



# Voices of experience

Transport for London

Citizen Experience Excellence 2024-25



# Transport for London: Access all areas



**Running a huge, multi-faceted transport operation like Transport for London (TfL) is a complex undertaking. On the tube alone, there are up to 5 million passenger journeys every day. TfL also manages a fleet of around 9,300 buses, the DLR, London Overground, trams, riverboats, aspects of the road network, and more.**

Customer satisfaction is generally good, with TfL ranking well in KPMG's Citizen Excellence Experience survey. However, conditions have become harder since the pandemic given its impact on passenger numbers, which remain down due to the working from home trend.

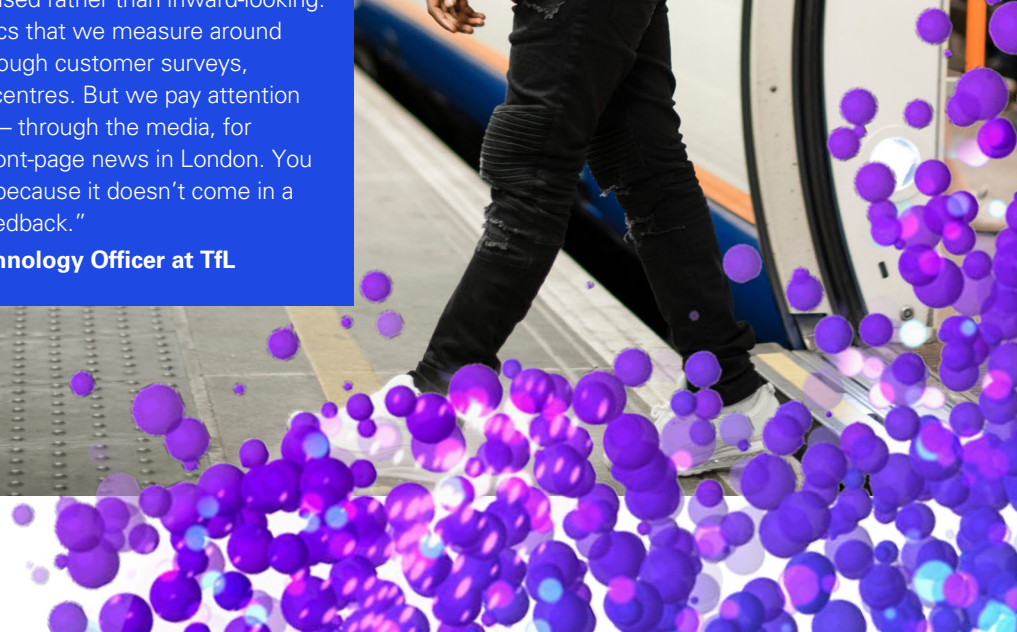
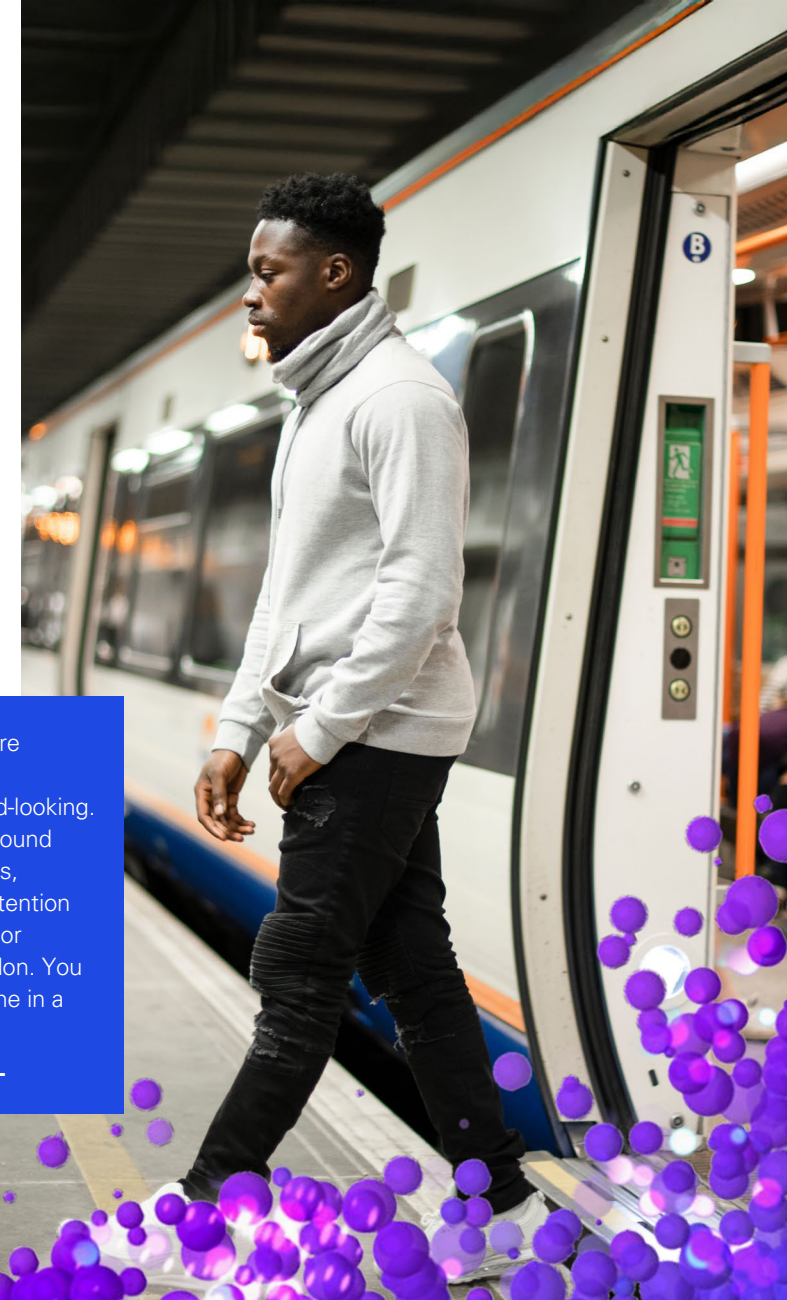
But while this has increased the focus at TfL on keeping services running within financial constraints, it has not dimmed the organisation's commitment to creating a network that puts the customer experience at its heart.

As Shashi Verma, Chief Technology Officer at TfL, reflects: "As an organisation, we have become steadily more customer-centric since our formation, becoming increasingly outwardly focused rather than inward-looking. We have a myriad of metrics that we measure around customer satisfaction –

through customer surveys, focus groups, our contact centres. But we pay attention to feedback in all its forms – through the media, for example, as we're often front-page news in London. You can't ignore feedback just because it doesn't come in a structured form – it's all feedback."

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### Accessibility at the heart

A key part of being customer-focused is accessibility. The notion of accessibility in all its forms perhaps lies at the heart of TfL's approach to the customer experience today. Accessibility is especially relevant in an industry like transport both on a practical basis for those with pushchairs or luggage, and, critically, to accommodate the needs of those with disabilities including wheelchair users and those with visual or hearing impairments or various forms of neurodiversity.

That's the foundation – the next step up, Shashi says, is considering accessibility in its wider sense through two key lenses: information and payments.

Information is a key need for any traveller and TfL has invested significantly in developing its online and app-based services that enable passengers to plan and manage their journeys. An ongoing focus here is providing more in-journey support and information, such as when there's a service disruption. This enhances the personalisation aspect of the travel experience.

But it isn't always digital – Shashi gives the example of spider maps that are now in every bus stop, showing passengers which services connect to or are available from that stop.

"You've got to think about the customer wherever they are," Shashi says. "Being customer-centric at the bus stop is very different to being customer-centric when they're at home planning a journey."

### Payment centred around the customer

Then there is accessibility to payments. One of the things TfL is perhaps most famous for is its Oyster card, which Shashi masterminded the launch of back in 2003. It's estimated that over 86 million Oyster cards have been issued, although since 2014 the service has been supplemented by a contactless system as part of TfL's Future Ticketing Programme, and this has become the most popular way of paying for TfL services.

These innovations have had a profound, positive impact on the customer experience, making it much easier for passengers to travel and pay as they go, simply touching in and out rather than having to queue up at a desk or machine to buy a ticket. Touching in and out requires an element of trust, and it is a positive sign that this has become so well-established.

These payment options play very much to the customer agenda, as Shashi observes: "We need to remember that people have to pay for their journey – it's not something optional that people choose to do, like buying a coffee. So really thinking about the steps involved for them to do that, making it less onerous – an invisible process almost – is critical. It has transformed the customer experience."



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**Shashi Verma, Chief Technology Officer at TfL**





### Reaping the service benefits

But there are powerful benefits for TfL itself too. Shashi estimates that prior to Oyster and contactless, TfL used to spend about 15% of its income actually collecting/managing/processing payments. That has now fallen to around 6.5% - a saving of hundreds of millions of pounds a year.

What's more, because so many passengers self-serve their journeys by touching in and out, this significantly frees up TfL staff to help those who need more individual service, advice or support.

"This really matters," Shashi says. "If you tie down public services in meaningless transactional activities (selling tickets), you're taking resources away from meaningful, value-adding customer support. It's a win all round: better experience for customers, increased trust, more time to help those who need it, and lower costs too."

### Evolving AI journey

Harnessing technology for greater digitisation, automation of online processes, and increased self-service by customers has become a cornerstone of TfL's approach – so what of AI? Shashi says that they are actively looking at where and how to deploy AI to help and improve the customer experience – but that other operational areas are probably the bigger prize:

"Through digitisation and automation, we have already reduced the cost of running our contact centres by around 50% since 2011. But these are small costs in the scheme of things – a fraction of a percent of our total expenditure. Asset maintenance meanwhile accounts for perhaps a quarter of our costs, so that is a fruitful area for us to apply AI to unlock improved performance and efficiencies."

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## Top tips

When asked about key messages to other public sector leaders, a point that Shashi strongly emphasises is the universal service obligation that most public services have.

“We serve everyone,” he says simply. “We don’t get to choose. That’s a fundamental principle and means we have a duty to be truly inclusive and consider every user’s needs. In doing so, we’re contributing to people’s quality of life, their access to employment and key services, and supporting social inclusion. It really is a public service mission.”

However, the service obligation can raise challenges that need managing. “You have to balance the needs of the few with those of the many. For example, installing a new lift in a station – that will be incredibly valuable to those with specific needs, but it may mean routing the majority of passengers slightly further to reach the escalators. Getting the balance right is a key question for any customer proposition – and of course it’s an area where cost is an important factor too.”

As CTO, and with technology so embedded into TfL’s service today, unsurprisingly Shashi also counsels other leaders to focus on how technology can be embedded. “Technology brings so many opportunities to improve the customer experience. Focus on what matters though. We’re custodians of public money – so every pound spent needs to contribute towards creating a better service. Channel your technology enhancement and transformation efforts into things that will help customers achieve what they want to do more easily. The result will be higher customer satisfaction, a better customer experience, and lower operating costs – meaning more money is available to invest into the assets and services that your customers want to use in the first place.”



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