

TRANSPORT FOR LONDON

ENVIRONMENT, CORPORATE AND PLANNING PANEL

SUBJECT: TFL PRESS OFFICE

DATE: 18 MAY 2011

1 PURPOSE AND DECISION REQUIRED

- 1.1 This paper sets out how TfL engages with customers and stakeholders via the media to promote TfL's delivery and respond to scrutiny of its activities. This is the latest in a series of papers for the Panel examining different elements of TfL's overall communications and customer information strategy. The Panel is asked to note the paper.

2 BACKGROUND

- 2.1 The scale of TfL's communications challenge is substantial. TfL is one of the largest transport authorities in the world supporting the needs of over 7.6 million Londoners and millions more visitors. Transport is at the centre of daily life in London and is crucial to the economic success of the UK. TfL is therefore, quite rightly, subject to intense scrutiny from media and stakeholders seeking to ensure the effective provision of frontline services, delivery of TfL's investment programme and to ensure value for fare and taxpayer money.
- 2.2 The Mayor and TfL also have a number of transport priorities and programmes, for example, the promotion of cycling and reducing teenage deaths on the capital's roads, that require proactive engagement with the media as part of TfL's integrated approach to communications.
- 2.3 The Press Office manages all TfL's engagement with media. There is intense interest in all operations, delivery and strategy from international, national, London, local and trade media sectors across broadcast, print, online and increasingly, digital and social media. TfL's Press Office is one of the busiest in the UK and receives over 60,000 calls a year as well as many thousands more mobile and email contacts.
- 2.4 Both London's transport network and the media operate 24 hours a day, 365 days a year and the Press Office is organised to respond to enquiries at all times.

3 TFL'S MEDIA ENGAGEMENT STRATEGY

- 3.1 The Press Office works hand in glove with TfL's operational businesses to stay on top of all strategic and operational issues, to communicate service levels and to respond to issues effectively and authoritatively.

- 3.2 Furthermore, it supports delivery of the Mayor and TfL's priorities by:
- (a) proactively making the case via the media for continued investment in London's transport network; and
 - (b) demonstrating efficient and professional management and delivery of that investment.
- 3.3 Alongside responding to all media enquires and the communication of TfL's activities and achievements through, for example, the issuing of Press Notices and provision of briefings and statements, the Press Office also manages a programme of media and editorial engagement for senior TfL officials, including the Commissioner and Chief Officers.
- 3.4 The programme of media and editorial engagement includes access for media 'behind the scenes', from experiencing why London Underground (LU) engineering works must mean parts of the network are closed at nights or weekends to seeing how TfL actively manages the smooth flow of traffic on London's road network from the Surface Transport and Traffic Operations Centre.
- 3.5 The Commissioner regularly appears on London's two premier London talk radio channels, BBC London 94.9 and LBC 97.3, and he and other senior TfL officials are frequently interviewed by key national and London broadcasters and newspapers, as well as trade titles and online forums.
- 3.6 This proactive programme enables us to communicate and explain in detail the background to our operational performance, investment programme and business plans.
- 3.7 Journalists covering transport issues in London and across the UK rate the Press Office in the top third across the private and public sector, under criteria including building relationships of trust with journalists, access to senior officials and for proactivity.

4 ORGANISING FOR EFFECTIVE MEDIA ENGAGEMENT

- 4.1 The Press Office is organised to reflect the structure and priorities of the organisation. There are two key sections, Operations and Strategy and Campaigns.
- 4.2 On the Operations side, there are three 'desks', covering London Underground and Rail issues, Surface Transport and Policing, Cycling and Streets. This enables Press Office staff to gain specialist knowledge and the full and thorough understanding of the organisation necessary, as well as facilitating close and collaborative working relationships with TfL's leadership, staff and operational control rooms and partner organisations.
- 4.3 On the Strategy and Campaigns side, there are two desks. Corporate, covering all businesses planning and strategic pan-TfL issues, such as Oyster fares and ticketing, and a Campaigns and Communities team, to enable delivery of the strategies supporting important public information campaigns, such as Safer Travel At Night. It also manages TfL's social and digital media engagement and film capability and leads engagement with media representing London's diverse communities.

- 4.4 All TfL PR and campaigning activity, with the exception of some film production, is developed and delivered in-house, with no external spend or support from agencies.
- 4.5 The London 2012 Games is a major priority for TfL, both in the run-up to and during the Games. A number of key 2012 transport programmes, including the Olympic and Paralympic Route Networks and Travel Demand Management programmes, have recently transferred from the Olympic Delivery Authority (ODA) to TfL. The Press Office will ensure that TfL's priorities and operations are communicated effectively to support a successful Games.
- 4.6 It is important to work closely and collaboratively with key partner organisations, particularly as the London 2012 Games approaches. The Press Office regularly meets, consults and engages with colleagues in the Mayor's team as well as with London Organising Committee for the Olympic Games, Olympic Delivery Authority, Department for Transport and other key transport organisations.
- 4.7 The Press Office also manages TfL's Media and Communications Planning Grid and the monitoring and analysis of all media coverage of TfL.

5 RESPONDING TO A CHANGING MEDIA LANDSCAPE

- 5.1 The media landscape is changing quickly, with the development of digital and social media channels. Alongside this, there is a proliferation of new communication channels, such as Facebook, Twitter and YouTube, as well as a number of well informed and influential bloggers on London transport and political issues. TfL has developed a Digital Strategy to govern all digital and social media activity and engagement.
- 5.2 Breaking news now often reaches the Press Office through these new channels, particularly Twitter. The Press Office manages TfL's two Twitter channels, @TfLOfficial and one developed specifically to support the successful launch and ongoing communication of Barclays Cycle Hire and Superhighways, @BarclaysCycle. TfL communicates key news and facts via these channels and is ready to respond to any major issue, event or 'crisis', in real time.
- 5.3 The Press Office's proactive activity now almost always includes a digital or social media dimension, and in many cases this is the primary method of reaching and engaging with our audience. For example, TfL's Teen Road Safety campaign, which has helped deliver a 55 per cent reduction in teenagers killed or seriously injured on London's roads since 2000, sees celebrities (recruited at no cost to TfL) post and encourage further dissemination of the campaign's 'Look out for your mates' message through their own Facebook, YouTube or Twitter pages and channels.
- 5.4 Film or video via YouTube, web or mobile channels is also a fast growing method of communication. The Press Office has developed a capability to produce short films in-house for distribution via TfL's website, its YouTube channel or on third party websites and channels. The most recent examples are the messages from LU line General Managers to explain what weekend Tube engineering works are taking place where and why, as part of the communication of TfL's Tube Upgrade Plan.

6 RESILIENCE COMMUNICATIONS PLANNING AND MANAGEMENT

- 6.1 The TfL Press Office usually takes the lead in resilience and ‘crisis communications’ planning and response for the organisation as a whole. This includes convening teams from across TfL to plan for known events, such as strikes or weather-related incidents. The Press Office also takes the lead in developing the message and response to operational or security threats and incidents.
- 6.2 The Press Office also works closely with communications colleagues from partner organisations through the London Resilience structures, including Cabinet Office, Police, Fire, Ambulance and NHS, to plan for and respond to pan-London events and incidents in an effective and co-ordinated way. Recent events that have demanded and seen successful co-ordinated communications include the Papal visit to the UK of September 2010 and the recent Royal Wedding.

7 CONCLUSION

- 7.1 As the transport authority for one of the world’s leading cities, TfL is rightly subject to intense media scrutiny from international to local level, and across all media sectors and platforms. This includes the growing digital and social media landscape, requiring a 24 hours a day, 365 days a year capability and response.
- 7.2 The role of the Press Office is to effectively manage all engagement with media and it is therefore structured to ensure it can fully support the operational parts of TfL and respond to all issues and events. TfL also develops proactive communications strategies to support the Mayor and TfL’s transport priorities, make the case for continued investment in London’s transport network and promote the delivery of value for money.

8 RECOMMENDATION

- 8.1 The Panel is asked to NOTE the paper.

9 CONTACT

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