

THE WORK OF LONDON TRAVELWATCH

**by Tim Bellenger, Director of Research and Development
London TravelWatch**

A report of the LURS meeting at All Souls Club House on 9 March 2010

Tim Bellenger is the Director of Research and Development at London TravelWatch. This organisation, which has had various names through its life, was founded in 1950 to look after the interests of transport users in London. It is a statutory body under the Greater London Authority Act of 1999 and acts as an ombudsman for complaints not settled with the operators' of all the Transport for London functions (Underground, Docklands, Overground, National Rail, ferries (Woolwich and Riverboat)) as well as cyclists. The London TravelWatch Board is chaired by Sharon Grant, and consists of 12 lay members. There are also 23 paid staff. London TravelWatch is sponsored and financed by the Transport Committee of the London Assembly with an annual budget of £1.6million.

They receive on average 250 pieces of correspondence per month from the public and also respond to a wide range of official consultations. Issues that are dealt with include fares; overcrowding; closure notices; and sale or change of use of railway land.

London TravelWatch has a number of statutory responsibilities, but its main belief is that London deserves a transport system which is: accessible (not just physically, but in terms of understand and comprehensiveness); frequent ("turn up and go"); clean (if an area is free from graffiti and litter then it looks cared for and safe); and with good customer service (information available in different formats and promptly in times of disruption).

Their policies are influenced by the results of the research programme (to influence policy), by customer surveys; case work; and liaison with user groups and transport authorities There is also substantial liaison with operators on areas of interest.

Recent issues have included:-

EAST LONDON LINE REPLACEMENT BUSES

Usage patterns have shown that passengers don't want to go from Underground station to Underground station (the route of the replacement buses) but have used alternative transport (eg: Overground and scheduled buses) to reach their destination.

THAMESLINK

The closure of the Moorgate branch, and the temporary closure of all of Blackfriars station later in 2010, have not caused many complaints to London TravelWatch. This is because London TravelWatch made some substantial recommendations during the closure hearing process to mitigate the impact of the closures, which were later adopted by Network Rail and train operators The organisation also encouraged First Capital Connect (who were charged with running the communications campaign for the upgrade) to provide comprehensive information of the changes to passengers well in advance of implementation – this was one of the major lessons learnt from the East London Line closure.

FUTURE OF TICKET OFFICES

Passengers appreciate staff being visible at stations but the full introduction of Oyster has greatly reduced the number of tickets bought at stations, it is therefore quite likely that there will be changes to the way in which stations are staffed. It should also be noted that some joint National Rail/Underground stations are not able to sell the full range of tickets, even to destinations reached from that station.

POTENTIAL FUTURE PROJECTS

Mr Bellenger briefly touched on a number of future proposals including the Croxley Link at Watford, the extension of Bakerloo line from Elephant and Castle into south east London and the potential branch from Northern Line to Battersea Power Station site and Clapham Junction.

There followed an opportunity to ask questions of Mr Bellenger which included:

How has the amended Circle Line (“the t-cup”) been received. He responded that it seems that passengers like it (no great volume of complaints) and LUL report that it has increased reliability and allowed shorter intervals between trains.

A number of members raised issues about platform indicators showing incorrect or incomplete information and they were invited to make contact after the meeting and he would investigate.

The meeting then thanked Mr Bellenger in the usual manner.

Amanda Day