

# TfL Elizabeth line at Heathrow: The world's smallest global advertising campaign



Credited agencies: Wavemaker, VCCP.

## Challenge

Fourteen years after royal assent and £15.9 billion investment, in 2022, TfL opened the Elizabeth line. The line quickly became part of Londoners' travel habits, increasing the network's capacity and helping make London a more sustainable city.

One way that the line could contribute to both these goals was by transporting people from Heathrow into (and across) Central London. However, getting people at Heathrow to choose the Elizabeth line for the next leg of their journey presented a different set of challenges to those faced by TfL in encouraging adoption by London at large.

First, unlike TfL's standing as market leader across London as a whole, at Heathrow, the Elizabeth line was a new, unknown brand entering an established market. Travellers at Heathrow would likely be well-acquainted with choices such as the Piccadilly line and Heathrow Express, whilst also be tempted by 'to your door' options, like Uber and Addison Lee, that they perceived as 'simpler' after a long flight. We could not expect to simply absorb traffic naturally.

Second, whilst TfL has, over the last 24 years, developed a deep understanding of Londoners and their travel behaviours, the organisation was less familiar with the 32.1 million people from across the globe, who passed through Heathrow each year. And vice versa - those people were less familiar with the available public transport options than any Londoner would be. This meant we could not rely on existing brand equity and experience to give us an edge in the customer's decision-making process.

## Desired Outcome

Our desired outcome was simple - get people arriving at Heathrow to choose the Elizabeth line.

## Creative Solution

Conventional wisdom would have sought to raise mental availability of the Elizabeth line at Heathrow like any other product, service or brand launch. Go for mass awareness, one simple message, biggest formats you can buy, etc.

But we took a different approach.

Instead of using media to simply raise awareness of the Elizabeth line, **we created communications that was helpful to people and used media to simplify travellers' journeys.** We did this by mapping key touchpoints along a traveller's journey to and through Heathrow, and then showed up to help them on their way.



## The world's smallest global advertising campaign

### Client

Transport for London (TfL)  
- Elizabeth line

### Category

Creative Use of Media

Thirdly, the particular customer decision making process we were faced with here was one in which the customer was most likely, thousands of miles from familiarity, sleep-deprived, and surrounded by a language most likely not their native tongue. Behavioural economics will tell you that under circumstances such as these, people will seek out a path of least resistance to make their decisions as easy as possible. Past experience or recency bias will come into play, reinforcing our first challenge as a new entrant into the market.

There you have it. **The unusual position of not being the dominant, default travel choice from Heathrow into London, combined with an unfamiliar target customer and circumstances that served to hinder that customer considering new options all conspired to make establishing the Elizabeth line as a major player at Heathrow a complex challenge.**

First, we reached them in down-time on their flight, using in-flight pre-roll video to prime them about the Elizabeth line before they'd even touched down in Heathrow. But we really started to simplify things for them once they had landed...

As such, we chose to invest 75% of our media budget to reach this global audience in a space of just a few hundred square feet.

Once off the plane, we reached passengers through 42 dynamic digital screens, situated on the baggage carousels across the Arrivals Hall at Heathrow Terminal 5.

Central to this activation was data. Now, we know what you're thinking. Data-led marketing and communications - it's remarkable what marketers can do with data and how it can drive effectiveness. But when was the last time data made things simpler? Well, here, that's precisely how we used it.

We employed live train departure data, fed from the National Rail API to give real-time updates on journeys

between T5 and central London on the Elizabeth line. Passengers were only shown realistic and actionable departure information, which negated weary passengers running for the next train when the trains are more frequent than ever before.

This made passengers' decision-making process simpler – but we got smarter, and made the process simpler still...

We matched, in real-time, the language of messaging to match the flight for each specific carousel in the Arrivals Hall as passengers' baggage arrived. We used flight arrival data, with the origin airport informing the primary language, and updated specific screens to display content in that language (as well as English) for passengers arriving on specific flights. Passengers arriving from Berlin, waiting on carousel 4 would see our message in German, while those from Rome on carousel 9 saw our message in Italian.

By **reducing friction** in these ways, we **helped make the Elizabeth line the easy choice** for the final leg of travellers' journeys.

## Risks

Any break with convention presents a risk, but the risk we took that required the most bravery from the team came in the form of the dynamic messaging we deployed.

As iconic as the brand may be, Transport for London (TfL) is essentially a local brand - not national, but local. Speaking to customers in multiple languages is something that the organisation does only in exceptional circumstances, such as public health crises, rather than for major advertising campaigns. Even in a city as diverse as London, Transport for London operates in English. This meant the organisation was unfamiliar with multilingual marketing, yet alone real-time multilingual marketing. The risks inherent in the translation process; the reaction of (or impact on) native English speakers; the delivery of the right message at the right time, using data sources that the organisation had not worked with before - each of these posed a risk for the team and the organisation.

However, these **risks were both mitigated as much as possible throughout the process, but also weighed up against the potential up-side of making travellers' decision-making process at Heathrow easier.**

One specific mitigation for this campaign was a decision to limit the first burst of this activity to a single terminal at Heathrow, rather than activate across all, we deployed this activity only at Terminal 5. This helped us test the activity before any increased investment. (And at the risk of dropping a spoiler, helped make the case for a broader roll-out of the activity!)

## Results

Whilst the guiding thought of this campaign was to make travellers' journeys simpler, the execution behind the scenes was anything but. Across the campaign period we served up over 4 million different messages, in five different languages. But this effort paid dividends.

Tracking the value of a campaign activated in a context as dynamic as an airport, where footfall can be affected by anything from seasonality through to exchange rates, is not simple. However, to help us understand the impact of using dynamic Out of Home media to simplify travellers' decision-making process, we have compared data from Terminal 5 (where we activated) against Terminal 4 (where we did not activate). Specifically, we examined the share of traffic that we saw heading for the Elizabeth line that came from visitors to the UK, rather than UK residents (who would most likely have been exposed to other Elizabeth line communications).

Over the summer months, **when our real-time, multilingual campaign was live, we saw an uplift in the share of people heading for the Elizabeth line** who were non-UK travellers.

The 'visitor share' that headed for the Elizabeth line from Terminal 5 was **18% higher** than it was at Terminal 4.

Advertising in another language isn't easy but TfL did it, in not just one but five extra languages! We proved we could do it at Terminal 5 and have since rolled it out across Terminals 2, 3 and 4. Merci, Danke, Grazie, Gracias, Namaste.

## Advocating for the importance of the marketing industry

In this campaign we have a prime example of how marketing – specifically through media – improved the experience of people going about their lives. In doing so, the campaign turned them into a new customer segment for TfL – a revenue stream that was previously untapped was unlocked. Using the customer-centric thinking that is championed by the marketing industry, a novel approach to media was designed that helped move metrics that are meaningful to the broader organisation.