

# Hearing with the London Transport Users Committee and the Rail Passengers' Council

## Background

The London Transport Users Committee (LTUC) is a statutory body (formed under provisions in the Greater London Authority Act 1999) and represents the interests of most transport users in and around London. The Rail Passengers' Council (RPC) is a body recently recreated under provisions of the Railways Act 2005, whose key objective is to improve the quality of all rail passengers' journeys.

## Views on the merger

The level of competition on rail is limited. Although there could be a reduction in competition following the merger the potential benefits of having a more integrated railway outweigh the possible disadvantages. Passengers ultimately want a railway that they can rely upon and a fare structure that they can understand. LTUC/RPC believe passengers should be able to board the first available train that will take them to their destination and should not have to worry about whether their ticket is valid on that train, or whether they will be at risk of having to pay a higher fare because they have inadvertently breached some complex rule of the railway industry.

## The market

The service requirements for new franchises are set by the Department for Transport (DfT). Operators bid against these requirements (on factors such as frequency and reliability) but have little scope to change them. The DfT have made it clear to Network Rail that improved reliability is a key issue, and so only those routes that can be operated with a degree of certainty should be made available to the industry.

Rail is able to meet the demands of passengers travelling between Gatwick and London and Luton Airport and central London but can not service very well the needs of people living in more widespread locations.

Rail and coach comprise separate markets. Coach offers a different product to rail and is perceived to be different in terms of quality, time and price. At various airports rail and bus operators promote themselves as being in competition with each other and are marketed differently. That being said, there are consumers, particularly those who are not time-sensitive who will choose rail or coach on price. Heathrow Express considers its main competitors are taxis and not the Underground, buses or coaches.

The advantage of the Gatwick Express service is that it is a non-stop service between Gatwick and London, which means that once a passenger is on the train and his or her luggage is stowed, they do not have to worry about it. LTUC/RPC are concerned that if passengers have to use a common service there will be increasing levels of conflict between airport passengers and non-airport passengers who have to make their way over luggage to get into and out of trains, particularly in peak periods.

LTUC/RPC are not satisfied with the arrangements at Gatwick Station. One of the disadvantages that might arise from the proposals in the Brighton Main Line (BML) Route Utilization Strategy would be that the fast services to and from London would serve 'the wrong platform': platforms currently used by the Gatwick Express require flat junction cross overs each hour, which are one of the main disruptive elements of the current BML operation. The only way to avoid this disruption would be to use platforms 5 and 6 which are

much narrower and less well served by escalators and lifts than the platforms currently used by the Gatwick Express service.

The Thameslink 2000 project is vital for increasing the capacity of both the Thameslink and Great Northern franchises, as well as providing a 12-car operation and a variety of new through services Thameslink 2000 is one of the most important schemes that there is in the London area for enhancing capacity.

The capacity constraints on the Thameslink route are such that they shape the franchise agreement and give little scope for competition. Capacity will remain restricted until Thameslink 2000 is implemented. LTUC/RPC do not think there is much scope for running additional trains on this flow at the moment.

With regard to the flows north of London the determinants of passenger choice are the perception that Midland Main Line is a faster service and, that for people boarding in the evening empty trains are waiting at St Pancras. Thameslink services, however, have passengers on board when they arrive at Kings Cross Thameslink, and therefore fewer seats are available for those wanting to board.

The Stansted Express, Heathrow Express and Gatwick Express are important sources of revenue for their respective operators.

Integration of bus and rail timetables in London is easier given the regulated bus service. Transport for London has a good journey planning service that helps people make multi-modal journeys.

Very few bus services appear in the national timetable, except where at some time in the past a bus service has replaced a rail service. The deregulation of bus services has made it quite difficult for the integrated information to be provided on a reliable basis because operators are able to change their bus services at relatively short notice. LTUC/RPC do not think that the new franchise agreements will improve that position.

## **Fares**

A paper LTUC produced some years ago showed the problems that existed (not just that there were different London termini, or different stations in central London) with regard to the variety of differently priced tickets. LTUC/RPC encourage operators to offer their passengers advice, particularly where a different option might result in a cheaper fare.

Travelcard fares constrain other fares in the London area. LTUC/RPC believe that the Travelcard is beneficial and would like to see the use of the Oyster card extended in London (and to include more of the national rail operators) because it gives even more choice, especially for people who are not making the same journey every day.

LTUC/RPC understand that there are no competitive dedicated fares on the flows between London and Luton and Luton Airport and Bedford but do not believe there is anything to prevent competitive fares being introduced on these flows. One reason may be that MML focuses on longer, higher revenue-earning journeys to and from locations north of Bedford, rather than on commuter services between London and Luton/Bedford, for which Thameslink is the main service provider.