

TRANSPORT WATCH – FEBRUARY 2008

Good news for passengers on the 112 route. From this week end the frequency of the service goes up from 3 buses per hour to 4 buses per hour. Not only will this increase capacity but it will also reduce waiting times on this increasingly popular route which runs through some of the capital's worst traffic conditions often leading to extraordinary long delays and gaps in the service.

The Heathrow Express is now carrying 5.4 million customers a year and almost a quarter of the passengers using the service make in excess of 10 journeys a year on the train. Many, 70% in fact are business travellers and around 50% are passengers from overseas. The Heathrow Express's sister railway, the Heathrow Connect, is also doing well. Since it dramatically reduced fares between Hayes and the Airport passenger numbers have more than doubled and the total revenue earned increased. Now why does that not surprise anyone?

The over 11s who qualify for free travel will have to touch in on London's Bus and Trams starting on the 1st June and they will, if requested be required to show the card which will include the holder's photograph. The Mayor has said no charge will be made for the issue of the new Zip card but it recognises that free travel is a privilege which can be withdrawn if abused. Since free travel for teenagers has been introduced in London many have claimed this has led to an increase in bad behaviour on board which it is hoped the threat of losing the free pass will discourage.

London Buses has denied claims made by the GLA that bus travel is becoming a risky business and that crime on public transport is rising. They say crime is down by 11% and on average there is one crime reported per 15,000,000 journeys thanks in part to the fitting of CCTV to every bus and the employment of 440 extra police and CSOs to complement the existing 1200 strong Transport Operations Command Unit.

The Ealing Passenger Transport Users Group is supporting London Underground's steady progress towards making the world's first underground system more readily accessible to the disabled. But it also points out that step free access to the station platform can be flawed when the gap or the difference in height between the train and the platform makes it impossible for the independent wheelchair passenger to board the train. This problem must also be addressed.

Passengers have been quick to express views about the newly installed audio information facility appearing on buses by leaving messages on EPTUG's message service, 020 8998 0999. Transdev, who operate many routes including the 65 and 120 in the Borough are the first company to install the equipment paid for by London Buses and designed to help the visually impaired as well as those unfamiliar with the route they are on to find their way around and to encourage greater use of the buses. Bus stops along the routes have been named and match the names of stops used on the hugely successful "Journey Planner" found on the TfL website, www.tfl.gov.uk.

What is it about underused station entrances that attracts youngsters to congregate there late into the evening? Passengers find it disconcerting even though the youths are usually there not to cause trouble but simply looking for a place to meet. In some

places ASBOs have been used to good effect but no First Great Western are experimenting with high pitch noise emissions to encourage youngsters to move on.

The German state owned railway, Deutsche Bahn are the new owners of Chiltern Railways who operate services into Marylebone through Northolt Park and the Sudburys. They are now also part owners of LOROL, the company operating the London Overground serving Acton Central and South Acton following the recent sale of Laing Railways. EPTUG have asked to meet the new owners to discuss the lack of trains and poor facilities at the Sudburys.

Paddington will become a closed station by the end of March when ticket gates will be installed at the concourse end of Platforms 8 to 12. The existing gates between the Hammersmith and City Line platforms will go but replaced with Oyster Card readers. Passengers arriving on Platforms 13 and 14 will present their tickets at the machines located at the end of Platforms 8 to 12 or at machines to be located on the overbridge near to Platforms 2 to 6.

Ealing enjoys the best and suffers the worst railway operator according to a recently published national survey into performance and reliability. Chiltern's showing in the table rose to 96.0% moving further ahead of runner up Merseyrail whilst First Great Western managed only 79.1%, well below the national average of 85.9%. The tables were compiled from records taken between mid November and the 8th December. Customer dis-satisfaction with FGW reached a new low earlier this week when users refused to pay their fares in protest about overcrowding and unreliability.

There were red faces at London Underground when they had to admit that planned upgrades to the District Line would take 10 years to complete. This depressing news comes shortly after they have admitted that the demise of Metronet has thrown their other upgrade plans into turmoil.

In what might be seen as a desperate attempt to win back public support the new management team at First Great Western have announced free upgrades for pregnant passengers on overcrowded trains. FGW recently hit the headlines with the story of a youngster fainting on an overcrowded FGW train in the West Country. Cynical FGW London commuters might however see this as training for the future journeys to work. However behind the scenes FGW's new chief executive has been lobbying the government for permission to acquire more trains. The plan would be to use these on the company's Gatwick services thereby releasing Turbo units for use on the Paddington services.

There are still no definitive answers to many questions being asked about the extension of the Freedom Pass to services across the UK. It is reported that several bus operators have threatened to withdraw services if local councils, faced with their new responsibilities under this government promoted scheme, cut the payments they receive. Elsewhere useful long routes are being divided into two new routes in order to qualify and there remains the question of reciprocal use of train services.