

By email: rivercrossings@tfl.gov.uk

Date: 18/09/2014

Dear Sir/Madam,

RE: River Crossings consultation

I am writing in response to the consultation on new river crossings in East London. The London Assembly Liberal Democrats are naturally supportive of regeneration in East London, and we are excited by the huge potential in the region. However, we have significant concerns about the proposals raised in this consultation, and are not convinced that increasing road capacity is a sustainable way of realising the potential of the area.

We welcome the increased investment in public transport in London in recent years, from the Jubilee Line extension to the DLR and Crossrail. However, we reject the complacent, implicit assumption in the consultation that the level of investment in public transport in East London, and particularly South East London, is sufficient. We believe that much of South East London is poorly served by public transport, and especially in those areas that would be most affected by the increased congestion new bridges would bring. We firmly believe that the funds for proposed new bridges would be much better spent on meeting this need.

Crucially, it is clear from Census data that private car ownership in London is decreasing, and we expect it to continue to do so. In light of this, we question the rationale for committing public funds to increasing road capacity. We are also concerned that there is strong evidence that increasing road capacity simply attracts more traffic rather than reducing congestion.

In his public statements and lack of action on the issue, the Mayor has shown himself to be worryingly complacent about London's poor air quality. We do not believe that enough work has been done to assess the impact of increased traffic on air pollution, and we do not believe the Mayor takes this threat seriously enough. It beggars belief that the consultation document claims that work done by TfL to date shows that new bridges at either Gallion's Reach or Belvedere would not lead to a noticeable change in emissions. We believe there is a genuine risk that the much-touted economic benefits of new bridges may well be offset by the negative effects of increased air pollution, as investors and employers become increasingly concerned about this threat to the health of Londoners.

We are also unconvinced by the estimates for increases in traffic flow on roads either side of both proposed bridges; we believe it is highly likely that roads in Thamesmead and Beckton, and Belvedere and Rainham would experience significant increases in traffic if the Gallion's Reach or Belvedere bridges were built. We are concerned that some of the roads in these areas simply would not be able to cope with these significant increases in traffic.

Given that another Lower Thames Crossing at or just east of Dartford is planned by the Department for Transport, we believe the case for yet another bridge at either of the proposed locations is weakened.

As car ownership decreases, and TfL seeks to encourage more people to walk and cycle, we believe that other river crossing options not presented in the consultation present a more sustainable way forward for London. We have long argued that both the Greenwich and Woolwich foot tunnels should be brought under TfL control. They should be properly maintained, with reliable lifts, and made a safe, appealing option for crossing the river. Making the tunnels strategic TfL crossings would help achieve this.

We are supportive of imaginative solutions – regrettably not included in this consultation – for improving links for pedestrians and cyclists. The long-standing proposal by Sustrans for a pedestrian/cyclist bridge between Rotherhithe and Canary Wharf would be an ideal addition to cross-river links, providing easy access for commuter cyclists.

We are pleased that TfL is also consulting on proposals to extend the Overground to a new station at Barking Riverside, and that Sir Peter Hendy has indicated that the work will be planned in such a way that it remains possible to continue the extension to cross the river. We would strongly support such a crossing, and believe that it further undermines the case for road based crossings in the area.

We also believe the cable car should be properly integrated into London’s transport network; it should be available for use by travelcard holders, and a single fare on Oyster should be set at the level of a single bus fare. This expensive facility cannot be justified as a poorly-used tourist attraction; we must enable Londoners to make good use of it.

We welcome the new partnership between Thames Clippers and MBNA, and the potential expansion of the service that this could bring. However, we would support a significant expansion of this service, including new piers such as at Convoy’s Wharf. This could open up new opportunities for travel up and down the river, but crucially new ways for people to get across.

We strongly support the renewal of the Woolwich ferry. This is a well-used facility but would benefit from the increased reliability, reduced journey times and improved environmental impact that new vessels would bring. However, we strongly believe that the service should remain free to use. We also believe that a renewed service should also offer increased opening times; access should be available from earlier in the morning until later at night, every day of the week.

We believe that with a renewed and expanded Woolwich ferry service, a fresh look at other public transport links in South East London, the planned Lower Thames Crossing near Dartford, a potential Overground crossing from Barking Riverside, and given the long term trend for reduced private car ownership, the area is sufficiently well served by road-based river crossings. We believe that increasing road capacity by building either of the proposed bridges would lead to unacceptable increases in congestion and air pollution detrimental to Londoners’ health.

We would stress, however, that if TfL does decide to proceed with either of the options for a new bridge, firm and radical action must be taken on air pollution alongside this decision. London’s future motorists must be driving low emission or electric vehicles if we are to properly tackle this problem; penalties and incentives must be attached to large projects such as these to encourage people to make the switch. Given that either bridge is unlikely to be built within 10 years, there is sufficient time to introduce transformative measures on air pollution in parallel with the increase in road capacity.

With best wishes,



Caroline Pidgeon MBE AM

Leader of the London Assembly Liberal Democrat Group

Chair, London Assembly Transport Committee

Deputy-Chair, London Assembly Police and Crime Committee