

**THE LONDON FORUM OF AMENITY AND CIVIC SOCIETIES  
PLANNING, ENVIRONMENT AND TRANSPORT COMMITTEE  
Wednesday 11th January 2017**

**Consultation on West End Bus services**

1. This response is made on behalf of the London Forum of Civic & Amenity Societies. The Forum is the umbrella group for over 130 Amenity societies. All of them have members who use buses in central London.
2. This response is largely confined to consideration of the broad principles behind the consultation. Where we refer to a particular bus route, it is to illustrate where we believe sound principles are upheld or breached.
3. We understand that the review is prompted by three factors: a recent decline in bus use in central London; the desire to reduce or remove empty buses from Oxford Street, and the need to address air quality issues.
4. We believe the decline in bus use has come about because of prolonged disruption to bus routes. The long term benefits of Crossrail and of Cycle Superhighways inevitably come at a short term cost. Nonetheless, the impact of construction work has been far greater in the past five years than at any other time. Many journeys formerly made by bus are now quicker to walk; longer journeys are being made on the Underground despite its severe overcrowding.
5. If there is to be continued growth – and every Mayor and every London plan has endorsed that – it is not sustainable for the bus network not to absorb some of the increased travel that results. Crossrail will provide a temporary respite in congestion, but some estimates are that it will only last for three years. After that time the bus network must be able to cope with renewed growth.
6. The phenomenon of lightly loaded buses was the direct result of the privatisation of 1987, when London Buses felt compelled to split routes which operated well from two garages at either end. The result was too many routes terminating around Oxford Street. Terminating buses are inevitably empty.
7. There are ample places to park buses around Oxford Street, but as far as passengers are concerned it is a poor place to terminate buses. Passengers board and alight in roughly equal numbers at all times of the day. The ideal terminal point is one at which large numbers board or alight in the morning and perform the reverse operation in the evening.
8. We are therefore disappointed that it is proposed to increase the number of routes terminating there from five to six. Removing lightly loaded buses from Oxford Street would improve its air quality, but increasing the amount of dead mileage would worsen it.
9. In particular, the 12, which has gradually been shortened, was only curtailed at Oxford Street rather than Notting Hill Gate because of a problem with bendy buses. Now that the bendy buses have gone the route should be restored. It is a far better option for passengers than the 23. You refer to a decline in use of the 73. If it becomes a still shorter route that decline will accelerate. Although we prefer longer routes that obviate the need to change buses, we see little merit in extending the 22 and adding it to the phalanx of empty buses at Oxford Circus.
10. The changes proposed for the 73 and 390 reverse the improvements that made the introduction of the congestion charge so successful. TfL should be looking at what needs to be done to reinvigorate the Congestion Charge scheme. We would suggest reviving the western extension, as a separate zone, and improving bus services to make it work, would be the way to go. The income from the CGZ should pay for the necessary improvements to buses.
11. We strongly reject the idea that the hopper fare justifies shortening bus routes. The people who benefit most from through routes – those with poor mobility – are not paying fares and do not benefit from the hopper fare. The boarding time is a greater proportion of the total journey time for wheelchair users, and doubling the dwell time has an adverse effect for all users. A more constructive way forward would address the issues of mobility. Could changes to bus design, or bus stop layout, be made to reduce the impact of changing buses on dwell time? Is there scope for bringing bus stops closer together where interchange between the two takes place, or providing more stops? The stopping arrangements in Oxford Street were drawn up when almost all buses had an open platform and boarding an alighting took place between stops.
12. We feel it would be wrong to anticipate the effects of the Crossrail line. Many of the journeys where you anticipate a resultant reduction of bus use can currently be made using the Central line. In particular, the proposed 23 bears little resemblance to the current route of that number, which is basically the western arm of the old 15. TfL should await the experience of three months of Crossrail before advancing proposals related to its effect, and should remain mindful that once usage grows to the level of that of the Central Line, travellers will turn again to the bus.

13. There are on the other hand several proposals which improve the bus network. The changes suggested for route 3 provide useful new links. We welcome the proposals for the 25/425. The 172 is given a terminus which better meets our criterion of serving passenger interests. Taking the 452 to Vauxhall is sensible: this has been the least successful of the CGZ related routes. Curtailing the 137 seems reasonable as long as the 159 is to continue in its present form.