

Transport Committee – 14 January 2015

Transcript of Item 6 – Update on London Bridge Station

Caroline Pidgeon MBE AM (Chair): What we are going to do now is have two guests, Paul Harwood from Network Rail and Dr Michèle Dix from TfL. We are going to start but before we get into Crossrail 2, we just wanted to take a moment as we have Network Rail here - and Paul Harwood, you are very welcome - to just ask you for an update on what is happening at London Bridge and for the latest. As you will be aware, many of us on this Committee travel through London Bridge every day. Many are now impacted who come in, for example, to Waterloo. It would be great if you could give us an update because, clearly, there have been some very serious problems at that station.

Paul Harwood (Principal Network Planner, Network Rail): Thank you for the invitation along today. I always appreciate coming along.

I should start off simply with an apology. What we saw last week is not what we expect to offer and what customers deserve and it is not what we want to see. That did not go as well as expected and planned.

It was a difficult time. As we have discussed before, what we have to work with at London Bridge is incredibly constrained now. It is reaching a very difficult phase when we are taking out significant assets there and trying to make big, big changes. Some of those changes are the key to what happened last week. Some of it was simply people getting used to what was changing on the operating side. You can practise as much as you can with simulators and so on, but some of the early parts of last week were when things had changed very radically and people were navigating their way through them from both the operating side and the passenger side. Whether we handled some of those things well enough with the right people in the right places is the bit we really need to review, and we have reinforced it with more information, more screens and more staff on hand to actually help people. Some of that was very constrained space. It was very difficult to manage, but it got better as the week went on.

We should not forget that we did an awful lot of work over Christmas to successfully achieve that. I know that there were issues elsewhere in some of our works, but we achieved that and returned the railway on time. It was three kilometres of track ripped up and re-laid, two new platforms in action and all the signalling work done as well, and so it was quite a high-risk piece of work with lots of work going on and many, many people onsite. We are really pleased we had that back on time.

Of course, then there is another change on Monday as well in terms of the timetable that operates through to August next year with the trains that come through from Charing Cross not stopping at London Bridge. Of course, that brings another challenge with people changing their travel patterns quite considerably. Again, we have done what we could in terms of information provision, all the different alternatives and the ticketing issues. We have those arrangements in place. I heard an announcement today reminding people that they might have to change their ticket in terms of actually how the ticket works, but that is done for free and it gives them the ability to use the other transport modes. That seems to have worked.

There is a timetable challenge. Again, last week, we addressed some of the issues by effectively trying to run too many trains in there. We modelled it. It worked in theory. In practice, we could not quite operate a

reliable level of service. There was a review with us and the train operating companies last week. We rectified that. Some of those issues will continue to emerge as we fine-tune it to try to get the maximum level of service to move the maximum number of passengers, given the best opportunity, and actually then deliver a reliable service as a result of that because, if you push it too far with a constrained network, it is just not going to work reliably.

We will continue to review that. We have to keep helping people with lots of information and aiding people in undertaking their journeys, but some of that is going to evolve a little bit over the next week or two.

Caroline Pidgeon MBE AM (Chair): Thank you for that. Passengers are finding it incredibly stressful and at times the overcrowding not just at London Bridge but the knock-on effect at places like Canada Water is very serious indeed.

Paul Harwood (Principal Network Planner, Network Rail): Indeed.

Tony Arbour AM: -- and Waterloo.

Caroline Pidgeon MBE AM (Chair): Yes. You need to be looking at what other measures you can put in place.

Valerie Shawcross CBE AM (Deputy Chair): Thank you for that, Paul. We did have a site visit and we crawled around underneath London Bridge and we were all impressed by the complexity of the project and how well the construction project was being delivered. Therefore, so far, well done on that.

However, also, before Christmas when we met below this Chamber cross-party, we were confidently assured by you and your colleagues from the train operating companies that things would get better in the New Year on delays, that there would be more drivers and that the new timetabling would basically deliver, although a seriously trimmed service, one where the published timetable would be delivered.

I think what you have just told us is that it has been an issue of the train operators getting familiar with the procedures they need to undertake to operate the timetable. Is that correct?

Paul Harwood (Principal Network Planner, Network Rail): There was an element of that definitely earlier last week and, again, the timetable change on Monday will have.

Valerie Shawcross CBE AM (Deputy Chair): As a massive crisis correction, you took out a number of services, particularly the ones from West Croydon, which are part-paralleled by the TfL Overground service. Do I hear from you that those services now are going to remain off the timetable until the end of this construction work or are you planning to get those put back in?

Paul Harwood (Principal Network Planner, Network Rail): I am not sure on the exact detail. Some will stay off. I am fairly certain about that. We have tested and we cannot accommodate one particular period in the timetable when it becomes almost too difficult to manage in terms of the service. However, they will be reviewing it and some of it is part of the system bedding down and then we will, with the train operating company, push as much back in as we can to then deliver that reliable service.

Valerie Shawcross CBE AM (Deputy Chair): As the system beds down - and I do get some sense it is settling this week, although it is not completely right yet and I have to tell you a bit more about that - are you

therefore in negotiation with TfL about it perhaps boosting the Overground train service in order to make up for some of the West Croydon/London Bridge trains that have been taken out?

Paul Harwood (Principal Network Planner, Network Rail): Absolutely. We have been talking about that for several years and the whole travel demand management concept is around actually making sure that the alternative routes are as robust and good capacity provision is possible.

Valerie Shawcross CBE AM (Deputy Chair): When would we hear about that, then?

Paul Harwood (Principal Network Planner, Network Rail): Michèle may know a little more.

Dr Michèle Dix CBE (Managing Director, Planning, Transport for London): It is more about encouraging people to take alternative routes --

Valerie Shawcross CBE AM (Deputy Chair): No, the alternative route is completely massively crowded. What we are asking for is whether there is some capability for an additional Overground service in the morning - or services - in order to take some of the weight that has been lost from the West Croydon to London Bridge Southern service coming out?

Dr Michèle Dix CBE (Managing Director, Planning, Transport for London): I do not know the details but, as you know, when we have these issues before with our own trains and we have asked Network Rail to increase services and add carriages on, the issue has been that it has not had the carriages to add on. You know that on the Overground we are actually seeking to add new carriages on to the services we have already and we are adding fifth cars to trains. We do not have them on all the trains but we are bringing them in. It is not something you can automatically do, to add another carriage, because of it. Our approach is to try to encourage people to take different routes at different times of day in order to spread the load in the same way as was done during the Olympics.

Valerie Shawcross CBE AM (Deputy Chair): Paul, I appreciate you have to have the train operators alongside you, but as soon as we know what the interim timetable is going to be, we will want to also know whether or not there are any mitigation measures that could be put in place. The capacity is not there. People are getting left behind on platforms.

I have certainly found in the mornings that there are two things that seem already to be wrong. The first thing is that in the published Southern timetables, there are some 'ghost trains'. There are trains in the published timetables which, before you took out the West Croydon services, do not exist. They literally do not exist. There is no 8.30am train from West Norwood to London Bridge. It does not exist. This morning I discovered there is no 8.27am Tulse Hill train to London Bridge. It does not exist. The information that is already out there is incorrect. Clearly, there have been some very rapid changes to try to improve the reliability of the services. That needs to be nailed down and published and it is not clear. The websites are not particularly helpful.

There have also been problems with services being cancelled mid-journey. Twice within the last fortnight I have been kicked off my train in the morning with lots of other disgruntled people when we thought we were home-and-dry and were going to get to London Bridge today; great. Then out we get pushed at Peckham and then out we get pushed at South Bermondsey, which means then we are forced to stand on small platforms not designed for that number of people and of course trains come in behind that are massively overcrowded already and it is very difficult to get on. There are incredibly stressful journeys going on in the mornings.

What can you be doing to get some decent information and some reliability going on for the morning rush-hour?

Paul Harwood (Principal Network Planner, Network Rail): It is continuing to do what we are trying to do. It is to get the timetable in a position that it works reliably. That is a key part of it. Then, once that timetable is firmed up, it is then communicating what is going to operate as quickly as possible and updating websites, et cetera.

Valerie Shawcross CBE AM (Deputy Chair): Then the train operators could be withdrawing the inaccurate information that is out there at the moment because it is everywhere. If you look at all the train stations, they have very unhelpful timetables that do not have information in them that is in any way, shape or form accurate.

A last point from me - sorry, Caroline - to do my group therapy.

Caroline Pidgeon MBE AM (Chair): It does feel like it.

Valerie Shawcross CBE AM (Deputy Chair): I was very struck - because I three times got caught up in the evening at London Bridge Station - by how badly managed the crowd was. It is shocking really that there were not enough screens so that people were clustered around one and, equally, even now there are no clear pathways kept through for people to walk across. You discover from the new screens - thank you very much for those - that you do actually have a train and it might actually leave sometime in the near future and is there waiting for you, but there is no pathway through the crowds. I can see there is a lot more staff and police there, which is very helpful, but there still does not seem to be any thought for how people transit across the great crowding. With the advent last week of grave concerns about security and evacuation, it does seem to me that you do need to raise your game on the management of people within the station.

Paul Harwood (Principal Network Planner, Network Rail): Yes. It is being reviewed. I talk to Dave Ward [South East Managing Director, Network Rail] regularly about it and his team are working with the train operating companies at trying to improve it all the time. I will take the message back in particular about the transit through the station and I know that was one of the major issues.

Valerie Shawcross CBE AM (Deputy Chair): You have to fight your way through.

Caroline Pidgeon MBE AM (Chair): Yes, you do.

Paul Harwood (Principal Network Planner, Network Rail): Absolutely.

Valerie Shawcross CBE AM (Deputy Chair): That is OK if you are fit and able-bodied. If you are not or if you are disabled, it is not. That station serves Guy's Hospital as well. There are people going into the cancer treatment centre there and they do not want to have to elbow their way through a huge crowd. All those extra staff, thank you for that and they are nice people and they try to answer your questions, but they are not crowd-controlling to allow pathways for people to walk through the foyer area.

Paul Harwood (Principal Network Planner, Network Rail): That effectively picks up the fact that we are in a reactive stage still with people trying to help, but now we need to move into the proactive stage of actually managing the space we have and the situation we have.

Valerie Shawcross CBE AM (Deputy Chair): You did so well with the Olympics, Paul, and it is really shocking that you have done so badly.

Caroline Pidgeon MBE AM (Chair): Network Rail has.

Valerie Shawcross CBE AM (Deputy Chair): Network Rail and Southern have done so badly. Sorry.

Darren Johnson AM: That was the very point that I wanted to touch on because, following the 2012 Games, which were an absolute triumph in terms of public transport planning, we were told that lessons had been learned in terms of crowd management, in terms of journey information and in terms of the rail operators and the industry working together. Have those lessons not been learned in reality or has this turned out to be much more complicated - trying to run rail services at London Bridge while the station is being rebuilt - than the Olympics?

Paul Harwood (Principal Network Planner, Network Rail): The latter point is really key because we are, effectively, trying to fit a quart into a pint pot in terms of the area we have to work with and so that is always going to make it difficult. There was an awful lot of work done with the train operating companies in the run-up to it on modelling the situation on the operating side and the passenger movements and trying to predict what people are going to do. Some of it did not get it quite right on exactly what happens on the day. That is the tricky bit. Therefore, we learned the lesson in working with everybody and in trying to predict in the first place. Some of it did not turn out quite as we expected.

Darren Johnson AM: So many of the things that were done so well during the Olympics in terms of crowd management, information and so on just seem to have been completely forgotten. I do hope you take that back.

Paul Harwood (Principal Network Planner, Network Rail): Our apologies.

Dr Michèle Dix CBE (Managing Director, Planning, Transport for London): I would say it was not forgotten, certainly in terms of what was forecast to happen. Plans had been put in place to try to manage what was forecast to happen. However, what Paul is saying is that what happened was not what was forecast. It was actually far, far worse and therefore a better solution --

Darren Johnson AM: In the run-up to 2012, you did not just do one forecast. There was lots of very complicated modelling, was there not?

Dr Michèle Dix CBE (Managing Director, Planning, Transport for London): We predicted the worst case and then had plans to deal with the worst case. However, if you are predicting a worst case but for some reason or another it is worse than the worst case because it has not worked, then it is making sure you can react quickly, taking on board the points Val [Shawcross CBE AM] makes, so that you can adjust those --

Darren Johnson AM: For future major projects, key questions need to be asked about the modelling at the start because, if you screw up the modelling, the whole thing falls apart.

Richard Tracey AM: Paul, I am one of the casualties of the Southeastern service from Waterloo East, along with - as I am sure you are very well aware - many thousands of people who have been relying on that service in the mornings at the peak times. I just want to ask you whether your talks and the railway companies' with

TfL have really yet gone to the ultimate point. I know it has been announced by TfL that of course you can get on the Jubilee line. I did this morning and it is absolutely packed with crowds first of all at the barriers and then on the concourse down by the platforms, on the platforms and obviously on the trains themselves. That is one option that really does seem to be a bit dismal.

TfL has also announced some extra buses between Waterloo and this area at London Bridge. I think it is the 381. Michèle may be able to confirm the numbers.

Dr Michèle Dix CBE (Managing Director, Planning, Transport for London): Yes, it is.

Richard Tracey AM: There is the 381 and I think the RV1 that comes this way. The other one, which I actually used yesterday, of course, is the boat service. From Waterloo, one can get on at the London Eye and come straight down here and just the same for returning in the evening. Have these really been explored fully, the idea of extra buses, the whole idea of shuttle buses, which normally happens? I know this is an 18-month period for this blockade of the Southeastern line, but surely there must be a case for shuttle buses, just as you have very often when there are underground works, and obviously using the boats far more. There must be available boat space for people. Maybe you will have to subsidise the fares, but it must be a further means of tackling this. What do you say to all that?

Paul Harwood (Principal Network Planner, Network Rail): They are all things we have looked at; there is no doubt about it. I am not so close to the exact solution that is being put in place at the moment. I knew that the bus service had been improved and that they run as many trains as possible on the Jubilee line, being one of the most frequent services anyway. On the other routes, even the bikes are being topped up more regularly at Waterloo in the mornings. I have noticed that as well. Therefore, as far as I know, we have deployed as much as we can.

There will be continued conversations because we cannot allow what we saw at Waterloo a couple of times in terms of closing the gates to the Jubilee line to continue to happen. We will need to look with our TfL colleagues at what we can do on top of that. They have all been enhanced to, as far as I know, the level that was thought to be required. That may be the secret. Maybe we need to require more.

Richard Tracey AM: It is very urgent. Michèle, do you have anything to add, as you are TfL?

Dr Michèle Dix CBE (Managing Director, Planning, Transport for London): Not in terms of the detail, other than that we are working closely with Network Rail. We did have plans in place. Those plans do need to be looked at. We have provided what we can, knowing what was going to happen. We have been very, very keen, though, about trying to ensure that people are aware of what was going to happen rather than what did happen and that they can make plans in advance, encouraging people to walk when they could walk or go to different stations where they would avoid this congestion.

What we need to do is to work with Network Rail to see what new messaging is required. However, on the basis of what was thought to be going to happen, plans were put in place to accommodate those diversions. It was always going to be a difficult period, given the scale of construction that is taking place.

Caroline Pidgeon MBE AM (Chair): Thank you. I wonder, Paul - we have already written to Dave Ward [South East Managing Director, Network Rail] about this - whether you could feed in our further points today and that could be incorporated in our reply.

Paul Harwood (Principal Network Planner, Network Rail): Absolutely.

Caroline Pidgeon MBE AM (Chair): Thank you for taking questions on that.