

**TRANSPORT FOR LONDON**

**ENVIRONMENT, CORPORATE AND PLANNING PANEL**

**SUBJECT: ENGAGING WITH LONDON'S POLITICAL COMMUNITY**

**DATE: 10 FEBRUARY 2011**

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**1 PURPOSE AND DECISION REQUIRED**

- 1.1 This paper sets out public affairs activity and engagement with members of the London Assembly, Westminster Parliament and European institutions, including the European Parliament. This is the latest in a series of papers for the Panel examining different elements of TfL's overall communications and customer information strategy. It follows the paper on engagement with non-elected stakeholders, which the Panel noted when it met in November 2010. Teams handling engagement with elected and non-elected stakeholders work in close collaboration to coordinate public affairs activity.
- 1.2 The Panel is asked to note the paper.

**2 BACKGROUND**

- 2.1 The scale of TfL's communications challenge is substantial. TfL is one of the largest transport authorities in the world supporting the needs of over 7.6 million Londoners and millions more visitors. Transport is at the centre of daily life in London and is crucial to the economic success of the UK. TfL is therefore, quite rightly, subject to intense scrutiny from a range of stakeholders seeking to ensure effective delivery and value for fare and tax payer money. Indeed, with the heart of the Government found in central London, senior civil servants and the vast majority of Parliamentarians will have knowledge of and use TfL's services.
- 2.2 The right of London's elected representatives to take up constituents' cases and issues of policy with TfL is an important part of the democratic process and underlines TfL's accountability to Londoners for the services it provides and the money it spends. Assembly Members (AMs), Members of Parliament, peers and Members of the European Parliament rightly expect to be informed about and scrutinise TfL's decisions and policy-making and to have constituency casework investigated in a timely manner.
- 2.3 TfL's standing among London's elected representatives is pivotal to the effective delivery of the Mayor's Transport Strategy (MTS) required by the Greater London Authority Act 1999 and TfL's Business Plan, which sets out how TfL will deliver on the MTS in the current period. Ensuring TfL is responsive to the needs and demands of AMs, MPs, peers and MEPs means they can confidently argue for the appropriate financial and legislative approaches required to deliver the objectives of the MTS and the Business Plan.

### **3 FACILITATING SCRUTINY**

- 3.1 The London Assembly acts as a constant watchdog. It examines, in detail, the Mayor's transport policies and the full scope of TfL's activities through its meetings and committees. Chief Officers and senior TfL managers regularly provide oral evidence to Assembly investigations on a diverse range of topics. Recently, these have included the PPP and Tube upgrades, TfL's response to extreme weather conditions, accessibility of the London transport network and the early impacts of the Barclays Cycle Hire and Superhighway schemes. TfL further informs these investigations by responding to Assembly requests for written evidence. Since the Assembly's term began in 2008, TfL has provided 35 submissions. In addition, TfL responds in full to Assembly scrutiny reports, notably those of the Transport Committee, which often focus on TfL as well as motions and petitions tabled by Assembly Members.
- 3.2 The Assembly also directly questions the Mayor ten times a year at Mayor's Question Time (MQT). More than half of the questions they table relate to transport and in 2009/10 TfL assisted in providing answers to over 2,000 Mayor's Questions.
- 3.3 Select Committees in the House of Commons and the House of Lords regularly seek written and oral evidence from TfL as part of their inquiries. In the last Parliament (2005-10), TfL submitted written and/or oral evidence to more than 40 such inquiries. The Commons Transport Select Committee naturally takes a particular interest in TfL. As well as responding to its calls for evidence, since the General Election, TfL has organised briefing sessions for the new committee members to help inform their scrutiny work. During the pre-election period in 2010, TfL hosted placements for committee staff to broaden their knowledge of TfL's responsibilities.

### **4 BUILDING UNDERSTANDING**

- 4.1 Transport is a central issue for the London Assembly. It represents one of the most significant areas of the Mayor's powers and annual budget, which the Assembly must approve. TfL organised induction events for the new intake of AMs following the 2004 and 2008 Mayoral and Assembly elections to provide them with an overview of TfL's work and insight into some of the challenges TfL faces, not least the need for sustained investment. TfL builds on this by arranging site visits and briefings for Assembly Committees or individual members, which help give them a wider picture of its activities than they might otherwise gain through their formal scrutiny role.
- 4.2 For MPs and peers, transport competes with a diverse range of issues for their attention. TfL undertakes a programme of engagement with MPs and peers over the course of each Parliamentary Session. In the past year, TfL has organised a series of introductory meetings first with Prospective Parliamentary Candidates and then with newly-elected MPs in London to set out our areas of responsibility, to address any issues of concern for their constituents and to help them 'hit the ground running'.
- 4.3 In addition, TfL works with specific groups of Parliamentarians. TfL has arranged for its Chief Officers to address relevant cross-party interest groups in Parliament, including the All-Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) on Rail and the APPG on Cycling. Similarly, the Commissioner regularly meets the Lords London Group to update them on transport developments in the Capital and the Commissioner and Chief Officers have regularly met with groupings of London MPs representing the three main political parties. TfL also organises individual briefing sessions with MPs on a range of

transport issues, often in response to these issues being raised in the course of debate.

- 4.4 At a European level, TfL works with MEPs and the European institutions to ensure they understand how European Union legislation can impact on the delivery of the MTS. TfL engages with European policy makers and MEPs so London can benefit from European opportunities such as funding streams, while seeking to reduce potential negative impacts of regulation drawn up at a European level. TfL is seen as a pioneer in areas such as low emission zones and road pricing and shares its experience with policy makers across the European Union, allowing us to draw on other countries' best practice on issues such as cycling.
- 4.5 AMs, London MPs and MEPs receive a regular digest of TfL's announcements and TfL maintains regular contact with the offices and researchers employed by AMs, MPs, peers and MEPs as well as with the House of Commons Library.

## **5 RESPONDING TO ENQUIRIES**

- 5.1 In January 2009, TfL set up a new system to coordinate answers to AMs' enquiries separate from MQT to ensure they receive answers to their questions and constituency casework in a timely manner. Since the system began operating, more than 4,000 individual cases from AMs have been handled and enquiries from MPs and MEPs are increasingly being handled in this way. The majority of enquiries relate to constituency casework and local issues. Enquiries are ultimately answered by the appropriate part of TfL, but the system seeks to ensure a response within 20 working days, which is in line with Cabinet Office guidelines.
- 5.2 In 2009/10, TfL responded to 2,460 enquiries from AMs in an average of 12 working days. Eighty-eight per cent of these enquiries received a substantive answer within 20 working days.

## **6 CONCLUSION**

- 6.1 Unlike many public sector authorities, TfL operates in a political community which spans all layers of democracy at European, national, regional and local levels. Engagement with elected representatives is characterised by a high volume of individual daily contact about constituency case work and a smaller volume of more in-depth engagement relating to scrutiny and the building understanding among AMs, MPs, peers and MEPs about TfL's objectives, its challenges and the environment in which it operates.
- 6.2 Staff from across TfL work collaboratively to ensure the organisation is responsive to these legitimate demands to scrutinise our work in the wider context of TfL's communications strategy. As well as fulfilling its statutory and constitutional duties to be accountable for the services it runs and the money it spends, TfL's responsiveness to this stakeholder group reflects the central role they can play in advocating a financial and political environment in which it can deliver the MTS and commitments set out in our Business Plan.

## **7 RECOMMENDATION**

7.1 The Panel is asked to NOTE this paper.

## **8 CONTACT**

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