland, is made up of Metro, NIRailways and Ulsterbus. Translink provides over 75 million bus and rail passenger journeys each year and operates around 1,500 buses and 38 trains.

Passenger Focus has highlighted the Translink passenger charter as a good example of a passenger charter that covers multiple services.⁷ The charter includes:⁸

- Commitments on performance;
- Standards of passenger comfort such as the cleanliness and ventilation of carriages;
- Employee and passenger behaviour; and
- Policies on accessibility for disabled passengers.

Where there are differences between transport modes, the Translink charter specifies just the core standard for each mode. For example, in the case of service performance it sets out its commitments for the two most important parts of its service according to passenger feedback: reliability and punctuality.

Translink advised the Rapporteur on our site visit that the passenger charter was one of the first documents to be produced when the organisation was established. It told the Rapporteur that it uses its passenger charter as a quality assurance document and that initiation training for staff is based on the principles of the charter.

Translink consults with its Inclusive Mobility and Transport Advisory Committee on the accessibility aspects of its passenger charter, as well as Age Northern Ireland and other passenger groups. Service standards included in the charter are set by benchmarking and revised every five years under the advice of the Consumer Council of Northern Ireland.

The benefits of a single customer charter

In our January 2012 report, *TfL's customer service*, we recommended that TfL should “produce a single Customer Charter for consultation which covers all services and gives specific guarantees about the timescale and quality of its responses.” We had found that passengers and TfL staff were confused about their respective rights and responsibilities. In addition, its separate passenger charters were inconsistent and sometimes contradictory.

In its initial response to this recommendation, TfL recognised the opportunity to harmonise the way in which it provided customer service to passengers, irrespective of the particular service they used.⁹ In a later update in March 2013, TfL advised that it was testing a single customer charter with customers and would use their feedback to change its approach by the summer of 2013.¹⁰ However, since then TfL has reported to the Rapporteur that a single charter was no longer being considered:¹¹

“during research undertaken in September and October 2012, customers warned us that they did not want to read about what we do and intend to do. Instead, the preference was for us to demonstrate the ‘promise’ of Every Journey Matters¹² through delivery in the areas customers care about.”

TfL already publishes a number of different customer charters for transport modes. However, not all modes – including those with the greatest usage – have customer charters. It seems incredible that customers cannot easily find out what service standards they can expect on either the underground or buses. This needs to change. The table below sets out which of TfL's services currently have customer charters and how these can be found.

Mode	Is there a customer charter?
Underground	No charter for London Underground services.
Bus	No overall charter for London Bus services. Some bus operating companies have customer charters, but these are not necessarily specific to London services. For instance, Arriva publishes a UK-wide customer charter: www.arrivabus.co.uk/about-us/our-promise
Docklands Light Railway (DLR)	Yes, <i>Our Customer Service Promise</i> , published by TfL and the operator Serco. Available at stations and on the DLR website (April 2013): www.dlrlondon.co.uk/Customer-Service-Promise/
Tramlink	Yes, <i>A Charter for Tramlink Passengers</i> . Not published online, but has been distributed via stations.
London River Services (LRS)	The LRS licence with boat operators includes a <i>Statement of Passenger Commitment</i> , but this is not aimed at passengers and is not published.

London Overground	Yes, the <i>London Overground Customer Charter</i> , available on the TfL website (July 2014): www.tfl.gov.uk/cdn/static/cms/documents/london-overground-customer-charter.pdf
Barclays Cycle Hire	No charter for the Cycle Hire scheme.
Dial-a-Ride	Yes, a charter is contained in the <i>Your Guide to Dial-a-Ride</i> document (November 2013), published on the TfL website: www.tfl.gov.uk/cdn/static/cms/documents/guide-to-bookings.pdf
Emirates Air Line	No charter for the Emirates Air Line cable car.

A single passenger charter would provide a core set of standards that apply to all aspects of TfL customer service. There could be multiple benefits for TfL and passengers from developing a single customer charter. For instance, a single charter would:

- Be easier for customers to understand than multiple different charters with different commitments;
- Require passengers to access the charter only once;
- Fill the existing gaps in coverage of TfL's existing customer charters;
- Reflect the fact that many passenger journeys involve multiple transport modes;
- Help develop a common approach to customer service across TfL, including in the design of staff training;
- Be easier for the TfL Board to oversee, and understand when things go wrong; and
- Help TfL define its expectations of private operators delivering TfL services, to improve procurement.

During the investigation the Rapporteur received suggestions that a single passenger charter could cover a range of issues, such as service performance standards, staff behaviour, and commitments to levels of assistance available at stations. The single passenger charter could cover these broad areas for all modes and provide the context for more detailed, mode-specific commitments, which in some cases already exist.

The charter could also specify how people can complain, and how TfL will respond. This would include a clear account of all the different methods customers can use to complain, what information TfL will require, the process for handling and escalating complaints, and TfL's aims for the timeliness of responses. TfL's existing complaints handling is discussed further in the next chapter.

It is clear that customers want excellent service on each journey, and TfL is right to redouble its efforts there. But passengers also need a clear understanding of the standards of service they can expect, and what they can do when things go wrong. Customer charters are an essential part of the relationship between TfL and its customers.

TfL has been very inconsistent in this area. Some customer charters have been produced for specific modes of transport. Inexplicably, these do not include the Underground or bus services, which have by far the heaviest usage of all TfL services.

If TfL were to be formed as a brand new organisation tomorrow, would it really draw up multiple different customer charters for its various modes, while leaving some without a charter? Of course not. It would want to provide its customers with a common set of service standards and processes that apply regardless of whether customers use the bus, the tube or any of TfL's services. That is what we are proposing it should do now.

Recommendation 1

Transport for London should produce a single customer charter covering all of its services, applicable from 1 January 2016. TfL should respond to this recommendation by the end of May 2015, setting out its plans for the development of a charter.

3. When things go wrong

Transport for London receives around 70,000 complaints per year – over 1,300 per week – from passengers on its busiest public transport modes: the tube, buses, Docklands Light Railway and London Overground.¹³ This investigation has considered how well TfL encourages customer feedback, deals with complaints and whether it could improve its response to passengers.

Making it easier to complain

Passengers can complain via TfL's customer service centre online or over the phone. In the Transport Committee's 2012 report, we noted problems such as the high cost of making calls to TfL, the range of different numbers available, call waiting times and the process for issuing Oyster refunds.

Telephone

Since our previous report, TfL has introduced a new, single helpline number (0343 222 1234) so people can contact customer services. The cost of calling customer services has been reduced to 2-10 pence per minute; TfL has reported that calls have increased by 40-50 per cent as a result.¹⁴ TfL has also reported that its average call waiting time has fallen to 20 seconds, and that Oyster complaints are now dealt with in an average of 24 hours.

However, we also heard concerns from London TravelWatch that the helpline menu was hard to navigate for callers.¹⁵ By placing test calls to the helpline we mapped the menu options and confirmed that this was the case. There were lots of different options, with some lacking in clarity about what service is provided behind them. Significantly, there was no obvious option to make a complaint, and while there were options for older and disabled callers to choose for more direct support, these were relatively deep within the menu system.

The Rapporteur raised concerns about the helpline with TfL during a site visit to the customer service Contact Centre in September 2014. Subsequently, TfL decided to review the helpline menu options, and in February announced that the menu had been modified to make it clearer and simpler. In the boxes overleaf, we show the previous and current menu options available on the helpline. The new menu is less complex, although it still does not have an option for complaints.

Transport for All argued that offering an alternative to complain by text message rather than a telephone may be appropriate.¹⁶ This is because passengers may not be able to make a phone call on the move if it is too noisy, they feel self-conscious or they want to avoid disrupting other passengers.

Previous menu options for callers to TfL customer services (before February 2015)

LEVEL 1	LEVEL 2	LEVEL 3
* To find out how we use your data	<i>[Recorded information on data usage]</i>	
HOLD for main menu	1) Oyster and Contactless payment	1) If your Oyster has your name and photo printed on it
		2) If your blue Oyster has been lost, stolen or stopped working
		3) To buy a product
		4) Contactless
		5) Anything else
	2) Travel information	1) Instant response using automated journey planner
		2) If you are an older or disabled caller requiring further support
	3) Information relating to a specific method of transport, including London Streets	1) London Streets
		2) Rail services or Crossrail 2 <i>[includes tube, DLR, Overground]</i>
		3) London Buses
		4) Emirates Air Line or Riverboat services
		5) If you are a driver wishing to check the status of your license
		6) Private Hire
	4) Lost property	* For lost Oyster cards
		HOLD for Lost Property office

New menu options for callers to TfL customer services (from February 2015)

LEVEL 1	LEVEL 2
* To find out how we use your data	<i>[Recorded information on data usage]</i>
1) Ticketing, including Oyster and Contactless payment	1) If your Oyster has your name and photo printed on it
	2) If your blue Oyster has been lost, stolen or stopped working
	3) To buy a product
	4) Contactless
	5) Anything else
2) Help planning a journey	* If you are an older or disabled caller requiring further support
	HOLD for automated journey planner
3) Lost property	* For lost Oyster cards
	HOLD for Lost Property office
4) All other TfL enquiries	<i>[Put through to operator]</i>

The wording of some options has been summarised.

Online

Customers can complete a form on the TfL website to make a complaint. By and large, this is a simple and clear process, although we have heard about some problems with the web form that TfL needs to put right:¹⁷

- People completing the form cannot retain a copy of their complaint, and it is not included in replies from TfL;
- The form can be difficult to complete on some mobile devices;
- Complainants cannot attach additional documents or photographs, which may provide useful evidence;
- TfL does not send 'read notices' to let people know their complaint has been read; and
- The form asks for complainants' Oyster card number, but does not allow people to add a Freedom Pass number instead, making it harder for older people to complain.

Some of these issues could be resolved with relatively minor modifications to the web form. Another option would be for TfL to provide a complaints email address as an alternative to the form. This would give users more control over the information they send, although it could mean some required information is not included.

Passengers can also contact TfL online via social media platforms. For instance, TfL manages a large number of Twitter accounts, so users can send messages directly to customer services if they encounter problems. Another possible method of complaining that may make the process easier is a dedicated smartphone application for complaints. There are third-party apps that allow people to complain to TfL, but these are unofficial and do not necessarily cover all TfL services or generate formal complaints.¹⁸

It should be easy for passengers to make a complaint about TfL services, should they need to do so. A range of different methods should be available, with support available for complainants that need some extra help.

We welcome recent improvements in the responsiveness and accessibility of TfL customer services introduced since our 2012 report. We are also pleased to see that TfL has responded to concerns raised during this investigation and simplified the menu options for its customer services helpline.

During this investigation we have identified a number of further improvements that TfL should consider. There are flaws in the way the complaints web form is designed. The helpline continues to lack a complaints option on its main menu, leaving callers to guess which option they need to select to make a complaint. There are some additional methods for making a complaint that should also be considered.

Recommendation 2

Transport for London should:

- Add a specific option to make a complaint to the main menu of the customer services helpline.
- Modify the design of its web form for complaints, so people can save their own complaints, upload documents and enter a Freedom Pass number.
- Allow people to make a complaint via a direct email address, text message or smartphone application.

TfL should respond to this recommendation by the end of May 2015, setting out the findings of its review and next steps.

Dealing with customer complaints

Receiving a complaint is only the first step of the process for TfL. To improve services and reassure passengers, TfL must act on the feedback provided and show passengers that it is doing so. This is an absolutely vital part of the feedback loop. TfL has reported improvements in how it does this, although we have heard that more could be done.

Some stakeholders have told us that TfL needs to improve the way it responds to complaints. Transport for All told the Rapporteur that a large proportion of calls to its advocacy line for disabled transport users were about unsatisfactory responses to complaints from TfL. Often, responses come in the form of a template response that a passenger may already have received several times before.¹⁹ Similar concerns were echoed in a submission from the public transport team at the Royal Borough of Kensington & Chelsea:²⁰

Residents are often left frustrated as TfL responses to complaints often don't directly deal with the complaint, but can come across as a generic response thanking the person for getting in touch and stating that TfL will look into the issue. We would like all responses to deal with the specific issue at hand, providing all of the necessary information.

One of the potential pitfalls of this is that TfL could leave passengers with a sense that their complaint isn't getting to the necessary department. To take bus services as an example, some may feel that complaints are stuck at 'garage level'. This means that complaints may be forwarded to the bus garage concerned but are then

dismissed or dealt with in a minimal way, without feeding into change at the London-wide level.

TfL's submission to this investigation emphasised it had "*completely overhauled our culture surrounding complaints*" since 2012, moving from a defensive posture to an approach where staff are enabled to fix a customer's problem immediately. TfL provided details on how it reports complaints to the operational level:

Reports are produced for each operational area of TfL setting out the nature of complaints and any emerging themes or trends. These are used to address issues at source. For example, a series of complaints identified an issue with ticket vending machines on the DLR. To resolve this, software has been upgraded, extra machines have been provided at busy stations and there is better signage. We produce a number of reports that provide feedback to our operational teams. These are often supplied overnight for senior managers to discuss in the morning and decide what action to take.

It is important that TfL monitors the effectiveness of its complaints handling processes. TfL could consider commissioning external audits of complaints, similar to those conducted by Passenger Focus for train operating companies (TOCs).²¹ For each audit, Passenger Focus checks a TOC's responses to a sample of complaints, judging them against the company's own standards and Passenger Focus standards on the tone and quality of response. Passenger Focus produces a report, with recommendations to the TOC on how it can make improvements. The team then returns after approximately nine months to conduct a follow-up review. Passenger Focus maintains that its rigorous approach has led to improved performance in some TOCs as staffing and complaint processes were modified.

TfL could also benefit from an independent audit of its complaints handling. We recognise that this would incur up-front costs, but we argue that this would be outweighed by much larger benefits for TfL and its customers over the long term. Dealing with complaints properly the first time every time would save TfL money, and help improve its services for millions of customers.

TfL should deal with complaints from service users quickly and thoroughly. TfL should tell complainants what it has done with the information provided and how it has dealt with the problems identified.

We welcome TfL's acceptance that it needed to change its attitude to complaints. TfL – and customers – would benefit from a regular independent review of its complaints handling to help it improve further.

Recommendation 3

Transport for London should appoint an external organisation to carry out an audit of its response to complaints, including the process for internal escalation of complaints. TfL should respond to this recommendation by the end of May 2015.

Resolving difficult complaints

When customers have been unable to resolve a complaint directly with TfL, they are directed to London TravelWatch for further assistance. It currently deals with 6,000 enquiries and complaints a year and has a budget of £1.1 million. Following a recent EU Directive regarding Alternative Dispute Resolution (see box below), TravelWatch is in discussions with the Department for Transport about becoming the new Alternative Dispute Resolution body for TfL customers, but no agreement has yet been reached.

TravelWatch told us that it supports the Directive, but believes some aspects of the Department's proposals are problematic:²²

We have welcomed the Directive in principle, as an enhancement of consumer rights. But we believe that it is essential that it (a) should be implemented in such a way as to complement and augment our existing conciliation function, not replace it, (b) should not be allowed to diminish or hamper our role as consumer advocates, (c) should be mandatory for operators to participate, (d) should lead to binding decisions, and (e) must be properly funded (but at no charge to users).

EU Directive on Alternative Dispute Resolution

Various forms of alternative dispute resolution (ADR) are available to consumers across many industries. These are mainly founded on a voluntary basis and provide for disputes between consumers and suppliers of goods and services to be resolved or mediated by an independent body, without recourse to the courts. For instance, the Property Ombudsman provides dispute resolution between consumers and sales and letting agents.

The recent EU Directive on Alternative Dispute Resolution mandates that this form of redress must be available for any dispute concerning contractual obligations between a consumer and a supplier from July 2015.²³ The Directive applies to public transport providers, including TfL, although suppliers are not obligated to take part in the ADR process or accept its outcomes.

TravelWatch has highlighted an example of good practice complaints resolution in the transport sector which may be applied to London, in order to meet the objectives of the Directive. Bus Users UK represents bus passengers outside London and handles complaints about bus operators. Where unresolved, these complaints can be referred to the Bus Appeals Body (BAB). The BAB has members representing industry and passengers, with a neutral chair; it is voluntarily funded by operators and makes binding decisions about unresolved complaints.

The introduction of an Alternative Dispute Resolution mechanism for public transport would help enhance the rights of public transport users in London, as it gives passengers a new opportunity to have service failings addressed without onerous legal

battles. It is disappointing that further progress toward this outcome has not been made to date.

Although Transport for London is not obliged to participate in the ADR system, we believe TfL should welcome this change and work to deliver an effective dispute resolution process for London. Options for how this can be achieved, including the suggestions put forward by London TravelWatch, should be discussed with the Department for Transport at the earliest opportunity.

Recommendation 4

Transport for London should engage in discussions with the Department for Transport, aimed at agreeing arrangements for the structure, funding and governance of a new Alternative Dispute Resolution system for TfL service users. TfL should respond to this recommendation by the end of May 2015 setting out its approach to the ADR Directive and plans for further discussions on this topic.

4. How the TfL Board can improve customer service

A customer service culture should, ideally, permeate any organisation that serves the public on the scale that Transport for London does, including the very top of the organisation. We have therefore looked at TfL's approach to customer service at Board level.

We have seen indications that TfL is getting better at dealing with customers, but there is still a long way to go. We think that the customer voice is still not being properly heard at Board level, and that the Board lacks the information it needs to understand how well TfL is performing in terms of customer complaints.

In the Committee's 2012 report we recommended that TfL should change the way it measures customer service performance. The key statistic used by TfL is the 'number of complaints per 100,000 journeys' across different transport modes, but this only gives a partial picture and can be misleading. For example, if TfL made it easier for customers to complain we would naturally expect to see an increase in the complaints rate, even if service levels were unchanged. A larger suite of indicators is needed, so we are pleased that TfL has recently introduced extra measures of customer service:²⁴

- Call abandonment rate – target under 10 per cent;
- Correspondence Service Level Agreement²⁵ – target 80 per cent; and
- Mystery Shopper Quality assessment scores – target 85 per cent.

It would be helpful for this information to be made available to the TfL Board as part of the quarterly Operational and Financial Performance Reports, which currently only contains the complaints per 100,000 journeys figure for each mode.

It is important that the public as well as Board Members can see this customer service data. In its submission, TfL directed the Rapporteur toward a page on its website containing quarterly Complaints Reports, which provide further detail on the causes and responses to complaints.²⁶ However, the latest report on this page is from the second quarter of 2012/13. TfL has confirmed that the Complaints Reports are no longer produced.

We do not think, however, that better data will be enough by itself to drive improvements from the TfL Board – we think it is vital that one Board Member has overall direct responsibility for customer service. Senior TfL executives with responsibility for customer services – specifically the Managing Director of Customer Experience, Marketing and Communications and the Director of Customer Experience – do report to the Board, and the membership comprises people with experience in this field. But it is remarkable that the only Board Members with clear responsibility for

customers are those representing people using TfL's rail services outside London.²⁷ This needs to change, and TfL should appoint one Board Member to act as the customers' champion. The voice of the customer needs to be heard at TfL Board meetings, and this would be one way of achieving that.

Transport for London says it is committed to improving customer service. We think that it can go further so that the voice of the customer reaches the decision-makers on the TfL Board. The Board needs to receive better customer service data, and one Board Member needs to take lead responsibility to act as the customer champion.

Recommendation 5

The Transport for London Board should play a more visible role in championing good customer service. We recommend that:

- The Board should receive quarterly complaints reports, which include the full range of customer service metrics.
- A single Board Member should be designated as the customer champion to represent the interests of TfL's customers at Board level.

TfL should respond to this recommendation by the end of May 2015.

4. Informing and engaging passengers

Good customer service requires the provision of comprehensive, accurate and timely information for passengers, and taking on board their views in the design and delivery of services. TfL faces challenges in this area. Ticket office closures are changing the relationship between staff and passengers, for instance, while social media has opened up a new way of communicating. Here we consider how TfL is responding.

How staff engage with customers

Passengers should be able to feel they can communicate directly with TfL. This is not just to complain, but to share suggestions, ask questions, receive information, provide intelligence, and so on. This can be done in many different ways.

Stations

The Mayor's decision to close TfL's underground ticket offices was highly contentious, and has been discussed at length. TfL's *Fit for the Future* programme will see all ticket offices closed by April 2016, with the loss of approximately 900 jobs. The remaining staff from ticket offices will be moved onto station concourses and platforms to sell tickets and help customers with their journeys. They will attend a five-day customer service training course, specially developed so they can receive feedback and coaching on a wide range of work-based situations in stations.²⁸ What TfL needs to do now is ensure that the customer experience is enhanced, not diminished, as a result of these changes. We will keep a close eye on developments over the next year.

Public meetings

A number of train operating companies hold regular 'meet the manager' sessions for their passengers. For instance, Southern holds these sessions on the concourse at its main hub stations, London Bridge and Victoria, so rail passengers can discuss any issues they have with senior representatives of the company face to face.

TfL undertakes similar activity for some services, for instance the local meetings in which Dial-a-Ride users can meet service managers. It may be possible to extend this approach, although we appreciate there will be practical challenges to consider, given the number of passengers TfL serves.

Social media

TfL has increased its use of social media in recent years. The Institute of Customer Service has reported that eight per cent of transport users prefer to make complaints

via social media because this allows other users to read about the problem. TfL now runs separate Twitter accounts for different services, and for each tube line. In total, these accounts are followed by around 1.8 million Twitter users, although there is likely to be some replication between accounts. TfL uses them to provide service updates to customers, and customers use them to make complaints directly to TfL.

Twitter has been used for other purposes by TfL, too: TfL's Director of Customer Experience held a live Q&A session on the site recently, and TfL monitors Twitter for evidence of customer dissatisfaction. Although it might be assumed this activity mainly targets younger Londoners, Age UK London reported that online communication with TfL is also important for growing numbers of older people.²⁹ As with text messaging, Twitter can allow customers and TfL service staff to communicate directly and in real time, helping TfL deal with problems as they arise.

Transport for London should take all available opportunities to engage with its customers. This is important for dealing with issues passengers face getting around the transport network, as well as receiving feedback and identifying service improvements that need to be made.

We are pleased to see TfL embracing social media as a forum for doing this, but it is no substitute for direct contact between front-line staff and passengers. Clearly, the closure of ticket offices and reduction in staff at stations means there is a risk of reducing the level of contact. It is important that the Fit for the Future programme does instil high standards of customer service in staff, which are maintained in the future.

Recommendation 6

Transport for London should take steps to build on the customer service training being provided for London Underground staff during the Fit for the Future programme. The training should be repeated regularly, and extended to staff on other modes. From 2016 it should also incorporate training in implementing the new single customer charter. TfL should respond to this recommendation by the end of May 2015.

Enforcing Conditions of Carriage

All passengers using TfL services travel under specified Conditions of Carriage.³⁰ An important element of the customer service relationship is the understanding that these conditions will be respected by both parties. TfL seeks to enforce the Conditions of Carriage in a number of ways, for instance through highly visible ticket inspections. This can give confidence to passengers that rules are being followed, encouraging good behaviour.

We know that on an extremely busy, often overcrowded transport network the level of service passengers receive will be affected by the behaviour of other passengers.

For instance, older people and pregnant women often require a seat more than others, but may have to rely on other passengers being willing to stand. TfL places signage in carriages to encourage people to offer their seats to those in need, and in the case of pregnant women also provides free 'Baby on Board' badges.

One area of tension that has been explored in this investigation is that of access to wheelchair space, particularly on London bus services. There have been high profile cases involving parents with buggies and wheelchair users, but there will also be other types of passengers wanting to use this space, including those with other forms of disability, passengers with heavy luggage, or just those who cannot find any other space on the bus.

TfL's Conditions of Carriage are clear that wheelchair and mobility scooter users should be given priority access to this spaces on buses, and that drivers will enforce this rule:

Wheelchair and mobility scooter users have priority over everyone else for the use of the wheelchair space, since this is the only space in which they can travel safely. If someone in a wheelchair wishes to board, and the wheelchair space is occupied by standing passengers or buggies, standing passengers will be asked by the driver to make room if possible, and buggy users will be asked to fold them and put them in the luggage space or keep them by their side. The driver will tell you what to do.

Transport for All, representing disabled transport users, has highlighted a disparity between this policy and what happens in practice.³¹ It has received reports from wheelchair users that they have been denied access to wheelchair spaces on buses. Furthermore, those complaining to TfL have sometimes been told that access to the space is a courtesy, rather than a reasonable adjustment as per TfL policy.

TfL and Passenger Focus both told the Rapporteur that conflict existed over what is clearly a contested space. They also highlighted the risk that strict enforcement of the Conditions of Carriage may exacerbate this by forcing staff into confrontations with passengers. TfL has previously run a publicity campaign on this issue, with posters being placed on buses asking passengers to respect the wheelchair priority in November 2012.³²

TfL's Conditions of Carriage help define the relationship between passengers and TfL as a service provider. The risk, if rules are not enforced, is that passengers will lose trust in the service. For some of the most vulnerable Londoners this could limit their mobility.

Nevertheless, we recognise TfL has a difficult job managing tensions over usage of priority space on buses. Proactive steps to avoid conflict from arising and to equip staff with necessary skills should be considered.

Recommendation 7

Transport for London should improve the way it informs passengers about their rights to use priority space on buses. Where necessary, clear, accessible signage should be on display, supported by further publicity campaigns and online information. The review should also consider how bus operators train staff to promote these messages and deal with any conflict between passengers, and identify any required improvements in staff training. TfL should respond to this recommendation by the end of May 2015.

Informing passengers of fare options

The issue of TfL's fares has been considered recently by the London Assembly's Budget and Performance Committee.³³ In this investigation, we have considered how TfL informs passengers about fare options, as this is an important element of customer service.

TfL provides an online Journey Planner tool for passengers, helping them find the fastest or most convenient route for their journey, across all modes and tailored to individual needs. TfL also releases a range of real-time service data so other web developers can create tools designed to help people get around the city

There are different cost implications of different transport modes available to Londoners. Travelling by bus is cheaper than travelling by tube, for instance, while some modes are not yet integrated with Oyster. However, TfL's Journey Planner support does not include fares information. It is therefore difficult for passengers to identify in advance what their fare options are, including what the cheapest fare for their journey could be.

Some third-party London journey planning tools, such as the Citymapper website and app, do include fares information. Fares for different journey options are given, including a bus-only option, so users can decide which routes to take depending on the cost, as well as speed, convenience and so on. Citymapper and similar services use data released by TfL to do this.

Station ticket offices are closing, new transport modes such as Crossrail are being introduced, and the rollout of contactless payment is changing the way Londoners pay for travel. In this context it is more important than ever that TfL does all it can to help people to identify the best available fares for their journey.

Recommendation 8

Transport for London should add fare information to its Journey Planner tool, including a 'best available fare' option, giving people the ability to tailor their journey according to the fares they will incur. TfL should respond to this recommendation by the end of May 2015.

Recommendations

Recommendation 1

Transport for London should produce a single customer charter covering all of its services, applicable from 1 January 2016. TfL should respond to this recommendation by the end of May 2015, setting out its plans for the development of a charter.

Recommendation 2

Transport for London should:

- Add a specific option to make a complaint to the main menu of the customer services helpline.
- Modify the design of its web form for complaints, so people can save their own complaints, upload documents and enter a Freedom Pass number.
- Allow people to make a complaint via a direct email address, text message or smartphone application.

TfL should respond to this recommendation by the end of May 2015, setting out the findings of its review and next steps.

Recommendation 3

Transport for London should appoint an external organisation to carry out an audit of its response to complaints, including the process for internal escalation of complaints. TfL should respond to this recommendation by the end of May 2015.

Recommendation 4

Transport for London should engage in discussions with the Department for Transport, aimed at agreeing arrangements for the structure, funding and governance of a new Alternative Dispute Resolution system for TfL service users. TfL should respond to this recommendation by the end of May 2015 setting out its approach to the ADR Directive and plans for further discussions on this topic.

Recommendation 5

The Transport for London Board should play a more visible role in championing good customer service. We recommend that:

- The Board should receive quarterly complaints reports, which include the full range of customer service metrics.
- A single Board Member should be designated as the customer champion to represent the interests of TfL's customers at Board level.

TfL should respond to this recommendation by the end of May 2015.

Recommendation 6

Transport for London should take steps to build on the customer service training being provided for London Underground staff during the Fit for the Future

programme. The training should be repeated regularly, and extended to staff on other modes. From 2016 it should also incorporate training in implementing the new single customer charter. TfL should respond to this recommendation by the end of May 2015.

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Notes

- ¹ Simon Kucher and Partners, *Local Public Transportation Study*, January 2015
- ² Transport Committee, Transport for London's customer service, January 2012
- ³ Institute of Customer Service, Roundtable discussion, 8 December 2014
- ⁴ <http://www.tfl.gov.uk/cdn/static/cms/documents/your-accessible-transport-network.pdf>
- ⁵ Roundtable discussion, 8 December 2014
- ⁶ Site visit to Translink, December 2014
- ⁷ Passenger Focus, Roundtable discussion, 8 December 2014
- ⁸ To view the Translink passenger charter please visit:
<http://www.translink.co.uk/Documents/Corporate/publications/4644%20Passengers%20Charter.pdf>
- ⁹ Letter from Sir Peter Hendy to the Transport Committee, June 2012
- ¹⁰ Letter from Sir Peter Hendy to the Transport Committee, March 2013
- ¹¹ Written submission from Transport for London, November 2014
- ¹² Every Journey Matters was a TfL consultation programme about how to improve customer service in stations. For more information see: <https://fitforthefuture.tfl.gov.uk/category/every-journey-matters-and-the-proposals/>
- ¹³ Calculation based on quarter one complaints data for 2014/15, available in:
<http://www.tfl.gov.uk/cdn/static/cms/documents/q1-2014-15-operational-and-financial-performance-report.pdf>
- ¹⁴ Site visit to TfL customer Contact Centre, September 2014. 034 numbers are typically included in free call packages from telephone service providers. Otherwise the cost from a landline will be 2-10p, and 10-40p from a mobile. For more information see: <https://www.tfl.gov.uk/corporate/terms-and-conditions/tfl-call-charges>
- ¹⁵ Meeting with London TravelWatch, September 2014
- ¹⁶ Roundtable discussion, 8 December 2014
- ¹⁷ Written submission from RB Kensington & Chelsea, November 2014; Meeting with London TravelWatch, September 2014; Transport for All, Roundtable discussion, 8 December 2014
- ¹⁸ For instance, the Resolver app allows people to complain about Oyster, Underground and Overground services, while the Complain app allows people to post complaints on several social media sites.
- ¹⁹ Roundtable discussion, 8 December 2014
- ²⁰ Written submission from Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea, November 2014
- ²¹ These audits are conducted jointly with London TravelWatch for TOCs running London routes; TravelWatch carries out London Overground audits exclusively.
- ²² Written submission from London TravelWatch, January 2015
- ²³ https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/377522/bis-14-1122-alternative-dispute-resolution-for-consumers.pdf
- ²⁴ Written submission from Transport for London, November 2014.
- ²⁵ The correspondence service level agreement measures the speed of TfL's response to customer contact. The target is to respond within 24 hours, or within 10 days if the query/complaint requires further investigation.
- ²⁶ <https://www.tfl.gov.uk/corporate/publications-and-reports/complaints-report>
- ²⁷ <https://www.tfl.gov.uk/corporate/about-tfl/how-we-work/corporate-governance/board-members>
- ²⁸ <https://fitforthefuture.tfl.gov.uk/new-training-course-to-help-station-staff-deliver-world-class-customer-service/>
- ²⁹ Roundtable discussion, 8 December 2014
- ³⁰ <https://www.tfl.gov.uk/corporate/terms-and-conditions/ticketing-and-travel-conditions-of-carriage>
- ³¹ Roundtable discussion, 8 December 2014
- ³² <http://www.tfl.gov.uk/info-for/media/press-releases/2012/november/wheelchair-priority-space-campaign-launched>
- ³³ <http://www.london.gov.uk/mayor-assembly/london-assembly/publications/response-to-the-mayor-s-draft-consultation-budget-2015-16>

Further information

Members of the Transport Committee

Caroline Pidgeon (Chair)	Liberal Democrat
Valerie Shawcross (Deputy Chair)	Labour
Victoria Borwick	Conservative
Tom Copley	Labour
Darren Johnson	Green
Onkar Sahota	Labour
Navin Shah	Labour
Richard Tracey	Conservative

Views and information received

The Committee received written submissions from the following individuals and organisations:

- Age UK London
- Andrew Bosi
- Go Ahead London
- London TravelWatch
- Nicola McDowall
- Royal Borough of Kensington & Chelsea
- Southern Railway
- Transport for London

Committee contacts

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