

TRANSPORT FOR LONDON

SURFACE TRANSPORT PANEL

SUBJECT: UPDATE ON COUNTDOWN II

DATE: 17 FEBRUARY 2011

1 PURPOSE AND DECISION REQUIRED

1.1 This paper updates the Panel on Countdown II.

2 BACKGROUND

- 2.1 The new and improved Countdown system is the next step in London Buses' provision of real time bus service information to passengers. Passengers will be able to access predicted bus arrival information for every one of the 19,000 bus stops and for 700 routes in London via the internet and mobile phones. This service will be complemented by a new generation of Countdown signs, which will provide real time information (RTI) at around 2,500 key bus stops in London.
- 2.2 Engagement has been mostly focused around the strategy for selecting stops for signs. A strategy was developed that allocated the 2,500 signs to the 19,000 stops on the network by choosing those stops within a local context where passenger need is greatest and the most passenger benefit can be gained. These locations were then discussed with each borough to take into account additional local factors, and a final set of locations was agreed.
- 2.3 SMS (text messages) and the web provide RTI away from bus stops at home, work or on the move. This helps travellers make more informed travel choices before or during their journey and makes RTI available across all 19,000 bus stops, covering locations where roadside signs would not be financially viable.
- 2.4 It is intended that bus arrival predictions will be available via a 'syndicated data feed', enabling third parties to develop smartphone 'apps' and other targeted products. There is a significant challenge to delivering this solution. Experience has shown that websites and other applications rarely reach maximum calculated demand levels, unless very unusual conditions occur. In this case, maximum demand could be users requesting prediction data for all 19,000 stops every few seconds. Based on TfL's experience with Data Syndication and the London Underground Trackernet project, it is possible that bus arrival data could be demanded very frequently for all stops from an uncontrollable number of users. This may require significantly larger systems and bandwidth than previously envisaged.

3 PROGRESS UPDATE

- 3.1 The contracts were awarded on 1 September 2009.
- 3.2 All design stages were completed to schedule and development is nearing completion. As of 1 February 2011, the testing phase began for the three primary services: Web/Mobile Web, SMS (text messages) and signs.
- 3.3 Borough engagement is complete and the locations for 2,500 roadside signs have been agreed.
- 3.4 The Syndicated Data Feed design proposal is under review.

4 NEXT STEPS

- 4.1 Scalability and operational testing will complete at the end of spring 2011, whereupon final launch dates will be agreed.
- 4.2 The rollout of the 2,500 roadside signs will commence in July 2011 and run through to the summer of 2012.

5 RECOMMENDATION

- 5.1 The Panel is asked to NOTE the paper.

6 CONTACT

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