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Consultation

## **Independent Winter Resilience Review**

*pteg* Response

May 2010

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## 1. Introduction

- 1.1. **pteg** represents the six English Passenger Transport Executives (PTEs) which between them serve eleven million people in Tyne and Wear ('Nexus'), West Yorkshire ('Metro'), South Yorkshire, Greater Manchester, Merseyside ('Merseytravel') and the West Midlands ('Centro'). The PTEs plan, procure, provide and promote public transport in some of Britain's city regions, with the aim of providing integrated public transport networks accessible to all. Leicester City Council, Nottingham City Council, Transport for London (TfL) and Strathclyde Partnership for Transport (SPT) are associate members of **pteg**, although this response does not represent their views.
- 1.2. This response represents the collective views of **pteg** and has been consulted on with the PTEs. Our response answers only those questions where we feel able to comment.

## 2. Review Questions

### Phase One – Winter Resilience and salt stock management

#### 2. The approach to winter resilience – highways

***2.1 What has been the experience of your authority, organisation of the winter 2009-10, and what are the lessons you have learned? If you have conducted a formal review we would be pleased to see a copy.***

- 2.1. The key lessons learnt reflect the ability of organisation like PTEs to prepare properly and respond quickly to situations which severe weather can bring about. The main issues are:
  - that there is need of clear decision-making channels to determine priority routes for gritting;
  - that the assessment of routes needs to be undertaken in a way that minimises delay; and
  - that communication channels between the various partners needs to be responsive to the situation and effective in communicating problems and issues across organisations.

***2.2 What has been your own practice about salt stocks, and your experience of the salt supply chain? What views do you have about the operation of the Salt Cell?***

- 2.2. In some areas the performance of district councils in keeping main road open was hampered by the rapid diminution of salt stocks and the compulsory transfer of resources to less well prepared authorities.
- 2.3. Some PTEs have arrangement for gritting and clearing their own facilities – e.g. interchanges; park and ride; and some rail stations. Action to make safe and clear these facilities was carried out to the best of ability, but were hampered by lack of substantial grit stocks on site and the difficulty of delivering stocks to sites.

***2.3 What action is now under way as a result of the challenges you faced? How well prepared are you for future winters of similar severity?***

- 2.4. Some PTEs have undertaken reviews to make sure they address the issues raised by the severe weather conditions. This has included working with operators and district councils to

ensure communication issues are resolved and that resources are properly coordinated to respond to the situations as they arise. In addition, some PTEs have reviewed their contracts for winter maintenance to ensure that, for example, vehicles are available which can simultaneously dispense grit as well as act as a snow ploughs.

***2.4 What has been your experience as a passenger or freight transport operator, and what lessons have been learned?***

- 2.5. During the period of severe weather public transport was disrupted to varying degrees, linked to factors such as topography; time and duration of snowfall and extent of freezing conditions; and gritting patterns. Individual PTEs experienced a variety of responses by transport operators accordingly. Generally operators performed as well as could be expected and generally took a cautious approach to restoration of services in order to minimise any danger of collision and injury to passengers, drivers or vehicles. Trams largely performed better than bus operations. The key lessons learnt are:
- apparent inconsistencies in terms of some bus services operating whilst others were not in the same city can be caused by conditions at bus depots, rather than on-street, which in turn makes it difficult to offer passengers a clear and sensible reason for such inconsistencies;
  - in some places there was a concern over the length of time operators took to restore services, and this was due to operators' own processes – e.g. supervisors having to personally check routes before they are reinstated; and
  - where alternative provision to buses existed, such as trams, these services came under increased pressure to perform as passengers switched to these services.

***2.5 What action would you like to see taken by others – whether in relation to salt supply and use or to other matters?***

- 2.6. Operators need to work closely with PTEs (and local authorities) and a system of checking and route clearance which is acceptable to all parties needs devising at a local level – thereby focusing resources more and reducing delay;

***2.6 Should further action or powers be taken by central government or its agencies to assure salt supplies or winter resilience generally?***

- 2.7. Government should improve the supply of and coordination of salt stocks to ensure these are deployed in the most effective way at such times.

**Phase Two – maintaining winter transport service (all modes) and longer term issues**

**4. Resilience of rail services in severe winter weather**

***4.1 How was the service provided to customers modified and how well was it communicated in response to winter conditions, and what were the consequences of this?***

- 2.8. We were pleased with the general train performance during the winter – e.g. on the Northern Rail franchise, the operator concentrated on providing the advertised level of service, albeit with delays, rather than focus on punctuality through a reduced level of service. This

contrasts favourably with other franchisees which ran emergency timetables and cancellations.

***4.3 What was the experience of the 2009-10 winter? To what extent were the lessons learned from 2008-09 applied, and what has been learned since from that? Where formal reviews have been carried out we would be pleased to see them.***

- 2.9. There were some technical problems with some parts of the rail network, in terms of infrastructure and rolling stock. These problems have been taken up with the respective operators to reduce risks of failure in the future.
- 2.10. However, the positive action by Northern left something of a maintenance hangover into the following few weeks as trains that had not had their proper maintenance exams on time had to be withdrawn. Northern sometimes ran trains that were shorter than usual during this post winter weather, which meant that overcrowding was even more accentuated than usual. The fact that the fleet is so intensively used means that there is just no slack to pick up the strain during such times. The only solution here is some spare capacity provision for such times.
- 2.11. The main area of concern however was the preparedness of ISS, Northern's cleaning/gritting contractor. For example, it was appreciated that that it was difficult for them to get around using road vehicles, however Metro felt that a 48 hour rotation to cover all West Yorkshire stations was not enough when fresh snow was landing and turning to ice. There were concerns during the first few days of the weather that they were not gritting enough - however after some pressure this did seem to pick up somewhat. Given the level of resources however, additional gritting meant that litter/rubbish collection etc had to stop, meaning that bins were often overflowing. Along with other PTEs, Metro have pressured Northern for a review of winterisation measures to ensure that routines are relevant and sufficient should we get such weather again. This review is happening.

## **6. The consequences and economic impacts of severe winter weather**

***6.1 How does severe winter weather impact on critical aspects of people's daily travel needs, and on the mobility of goods and services? What lessons have been learned in business, public service and other organisations about forecasting and mitigating the transport effects of severe winter weather? How effective have winter resilience measures been, and what other measures should be taken?***

- 2.12. Plainly severe weather impacts on the ability of people to travel to work, school or other purposes. To a greater extent, the severity of the weather means that expectations of how people travel about have to be reduced accordingly. The focus of PTEs has been to provide passengers with up to date information, allowing them to reduce the risks of travelling as well as trying to ensure that essential services are maintained.
- 2.13. The key lessons learnt have been set out elsewhere in this response.
- 2.14. The effectiveness of measures has been outlined elsewhere in the response and beyond adequate emergency planning procedures and addressing the lessons learnt, the main issues are:
  - the availability of up-to-date information which allows passengers to understand the situation relevant to their travel needs and act accordingly; and

- the availability of resources, such as grit, but also staff and vehicles, to meet emergency requirements

## **7. Communications and public expectations**

### ***7.1 What can the public reasonably expect in terms of the winter resilience of roads and transport services, and communication about this in severe weather?***

- 2.15. Customer communication is key during periods of disruption. Passengers need reassurance about their ability to travel and the options available. PTEs have adopted a range of methods of communicating with passengers via local media (radio in particular), the telephone, websites (and web based communication tools), email and to some extent, on street systems such as real time displays. The key issues are:
- some issues, such as restrictions at depots, cannot easily be explained and will result in some passengers feeling frustrated;
  - there was a heavy reliance on operator depot staff for information, which can cause problems if there are limited staff at depots, and consequently feedback to passengers;
  - there was a lack of notice where services were withdrawn by operators which in turn caused problems of travel advice services;
  - smaller operators do not necessarily have the resources to communicate up to date information; and
  - real time displays on street in some areas are not enabled to display clear information about service disruptions.

### ***7.2 Are there ways of enabling the public to be better prepared for future severe winters?***

- 2.16. Each PTE area will be different in terms of how best to communicate with partners and passengers, given the mix of operators and other stakeholders. However, PTEs are working to ensure that:
- clear channels of communication exist between all relevant parties to make sure that information is communicated effectively and that passenger receive the most up-to-date picture as soon as is practical;
  - information technology and communications systems are adaptable enough to respond to changing requirements;
  - passengers are provided with reliable and trust-worthy sources of information that they are able to routinely use and thereby come to rely on in times of emergency.
- 2.17. Educating passengers in good travel planning as part of PTEs routine activities seems to be the most effective way of helping the public cope better with relatively rare events such as extreme weather.