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Dear Caroline

Report of the Transport Committee's seminar – 'The Future of London's buses'

Thank you for your letter of 16 February about the report 'The Future of London's Buses'. Please accept my apologies for the delay in responding to you.

I very much support your findings on the importance of the bus network in London's transport system, including its flexibility, the accessibility of the network and its contribution to inclusivity and other economic, social and environmental objectives. I shall address the points raised in your letter in turn.

Following the KPMG Review, what further work are you and TfL now undertaking to implement your plans to reduce expenditure on London's buses?

Plans for ensuring that the cost of providing the network remains affordable are set out in Transport for London's (TfL) Business Plan. It is envisaged that the size of the network will remain broadly stable, with 478m km forecast for 2017/18, around 1% lower than now. TfL will continue to keep all bus services under regular review in the usual way, taking account of actual usage and the results of liaison, consultation and market research. The Independent Review carried out by KPMG in 2009 found that this process was well-managed and fit for purpose. Where changes are proposed, they will continue to be subject to the outcome of consultation. The plan allows for the achievements of the bus network to be maintained while reducing the overall level of subsidy needed.

How far is this work covering factors such as the breadth of bus coverage in London and the scope of concessionary fares?

London already has one of the most comprehensive bus networks anywhere and there are no plans for significant alterations to this. Changing travel needs and the fact that the network is kept under continuous review means that proposals for change will continue to come forward. These will, as always, take account of the relevant benefits or disbenefits, the costs and the overall amount of money available. Fares levels will also continue to be reviewed, as normal, each year.

There are no plans to alter the current range of concessions. As you know, the Freedom Pass is funded via London's councils (with TfL funding travel before 9am) and it continues to offer benefits exceeding those available in the national scheme.

What formal assessment has been made of the scope to meet long-term increased demand for buses through increased capacity on other modes of transport and TfL "sweating its assets"?

My new Transport Strategy contains full details of plans to increase rail capacity, and to increase levels of cycling and walking, in the context of London's growing population and economy. Smarter travel initiatives will also continue to be pursued, including through school and workplace travel plans.

There will be a significant increase in capacity on the Underground over the next ten or so years. Beyond that, Crossrail will be delivered, transforming journeys for many. TfL is also to deliver a large increase in cycling, with an objective of a 5% modal share by 2026, compared to less than 2% in 2000. They also aim to increase the number of daily walking trips from 5.7m to 7m over the same period.

Making the most effective use of assets has always been a priority, of course. On the bus network, service capacity is considered in detail, route by route and corridor by corridor, as part of TfL's ongoing review process. TfL will continue to take account of the demand for travel in the peak and the need for value for money within every review. As you may know, average occupancy on London's buses has increased by 27% over the period since 1999/00.

Various speakers at the seminar emphasised the importance of bus priority in maximising the effectiveness of investment in the bus service. It helps buses to provide faster and more reliable journey times than would otherwise be the case and it means that buses can take passengers where they need to go more directly and with stops closer to the start and finish of their journeys. Most of the bus network runs on Borough roads. Working with London Councils, I have given the Boroughs greater control over the allocation of the funds available from TfL for investment in these roads, so that we can improve the overall effectiveness of this investment. I am sure that buses will continue to be a priority in these allocations, and the seminar report shows why that should be so.

What formal assessment has been made of the extent to which home working and flexible work patterns could reduce demand for buses?

No formal report of the extent to which home or flexible working could reduce demand for buses in London is available. However, the TfL review process for the bus network takes account of demand at a detailed level and any changes would be reflected in service planning.

As you know, TfL and the Boroughs are working to promote voluntary changes in travel choice through school and workplace travel planning, and through targeted personal travel advice for individuals. These are intended both to reduce overall travel demand, for example through home working, and to increase walking and cycling. Workplace travel plans are in place for over 450 London businesses.

Many workplace travel plans tend, quite rightly, to place some priority on achieving a reduction in single-driver car travel, and in some cases this may of course lead to increased demand for buses. For schools there is undoubtedly an opportunity to use the travel plan process to encourage increases in cycling and walking, which could well reduce bus use.

What if any cost/benefit analysis of London's buses has been undertaken that takes account of their wider social and environmental benefits?

No cost benefit has been carried out. However, the consultation during the process of planning bus services takes account of the issues raised at the seminar.

Speakers at the seminar mentioned various social and environmental benefits derived from investment in the bus network, including helping to reduce overall carbon dioxide emissions; contributing to local traffic reduction; catering for the needs of older Londoners and providing affordable and accessible transport for those with lower incomes.

TfL's detailed and continuous planning process for the bus network ensures that all such effects are taken into consideration as the network changes and develops. The central role this process plays is emphasised in my new Transport Strategy.

The level of wider benefits delivered is recognised by the continuing level of significant public investment in the network each year. I am sure you will recognise the need to ensure that this level of investment remains under review, in the context of the overall balance of transport spending in London and indeed in the country as a whole. This is what the current TfL Business Plan delivers.

How will you use the findings from our seminar and review of research in developing your approach to London's buses?

TfL and I are grateful to the Committee for holding the seminar and producing the reports. We will continue to work on maintaining the achievements of the transformed bus network, with support from colleagues in London's councils who are responsible for so much of the infrastructure the buses use.

I am sure that the Committee's report and its endorsement of the value of investment in bus services for London will be very valuable in forthcoming discussions with central Government regarding investment in London's transport.

Thank you again for writing to me.

Yours ever,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'Boris Johnson', with a long, sweeping horizontal line extending to the right.

Boris Johnson
Mayor of London