

Consultation Response to the Mayor of London's draft Transport Strategy 2017

**Submitted by Ageing Better Camden and
Connect Hackney on the 29th September 2017**



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Introduction

Ageing Better Camden and Connect Hackney are two programmes funded by the Big Lottery Fund's £78m Fulfilling Lives: Ageing Better strategic fund.

The main purpose of the funding programme is to deliver sustainable changes to reducing social isolation among older people, giving them greater power to make choices that affect themselves.

The Ageing Better programme has been co-designed with an older people cohort to:

- Deliver and test at scale evidence-led programmes; and
- Use learning from the programme to provide real-time feedback to strategic partners, grant holders and the Centre for Ageing Better to inform future practice.

There are two programme areas in London and these are based in Camden and Hackney.

Ageing Better in Camden

Ageing Better in Camden is a partnership of older people and agencies in Camden working closely together to tackle the social isolation and loneliness that many older people in the Borough experience. Camden's diverse communities are at the heart of the Ageing Better in Camden approach.

Ageing Better in Camden is intended to produce the following outcomes:

- Older citizens, at risk from or experiencing social isolation will be more involved in their communities, and provide stronger support to each other
- Older people will experience less social isolation as a result of participation in programme activities.
- Services which address the social isolation of older people (SIOP) in Camden are more relevant and better co-ordinated, with increased numbers of older people engaged in their design and delivery

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- A body of robust evidence on ABC activities will result in increased awareness and knowledge in relation to SIOP, both locally and wider

Connect Hackney

Connect Hackney is working with older people and partners in the London Borough of Hackney to achieve the following outcomes:

- **Outcome 1:** Increased numbers of older people who are socially isolated engage in meaningful and enjoyable activities which result in new friendships, sustained networks, improved resourcefulness, more confidence and thus, ultimately, a better quality of life.
- **Outcome 2:** Increased numbers of older people who are at risk of social isolation, engage in meaningful and enjoyable activities which result in new friendships, sustained networks, improved resourcefulness, more confidence and thus, ultimately, a better quality of life.
- **Outcome 3:** Hackney sees a positive shift in attitudes towards ageing and older people, where the latter are more actively engaged in the community and valued for the contributions they make.
- **Outcome 4:** Increased direct involvement of older people and people as they age in shaping policy and holding key stakeholders to account, leading to stronger partnerships and more effective, better coordinated delivery which reduces social isolation.

Both programmes have been running since 2015 and regularly hear from the older people that we work with, that transport is one of the things that can really have an impact on isolation for a number of different reasons. On reviewing the Mayor's draft Transport Strategy for London, we recognised that a number of the themes in the strategy are linked to the issues raised by the older people that we work with.

Ageing Better Camden and Connect Hackney were therefore keen to facilitate the involvement of older people from our respective areas, in providing a response to the consultation.

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Due to the time constraints and breadth of the strategy, we chose to focus on specific areas within the consultation that were likely to be of the most interest and relevance to our audience. We held a 2.5 hour workshop on the 19th September to look at the following themes from the strategy:

- Policy 11: Make Transport easier and more enjoyable to use
- Policy 12: Enhance public transport networks to enable older and disabled residents to travel spontaneously

The workshop was attended by 12 older people with a diverse range of access needs, including dementia, sensory loss and specific mobility needs.

We were also pleased that Esme Yuhill, Senior Strategic Communications Manager from Transport for London was able to attend to hear directly from older people, about their views and experiences of transport in London. We would like to extend our thanks to Esme for attending.

The following pages provide a summary of the discussions that took place and we are pleased to contribute them in response to the consultation. We are also submitting a video alongside this response which has been produced by KOVE (Kilburn Older Voices Exchange), a small charity working with older people in Kilburn & West Hampstead. The video provides some insight of older people's experience of bus stops in Kilburn & West Hampstead.

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The workshop – 19th September 2017

Your public transport experience today

Individuals were given post-it notes and asked to specify their mode of travel to the workshop and rate the journey between 1-10 (10 being high and representing a good experience). People were asked to introduce themselves by sharing their experience and scores.

The method of travel used by those attending the workshop varied. Methods included; dial-a-cab, bus and underground although nearly all combined public transport with walking as part of their journey. Everyone scored their journey between 8-10 which indicates that their overall public transport experience was positive. That said, everyone shared challenges they experienced with their journey although most had planned their journey to mitigate expected issues with congestion at peak time. For example, people either left earlier or in some cases selected an alternative but longer route.

The main challenges experienced included: traffic congestion, overcrowding on both underground and buses, poor announcements and signage which resulted in one person with visual impairment take the wrong tube line, long walk at stations categorised accessible and confusion due to poor signage at multi-exit stations.

Policy 12: Enhance public transport networks to enable older and disabled residents to travel spontaneously

51: Provide accessibility training to all bus drivers and ensure all new buses have better accessibility

Access onto buses was a concern raised numerous times throughout the consultation in relation to boarding and disembarking buses, priority and disabled seating – these issues becoming more challenging during busy times or on busy routes. Issues with accessibility to buses were:

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- Inconsistent procedure for wheelchair or mobility access onto and off of buses *'lowering the step for people with mobility issues or wheelchair access should be automatic and not at request of individual'*.
- The provision of seating for disabled and older people was felt to be inadequate on most forms of transport but particularly buses. Furthermore, the new design of buses (and underground) appears to prioritise space for standing rather than those with mobility issues or disabilities. *'The design of new buses is dreadful, there is a lack of priority seating, seats are too high at the back and stepping up to get in them is very difficult – they are basically inaccessible for me'*.
- Signs for priority seating are too subtle to stimulate travelling public to forgo their seat voluntarily for older people or those with a disability. This issue becomes more challenging where a disability is not obvious, the example given was some visual impairments. *'Not everyone wants to declare that they have a disability in public, signs need to be more prominent and a campaign for public awareness would help'*.
- The management of designated seating for older or disabled people by transport staff on buses was at best inadequate and at worst non-existent. Often older people have to stand throughout their journey which can compromise their safety due to instability. Requesting a seat often requires them to disclose a disability which many said they did not feel comfortable with. On some occasions, older people shared experiences where they had requested a seat which resulted in confrontation with another traveller.
- An overarching issue raised by both groups in relation to access was the inconsistent policies and procedures of different bus companies operating in London which makes access to buses even more challenging. For those with a disability and where a journey requires travelling on more than one bus, travel to their destination can be impossible – groups felt very strongly that access policies should be consistent across all sub-contracted transport companies. *'Each bus company has their own rules, the number 11 lowered to give me access as I have a mobility issue but 38 didn't and driver said it was only for wheelchair access'*. Other concerns raised in relation to subcontracted companies was the management of complaints in relation to customer service and access issues – Transport for London forward complaints to relevant companies but people reported that they rarely receive a response from the company or any follow up by Transport for London.

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The intention set out in the draft Strategy to provide accessibility training to bus drivers was viewed positively. It was felt that a heightened awareness and understanding by transport staff of the access needs of older people and disabled commuters could help contribute to a more responsive service. Although it was felt by some that the absence of formal policies and regulated procedures in relation to access may not bring about the desired change as it will be left at the discretion of individual drivers.

Whilst numerous examples of good practice by bus drivers were shared within groups it was agreed that this is not standard practice. Good practice examples include:

- Automatically lowering access step when they see a disability or mobility need in older people rather than sticking to a policy
- Waiting for people with mobility issues to be seated before disembarking
- Managing congestion by making people move down the bus or upstairs and keep exits clear which is particularly important for people with visual impairment. In some examples there was management of priority seating
- Making regular and clear announcements about bus stop closures as they can result in people needing to walk long distances unnecessarily
- Not overriding bus stops which can be problematic for people with access needs and often results in them boarding the bus last and not accessing priority seating

52: Improve accessibility overall by:

- *Better journey planning tools which are more accessible*
- *Inclusive Design for train and station planning including: signing, information and seating*
- *Step free access at selected rail and over ground stations*

All those attending said that they had experienced issues with access to public transport which has affected their ability to travel spontaneously either on occasion or regularly. It was acknowledged that a challenge with access to public transport was far greater for older people who are registered disabled or have mobility issues. Key access issues and barriers to spontaneous travel were identified as:

- Overcrowding on all forms of transport, particularly during peak times was viewed as a major barrier to travelling spontaneously for older and disabled residents. Everyone said

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they try to plan journeys that avoid travelling at peak times but this is not always possible. For many, travelling at peak times is not an option particularly for those dependent on staff to support them to access transport '*Transport needs to be less crowded, it makes it difficult and unsafe for me to travel*'.

- Physical access was identified as a key barrier to accessibility for older people or those with disabilities. Issues associated with physical access include: access onto buses, access within stations as a result of too many steps, too few lifts and long walks within stations categorised as accessible.

Journey planning tools

People use a range of different tools to plan their journey in advance which include; Transport for London website, Google, TfL application for buses and some used resources at their local library to help plan journeys. Views differed on what was the most effective planning tool. For example, for those who are IT literate and have access to the internet there was a preference for interactive journey planning tools such as TfL website. Other people expressed a need for printed information such as leaflets and booklets which they felt should be made available at all stations, local libraries and through local support services. Most people agreed that timetables were not very helpful in planning journeys.

Experience of planning accessible journeys differed among individuals and everyone had knowledge of at least one accessible planning tool but no one had a comprehensive understanding of all tools available. Some concerns were raised with accuracy of existing tools such as predicted journey times on TfL website which underestimates walking time between platforms and others on how and where to access printed planning tools. Whilst Esme from TfL stakeholder engagement was able to provide further information during the workshop there appears to be a need for greater communication of the range of accessible journey planning tools available and guidance on how to use them.

For disabled residents planning journeys is more challenging. '*it is challenging to find out what kind of vehicles operate on different routes which is not currently available on the internet or known to the TfL staff who conducted a home visit*' – *wheelchair user*. Individuals with visual impairment explained that they are dependent on others to plan their journey and need support from TfL's customer service helpline or family and friends. Whilst individuals describe the TfL staff and information they receive through the helpline as excellent, the call

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waiting times are long which often results in them having to abandon the call or plan calls at off peak times. *'I often have to call at 11pm to ensure I get through without a long wait – it makes it impossible for me to respond to emergencies or travel spontaneously'*. It was felt that the customer service helpline needs to be better resourced in order for it to be a fully accessible planning tool for older people and disabled residents. *'this morning I attempted to call the helpline twice but couldn't get through, I was so anxious. They really need more operatives on the phone'*.

Furthermore, access to journey planning information whilst travelling is not always easy, often printed resources are not available, very few staff are present on platforms and often staff that are available do not have knowledge relating to accessible routes. Concerns were made about planned closures of ticket offices that will further reduce access to information during journeys.

Inclusive Design for train and station planning: including signing, information and seating

Everyone felt that the current design of underground and train stations have too many steps and too few lifts which make access challenging and impossible for some. That said, it was widely accepted that the future design of stations is limited by old infrastructure and may never fully address the needs of the wide range of disabilities and mobility issues experienced by older people. Comments made in relation to Inclusive Design include;

- Seating - The provision of more seating was viewed positively, particularly where there are long walks within stations to access lifts and in areas where people need to wait for taxis or buses. Some people felt that the design of seating within stations could be made more accessible and comfortable for older people, for example, the use of non-slip materials and non-sloping seats was felt to be more appropriate. Priority seating and signs to encourage travelling public to prioritise seating for older people or disabled residents should be standard within all seating areas and greater management of priority seating by transport staff was a reoccurring theme throughout workshop discussions, in particular for journeys on buses.
- Signing – The need for clear signs within stations was felt to be very important and critical for navigating accessible routes within stations. Both signs and information was felt to be particularly important as it was felt that there are noticeable less staff available

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for information within stations. Multi exit stations were highlighted as one area where signage needs to be improved, particularly within large, congested stations which were felt to be very confusing.

- Information – A great source of anxiety for people was the closure of ticket offices and less staff being available in stations. For many staff are the main source of information whilst undertaking journeys *'Reduction in staff and station offices means there is often no support or information available when I need it, this makes me anxious about journeys on public transport'*. There were some concerns made about the quality of information provided by staff in some stations where they were not able to provide information on accessible routes within stations or for their journey. Furthermore, it was felt that announcements made within stations were not always clear and often they are made too hastily by staff. Regular and clear announcements are critical for visually impaired travellers who often are not be able to see information monitors *'I got on the wrong line twice as I could not see the monitor on the platform and there were no staff available'*. There were a number of people who shared experiences of humorous announcements and there was collective agreement that more light-hearted announcements particularly during delays had enhanced the enjoyment of their journey and other travellers.

Step free access at selected rail and over ground stations

Step free access was viewed positively although it was felt that further consideration needs to be given to stations already classified as accessible which generally involves significantly more walking to follow accessible routes. Furthermore, lifts are not well signposted and always highly congested with long waits for older and disabled people as well as passengers with children and luggage. These issues significantly increase journey time for older people and disabled residents. *'Some walks in tube stations are very long although they claim they are accessible stations'*.

Policy 11: Improve customer service with staff training including bus drivers

The customer service experience of older people and disabled residents varied and whilst it was an area that people felt required improvement there were also numerous examples of good customer care provided by bus drivers which have already been highlighted in this

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document. A reoccurring theme throughout discussions was the need for the service to be more responsive to the needs of older people, rather than reactive - where often the onus is on the individual to highlight a need or request assistance. People felt strongly that the main function of a bus driver's role should be to manage the customer journey/experience rather than solely driving the bus. It was felt that customer service training combined with accessibility training would provide drivers with the knowledge and tools to enhance both the access and experience of older people and disabled residents but not necessarily the impetus to implement them.

Responsive management of congestion and priority seating in accordance with the needs of older and disabled residents was one of the main areas identified for improving the journey experience. That said it was acknowledged that it would be impossible for bus drivers singlehandedly to manage anti-social behaviour and drive the bus effectively. Many spoke positively of the role of conductors in the past and how effective they were at managing access, inappropriate behaviour and acted as a conduit for travel information – everyone felt these are the main things lacking in today's service.

Commuter etiquette in London was discussed widely in both groups and it was acknowledged that the customer experience on all forms of transport could be significantly enhanced with improved commuter etiquette by the wider public. It was suggested the Strategy should include development of a charter or a high profile public campaign (such as 'Clunk Click') to help generate greater empathy for others across all forms of transport which they felt would improve the travel experience overall within London.

Other areas identified that would improve the customer service experience for older people and disabled residents on busses were:

- Better management of the complaints process between Transport for London and sub-contracted travel companies. Complaints made to TfL are referred to sub-contracted companies who in turn do not contact the complainant directly. Furthermore, TfL have no further contact with complainant in relation to the complaint made.
- Consider older people and disabled residents in decisions about re-routing buses and closing bus stops. For example, make clear announcements at the point of boarding the bus and throughout the journey to ensure journey amendments can be made in time and avoid closing two consecutive bus stops which can result in walking long distances.

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- The cost of replacing freedom passes (£10) and length of time to get replacements is prohibitive and results in isolation due to restricted travel.
- Clean windows on buses more regularly, this not only makes the journey more pleasant but enables older people to identify when they need to disembark without relying on announcements (which sometimes are not made).
- Humorous and light-hearted announcements are more engaging and create a more enjoyable travel experience for all.
- Improve placement of storage areas. Ground floor storage is preferable as high storage is inaccessible for many older people to place and remove items during a journey. Bags that are often not placed in storage end up in gangways which are dangerous for people with disabilities or mobility issues. Furthermore, the Metro newspaper holders are now placed in storage areas of many buses which limits space available for luggage.

Next steps

We would like to thank the older people who participated in the workshop for sharing their views and experiences of public transport in London. As programme areas, this has given us further insight into some of the transport challenges experienced by an ageing population and it will help us to further develop our own work in this area.

We are keen to remain engaged with Transport for London, as they finalise the Mayor's Transport Strategy and plans for delivery. Our respective programmes can offer user insight through the diverse mix of older people involved in our programmes. We would be happy to facilitate participation in further consultations, service/product design and/or dialogue with transport providers.

If we can be of any further assistance, please contact:

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