

**Travel Ambassador  
Effectiveness: Elephant  
and Castle Northern  
Roundabout**

**Final Qualitative Research  
Report**

April 2016  
TfL number: 15224  
Future Thinking number: 1926b



# Contents

Background and Objectives .....	1
Method .....	2
Research Findings .....	3
Conclusions .....	7

## Background and Objectives

TfL are carrying out roadworks at the Elephant and Castle northern roundabout to improve traffic. A two-way traffic switch has occurred from the 5<sup>th</sup> December 2015 and the wider improvement works are to be completed summer 2016.

Improvements in place from the 5<sup>th</sup> December:

- New Kent Road into Newington Causeway to enable general traffic to turn left from Newington Causeway into New Kent Road
- Existing roundabout converted into two-way operation

Improvements in place from summer 2016:

- Replacement of the subway systems:
  - With wide and direct signal-controlled pedestrian crossings to provide convenient crossing points to and from transport links and local amenities
  - With parallel and cycle signal-controlled crossings to provide safe and convenient crossing points to and from transport to local amenities
  - With toucan signal-controlled crossing to provide safer and convenient crossing points to and from transport to local amenities
- Footway widening to allow cycle path separation from the road
- Relocation of bus stops servicing routes from Camberwell to Walworth Road to reduce the risk of conflict with cyclists and footway congestion

TfL have been trialling Travel Ambassadors (TAs) at the Elephant & Castle northern roundabout roadworks. The role of TAs is to mitigate the impact of the improvement works on customers and users by providing accurate and personalised travel information in and around the roadworks area. TfL required feedback on these TAs to assess whether they should be rolled out to other works locations and to understand their value.

To achieve this, face-face surveys were carried out with pedestrians around the roadworks area who had and who hadn't engaged with the TAs.

## Method

We spoke to a total of 24 pedestrians (11 Men and 13 Female) on Friday 26<sup>th</sup> February between 15:00 and 18:00.

The approach consisted of positioning moderators at busy inter-junctions and landmarks around Elephant and Castle northern roundabout roadworks. These consisted of:

- The Underground entrances: Bakerloo and Northern Line Station
- Cycle path leading to Northern line Underground entrance, close to London College of Communications

Moderators were also positioned close to TAs to ensure speaking to maximum number of pedestrians who had interacted with a TA. Conversations lasted typically 2 to 5 minutes. Throughout the shift it was observed that very few pedestrians spoken to TAs; 17% of our sample engaged with a TA: 3 pedestrians spoke to a TA (1 also took a leaflet), 1 took a leaflet only and 20 pedestrians didn't engage with a TA.

# Research Findings

## Overall Observations

Elephant and Castle northern roundabout roadworks are very busy with commuters travelling to each station, close by bus stops and the surrounding areas. TAs and sign posts directing pedestrians to key locations along roadwork paths were in place to help pedestrians on their journey.

Research found that there is some confusion among pedestrians regarding navigating around the roadworks. During the time spent observing the roadworks from various locations across the roundabout, it was noted that many pedestrians used the sign posts with most bypassing the TAs. On speaking to passers-by who did not engage with a TA it was found that many were also simply not aware of their role.

It was also observed that some interaction with TAs was leaflet taking, rather than a verbal interaction, thus our interviewers also targeted pedestrians from this group to collect information from this perspective.

## Awareness and visibility

Overall, pedestrians who did not speak to a TA either did not feel they needed information (due to existing signage and footpaths), did not notice the TAs or were generally unaware of their role. A key issue was that there was little communication about the presence of the TAs, both via signage in the area and via TfL emails, which was felt to hinder awareness and understanding of their role. There was also little to visibly identify the TAs; the writing on the high-vis jackets worn was often obscured by bags or hoods, thus while some pedestrians understood they were there on 'official business' of some kind, they were unclear who they were working for and their purpose.

Those who took a leaflet were a little clearer on the role of the TAs as they assumed they would be able to provide further information on the content of the leaflets themselves – as a result one was prompted to ask questions about both the works and how to navigate their way around. However, another pedestrian who had taken a leaflet was uncertain how knowledgeable the TAs would be i.e. is their role simply to hand out leaflets or do they have more knowledge and resources?

*"I have no idea what a Travel Ambassador is....They look kind of official..." Male, took a leaflet*

Pedestrians who felt they did not need any information relied more on the signs posted across the roundabout roadworks or were more likely to use apps on their phone such as

“Citymapper” and “Google Maps”/ internet than speak to a TA. In addition, students receive updates about major commute issues from their University.

*“I simply had no need (for any information)” Female, no engagement with TA*

**Moving Forward:** there was a sense that more information on the TAs and their role could be helpful in encouraging members of the public to interact with the TAs. Posters around the Elephant and Castle Station entrances and exits highlighting what the Travel Ambassadors do would perhaps help pedestrians understand their role and be more likely to ask for advice.

In addition, making alterations to the high-vis jackets could also help with visibility and understanding i.e. moving the ‘Travel Ambassador’ text further down the jacket and increasing font size.

## Approachability and helpfulness

Overall, TA's were mainly approached by pedestrians for directions rather than roadwork information. All the pedestrians who spoke to TAs found their information helpful especially in regards to helping them navigate their way around the roundabout roadworks. They also felt the TAs were generally positioned appropriately i.e. around areas where pedestrians are often looking to cross.

*“Super helpful, I couldn't figure out where to cross” Female, engaged with a TA*

*“The Travel Ambassadors knew how to get around the roadworks” Female, engaged with a TA*

*“They were in the right place at the right time....I didn't know I needed help until I couldn't cross the roads” Female, engaged with a TA*

One issue for a minority who did not engage with a TA was a lack of approachability. There was one instance where a group of TAs were talking together, and a pedestrian was put off approaching them to ask a question as a result.

*“There were three people there talking amongst themselves, I'm not going to go up to them” Male, no engagement with a TA*

There was also a feeling amongst a minority that they would like it if the TAs approached pedestrians as this may help define their role and make pedestrians feel more able to ask a question. Observations during the 3 hours showed no TAs approaching pedestrians.

**Moving Forward:** positioning of the TAs at identified problematic hotspots is key in optimising their value e.g. ensuring TAs are placed at areas where people are often looking to cross or particularly complicated junctions. Encouraging TAs to be proactive in their interaction with pedestrians may also help make their role clearer and encourage pedestrians to ask for help.

## Level of knowledge and perceptions of leaflet

Those who did approach the TAs were generally asking for directions/navigation help. Level of knowledge amongst TAs regarding roundabout navigation was good based on observation and conversation. According to pedestrians who had taken leaflets from the TAs the leaflet's level of helpfulness was mixed. Some at first thought the leaflet was spam, others found the leaflet helpful with regards to information regarding the roadworks themselves and one was prompted to ask the TA a bit more about the purpose of the roadworks – the information received was felt to be helpful.

**Moving Forward:** little improvement required here – knowledge levels were good and the leaflet successfully provided useful information where desired.

## Value perceptions

Once the role of TAs was understood, pedestrians viewed them as a reassuring presence at the roadworks, even those who had not engaged with a TA or who were familiar with the area. Locals to the area felt that although they may not need to speak to the TA themselves they are useful for people who don't know the Elephant and Castle area and may make the area easier to use for all due to lowering confusion amongst those less familiar. In addition, TAs are a useful presence for locals to help keep themselves up to date with the works and their progress.

*“(TAs) are good for questions, if people need to ask questions” Female, no engagement with TA*

*“Useful for future Information” Male, no engagement with TA*

*“(TAs are a) good service, it's important to know what's going on” Male, no engagement with a TA*

*“They are useful as the roadworks are changing all the time” Female, took a leaflet*

When questioned on the potential of rolling out TAs, there was some mention that pedestrians would like to see them in different areas of London too.

*“I would like to see TfL ambassadors in Elephant and Castle everywhere in London”  
Male, no engagement with a TA*

*“You can never do too much in London (to help people navigate and keep them informed on roadworks)” Male, no engagement with a TA*

**Moving forward:** potential to roll out TAs to other roadwork locations, however it will be key to overcome barriers surrounding visibility and understanding, in order to ensure value to pedestrians.

## Previous knowledge amongst pedestrians

Some pedestrians felt they had good knowledge of the roadworks via a combination of discussing with others living or working in the area and TfL emails. One person did recall receiving information from TfL via post but couldn't be sure this covered the Elephant and Castle roadworks. There were also a couple of claims from those who lived in nearby areas that despite subscribing to TfL emails, they had not been notified about the roadworks.

Those that did not live in the Elephant and Castle area but had subscribed to TfL emails expressed interest in being notified about the different areas of London, not just restricted to their local area (they were unsure how to request this) – roadwork information is key to include within this.



## Conclusions

During our observation, the majority of pedestrians didn't stop to talk to the TA however most individuals interviewed, once they understood the role of TAs, felt they would work well as a reassuring presence at the roundabout, assuming their role is clearly communicated. In addition, there was a sense that the presence of TAs makes pedestrians feel that TfL cares about their customers.

The major strengths are that those who spoke to the TAs considered them confident and very helpful in terms of helping them navigate the roundabout area during the improvement works. Overall, TAs were felt to be a valuable asset at the roadworks and many liked the idea of rolling out TAs to other parts of London too.

Visibility and understanding regarding the role of the TAs are key barriers however and need to be overcome in order for pedestrians (and TfL) to gain maximum value. Improvements in promoting the TA role through emails, potential signs or posters in the area, a uniform with greater impact and placing TAs at key problematic areas on the roundabout could help improve identification, visibility and ultimately use and value of the TAs.