

Transport information standards for the London 2012 Olympics (update)

Briefing Paper for the Public Transport Coordination Group (PTIC)

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Abstract

In February 2009 Transport Direct published its strategy on public transport technology standards to PTIC. The key elements were (a) to base the UK's standards future solidly on existing standards, especially NaPTAN and TransXChange; (b) to ensure that developments concentrate on demonstrable sector demand, expressed through PTIC; (c) to align where practical with emerging European standards.

During the subsequent 18 months there has been extensive work identifying the practical steps towards the inclusion of accessibility information in journey planners for the 2012 Olympics. This note updates PTIC on the implications of the Olympics requirements on transport information standards, particularly NaPTAN and JourneyWeb.

Actions Required

- ▶ All to note the importance, current status and potential impact of the Olympics standards development;
- ▶ PTIC to comment on the priorities and timescales envisaged;
- ▶ Transport Direct to consider stakeholder requirements in this initiative.

Background and context

Transport Direct has supported standards from its inception, via a range of actions.

- ▶ Via its own development – notably TransXChange and NaPTAN.
- ▶ As part of a wider framework within UK and internationally – notably Transmodel.
- ▶ Through third parties such as RTIG – RTIG-xml (which led to SIRI), clear2go, GPRS air interface and numerous others.
- ▶ Via contribution to European standards, to ensure a strong UK voice in products which are likely to affect us in future – notably IFOPT and more recently NeTEx.

In February 2009 Transport Direct published its standards strategy to PTIC. The key elements were:

- ▶ To base the UK's post-EBSR future solidly on existing public transport standards, especially NaPTAN and TransXChange;
- ▶ To ensure that developments concentrate on demonstrable sector demand, as expressed through sector use of these standards and feedback from the industry (typically through PTIC);
- ▶ To align where practical with emerging European standards, and thereby to achieve a degree of future-proofing in an increasingly global market.

During the subsequent 18 months, a number of specific actions were taken, capturing and then fulfilling several dozen specific refinements to TXC in particular culminating in version 2.4.

The Olympics requirement

The Olympic Delivery Authority (ODA) has stated that the London 2012 Olympics will be both “the public transport Games” and “the accessible Games”. The ODA has specified a Spectator Journey Planner (SJP) to help users plan their journeys to the Games. The user will be able to request an accessible journey using one or more accessibility parameters, and receive a journey matched to those parameters. Transport Direct has been working with the ODA to establish the most effective way to meet these requirements.

Other related developments

Since February 2009 the following other developments have occurred.

- ▶ The European Union has issued the ITS Directive, presaging the creation of European standards and specifications which the UK and other Member States will be obliged to use;
- ▶ The INSPIRE Directive on geospatial information has moved from principle to practice, with engagement by TD in the transport domain and OS on the wider UK stage;
- ▶ IFOPT is now a published CEN Technical Specification and many aspects of NeTEx are well advanced.

Impact of Olympics on standards development

Overall approach

Transport Direct is responding to the ODA requirement by:

- ▶ Building on the respected legacy value of NaPTAN and TXC, avoiding unnecessary changes;
- ▶ Taking the opportunity to create lasting value for public transport and the disabled travel community, through building new information developments to open standards where practicable;
- ▶ In any new developments, making effective use of existing drafting work undertaken within IFOPT/ NeTEx, thereby minimising development effort and de-risking the impact of changes elsewhere.

Enabling the Games

TD is working closely with those organisations involved in delivering the 2012 Olympic Games, including ODA, National Rail, other parts of DfT, TfL, other UK stakeholders, and their systems providers. Within this framework TD is taking the lead on developing the travel information architecture, which includes the protocols used to capture and exchange data.

Some of this will be deliverable using existing standards, but some – for instance, station accessibility information – will require new mechanisms. In line with this strategy, we will adapt and adopt elements of IFOPT/NeTEx where these are relevant for the base data, and will seek to extend journey planner functionality with this.

There is also a need to inform people of the accessibility of the Olympic venues. We believe that much of the technical work of IFOPT may be relevant to this too (stairs-free paths through the site, etc).

The intention is that the protocols emerging from this project work will, having been stress-tested in the live Olympics environment, be a valuable legacy for the UK public transport sector as a whole. This applies both to “mid-journey” transport elements and to “end-point” (venue, point-of-interest) accessibility. Throughout the project work we will aim towards this legacy outcome.

In order to emphasise continuity, we have codenamed the protocols we will use for Olympic journey planning as “NaPTAN 3.0a” and “JourneyWeb 2.4a”. These protocols are still very much in development and may go through significant change as business requirements, UK policy, European standards, or technology opportunities change. While our hope is to evolve these project protocols towards an eventual publication of NaPTAN v3.0 (and for this to be fully IFOPT/NeTEx compliant), we are deliberately not committing to, or setting a timeline for, this step.

This work is of course being done in a specific project context, and under the leadership of the ODA. It is not, therefore, clear quite how much will be possible and practical within the tight timeline. This uncertainty is a key reason to keep “NaPTAN 3.0a” developments on accessibility information at arms length from the standards process, at least until the shape of the output becomes clearer.

Protecting the future

Assuming that they are developed successfully, we will ensure that the Games proto-standards “NaPTAN v3.0a” and “JourneyWeb 2.4a” (and subsequent revisions) are made available publicly, to allow for review, comment and (eventually) preparatory work by the wider industry. We will not, however, publish these unless and until we are confident that have been validated in the Games context and are likely to be of wider applicability.

Further review

We will continue to monitor the sector, in partnership with PTIC, for the availability and utility of public transport information standards. If and when it becomes necessary to change our strategy, we will present our thinking to PTIC for comment.

PTIC

The Public Transport Information Coordination Group (PTIC) is a community enterprise, created and operated collaboratively by ATCO, RTIG and Traveline, with the active participation of DfT Transport Direct.

Its purpose is to provide coordination on UK activities relating to the compilation and presentation of public transport information, whether to the public or for operational purposes.

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