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Sent by email

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Andy Byford
Commissioner of Transport

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Dear Caroline,

I am writing in response to the Assembly Transport Committee's report, published on 5 November, regarding London's river crossings.

I am grateful to the Committee for providing a copy of the report and for offering me an opportunity to respond to the findings.

I have provided a response to each of the Committee's five main findings and as ever, my office would be happy to assist you should you require any further information.

Speed and volume of road traffic should form a part of the reporting on the maintenance needs and costs for existing crossings. Options should be laid out for how maintenance can be made more affordable by means of controlling speed or volume of traffic, particularly for heavy vehicles

As I know Gareth and David set out in their evidence to the Committee, based on Transport for London (TfL)'s experience and that of other relevant organisations, such as the London Bridges Engineering Group (LoBEG), speed and weight are less significant factors to river crossing deterioration/degradation than considerations such as environmental exposure over time (e.g. to changing weather conditions and the tidal river environment). Speed and weight restrictions are usually put in place when a river crossing is already in need of critical maintenance.

We face several challenges in respect of maintaining London's river crossings. The most pressing of these, which I know the Committee is very aware of, relates to securing a long-term sustainable funding agreement with Government

Without this investment, costs will escalate due to increased maintenance, as well as an inability to achieve efficiencies from long-term planned works.

Many of London's river crossings are over 100 years old, so due to construction form and materials they have high maintenance and renewal costs. The age and design can pose many engineering challenges that are expensive to maintain.

There are also high costs associated with maintenance/renewals when working over a navigable waterway and complying with environmental requirements, as well as high cost associated with working in confined spaces in tunnels.

Adding additional speed and weight restrictions pre-emptively to London's road network is unlikely to assist with these challenges, but would lead to longer journeys and additional pressure and congestion at other parts of the network, having a disproportionate impact on local communities.

TfL, the Government and all impacted boroughs should consider formalising the Thames River Crossing Coordination Group overseeing the maintenance of river crossings in London. This formalised group would publish relevant documents and papers relating to its work, which would provide greater transparency and accountability on the management and maintenance of river crossings in London

We agree that this would be a positive approach, but feel it would need to be done in collaboration with the groups that already exist, such as LoBEG and the Thames River Crossing Coordination Group.

These groups have different primary functions, so it may be that they need to work under the umbrella of a main coordination group, but it is crucial that their knowledge, expertise and function is retained.

TfL, the Government and all impacted boroughs that wish to opt-in should consider having a collective fund for maintenance of the relevant river crossings in London, into which all the relevant asset owners would contribute. This would allow for a more planned and transparent maintenance and investment plan for London's river crossings

Whilst we agree with this recommendation in principle, we feel it would be very challenging to administer in the current financial climate. We would anticipate that London's boroughs, who are facing significant financial challenges themselves, would be unlikely to choose to opt in unless they are facing significant asset maintenance and renewal costs already, in the hope these would be shared with other authorities.

There would also be significant challenges in the formation of an organisation or entity to administer the fund and we anticipate challenges relating to the conditions that would need to be met in order to draw-down funding.

The Government should devolve London's portion of VED, currently worth around £500 million, to TfL and make national roads funding schemes available to London boroughs, on the same basis as other English Local Authorities. This would allow a portion of the funding to be spent on the future maintenance of London's river crossings, as well as dealing with London's £241 million bridge maintenance backlog

We strongly agree with this recommendation from the Committee, however the Government have confirmed to us that this is not something they would support.

TfL and other asset owners in London should publish an annual report on the condition of river crossings in London, showing the need for maintenance, scheduled maintenance over the coming years and any capital projects that are planned.

London Councils and the London Technical Advisors Group (LoTAG) already produce an annual maintenance report on London's highway assets, known as the 'State of London Report'.

We feel that the best approach to creating a similar style report for London's river crossings would be to include it formally as part of the 'State of London Report' process. I would be happy to arrange for the Committee's suggestion to be discussed with this group at the next available meeting.

I hope this further information is helpful.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Andy Byford', with a stylized, cursive script.

Andy Byford