

Interim workplan April–July 2020

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1. Introduction

The coronavirus crisis has presented an unprecedented challenge to populations, governments and organisations. All non-essential travel has stopped, but Transport Focus continues to represent the interests of those still travelling and those, such as passengers seeking refunds, who have ceased to travel but still need help. We also need to think about the needs and possible changed travel patterns of those who will be on the move again once this crisis is over.

It is clear we need to reprioritise what we are going to do and how we are going to do it in the next few months. Basing our work on the core principles of being a useful and evidence-based consumer organisation, we need to reorder some activities, pause others, and plan for the future.

We already have in place a three-year work plan for [2018-21](#) and a plan for the current financial year [2020-21](#). Both were written before this crisis erupted but still provide an overall direction of travel for the organisation.

This plan sets out how we will **continue** to respond to the crisis, the current projects we will **continue** or finish off, our **new** projects plus our **preparations** for the future. It also sets out how we will **continue** to be a good employer and be well governed. We will **continue** to work in close partnership on many of these issues with London TravelWatch.

This plan does not have the wealth of detail contained in individual team plans. However, it is a guide to our general direction of travel over the next few months allowing all staff to see how their contribution to this effort is making a difference.

2. Responding to coronavirus related transport issues

To date Transport Focus has focused on three major issues:

- **The quality of information provided by transport providers and governments.** Any anxiety inducing situation such as this crisis requires clear information to tell transport users what to expect and when, about timetables, motorway service areas or assistance. We have reported on this work in a series of blogs, tweets, Transport User Voice and on our website.
- **The adequacy of service provision for transport users.** As bus and rail timetables have been thinned out and altered it is important that the remaining services (and the prices charged for them) are suitable for the markets they keep serving. We published [principles about service alterations](#) and are helping the Rail Delivery Group with a survey on timetables and key/essential workers. We have also stressed the need for motorway and other service areas to [remain open](#) for remaining essential journeys.

- **The clarity and adequacy of refund arrangements.** Many rail passengers have significant amounts of money invested in season tickets. The welcome decision by governments and the rail industry to backdate season ticket refunds to 17 March (unless used since) is now, as a result of our work, backed by much clearer information and arrangements. This reduces anxiety, the need to return to stations where tickets were purchased and makes claiming easier.

Some or all of this work will continue in varying forms while the lockdown continues. This has and will involve significant amounts of desk research on websites and other channels, tracking of social media sentiment and comment and liaison with governments, trade associations and service providers.

3. Making a difference – ongoing work

This section summarises the specific outputs we are aiming to produce. Significant amounts of stakeholder liaison and follow-up is required with many of these to ensure they are as useful and effective in driving change as possible.

Boosting the user voice - tracker surveys

With the fieldwork on all our major ‘tracker’ surveys and many other insight projects now suspended, we need to decide of the work we have completed, what is appropriate to publish. In current circumstances any publication, as with the recent [Bus Passenger Survey](#), is likely to be low key but will still allow others to access and use the data.

These are the major tracker surveys and their current status:

- National Rail Passenger Survey Spring 2020. Fieldwork was about 70 per cent complete when suspended, which will allow for publication in June as planned
- Bus Passenger Survey. Autumn 2019 results were [published](#). We are reviewing how to approach the next wave of the survey
- Strategic Roads User Survey. Surveying was suspended in mid-March: 11½ months into the 2019-20 year of this continuous survey. It is likely that we will summarise the findings for the year up until the survey was paused
- National Road Users’ Satisfaction Survey. The old road user survey has now been discontinued. All fieldwork for the 2019-20 year was complete before the lockdown so a full year’s results will be published in June or July
- Motorway Services Users Survey. About 75 per cent of fieldwork is complete. Discussions are underway to determine the best way forward
- Tram Passenger Survey. Fieldwork in Manchester and Sheffield was fully completed and should, subject to stakeholder comments, be published in May.

Boosting the user voice

Other insight/policy projects to be completed are set out below along with indicative publication dates.

Rail

- Joint work with Rail Delivery Group (RDG) to understand the needs of passengers, including key workers, making essential journeys
- Rail Passenger Priorities for Improvement. A major piece of research across Great Britain will be ready for publication around June. We are reviewing how to use this in the potentially changed world post-lockdown
- Levels of Delay Repay awareness and claim rates. This key piece of DfT-funded work will partly be used to gauge the success of our *Make Delay Pay* campaign - summer
- Research funded by Network Rail into passenger views about the Trans Pennine Route upgrade - April
- Age and the train. Funded by GWR this look at younger and older passengers' attitudes to train travel will be ready for publication soon
- Passenger attitudes towards King's Cross engineering work in 2021 – May
- HS2 Community update – August
- Final report on passenger input to design of MerseyRail trains
- Passengers and refurbished trains. Funded by Porterbrook and conducted jointly with London TravelWatch
- Boosting the usefulness of NRPS and its online follow-up surveys, including analysis with Artificial Intelligence (AI) – May/June.

Bus

- Around 130 reports from BPS compiled on individual operators and transport authorities' areas, with associated virtual meetings where possible - May/June
- Further analysis of recent Bus Passenger Priorities for Improvement with focus on younger passengers and regional reports - April
- Qualitative phase of Traveline customer survey – June/July
- Barriers to West Midlands bus use – qualitative research - summer.

Road

- Attitudes and experiences of users/potential users of longer-distance Park and Ride, funded by Highways England - September
- Research into road users' attitudes and experiences regarding all-lane running smart motorways – May
- M4 Smart Motorway construction – second phase of this Highways England-funded work looking at awareness of and satisfaction with the roadworks – September
- Two reports looking in depth at findings from the Strategic Roads User Survey – one on signage and one on accessibility - summer

Franchise, direct award and concessions input

- Cross Country franchise Direct Award proposal review
- LNER Direct Award proposal review
- Review franchising/concessions guide.

Accessibility input

- Ensure that disabled passengers have adequate information to complete their journey on both rail and bus, particularly when coronavirus restrictions are in place
- Conclude up to 19 Accessible Travel Plan reviews, working with London TravelWatch, and feeding back to ORR for revisions where necessary
- Monitor how the industry resolves the accessibility issues associated with rail replacement vehicles
- Continue to represent Transport Focus on Highways England Access for All Forum to take forward our recommendations from our Disabled Road Users Report
- Continue to engage with stakeholder groups and plan arrangements for Transport Focus' own Accessibility Forum.

Other work

- Continue to deliver a 24/7/365 press office
- Conclude an audit of Northern disruption information
- Continue input to Rail Reform process as well as other national reform processes/legislation
- Continue participation in Route Supervisory Boards
- Work on contact and complaints handling will involve concluding arrangements for London TravelWatch to carry this out on behalf of Transport Focus – June.

4. Possible new work?

While our focus since the lockdown has quite rightly been ensuring that those that need to travel can do so when they need to in safety. Transport Focus, like others in the transport sector, must begin to think about what the future holds even though we do not know when the crisis will end.

It seems unlikely that the post-coronavirus world will be the same as before with both economic and health challenges likely to remain for some time. When and how quickly will people return to public transport after restrictions on travel have been lifted? Will people return to their old travel patterns, perhaps being reluctant to travel on mass transport systems? Will more people want to work from home? Will more people opt to drive because of health concerns, or because petrol is cheap and congestion is initially low?

This is all speculation at present. But we need to ask ourselves now, how can we be useful during a likely period of change to come? Can we use this ‘fallow’ period to revisit how we carry out some of our bigger pieces of work – including the tracker surveys? While we are confined to our homes, we could build on successful trials of online focus groups to allow us to develop our thinking and test out new products.

So, we will set up a workstream to consider these questions in the short to medium term future for transport, what it means for our users, for Transport Focus itself and our stakeholders. And what are the implications for the insight we collect? We must continue to be useful and relevant ensuring we don’t fight the last battle rather than the current one. However, this is a great opportunity to review what we do and how we do it, pulling from the breadth of experience and skills across Transport Focus in true cross-team working style.

We can also look at the likely phased return to transport through the lens of behaviour change – after all nearly everyone is currently a non-user of public transport, and many will need persuading to use it again, at least in the short term. As we know from previous research, non-user perception is crucial and often different to reality.

We also know that we will need to continue to communicate with stakeholders and ramp up our direct communication with the travelling public. We are already working with behavioural change experts to help us widen participation in the Transport User Panel. We must seize this opportunity to develop other innovative ways to communicate our work effectively, including exploring podcasting and webinars.

Additional insight/policy analysis

We will use this period to look in more detail at and plan/commence policy work on:

- Accessibility issues – use verbatim comments from, for example, NRPS, BPS, SRUS to help plan the next phase of our Accessibility Forum work
- Develop a passenger guide to information during disruption. This has already been earmarked with the West Midlands Grand Rail collaboration and could be rolled out to other areas
- Plan new multimodal research, resources permitting, that would provide insight into what transport users like about Apps across the transport sector.

Communications

- Start to redesign the website and build in greater co-ordination with the London TravelWatch site. It is also an opportunity to update website content
- Continue to produce the monthly Transport User Voice newsletter
- Issue daily updates on web and social channels
- Pilot a Transport Focus podcast
- Work with Insight Team to develop new ways of presenting data.

Road users

- Continue to articulate the need for those making essential journeys during the crisis to know what is open at which motorway and major 'A' road services while facilities are scaled back
- The Government's second road investment strategy commits Highways England to work with Transport Focus in a number of areas, particularly on developing new metrics. We will further develop our Logistics & Coach Survey and think about ways to obtain feedback from cyclists, pedestrians and equestrians so these can be introduced as soon as practical post crisis.
- We will continue to press Highways England to provide the clearest messages about services available for drivers at service stations, both on motorways and other parts of the their road network.

Enabling tools

- Develop templates to help Transport Focus staff provide best practice/areas for focus reports to transport operators, including on running customer panels, fault reporting and customer feedback

5. Planning for the future

Campaigns?

Fresh phases of our three campaigns are paused although some ongoing policy and background work with stakeholders continues. An initial review of the campaigns, informed by an Internal Audit Report, has been completed. We will further consider the appropriateness of each campaign during and after the coronavirus period.

Once we publish the awareness and claim benchmarking report for the *Make Delay Pay* campaign, we will consider whether to continue with that campaign. The bus campaign *Give Bus a Go*, aimed at reducing passengers' barriers to bus travel, could be re-positioned to help drive bus passenger growth after the crisis.

Now that we have established Transport Focus as a campaigning organisation, we will continue to campaign - albeit on different topics - in the 'new world'. We must allow ourselves time and space to plan and prepare so that we can hit the ground running once the lockdown is over.

We should also treat the 'asks' of essential transport users/those who need to engage with the transport industry as a mini campaign, rather than a series of separate activities.

Travel after the crisis?

We will prepare a short policy paper that sets out our thoughts on how to get passengers back to using bus and rail in particular. The need to rebuild revenue for both industries may well present opportunities for change that might not otherwise have occurred for years, such as fares reform.

Also, how will the reintroduction of full timetables – probably in phases – be communicated? What concerns will returning or potentially returning passengers have? Our Transport User Panel could be a good place to explore these and other issues.

The second Road Period started in April, with Highways England now delivering the Government's [Road Investment Strategy](#). Planning for Road Period 3 for 2025-30 needs to start almost immediately. To make sure road users' views are at the heart of thinking from the outset, we will carry out a major piece of insight work to inform the process, including examining user priorities for improvement. The outputs will be useful to Highways England, the Government and the Office of Rail & Road.

6. Continuing to be a great place to work with excellent delivery, value for money and good governance

Coaching, leadership and management

We will continue to seek opportunities for staff to gain wider or different experiences for their development. Both team and one-to-one meetings with staff continue as do our monthly full Management Team meetings and weekly catch ups. Cross-team working has, if anything, increased in the crisis as we have temporarily re-assigned staff to different roles and tasks.

End of year reviews for Board members and staff will take place.

Training and development

As the crisis moves into a more stable phase for transport, we could use this opportunity to continue our programme of development and the 'Lunch and Learn' series.

Possible topics for one of our seminars might include: the birth and basic elements of consumerism, accessibility for beginners, transport and green issues, the roles of governments and regulators, and others. The offer of training from the Good Practice Team at the Office of National Statistics will be taken up as will further training on data visualisation and data science.

Value for money

All of our existing controls and processes for ensuring we wisely plan and spend public and third-party monies will continue in place albeit working remotely.

Governance

We will continue to ensure that the organisation is well run and scrutinised with our usual programme of Board and Members Events. In addition, all the Board sub-groups will continue: the Audit, Remuneration and Risk Assurance Committee, the Statistics Governance Group and the Passenger Contact Group.

The Information Risk programme will continue as will the production of the Annual Report.

The recruitment for our new Scottish Board member will continue.

The action plan following the Office of Statistics Regulation report on NRPS will be completed and re-tendering of some insight work pursued as far as it can be.

Ways of working

In common with many organisations, we have been embracing the new technology for internal communication and have found it successful for many aspects of our work, including flexible working. We will consider how to take this forward.

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