

# Boris Johnson's Roads to Nowhere

Why the Mayor of London's transport priorities are wrong and what he should focus on instead

A report by **Darren Johnson**, Green Party Member of the London Assembly **Nov 2014**

(This report sets out my views as an individual Assembly Member and not the agreed view of the entire Assembly)

## Foreword

The Mayor of London recently published a report setting out a package of transport investments for the capital up to 2050.

Turn the pages of his report and certain words keep re-appearing: road-tunnelling, widening, bridging and 'decking over' crop up again and again. No corner of London is left out of his tarmac-heavy vision for the capital's future.

This car-centric future is totally at odds with what Londoners want. I have received thousands of emails from cyclists who want safe, segregated cycle routes so that they can bike to work. My inbox is full of messages from pedestrians who want more time to cross the street and 20mph speed limits to calm their neighbourhoods. Londoners tell me they want frequent buses and reliable trains with fares set at an affordable level.



People living in this city do not want damaging new roads ruining their communities, poisoning their air even further and swallowing up money that could be invested in new walking, cycling and public transport infrastructure.

Not so long ago, I helped the campaign to stop the Thames Gateway Bridge, a hugely unpopular six-lane road bridge first proposed under the previous Mayor of London. Together we kicked a rotten, flawed and dangerous trunk road scheme into touch. These projects have a habit of reappearing, as we see in the Mayor's infrastructure plan, but we can get these backwards-looking schemes scrapped.

This report reveals that the local road-building project in your neighbourhood is part of a London-wide pattern. I want Londoners to get talking about the alternative schemes a forward-thinking Mayor would pursue to allow the capital to prosper, not drown in a sea of traffic.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Darren Johnson".

**Darren Johnson AM**, Green Party Member of the London Assembly

## Introduction

London has enjoyed a great record of success in reducing traffic over the past fifteen years. Even as the economy and population grew, Londoners have abandoned their cars and taken the bus or tube, cycled or walked instead<sup>1</sup>.

The Mayor of London could seize the opportunity to build on this achievement by expanding the public transport network and making London's streets safe and inviting for cyclists and pedestrians.

Instead he is planning for big increases in traffic in an infrastructure plan containing numerous high-cost road-building schemes, including an underground motorway with a £25billion price tag<sup>2</sup>.

Communities in London have been fighting against plans for new roads for decades. The Greater London Plan<sup>3</sup> (1944) envisaged a series of ring roads encircling the capital with ten additional six-lane motorways funneling cars in from other cities. Too disruptive and too expensive, the project was shelved.

When it re-surfaced again in the 1960s, high land values, research highlighting the thousands of extra vehicles that the road would attract and public opposition to inner-city motorways saw the scheme jettisoned.

Public transport projects, on the other hand, are proven to improve places. Fast, user-friendly rail travel on the London Overground has regenerated east London<sup>4</sup>. Pedestrianisation brings more, not fewer, shoppers to London's high streets<sup>5</sup>. Likewise, businesses and their employees want safe cycle routes across the city and are loudly calling on the Mayor to deliver them<sup>6</sup>.

In contrast, new roads will devour the transport budget and spread congestion and pollution.

The Mayor should think again. This report outlines the flaws in his dangerous plan.



Queues of traffic on the Blackwall Tunnel approach road (Photo courtesy of No Silvertown Tunnel campaign)

## The Mayor's Transport Priorities

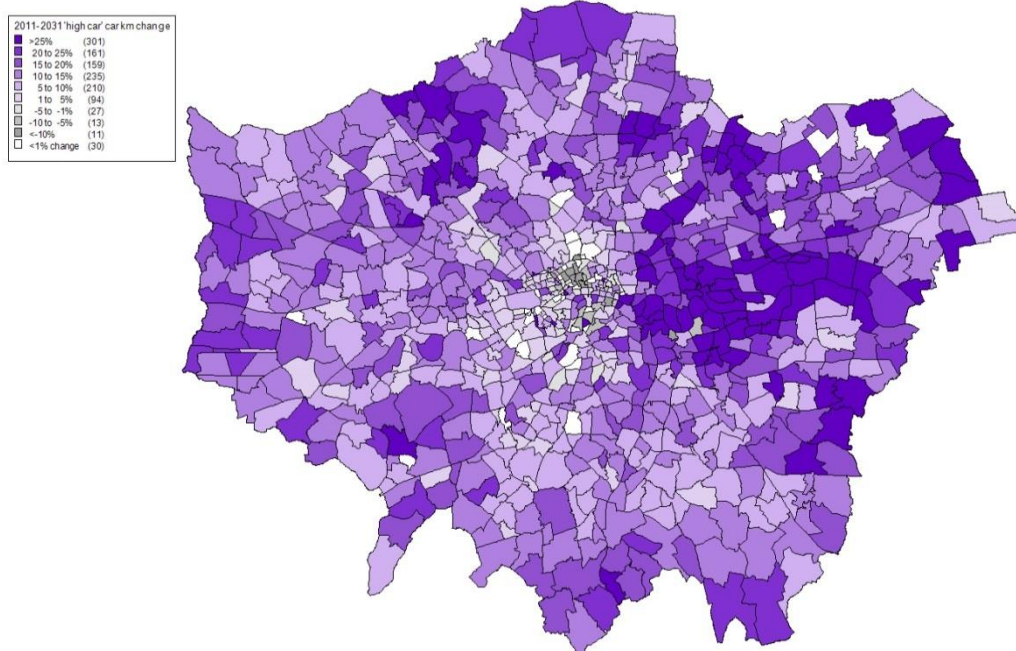
London faces serious challenges for its transport network:

Air pollution levels exceed legal limits on more than half the main road network<sup>7</sup>, and the Mayor predicts this serious health problem could remain until 2030. Ground transport accounts for one fifth of our carbon dioxide emissions, which we need to reduce to zero by 2030 (or 60 per cent by 2025 by the Mayor's targets).

These levels of pollution need to be cut while London's population is growing at the rate of 100,000 people per year.

But these aren't top of the Mayor's list. His overriding priority is to facilitate the relentless growth of London's economy. He is predicting an upsurge in car driver trips, despite acknowledging that this will cause many problems in terms of congestion, the environment, amenity and space<sup>8</sup>.

This map, sent to me by TfL, shows where he expects the highest growth in traffic (in dark purple) by 2031:



Instead of encouraging Londoners onto buses, trains and bikes to ease the gridlock, he is trying to bust congestion by building new roads. But this strategy has been proven to fail, because it just 'induces' more traffic as people see extra road space<sup>9</sup>.

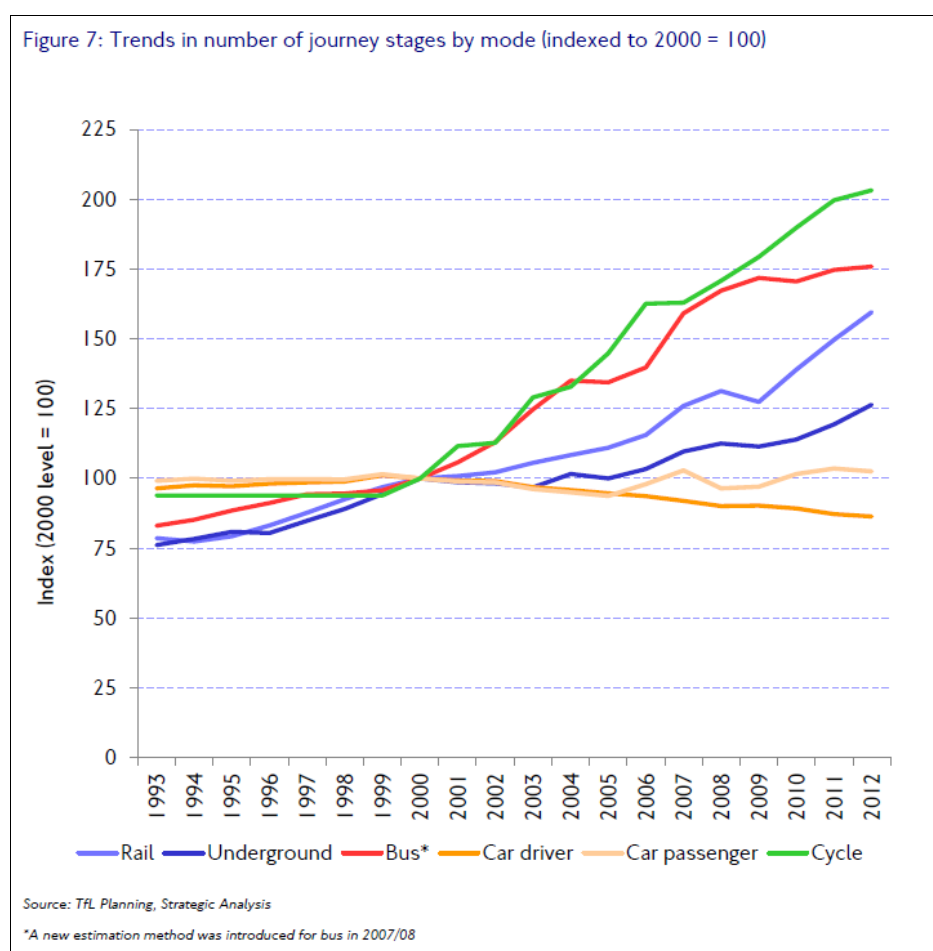
He is encouraging more car usage in other ways. By eroding the car parking standards and control regulations<sup>10</sup> that did so much to deter driving in the period 1995 – 2011, he is making private motorised travel more convenient. TfL are now warning that if we fail to cut current levels of car ownership, by 2050 we'll have an extra million cars in the capital and an area the size of Richmond Park will have been lost to car parking<sup>11</sup>.

The Mayor has also failed to prioritise his budget in a way that would accommodate growth most effectively within the transport system. Travel demand is a complex phenomenon and many different factors affect peoples' travel choices<sup>12</sup> but many of these factors are under the control of the Mayor of London and the policies he is pursuing – repeated above-inflation fare

risers, cancelling the Western Extension of the Congestion Charge zone, and his failure to continue the rapid expansion of the bus service – are resulting in rising congestion<sup>13</sup> and more unpredictable journey times on the Transport for London Road Network (TLRN), London’s strategic road network.

It didn’t have to be this way.

When he came into office, the Mayor had an excellent platform to build on. Between 2000 and 2011, Londoners’ travel patterns changed significantly. Even as the economy and population boomed, car use plummeted 15 per cent back down to 1971 levels. Public transport modes grew in popularity: tube trips went up 20 per cent, bus trips increased 70 per cent and national rail trips increased 50 per cent. Cycling growth far outstripped every other mode:

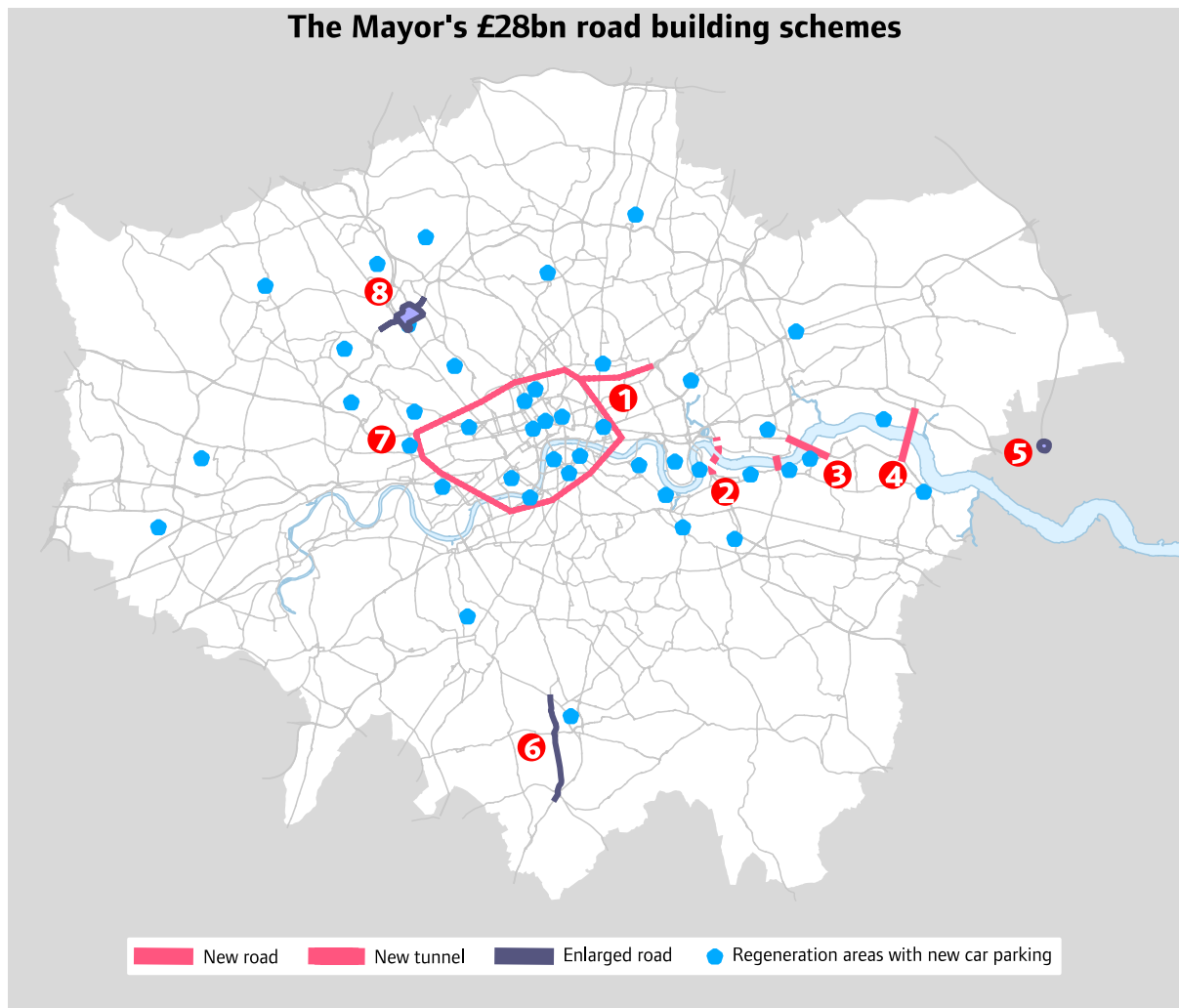


This enviable record of success led Transport for London to proudly state in 2011 “London is distinguished among major UK metropolitan centres, and is demonstrating a more sustainable accommodation of travel demand arising from economic and social development.”

During this time, road space was reallocated towards buses, bikes and pedestrians, with the result that space for cars declined since the mid-1990s by 30 per cent in central London, 15 per cent in inner London and 5 per cent in outer London<sup>14</sup>.

## What the Mayor is planning for London's transport network

He may think of himself as the cycling Mayor, but he is planning a huge level of spending on new road and car parking schemes around London. Here is just a selection.



- 1. Inner Orbital Tunnel and series of 'mini tunnels'**<sup>15</sup> – A 22-mile subterranean motorway for vehicles only, accessed via entry points in ten neighbourhoods around London<sup>16</sup>. Mini tunnels planned for A2 Old Kent Road, A40 Acton and A503 Woodberry Down. Cost: £15bn-£25bn.
- 2. Silvertown Tunnel** – A four lane tunnel linking Greenwich with the Royal Docks in Newham with no provision for cyclists or pedestrians. New junctions, a new flyover, a new roundabout and a widened A102 would also be needed<sup>17</sup>. I have opposed this scheme from the outset<sup>18</sup>. Cost: at least £753m plus cost of link roads.
- 3. Gallions Reach Bridge** – A 1,500m, four lane bridge linking Thamesmead and Beckton requiring new roads to connect it to the existing network at Royal Docks Road and the A2016 at Western Way. TfL state the bridge would cater for cyclists, but no details have been published of any cycle safety trials it has conducted on similar bridges<sup>19</sup>. Cost: up to £600m plus cost of link roads.

4. **Belvedere Bridge** – A four lane bridge linking Belvedere and Rainham requiring new access roads to connect it to the A13 at Marsh Way junction and to the A2016 at Picardy Manorway junction. Cost: up to £900m plus cost of link roads.
5. **M25 junction 30 scheme** – Includes A13 corridor widening and adding extra traffic lanes at the junction itself<sup>20</sup>, billed as a 'congestion relief scheme'. Cost: £150m.
6. **In Croydon widening the A23/A232 corridor and the Fiveways junction** – Measures to increase the capacity of the local road network for new traffic from Westfield shopping centre. Cost: £85m<sup>21</sup> plus £2.4m provided as a condition of a new Tesco at Lombard roundabout<sup>22</sup>.
7. **Earls Court Opportunity Area** – This is one of a number of major regeneration projects which will see an increase in car parking spaces – 5,124 in this case<sup>23</sup> – despite Earls Court already suffering illegal levels of pollution.
8. **Brent Cross Cricklewood development** – A car-oriented scheme<sup>24</sup> requiring a series of changes to local roads and the north circular to increase their capacity for vehicles including bigger junctions, extra traffic lanes and wider carriageways<sup>25</sup>. Cost: at least £200m.

**GRAND TOTAL:**

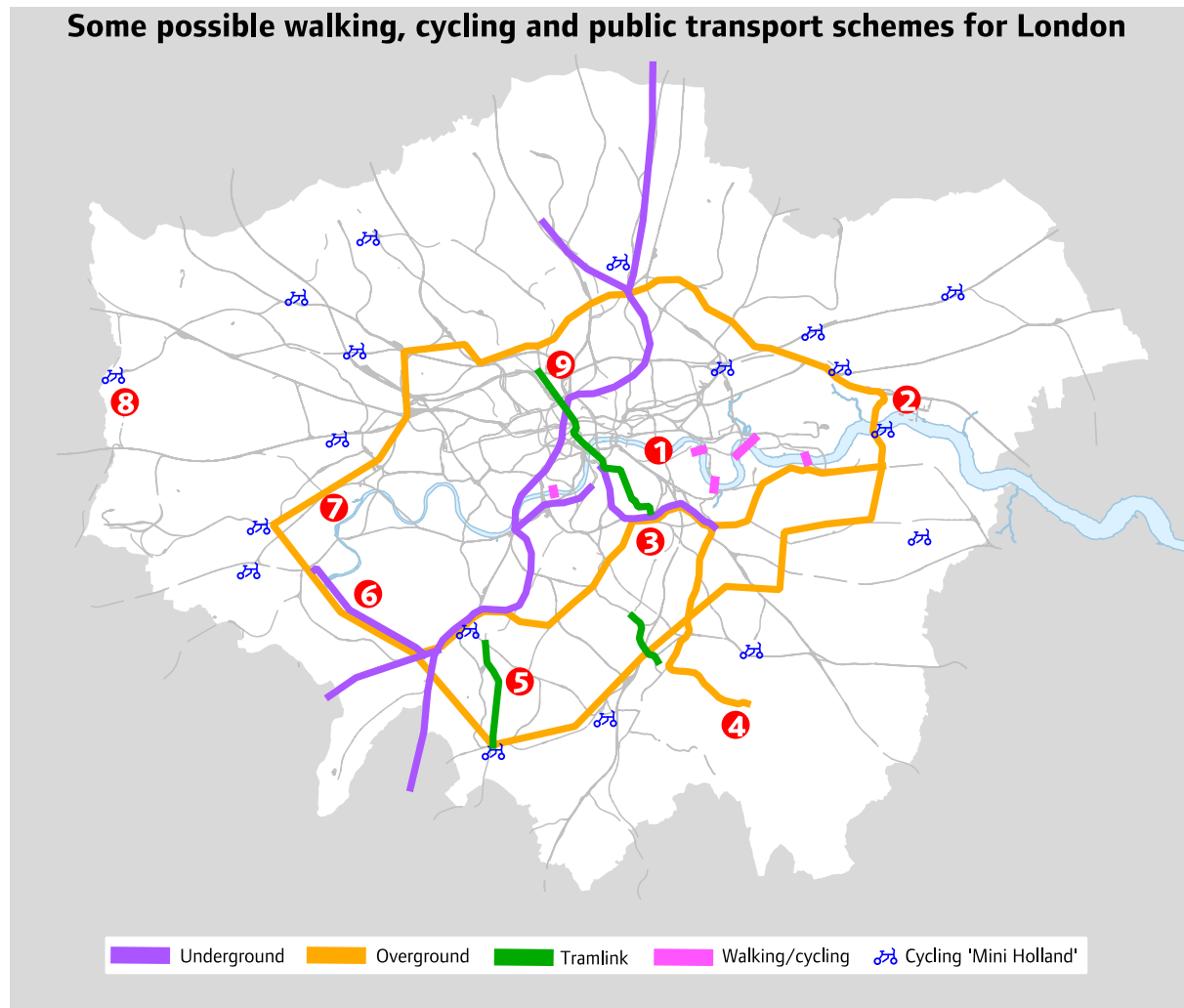
**£27,680,000,000**

In addition to these schemes, the Mayor has also spent considerable sums and tied up scarce resources carrying out research into various road projects:

- **£2.5m** conducting 'optioneering' and feasibility studies for the Silvertown Tunnel<sup>26</sup>
- Over **£43.4m** was spent by TfL under successive Mayors between April 2000 and April 2014 on making the case for more river crossings<sup>27</sup>
- **£70,000** conducting a feasibility study into his underground ring road<sup>28</sup>
- Significant cost of running several cycles of river crossings consultations, preparing a Development Consent Order application to submit to the planning inspectorate and the wage bill for TfL staff engaged on these activities

## An alternative future for our transport network

Instead of pursuing expensive road projects that will attract new traffic and worsen pollution, the Mayor could expand the public transport network and prioritise walking and cycling schemes. Here is a selection I have put together from past and present TfL plans:



- 1. River crossings that encourage cycling and walking** – Londoners support a new Woolwich Ferry<sup>29</sup> (£100m-£200m) and this could be in place as soon as 2020. Those on two feet or two wheels could benefit from traffic-free bridges linking Battersea and Fulham<sup>30</sup> (£40m) and Canary Wharf and Rotherhithe<sup>31</sup> (£40m). Cutting the fare on a cable car trip to the same rate as a London bus fare and bringing it into the Oyster and cashless caps and payment systems would make it more useful<sup>32</sup> (£3.85m annual subsidy). A low-cost technology trial in the Woolwich and Greenwich foot tunnels could ensure conflict between users of different modes is minimised<sup>33</sup> (£100k). Cost: £284m
- 2. London Overground extension from Barking to Abbey Wood** – A speedy cross-river rail link would give Thamesmead the station it has lacked for years and benefit the wider area by providing direct links between major interchanges both north and south of the river<sup>34</sup>. Cost: £100m
- 3. Bakerloo line extension to Lewisham, via Camberwell and Peckham Rye**<sup>35</sup> – By cancelling wasteful road projects, the Mayor could fast-track this scheme and open it in 2020 instead of 2030 as planned. This new link could relieve pressure on crowded bus

and rail services and slash journey times between south east London and the city centre.  
Cost: £1bn

- 4. London Overground expansion** – TfL could persuade Government to give them control over all of the Greater London commuter lines currently operated under private franchises. Passengers who are currently faced with understaffed stations, infrequent services and poor connections from the private rail operators could benefit from the same fast and frequent metro-style service that operates on the current London Overground lines. Cost: £1bn
- 5. Tramlink from Wimbledon to Sutton**<sup>36</sup> – Despite overwhelming public support, a strong business case and a 2008 manifesto pledge, the Mayor has dithered on whether to back this scheme and the plans for a Birkbeck to Crystal Palace extension. Fast, clean transport links could regenerate the area, create jobs and reduce traffic. Cost: £240m
- 6. A comprehensive Crossrail 2** – Both Dalston and Hackney should be served by the scheme rather than one or the other as proposed by TfL. Plans to remove Chelsea from the project altogether should be scrapped, given car reliance in the area<sup>37</sup>. Cost: £20bn
- 7. A new orbital railway** – London Overground extensions joined up with new stretches of rail would link up boroughs in the inner suburbs, boost areas such as Hounslow's golden mile and isolated Thamesmead and relieve pressure on the many overcrowded radial routes into London. Cost: £1bn
- 8. Cycling "Mini Hollands" rolled out in every outer London borough** – Earlier this year Enfield, Waltham Forest and Kingston each received £30m from TfL to make their town centres cycle friendly but fifteen boroughs lost out. Just 1.5 per cent of Uxbridge North residents cycle to work compared to 19% in Stoke Newington<sup>38</sup>. Funding all of the rejected schemes would encourage Londoners living in the outer suburbs to jump on their bikes for daily travel and also reduce traffic, tackle obesity and improve air quality. Cost: £450m
- 9. Cross-river tram from Peckham to Camden**<sup>39</sup> – Plans for this scheme reached an advanced stage before Mayor Boris Johnson cancelled the project in 2008. There is still a solid business case and public demand for this project that could relieve overcrowding on the Northern Line and promote regeneration in areas currently poorly served by public transport. Cost: £1.2bn - £1.4bn

#### GRAND TOTAL

**£25,474,000,000**

## Conclusion

The Mayor has set out his stall, and it looks a lot like the car-centric dreams of transport planners in the 1950s.

He isn't learning from past mistakes – for example, learning that new roads simply create more traffic and do little to reduce congestion.

He isn't learning from the past decade of success, when investment in alternatives to the car, the introduction of the congestion charge and a reallocation of road space from cars to buses, bikes and the public realm actually saw traffic and congestion fall.

He isn't learning that money and time wasted on the wrong priorities starves money and impetus from the sustainable transport projects he should be implementing.

The Mayor's new Infrastructure Plan has revived many of the alliances that saw off the last Thames Gateway bridge. I have been visiting local residents, schools and public meetings to back them in opposing these new roads, and will continue to do so. In the picture opposite I went to Gallions Reach, where the Mayor proposed to build a major new road bridge, but where the DLR shows a much better way forward for London.



I hope this report will show you that your fight isn't an isolated case, but part of a flawed strategy for London's transport system.

I hope I have also convinced you that there is an alternative, one that can reduce pollution so harmful to our health and climate, and that can be more affordable for Londoners.

### Let me know what you think

If you have any thoughts on this report or on solving London's transport problems, get in touch.

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