

MAYOR OF LONDON

Alex Wilson AM

C/o Nikoleta.Kemp@london.gov.uk

Our ref: MGLA061224-6165

Date: 5 March 2025

Dear Alex,

Thank you for sharing the petition about user charges on the Blackwall and Silvertown tunnels.

Following public consultation, which saw more than 5,000 responses, the Transport for London (TfL) Board has now approved the initial charges, discounts and exemptions for the Silvertown and Blackwall tunnels.

To deliver the benefits of the tunnel and help to cover the construction costs, user charges were first set out as part of a statutory consultation in 2015. The requirement to charge for the tunnels is set out in Part 5 of the Development Consent Order (DCO) made by the Secretary of State for Transport in 2018 and the associated Charging and Policy and Procedure (CPAP) document.

There have been a number of consultations on the Silvertown Tunnel, including two previous consultations in 2014 and 2015 that outlined the need for the user charge and saw around 4,000 responses each. There was also a six-month public examination into the scheme from October 2016 to April 2017 as part of the planning approvals for the DCO.

When it opens on 7 April 2025, the Silvertown Tunnel will help reduce congestion, delays and queues, making peak time journeys faster and more reliable, with journey savings expected to be up to 20 minutes.

The primary purpose of the user charges is to manage traffic demand for the river crossings. By managing this traffic demand, we can support economic and population growth and minimise any adverse impacts on communities, health, safety and the environment, allowing the scheme to achieve its objectives. A secondary reason for the user charges is to provide a means of helping to pay for the design, construction and operation of the new tunnel.

Revenue from user charging is the single most important source of funding for the scheme. Without this revenue stream, the scheme would not have been viable, and the persistent issues at the Blackwall Tunnel would remain. As you are doubtless aware, the Victorian-era Blackwall Tunnel was never designed for the levels of traffic that now need to cross the river. Incidents with larger, unsuitable vehicles frequently cause delays and closures, and idling traffic builds up, often leading to tailbacks of several miles in just a few minutes. This increases journey times, as drivers either queue in traffic or choose longer routes to avoid the tunnel. It also has a negative impact on air quality. TfL expects the revenue from user charging at both the Blackwall and Silvertown Tunnels to cover the cost of the scheme.

MAYOR OF LONDON

Implementing user charges at both tunnels is required by the DCO and is fundamental to successfully delivering all the project objectives. Given the tunnels' proximity on the south side, if the Blackwall Tunnel were not subject to a charge, queues would build up as they do today and inhibit access to the Silvertown Tunnel. As well as removing the benefit of reduced congestion, other benefits, such as the opportunity for enhanced cross-river bus provision, would be eroded.

To determine the opening year user charges, TfL assessed a range of user charging scenarios (including zero charge). This assessment shows that the charges are forecast to provide optimal performance against TfL's objectives by delivering a large reduction in delay and congestion on tunnel approaches while minimising the impact at nearby crossings. A zero-charge scenario performed badly, with significant delay and congestion remaining on tunnel approaches with worse traffic and environmental impacts when compared with the proposed charges.

Having assessed all responses to the consultation, TfL's recommendation to the Board was to proceed with the charges, discounts and exemptions as proposed in the consultation, but with minor amendments to ensure that electric vans do not risk being charged more due to their weight placing them in a higher user charge category and expanding the discount for borough refuse vehicles to cover all the east London boroughs also eligible for the low-income residents' discount.

To support residents and businesses and encourage people to use the new public transport connections, registration is now open for the package of concessions, discounts and exemptions. These include:

Bus concessions for local residents

- For at least 12 months from the tunnel opening, local residents will benefit from free pay as you go fares on the new cross-river bus routes serving Greenwich, Newham, and Tower Hamlets. These routes include the new Superloop SL4 and extended route 129, which will go through the Silvertown Tunnel, and route 108 through the Blackwall Tunnel.

DLR concessions for local residents

- For at least 12 months from the tunnel opening, customers using pay as you go for journeys between and including the following station pairs will have their fares refunded:
 - Greenwich/Cutty Sark - Island Gardens
 - Woolwich Arsenal - King George V

Residents on certain low-income benefits

- A 50% discount on tunnel charges will be available to drivers on certain benefits living in Barking & Dagenham, Bexley, Bromley, City of London, Greenwich, Hackney, Havering, Lewisham, Newham, Redbridge, Southwark, Tower Hamlets and Waltham Forest.

The eligible benefits are:

- Income Support
- Income-related Employment & Support Allowance
- Income-based Jobseekers Allowance
- Universal Credit
- Pension Credit
- Child Tax Credit
- Working Tax Credit
- Carer's Allowance
- Housing Benefit

MAYOR OF LONDON

The East London low income residents' discount would be for a period of at least 3 years from 7 April 2025.

Discount for small businesses and charities

- Small businesses, sole traders and charities will be eligible for a £1 discount on the off-peak charge on a maximum of 3 vehicles for at least 12 months from the tunnel opening. The off-peak charge is only accessible for vehicles registered with TfL on Auto Pay.

The business, charity, or sole trader must be registered and operate from an address within one of the boroughs of Greenwich, Newham, or Tower Hamlets.

A free cross-river cycle shuttle service for at least one year from the tunnel opening.

Additionally, there will be no charge at any time for vehicles:

- With a disabled tax class
- Taxis licensed by TfL
- Zero-emission capable and wheelchair-accessible private hire vehicles licensed by TfL when carrying out a booking
- DVLA-registered minibuses, buses and coaches

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Sadiq Khan', with a small '2' written below the name.

Sir Sadiq Khan
Mayor of London