

Caroline Pidgeon AM, Chair of the Transport Committee

London Assembly
City Hall
The Queen's Walk
London, SE1 2AA

Mayor of London
8th Floor, City Hall

13 September 2012

Dear Mayor

Response to consultation on the future work of the Roads Task Force

I am writing, on behalf of the Transport Committee, to set out our response to the consultation concerning your Roads Task Force. We welcome this opportunity to contribute views to inform the future work of the Task Force.

This response is based on our previous work which is relevant to the consultation and, in particular, our report *The Future of Road Congestion in London* (June 2011). The report set out our findings on current and forecasted levels of road congestion and the options for addressing this issue by increasing capacity on the road network and managing demand for road space.

The remainder of this response addresses the four specific areas covered by the consultation: 1) challenges facing London's roads; 2) managing and defining demand for road space; 3) solutions to meeting the challenges facing London's roads; and 4) prioritising these solutions. We have shared this response with London TravelWatch and wish to highlight that we both agree on the importance of the Roads Task Force developing a coherent plan to tackle road congestion in the capital.

1. The challenges facing London's roads

Our report on the future of road congestion highlighted the long-term challenge of increased road congestion. The predicted growth in London's population and employment is expected to lead to greater demand for road space. The GLA has estimated that, by 2031, the capital's population will grow by almost 1.3 million and an extra 750,000 jobs will be created generating an extra three million journeys per day by 2031. As this growth is expected to be particularly intense in areas that are already very developed such as central and inner London, there is limited possibility of meeting the extra demand by adding more road space. It is thus likely that road congestion will rise significantly. Indeed your Transport Strategy showed that if nothing is done congestion could rise by 20 per cent by 2031 and even if your proposed measures are implemented, there could still be an increase of up to 14 per cent in congestion.

The Roads Task Force will need to focus on tackling the long-term challenge of increasing road congestion. Road congestion already causes considerable economic and social problems. TfL has estimated that up to £17 is lost for every hour a vehicle is stuck in traffic and the total cost of congestion to London's economy is around £2 billion per year. The capital has some of the worst air quality in the UK which can be attributed to poisonous airborne particles that are closely related to congestion and heavy traffic. These economic and social problems will only intensify without a concerted effort to reduce road congestion.

2. The approach to defining and managing competing demands for road space

The Roads Task Force will need to take a wide approach to defining and managing demand for road space. We have argued that managing road congestion is not just about technocratic solutions; it is also about ensuring that transport policy prioritises different types of road users and transport modes to create a more vibrant, liveable and environmentally sustainable city.¹

The majority of the Committee concluded that, as traffic volumes rise, difficult choices will have to be made about road user prioritisation, particularly at London's congested junctions. The majority of the Committee therefore recommended that you should reinstate a hierarchy of road users in the London Plan. This would ensure transport planners prioritise sustainable and public transport, as well as economically essential services and important economic traffic such as freight, over private car use.²

3. The solutions to meeting the challenges facing London's road network

The Roads Task Force will need to consider many different solutions to meet the challenges facing London's road network. Our report on the future of road congestion set out our findings on measures that may enhance the capacity of the road network and reduce demand for road space. We urge the Roads Task Force to take these findings into account when exploring possible solutions.

Measures to enhance the capacity of the road network

We have questioned the extent to which new traffic management technology such as SCOOT could increase capacity at junctions. We noted that these systems do not as yet measure all road users including pedestrians effectively and stressed that accurate measurements of all types of road user were vital as the volumes of traffic increase. TfL will need to have accurate measurements of all road users so it can make informed choices about the transport modes to prioritise.

In relation to new road building, we noted that the Transport Strategy had left open the option of new road building and that river crossings in east London were seen as essential to the continued development of the region. However, we stressed the need to be clear about how any proposals for new road infrastructure would be assessed against the potentially negative impact on public and environmental health. We wanted to see details of how the negative effects of any new roads would be mitigated by other measures.

Measures to reduce demand for road space

We have noted some success from the road works permit scheme in reducing the amount of road space taken up by road works. We noted the possibility of benefits from the lane rental scheme too although we also highlighted some potentially negative consequences. For example, that utility companies could simply pass on the cost of lane rental to their customers rather than undertake road works more efficiently to avoid lane rental charges. There is also a risk that residents could experience more disruption from road works in off-peak hours.

The majority of the Committee concluded that other schemes should be pursued to reduce demand for road space.³ Most of us agreed that you should set out the terms at which more controversial

¹ Transport Committee report, The Future of Road Congestion in London, June 2011, p13

² The Conservative Group dissented from this conclusion and recommendation. Further details at Appendix 2 of the Future of Road Congestion report

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programmes included in the Transport Strategy such as road user charging would be considered and help to facilitate and promote more innovative ways of reducing motor vehicle ownership and managing increasing levels of freight transport. Our report highlighted the success of smarter travel initiatives and car clubs in some areas such as the London Boroughs of Sutton and Islington. We also reported arguments advanced by the freight industry that the 'London Lorry Ban' may contribute to road congestion during busy daytime periods.

The majority of the Committee recommended the provision of more information on possible other schemes. We wanted to see details of: the level of increase in congestion necessary to trigger a consideration of further road user charging; the broad principles to which any road user charging scheme would have to conform; how smarter travel funding for boroughs in future Local Implementation Plan funding rounds would be protected; any work TfL had undertaken to examine the potential market for car clubs in London and how it might develop support for these clubs in the future; and any work TfL has undertaken to look at changing freight delivery practices.

4. Prioritising solutions for London's road network

The Roads Task Force should prioritise solutions for London's roads network that are proven to work. In our report on road congestion, we stressed the need for improvements to TfL's data gathering techniques so the full impact of traffic management interventions could be accurately assessed. We found there was only limited information about road congestion which provided insufficient means to assess TfL's performance in reducing congestion effectively. We therefore recommended that: TfL's Network Operating Strategy quarterly assessments include more detailed congestion data; TfL explain how it would measure all types of traffic (vehicle, cycle and pedestrian); and TfL develop benchmarks for its four main congestion performance metrics (journey time reliability; journey speed and delay; disruption caused by planned and unplanned events; and volume of road works).

We trust that the Roads Task Force will obtain detailed information on road congestion to inform its work and publish details of the information it uses. It should be possible to see the evidence that underpins the solutions prioritised for London's road network. The Roads Task Force should also make clear how it intends to measure the impact of its proposals on levels of road congestion.

In summary, we agree that the capital's road network is vital to economic and social activity and faces many challenges. The main challenge we have identified is increased congestion. London is already the most congested city in the UK with five of the country's top ten congestion hotspots and drivers experiencing 20 per cent of all congestion nationally. This has direct economic and social costs; congestion costs the capital billions of pounds in lost economic activity each year and London has some of the worst air quality in the UK.

With the forecast growth in London's population and employment, congestion is set to worsen. This will, in turn, exacerbate the other challenges faced by London's roads. Growing road congestion is likely to mean more conflicts between road users, the need for more investment in roads as they experience greater usage, and more concerns about road safety. The Roads Task Force should, therefore, focus its efforts on tackling road congestion. The Transport Strategy set out some measures for reducing road congestion but did not provide the full answer. The Roads Task Force will need to go further. It should develop a plan for the capital's road network that fully addresses the forecast growth in road congestion, and should look at promoting sustainable transport options.

We trust this response will inform the consultation and look forward to receiving further details of the work of the Roads Task Force.

Yours sincerely

Caroline Pidgeon AM
Chair of the Transport Committee

Cc: Isabel Dedring, Deputy Mayor for Transport; and the London TravelWatch Board