MESSAGING

A clear communications campaign is needed to get people back onto public transport. It should be as consistent and directive in unlocking as it was in lockdown.

During lockdown the reduction in public transport use in London was one of the most severe in the world. Londoners internalised the message to only use public transport for essential trips, showing their willingness to do all it takes to tackle the virus. Cities around the world are following a fairly predictable trajectory once they unlock with most seeing at least 1 in 5 of their usual ridership who had left public transport returning within the first month, and somewhere between a third and two-thirds having returned within the first two months. But London (along with New York) is an outlier in this trend and we are seeing noticeably slower returns to public transport.

People need clarity on how the situation has changed and encouragement to return to public transport. As we have started to unlock, the messaging has been much softer and has failed to give people the confidence they need. There is evidence of an emerging 'trust gap' in which the general public are more hesitant to follow non-compulsory guidance from politicians and nervous about poor compliance with safety measures (such as face coverings) from their fellow passengers. Whilst clear and consistent messaging from politicians is a critical part of the picture, operators also have a role to play. The work has largely been done in making public transport as safe as it can be, with revised cleaning regimes and new operational measures in place across the network. This now needs to be communicated to the public – by government at all levels, by operators, and by businesses – to rebuild trust in transport.

MANAGEMENT

TfL should continue to proactively engage with the capital's largest employers to develop viable travel plans for their offices. For smaller companies, there must be clear, accessible, guidance about real capacity on individual tube lines and bus routes, and instructions about how to apply this information to office planning.

Employers have already started making decisions about reopening offices and returning to work, ahead of more detail expected from the Government on August 1. With half of Londoners commuting by public transport, we all know that public transport is a critical factor in these decisions. However, a lack of clear information and guidance from TfL is making it difficult for employers to take informed decisions. Whilst service levels are approaching their normal levels, the effective capacity on different lines and at different stations is not easily available. TfL has produced guidance for certain sectors but these are not widely publicised and exist only as static pdf assets on the TfL website. A dynamic online

tool or app would be preferable, especially if it had the ability for employers to input mode share data from their employee surveys.

There must be a clear plan to ensure that the return to school, as well as offices, does not overwhelm the bus network. This needs to be confirmed well in advance so that operators, schools and the wider public can prepare.

The planning-led approach needs to be extended to schools across the capital. Demand peaks risk quickly become a major problem – especially on the bus network – when pupils return in September. There are a range of solutions from putting more buses on the road (including, perhaps, pupil-only buses) to ensuring that schools on the same bus routes are not starting or ending at the same time. A communication campaign also needs to begin as soon as possible to encourage other bus users to avoid peak school times if they can, for example by having conversations with their employers about retimed working hours.

METRICS

Both real-time and predictive data should be used to ensure that people can plan their journeys so that they can travel in a safe way.

Data will be critical to successful reopening. London First is supporting the data team at the GLA in their response to COVID-19, specifically via a project being delivered with the Alan Turing Institute which uses a range of data indicators to measure the capital's busyness as we come out of lockdown. This builds on the work we are doing through our London Data Commission. Understanding busyness is important as it provides an indication of how behaviour is changing; it helps the capital avoid overshooting as normality returns; and critically informs business and London's government about how sectors and different parts of London are recovering.

TfL also need to be making the most of the data to which they have access regarding busyness and congestion. TfL could develop this tool themselves or work with private apps such as CityMapper and Google Maps to ensure that this available to the public. A simpler solution to help employers plan their returns to their offices could consist of a map of the transport network highlighting "red" routes or stations at specific times of day. This would allow employers to plan for different office locations, help employees to re-time their journeys, and iterate their plans as the network becomes busier, thus creating an active travel management ecosystem. Whilst some of this data is already available, it needs to be made as accessible as possible and promoted widely.

TfL should set out clear criteria and processes for assessing the success of schemes like Streetspaces and the increase and extension of the Congestion Charge.

It is imperative that the extensive interventions undertaken by TfL are assessed transparently, with opportunities for Londoners, local authorities, employers and others to feed in their experiences. Whilst many businesses have supported these measures, and expect that many will turn out not to be temporary, this support will be conditional upon clear evidence that they are having the desired impacts on modal shift, air quality, and congestion, and that they are not creating unintended consequences on London's roads.