

William McKee, CBE
Chair, Outer London Commission
City Hall
The Queen's Walk
SE1 2AA

City Hall
The Queen's Walk
London SE1 2AA
Switchboard: 020 7983 4000
Minicom: 020 7983 4458
Web: www.london.gov.uk

Our ref: MT/KR
Your ref:
Date: 5 May 2009

Dear Sir William,

Response to Initial Questions for the Outer London Commission

The Liberal Democrat Group on the London Assembly welcome the opportunity to respond to the Initial Questions posed by the Outer London Commission. We also welcome the Mayor establishing the Commission, as we have long called for the London Plan to recognise the current importance and future potential of outer London.

Our response follows the themes set out by the Commission: economic; quality of life and transport. Whilst these comments are general, we would emphasise that there should not be a "one size fits all" approach to outer London. Attention should focus on areas of deprivation and the recommended policy changes should not be at the detriment of central and inner London. We welcome the fact that the Terms of Reference of the Commission include having regard to the "Means of funding [the] infrastructure and investment" required to support economic growth in outer London; as we remain concerned that the Mayor must ensure better co-ordination of potential development and regeneration funding available through the myriad of agencies he oversees or is involved with (LDA, TfL, HCA, LSC etc) if the Commission's findings are to be implemented.

A. Economic questions

The question of how best to promote growth in outer London's economy are timely, given the realisation that London's economy needs to diversify away from a reliance on the financial sector based in Central Activities Zone (CAZ) as the driver of growth. This shift away from a reliance on the CAZ refocuses attention on the network of London's other town centres. The Liberal Democrat Group has consistently raised the fact that the London Plan should contain more policies to strengthen outer London's economy. In our response to the Draft Further Alterations to the London Plan in December 2006 we recommended that the Plan was remodelled to promote **multiple hubs** of economic activity across the London sub-regions, with clusters of industry and office space actively promoted in outer London, and supported by orbital transport links. A polycentric vision for London's development, incorporating an orbital approach to transport, which provided investment and regeneration in town centres outside the CAZ would maintain and improve access to local services and employment would have greater benefits for London, socially, environmentally and economically. A decentralised model would move away from the currently unsustainable reliance on higher levels of commuting and intensified building development in central London.

Therefore the Group welcomes the proposal in the Mayor's *A new plan for London* that "London's town centres will be the key spatial priority in the new Plan" (p.35). However, we are concerned about the proposals for 'super-hubs' - termed "Strategic outer London development centres" in *A new plan*

for London. Certainly greater employment opportunities in outer London should be encouraged, but the focus on a very few development centres could have an adverse impact on district centres. **Local high streets** and smaller shopping areas face further decline (especially following the closure of stores such as Woolworth's) unless action is taken to regenerate them and ensure that London accesses its share of government funding available for measures to tackle recession on the high street. In planning terms, channelling development into hubs may mean that boroughs who do not have such a hub could have difficulty safeguarding employment land against use for housing. In that sense the idea of the super-hub is at odds with the sustainability agenda of minimising commuting and promoting people's ability to live and work in their local area.

In terms of the broader questions on employment sectors and skills (Q.3-4), the Group is keen to see a diversification of London's economy. In the short term support is required for the **small businesses** which provide many of the jobs in outer London. There has been much discussion of the possibility of London's economic recovery involving **'low carbon' jobs**. This is a term which would benefit from greater definition, but a huge array of jobs connected to lowering London's carbon footprint and increasing the city's sustainability (from improving London's recycling and waste management, local energy generation, and the retrofitting of housing stock with energy saving measures) can be classified as an emerging growth sector with potential to be located in outer London. Another key employer in outer London are **further and higher education institutions**. It is noticeable that apart from Kingston University, outer South London lacks a higher education institution which could potentially act as a hub around which to cluster a science park. In terms of education and skills the Mayor has also announced many **apprenticeships**. It is vital that these are not just double counting of existing programmes, and present meaningful training opportunities. These apprenticeships should be spread throughout London, benefiting particularly people who were previously unemployed and those from deprived communities. Large infrastructure projects such as Crossrail have huge potential to employ many people from several outer London boroughs. The Group would like to see Crossrail follow the ODA's example in setting targets for employing people from local boroughs, London, the previously unemployed and to provide training and apprenticeships. However, a more robust system needs to be developed to ensure that the definition of local people truly reflects people who have lived in the area for a long time.

Finally, the Group would welcome the Commission investigating what more can be done to promote home working, or **remote working** in locations close to people's homes. The London Assembly's Planning and Housing Committee heard fascinating evidence from Cisco (Internet Business Solutions Group) about their Connected Urban Development programme. They are working in Amsterdam to develop Smart Work Centres in a ring around the city, each linked to each other and to the city centre. These Smart Work Centres bring together key services (IT, banking, crèche, food) which lots of companies share, and include high definition, life size video conferencing facilities. London needs to invest in such IT infrastructure for the future.

B. Quality of Life questions

Whilst a changing urban environment is inevitable, and development is often positive, we should seek to ensure that change is planned and that outer London remains an attractive place to live. Outer London boroughs house 60 per cent of London's population. The Group is concerned that new **housing** developments must offer a high proportion of family sized units, with sufficient outdoor space. High density developments in outer London may be appropriate at transport nodes but they should not replicate the spate of small studio, one and two bed apartments which have dominated recent building.

There needs to be improvement and investment in the quality of the **public realm**. Well designed open spaces, where pedestrians and cyclists are prioritised, can make local centres appealing destinations. Integral to quality of life is keeping essential public services local (health, police, post offices etc). The Group is concerned that whilst *A new plan for London* aspires to see London as a city that “delights the eye” there are no specific public realm proposals. The Mayor should instigate a well funded programme of local improvements and new public spaces. But so far all we have seen is the cancellation of projects such as High Street 2012 - which goes against the Mayor’s stated wish in *A new plan for London* to “ensure the quality of the public realm...is such that our city is seen by the world to its best advantage” in 2012 and to leave a “solid legacy...[of] lasting new urban spaces”(p.23). All that has been offered in funding has been a paltry £200,000 for a “Great Spaces” initiative.

The outer London **leisure** and **cultural sector** also should not be overlooked. There is the need for improved and more innovative marketing of outer London’s tourist attractions to visitors, to spread the benefits of tourist income to outer London. For residents, London 2012 provides the initiative to improve access to and participation in local sporting and cultural facilities. Unfortunately, due to the closure of many public swimming pools, in eleven London boroughs half the population live more than 20 minutes’ walk from a public pool. The Group would like to see the Mayor do more to open up ‘private’ facilities such as school pools out of hours and during school holidays, and to encourage public leisure provision in large scale developments.

C. Transport questions

In *A new plan for London* the Mayor proposes to “match development to transport capacity” (p.62), but we are still awaiting the “detailed schedule of transport schemes” which would enable us to see where it is proposed to “improve transport capacity”(p.63). As such, the Group makes the following general suggestions for transport priorities in outer London. Overall, residents of outer London need to be provided with choices regarding how they travel and be given the option of undertaking **orbital journeys**. We think that Transport for London significantly underestimate the suppressed demand for orbital travel, as has been evidenced by the popularity (and now overcrowding!) of the improved London Overground service.

We suggest that TfL trial a number of **express**, or limited stop, **bus** or coach links between outer London towns, providing rapid and reliable journeys at a comparable level of comfort to the private car. Ideally these buses would utilise hybrid technology, or run on biofuels that emit significantly less pollution than diesel vehicles. The Mayor should also investigate **Park and Ride** schemes as a way of reducing the number of car journeys made into London from beyond the GLA boundary. Park and Ride facilities could be located at points where rail lines intersect with the M25 and might significantly reduce traffic levels on arterial routes in outer London.

When discussing possible transport improvements for outer London, we recognise that projects which require massive investment and infrastructure may not always be viable. It is therefore important to consider the key underutilised transport network which already exists, which is **overground rail**, and what can be done to improve it. The Mayor needs to have more power over commuter rail lines in London, an oversight of the franchise conditions for the train operating companies and an active relationship with Network Rail. Passengers need more frequent and reliable services, especially at weekends, with staff on stations and in ticket offices. We look forward to passengers being able to use Oyster pay as you go on overground rail, but are concerned that such journeys will often cost more than their equivalent by tube. Consideration also needs to be given to improving capacity on lines

