

LONDON ASSEMBLY

Caroline Pidgeon MBE AM, Chair of the Transport Committee

London Assembly
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Gareth Powell
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Transport for London
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Dear Gareth,

Central London bus services review

I am writing on behalf of the Transport Committee to submit views for your consultation on Central London bus services.

I would like to thank you and your colleagues Geoff Hobbs, Claire Mann and Gus Davies for taking the time to meet with Committee Members in the run-up to and during this consultation. We appreciate the detailed explanations for your proposals that you have provided. I expect Committee Members will want to submit their own responses reflecting local priorities; in this response I will address the strategic issues being considered.

We understand the thinking behind your proposals and that there is replication among bus routes, which your proposals will aim to address. However, we have some fundamental concerns with how this review is being conducted and what is missing from it.

Nature of review

Unfortunately, it is clear that this consultation falls far short of the comprehensive review of bus services that is needed for London, and which we were led to expect would be happening. As TfL's Director of City Planning, Alex Williams, told us at the very start of the Mayor's term of office in June 2016:

There is also a recognition that we need to do a comprehensive review for the network and how it functions in central London versus inner London versus outer London. I think you understand that that is not a quick piece of work. That is a very fundamental review of how the bus network operates in London.

Alex Williams, Transport for London

This consultation consists of widespread changes to bus routes, but does not allow Londoners to give views on how the network functions as a whole, or address different levels of service in different parts of London. It does not include details on planned growth in buses for Outer London.

For instance, in our 2017 report on the bus network, the Committee recommended you consider changing how you tender for bus services. This would involve grouping together routes on corridors where possible, rather than the disjointed approach of tendering for every route individually. We understand this would be a change to your normal way of doing things, but it would surely be the best way to enable a strategic approach to route planning.

Outer London

We are concerned that you have no plans to deliver on commitments to shift bus service capacity from Central to Outer London.¹ The Mayor's Transport Strategy is clear that this is a priority, stating:

The current strategy for bus network development is to redistribute resources to reflect changing patterns of demand. There has been, and will continue to be, a fall in demand for buses in central London as passengers transfer to the new and upgraded rail network (e.g. Elizabeth line) and to cycling and walking. Demand for buses is expected to increase in outer London, where the potential for mode shift to buses and for housing growth is greatest. TfL will therefore re-shape the bus network to increase its focus on outer London. This will help improve bus services in outer London – right now, and continuing in the medium and longer term.

Mayor's Transport Strategy

The consultation proposals do not address this issue at all. You are proposing to remove capacity from Central London routes, which may well be justified for various reasons. But you have not set out any increase in capacity in Outer London.

TfL is in a very challenging financial position. Your £968 million operational deficit is not sustainable, and expected revenue from the Elizabeth line is now delayed. There appears a serious risk that you will reduce bus capacity in Central London without increasing it in Outer London.

We note TfL's pledges to the Committee that Outer London bus capacity will be addressed in the next TfL Business Plan, due to be published in December. However, this timing effectively renders the current consultation irrelevant. Clearly TfL's next business plan will be at an advanced stage by the time this consultation ends, making it extremely difficult to see how you will take Londoners' views on bus capacity into account.

New types of route

Our 2017 investigation identified that the bus network needs more orbital and express routes. Again, the subsequent Mayor's Transport Strategy indicated that these would be introduced. It stated:

As outer London becomes more densely populated, new types of service could allow buses to play an increasing role in allowing longer trips to be carried out without people having to rely on cars. These could include 'express' services, running on the same corridors as 'local' routes, but with fewer stops so longer journeys can be conducted more quickly... express routes could help to provide orbital connectivity around outer London, something that was previously only

¹ The Labour Group dissents from this section of the submission. Please see the appendix for details.

thought achievable through rail provision.

Mayor's Transport Strategy

We supported these ideas when the Mayor's Transport Strategy was published. We are therefore disappointed they have not been taken forward by TfL to any significant extent. We note that express routes on major corridors in Outer London would also provide good opportunities to consider the use of articulated vehicles, which could help increase capacity and accessibility, while reducing the number of vehicles on the road.

Interchange

TfL has informed the Committee that an additional 36,000 people each day will need to change buses on their journey as a result of these proposals. As an overall proportion of passenger journeys this is small, but it represents one in ten of the people currently using these routes.

We accept that changing buses is sometimes necessary, and with the hopper fare this is now more affordable. The key, however, is to make sure interchange is simple and comfortable for passengers. Without this, people will be put off using the bus network. In particular, passengers with disabilities can find changing buses more problematic. This is an area where TfL has admitted its own failings in the past, for instance when public realm improvements have led to interchange bus stops being moved further apart.

We note that your Equalities Impact Assessment has highlighted particular routes and stops where more interchange will now take place, and where passengers may be negatively affected. What TfL needs to do moving forward is give clear guarantees on its service standards for interchange points, in line with the Healthy Streets approach. This would take into account:

- The need to provide adequate shelter – noting that crowding often means waiting passengers cannot fit under on-street bus shelters.
- The need to provide accurate, timely information – bus countdown indicators should be provided at all stops where passengers are likely to be changing buses.
- The need to limit walking distances between stops – where there is a distance of more than fifty metres TfL should be looking to reduce this as a priority.
- The need to ensure bus drivers inform passengers of how and where they should change buses for key destinations.

Demand-responsive buses

You will of course be aware that demand-responsive bus services are now a feature of London's transport system, and it is likely that their presence will grow over time. This includes those regulated as buses under the London Service Permit regime, and those regulated as private hire services.

We believe these services have the potential to enhance mobility for Londoners, particularly those living in areas not well-served by traditional public transport services. It is important, however, that they do not replicate and compete with London's public bus services in a way that undermines their viability.

Our 2018 report, *Future Transport*, recommended that TfL works with Government to address the regulatory grey areas in order to ensure a positive contribution from demand-responsive buses. We argued this should enable TfL to impose conditions such as the need to serve Outer London and to use accessible vehicles.

We do not see in your consultation any attempt to consider how demand-responsive buses might work alongside other buses in the future. Although this is a long-term issue, it is important that TfL addresses this issue.

I hope you will take these concerns on board as you develop your proposals.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Caroline Pidgeon', with a stylized flourish extending to the right.

Caroline Pidgeon MBE AM
Chair, Transport Committee

Appendix – Views of the Labour Group

We support the views expressed in this letter, apart from those relating to Outer London.

Current Plans for Outer London

The Mayor does have plans to deliver on commitments to shift bus service capacity from Central to Outer London. Indeed, on 4th October TfL provided the Transport Committee with an indicative list of bus routes that they are looking to make changes to in 2018 and 2019. They are:

- Extensions of routes EL1 and EL3 further into the Barking Riverside area. By Early 2019
- Extend route E10 via South Ealing, and increasing frequency
- New route 301 from Bexleyheath to Woolwich via Abbey Wood
- Extension of route 125 to Colindale, and changes to route 384 to give new and better orbital links across LB Barnet (early 2019)
- Route 485 extended to Wandsworth Riverside in late 2019
- Route 440 extended to Wembley by early 2019
- Network and frequency changes to support development at Old Oak Common to extend routes 218, 302
- Extension of route 425 to Ilford in 2018
- Higher frequencies on route 158 in NE London in 2019
- Potential to extend route 164 or 280 to London Cancer Hub
- Extend route 470 to Epsom hospital in early 2019
- Enhancing routes 404 and 434 to serve housing estates in Coulsdon in 2019
- Potential for new route to North Middlesex hospital
- Increase frequency of 112 and extend to North Finchley during 2019

This list contains 19 current or planned routes, compared to the 34 current/planned routes in the Central London review. We expect that, as demand in Outer London increases, so will the Bus Service volume, through new routes and more frequent services.

The 2018 TfL Business Plan

TfL have confirmed that their new Business Plan, published on 5 December 2018, will break down the Bus Service volume (million km operated) into inner and outer London. This will allow us to see how Bus Service Volume will change over the next five years and will allow the London Assembly to hold the Mayor to account on his commitments to Outer London.