

DRAFT

LONDON ASSEMBLY



Dr Alison Moore AM
Chair of the Transport Committee

Heidi Alexander
Deputy Mayor for Transport
Greater London Authority
(Sent by email)

5 March 2021

Dear Deputy Mayor,

London's transport system in a post-COVID-19 world

On 11 February 2021, the London Assembly Transport Committee discussed the impact that COVID-19 has had on London's transport system and what this could mean for traveling around London in the future. Since the beginning of the pandemic in March 2020, the way Londoners live their lives has changed dramatically. The hustle and bustle of Tube stations during the morning commute and buses packed with children on their way to school has stopped for many people. Knowing the ins and outs of the transport system in London is part and parcel of being a Londoner, but to help stop the spread of COVID-19, Londoners have rightly been encouraged to stay away from buses, trains, and Tubes unless their journey is essential, leading to a much quieter, subdued atmosphere across the city.

Since the outbreak of COVID-19, there has been a significant increase in the number of people walking and cycling around the capital, as Londoners moved away from public transport and focused on taking more exercise. The lifestyles that people had this time last year are now on hold and travelling around the city is one of the biggest changes that we've had to adjust to. It is hard to predict what life will look like in a post-COVID-19 world, including whether Londoners will continue to work from home on a large scale. However, it is key that the Mayor and Transport for London (TfL) start to analyse and understand how travel may change, as London and the UK recover from the pandemic. COVID-19 is impacting on how Londoners live their lives – and will do so in the medium-term. Moreover, the longer-term impacts of the pandemic may change the way Londoners live and work, which may, in turn, affect London's transport needs. London's economy and public transport system benefit from agglomeration and significant changes to London's economy, working patterns, levels of tourism or population could all have a profound impact on our transport system in coming years.

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As the Prime Minister works towards reopening society, the Transport Committee wanted to hear from a range of experts about how London's transport system may need to evolve in the future to support our new ways of living. We heard from Alex Williams, Director of City Planning, TfL; Christina Calderato, Head of Transport Strategy and Planning, TfL; John Dickie, Director of Strategy and Policy, London First; Emma Gibson, Director of London TravelWatch (LTW); and Norman Baker, Adviser to the CEO at Campaign for Better Transport.

The issues that emerged from the meeting were clear. The potential impact of more localised living for some Londoners needs to be considered as part of London's longer-term transport planning needs. TfL has a unique role in both responding to emerging patterns of transport need and, in some cases, supporting changes to London's longer-term transport planning. Engagement with Londoners should be at the forefront of any longer-term transport planning activity. However, TfL can only properly deliver this work if it gets the basics right now, particularly in managing the short to medium-term pressures caused by COVID-19 and maintaining a high quality, affordable transport system which the public want to use, including managing perceptions of safety on the network.

The ultimate document through which London's longer-term transport priorities are driven is the Mayor's Transport Strategy (MTS). Given the issues we have discussed through the Committee's recent investigation on the future of London's transport system, it is clear that there is a risk that the MTS no longer reflects the potential longer-term work, leisure and travel patterns that have emerged from the pandemic.

The pandemic has brought its own challenges to TfL. As passenger numbers declined, so did TfL's revenue.¹ Short to medium-term planning was the focus for TfL as it battled to get funding to keep London's transport network open, a vital service for many front-line workers. Now, as vaccines are quickly being rolled out across the capital and the rest of the country, the Committee is keen for TfL to start planning medium to long term so that we regain passenger confidence in London's transport network and, more generally, it can be fit for purpose in the future.

Impact of more localised living on London's transport system

Post-pandemic, how and where most Londoners' work and socialise work is likely to change but it is not clear precisely how and to what extent.

At the Committee's 11 February meeting, we heard about TfL's pandemic recovery scenario planning activity. TfL presented five scenarios – return to business as usual, remote revolution, London decline, Low-carbon localism and agglomeration – alongside a further a hybrid scenario, which combines elements of all five models. These scenarios reflect the range of potential implications of COVID-19 for London's transport system. The Committee is keen for TfL to consider the impact of more localised living through the low carbon localism scenario, including the '15 minute city' model, as a possible scenario in some parts of London. TfL should also continue to support the recovery and maintenance of London's Central Activity Zone (CAZ). However, the Committee is acutely aware that the Mayor's Transport Strategy (MTS) will need to respond and be ready to adapt to any of the potential changes in work and leisure activity within London that have arisen since COVID-19. High quality, affordable transport will enable or support economic, cultural and social recovery, providing it can be funded in the short to medium-term to do so. On the other hand, guests at the

¹ Department for Transport, [Transport use during the coronavirus \(COVID-19\) pandemic](#), 24 February 2021

Committee's 11 February meeting were clear about the risks posed to London's recovery by reducing transport services and not continuing to invest in the network, in particular, vital capital infrastructure projects.

Through the Committee's investigation, we have heard about the potential longer-term impacts of changing travel patterns on particular areas of London, such as outer London, which may see greater levels of demand post-pandemic. It should also be noted that this potential trend operates in the context of a city where there are obvious inequities in transport provision between sub-regions of London and across socio-economic groups.

More generally, COVID-19's impact on London's transport system has created an opportunity to reconsider the transport needs across the capital, including developing orbital routes, reviewing overlapping transport routes and addressing gaps in provision, particularly in London's bus network. At the Committee's 11 February meeting, we heard that connectivity in the capital, particularly in the outer London boroughs, is a key factor in determining whether Londoners use public transport rather than cars to make their journeys.

The Committee is clear that, while the 15 minute city model provides a useful lens through which future transport planning can take place in some parts of London, it is likely to impact certain areas of the capital more than others, in particular outer London. A one-size-fits-all approach will not reflect the diversity of London as a city with different transport needs and experiences.

The Committee notes the GLA's recent interim report, led by Arup, Gerald Eve and the London School of Economics, which assesses the economic future of London's CAZ.² The report was highlighted at the Committee's 11 February meeting, in the context of a discussion about the importance of maintaining central London as a cultural, business and economic centre. The Committee believes that a fundamental aspect of the recovery of London's economy is a return of Londoners and visitors to the CAZ. The value of the CAZ as a world-leading cultural zone and economic powerhouse means London's transport network will continue to need to support longer distance travel into central London, as well as supporting more localised travel.

Notwithstanding the importance of maintaining the CAZ, the Committee believes the 15 minute city model may present opportunities to encourage a growth in active travel, support local town centres and economies in some parts of London and as such could influence the capital's long-term transport needs, where Londoners work patterns are more localised. The Committee is keen for this to be explored further.

Transport is a key enabler to London's success – whether that is economic, social or cultural – as a global city. It is in that context that further thought should be given to transport's role as an enabler for London's recovery from COVID-19.

Engagement with Londoners

Londoners should be at the forefront of all future transport planning considerations in the capital; and TfL should develop a comprehensive plan of engagement with Londoners to meet this aim. The

² GLA, [The economic future of the Central Activities Zone](#), February 2021

issue was discussed at length during the Committee's 11 February meeting. In particular, John Dickie from London First indicated, as per the organisation's recent report *Transport in London - New solutions for a changing city*, that London needs a "big conversation" about the future of its transport system and that that takes time, consultation and consideration of Londoners' views.³ The Committee believes that doing this will ensure there is greater buy-in from Londoners to potentially significant changes to the transport system, which, in turn, will increase the likelihood of success.

During the Committee's 11 February meeting, it was conceded that, in responding quickly to the urgent challenges posed by COVID-19, such as the need to maintain social distancing and support active travel to reduce the spread of the virus, TfL and the London boroughs had not engaged and consulted Londoners in the way it would have done pre-pandemic. While decisions had to be taken at pace to respond to an emerging public health crisis, the lack of engagement with under-represented groups, particularly disabled people in London, is a concern. It is important that any future transport engagement plans include specific steps taken to reach under-represented groups so that their views are included and any potential inequalities are addressed.

The desire to engage Londoners was raised by Emma Gibson from LTW, who shared some of the highlights of its own consultation with Londoners, *London TravelWatch investigates: What is the future of London's transport network?*⁴ LTW's initial research suggests that safety on the network, including how social distancing can be maintained on the bus and tube networks, is a key priority for Londoners as they return to the network.

Leading the way in changing perceptions of safety on the network

It was important that TfL adhered to the Government's *stay at home* communication strategy during the first lockdown. Since then, there have been varying levels of return to the network through the three lockdowns but it has been below pre-pandemic levels, given the ongoing risks posed by COVID-19, including more recently the impact of the new strains of the virus.⁵ TfL has made significant efforts during the pandemic to enhance its cleaning regime, including employing hospital grade antiviral cleaning products. As London begins to see a path to recovery through vaccination, TfL should be leading the way in communicating to Londoners the measures it has been taking to maintain cleanliness, social distancing and mask wearing on the system.

At the Committee's 11 February meeting, it was noted that significant work is required to challenge the public's perceptions of safety on London's transport network. For example, it was noted that recent research had highlighted that Londoners who had not travelled on public transport since the outbreak of COVID-19 were significantly more concerned about travelling during the pandemic than those who had travelled in the last year.

It is crucial to the longer-term future of London's transport system that TfL manages perceptions of safety through its communication to Londoners. By doing so, TfL will ensure there is a sustainable return to the public transport system that will support London's wider economic, cultural and social recovery.

³ London First, [Transport in London - New solutions for changing city](#), January 2020

⁴ London Travelwatch, [London TravelWatch investigates: What is the future of London's transport network?](#)

⁵ Department for Transport, [Transport use during the coronavirus \(COVID-19\) pandemic](#), 24 February 2021

Managing short to medium-term pressures from COVID-19

Managing effectively the short and medium-term transport pressures arising from COVID-19 is vital to ensure a solid platform on which to plan for the longer term. Our investigation has highlighted the huge pressures facing TfL, including the urgent need to protect the transport workers who are keeping the network running. At the time of the Committee's 11 February meeting, 78 transport workers had lost their lives. The Committee heard that TfL was engaging with the Government to establish rapid testing for control room staff, as it had been identified that their roles are particularly integral to the smooth running of the network. The Committee welcomes this action to protect the health of London's transport workers.

More generally, it is crucial that TfL learns the lessons of its experience – both positive and negative – in supporting a resilient transport system in the medium and longer term.

Conclusions

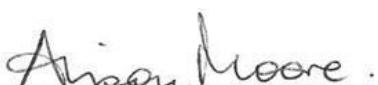
Understanding that not all aspects of life will go back to the way it was before COVID-19 must play a major part in TfL's planning for London's long-term transport needs.

London is at a pivotal point in its recovery from COVID-19. As Londoners consider their longer-term home, work and leisure plans, it is vital that the Mayor and TfL ensure, thorough analysis and planning, that London's transport system can evolve to meet Londoners' post-pandemic needs and support growth in the capital.

The MTS, which was adopted in 2018, is the key document through which the Mayor and TfL drive London's transport priorities. We know that the long-term scenarios that underpin the MTS could change fundamentally, in light of the effect of Covid-19 and there is funding uncertainty in the short term with TfL having to rely on emergency Government funding. As the situation becomes clearer in the coming months and years, we look forward to the Mayor providing the Committee with an update on how any new reality will affect the policies and proposals in the MTS and how they are delivered.

I would be grateful if you could respond to the Committee's letter by Thursday 18 March 2021. Please copy your response to Fiona Bywaters, Committee Services Manager (fiona.bywaters@london.gov.uk).

Yours sincerely,



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Chair of the Transport Committee

Copied to:

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