

London Assembly Transport Committee – 16 May 2018

Transcript of Agenda Item 9 – River Bus Services

Caroline Pidgeon MBE AM (Chair): I welcome our second panel of guests today, [for our discussion] which is looking at the river and river services, particularly thinking about passengers using the river. If I can just welcome our guests today, I am going to start on this side. We have Emma McFarlane, who is a passenger representative and works closely with Thames Clippers; Sean Collins, who has been before the Committee before, Managing Director of MBNA Thames Clippers; and Danny Price, who is the General Manager of Sponsored Services at Transport for London (TfL). You look after all the river services and piers?

Danny Price (General Manager of Sponsored Services, Transport for London): That includes river services, yes.

Caroline Pidgeon MBE AM (Chair): Fantastic. And Robin Mortimer is Chief Executive of the Port of London Authority (PLA). Welcome. Thank you for coming today. Sorry, we are slightly behind. Our questions on the Tube and issues with the Royal Wedding and the like this weekend slightly overran.

If I could start off our questions, we have done some work previously on the river and I know many of us are interested in it. It is a question to you all. How will you or can we increase the number of commuter or regular passenger journeys on the Thames? Who would like to start? Actually, I am going to go to Thames Clippers first because you provide the service. How can that be done?

Sean Collins (Managing Director, MBNA Thames Clippers): We always manage to fill boats in commuter periods, unsurprisingly. We are very different to any other form of transport in that we are limited in the number of passengers that we can physically carry. Every passenger by regulation has to have a seat and so the physical capacity is limited. That said, you can add as many boats, within reason, to the service and that is regulated by the PLA and London River Services (LRS).

However, at the moment, one of the biggest problems we have is congestion in the central section, arguably, between Tower Bridge and Westminster. That congestion is predominately around piers. More pier space in central London is vitally needed before we can consider further expansion of services to the east and the west to bring those commuters in. There are significant demands at certain times on the service from a leisure and tourism perspective. We operate 25 kilometres and 22 piers and many of those piers have an amazing cultural connection along the river. Therefore, there is good demand in that sector as well.

Caroline Pidgeon MBE AM (Chair): Can I just go back to what you were saying on congestion in the central section? Is that just at peak times? Surely some of the other river services which we are not particularly focusing on like the tourist boats would not be operating at peak times. What is the issue with the pier capacity?

Sean Collins (Managing Director, MBNA Thames Clippers): No, if you take Embankment Pier, for instance, we have three services combined there in in the morning and the afternoon, three in the morning

and two in the evening. That is because in the evening we have purposely tried to combine two services to limit the amount of boats we have going in and out of the pier. We literally do not even have enough space between our own services let alone the leisure and tourism services that have to run from that pier as well.

Caroline Pidgeon MBE AM (Chair): It is just literally the physical space at the piers, not that you have tourist boats alongside yours?

Sean Collins (Managing Director, MBNA Thames Clippers): No.

Robin Mortimer (Chief Executive, Port of London Authority): Can I just add to that?

Caroline Pidgeon MBE AM (Chair): Yes.

Robin Mortimer (Chief Executive, Port of London Authority): Thanks, Sean. We carried out a study in 2015 before we published *The Thames Vision*, where we said we think there is capacity to double the number of passenger journeys by 2035. That study looked at the capacity constraints – if you like, how full the river is – and essentially the answer was that there is a lot of spare capacity in the river except at peak times at peak points. As Sean said, typically around Westminster and here outside in the Pool of London and outside Tower [pier] are the real pinch points and, even then, it is the summer afternoon when we really face those constraints. For the rest of the time and certainly outside those areas, there is enormous capacity for growth. That is, if you like, the evidence base that we have to work on. As Sean said, the key issue then is, particularly in those hotspots, developing the piers to enable better utilisation of the limited space.

Sean Collins (Managing Director, MBNA Thames Clippers): I would just also like to add that five years ago when we were awarded the contract from TfL to run RB6, very shortly after that, four years ago, we worked with TfL and they put a lot of resource into demand modelling for the future. There is a lot of information there that demonstrates that we forecast by 2023 our operation alone could be carrying 7 million passengers. Last year we carried 4.1 million and that was a growth year-on-year, again, but new services had been added in that period, namely the Battersea Power Station service and expansion. We added more fleet and new boats to RB6. RB6 alone has seen 36% annual growth since its commencement and the entire service on average, since it started 19 years ago, has seen 40% growth.

Caroline Pidgeon MBE AM (Chair): You see real potential if we could improve some of the pier capacity? You are quoted, Thames Clippers, as saying that this has the potential to be the equivalent of the Hammersmith & City line on the river.

Sean Collins (Managing Director, MBNA Thames Clippers): Yes.

Caroline Pidgeon MBE AM (Chair): You absolutely believe that. And Robin at the PLA, do you support that? You think there is huge potential?

Robin Mortimer (Chief Executive, Port of London Authority): Absolutely, yes.

Caroline Pidgeon MBE AM (Chair): Then I come to TfL, and TfL in 2012 likened the river to a “medium-sized suburban bus route”, which does not seem the same scale of ambitions. Is that right, Danny, or is it that now you have some passion and energy behind it?

Danny Price (General Manager of Sponsored Services, Transport for London): There has always been passion and energy behind it. We should recognise that 10 years ago the total river volume was half what it is today and so there has been significant progress made in growing river passenger volume. With the challenge of doubling that again in 2035, there are key challenges, but, again, it has shown that progress has been made. There has been a lot of investment in the pier infrastructure.

We should also look at the capacity of those piers. Within the London Pier Strategy - which TfL, the Greater London Authority (GLA) and boat operators as well as waterfront boroughs are working on - we recognise not just opportunities to increase the size of piers but also looking at timetables, looking at the efficiencies, looking at maybe having a more dynamic approach. At the moment these are within the Strategy, which is in draft form, and are challenges and we need to put actions against them, but we need to not just look at the amount of infrastructure to increase. It is about how efficient that is.

Part of that is looking at the operators and how they operate from each of the piers, the time taken for boarding and alighting.

The other thing I want to add is that the growth target to double by 2035 is about safe and sustainable growth, and safe has to come first. Everyone involved in the passenger working group is very passionate about that. It is one thing absolutely everyone agrees on: we have to do this safely. Therefore, in terms of increasing piers, we have to look at a number of other factors including an increased amount of freight on the river and other challenges as well. We are, equally, very passionate but we will do it safely.

Caroline Pidgeon MBE AM (Chair): Who leads on the river? Is it you personally, Danny, or what team do you have? In the past, from my memory, it was people from the bus team who were nearing retirement who went and did a year or so doing river services before they retired. Do you have someone who is passionate about expanding river services?

Danny Price (General Manager of Sponsored Services, Transport for London): We have, and hopefully I have a little bit of time to go before retirement, we do have a team on London river services and it is the collaboration with the PLA and with the boat operators that make the river successful. And it has that whole 10 years of driving success so why would it not continue going that way? We have challenges but we need to overcome them.

Caroline Pidgeon MBE AM (Chair): From a passenger point of view, tell us what passengers want and is there demand?

Emma McFarlane (Passenger representative): Yes, absolutely. Just a quick point. First of all, I would like to say that I do not just represent myself today. I intend to speak to all of the passengers that I come in contact with on my jetty and on boats generally. I have been trying to work with Thames Clippers to improve things. We have been giving them feedback and I have also been writing to the PLA.

That is one point I wanted to make this morning about the speed of the boats. You could add lots of boats, but sometimes the speed that they go along the Thames has dropped drastically so that what you have is bicycles running along the embankment quicker than the boats. That is very frustrating as passengers. We understand why that is - because you get feedback from houseboats that there is some kind of swell coming

from the Clippers - but perhaps we ought to take a look at that and see whether we can speed up the service. Then, of course, you would not necessarily need a huge amount of extra boats if you were turning around the system quicker.

Caroline Pidgeon MBE AM (Chair): Yes, but you talk to passengers and people contact you. Is there a demand from people, particularly near the river in these new developments that they want more services?

Emma McFarlane (Passenger representative): Absolutely. Anybody who lives near the river and has access to a jetty would take it anytime over a train or Tube.

Caroline Pidgeon MBE AM (Chair): Thank you. TfL, what targets do you have, maybe including some interim targets, to increase the number of river bus journeys?

Danny Price (General Manager of Sponsored Services, Transport for London): Currently, the Strategy aims to double them, which, again, is quite a long way off. Within the Pier Strategy we have discussed recently -- and the reason I am talking about very recently is we have not long put most of the draft Strategy together and so there are a lot of discussions within the passenger working groups on how we set targets. Sometimes, if we set an interim target every single year, all the sudden, if we cannot achieve it in year one, it drives the wrong - perhaps - behaviours. What we have discussed is looking with the boat operators at their business targets and the rationale behind their targets and how that supports the delivery of, over time, doubling river growth.

We did have a target to hit 12 million passenger journeys by 2020. We are slightly behind that, looking at last year's numbers, but there are a lot of good things that were happening last year with investment in Battersea Pier, with new boats from the likes of Thames Clippers that have invested heavily, with the full-year benefit of Westminster Pier that was extended the previous year. What has been successful is developer-led pier infrastructure - including Battersea - that has happened over the last few years and we will continue to support that to happen.

Caroline Pidgeon MBE AM (Chair): We are very keen as a Committee to see in the Transport Strategy your overall targets and to then have interim [targets], and I know a number are going to be in the Business Plan that comes out at the end of this calendar year. Can we expect there to be an interim target in the Business Plan for river bus journeys?

Danny Price (General Manager of Sponsored Services, Transport for London): If I can politely ask to take that back from this Committee?

Caroline Pidgeon MBE AM (Chair): Yes, that is fine. We can pick that up afterwards. I think we would feel that you need to have something to be aiming for. You cannot just have something in 5, 10, 15 or 20 years. You need something so you have something to be focusing your energies around.

Danny Price (General Manager of Sponsored Services, Transport for London): As an operator, we would very much support that. We need to know where we are going on an annual basis. We cannot just develop people and skills and conjure up boats overnight. We have to plan and there has to be a little bit more strategy in that regard.

Caroline Pidgeon MBE AM (Chair): OK. Could I come to you, Robin? We have talked about, and Danny has mentioned, safety on the river and that is really important, but how can you manage these competing demands? We want more people using it as passengers not just as tourists, as houseboats, leisure, freight, the environment. Can you just give us an outline of how you manage that? If you want to increase the use of the river, how are you going to manage those demands?

Robin Mortimer (Chief Executive, Port of London Authority): Sure. The PLA is the safety regulator for the river and the other main body on the safety side is the Maritime and Coastguard Agency (MCA), which licenses the vessels. We do not do the passenger vessel licensing.

Overall, the safety record in the last four years has improved. Last year there was around a 20% reduction in what is called “serious and very serious incidents”, which is the MCA category. We obviously want to see that sustained. So far in 2018, the record is in line with that. Our objective is to get to zero. That is the only goal you can have on the safety, is it not, to have absolutely zero incidents? That is very much where we are driving.

The key part of that really is the causes of incidents when we investigate. Every incident is investigated. The three main causes are human error, compliance failure and mechanical error. Those are the things we work on. We work very closely with all the operators. Last year we ran a campaign called “Human factors”, behaviour change, near-miss reporting, all of those things which support safe operations. Those are the sorts of things we do.

I would just come back to this point about the capacity issues because, if you have a system - which is what the river is - and you put extra demand on that system, then there is always greater risk associated with that. That is why we think that dealing with these pinch points in central London is critical not just from a growth and economic perspective but from a safety perspective. I would say, going back to your earlier question, the LRS team is very passionate, very committed and very capable. It is fair to say, though, that TfL’s budget is more constrained than it previously was and the capital budgets are not necessarily there for the investments which were previously planned. Therefore, we think we need to look quite creatively at the financing of some of these peer expansions because, if the public purse is not going to be able to provide all of that, how else are they going to be funded?

If we take Embankment Pier as an example, TfL, I know, did a project a couple of years ago now looking at the costs of extending that pier and the budget for that would be between £1 million and £4 million depending on how you do it. We would love for TfL to be able to finance that. If that is not possible, then who does finance that? That is the question we are currently all faced with.

Caroline Pidgeon MBE AM (Chair): OK. Do you have set out somewhere details of these pinch points that you think need addressing to then help capacity? Would you be able to supply us with that?

Robin Mortimer (Chief Executive, Port of London Authority): Yes, absolutely. We published the report before, *The Thames Vision*, which we can certainly send to the Committee. It was with Marico, which is a consultancy, and it modelled both current river use and future river use and takes account not just of the river bus service but of other passenger operators, the charter and tourism operators, and freight. On the freight side, with the Thames Tideway project now ramping up, we are going to see more barge movements and more night-time barge movements and all of that we need to take into account.

Caroline Pidgeon MBE AM (Chair): Lovely.

Danny Price (General Manager of Sponsored Services, Transport for London): Could I also add, just from a safety point of view, from TfL's perspective, we operate and own eight of the busiest piers in London and we have licences with operators, and so we do recognise we have a significant influence on safety. Certainly, within the Pier Strategy, working very closely with the PLA, we are looking to tighten that up to see how we can improve that even further, maybe even looking at what goes into those licences and compliance with them. That perhaps will be a little bit more intrusive, some might say, of what our own safety standards should be and ensure that they are applied by operators in the future.

Again, as I said beforehand, within the working group forums that we have had, the passion about ensuring that we have a safe route comes out really strongly. It is not just from the PLA's policing perspective. It comes from the boat operators and TfL has a key role to play in that as well.

Caroline Pidgeon MBE AM (Chair): Can you just comment on the point Robin made about the funding situation at TfL and perhaps a reduction in capital investment that you planned in piers?

Danny Price (General Manager of Sponsored Services, Transport for London): Sure. Over the course of the business plan, we will be investing up to £1 million each year on renewal of pier infrastructure, as well as between £250,000 and £500,000 on pier maintenance. Absolutely, the safety and wellbeing of the current piers is really important. We have just finished life-extension work on Greenwich Pier of £1.3 million and so there is money in there. However, I do appreciate the point taken, particularly on Embankment Pier, which Robin and I and Sean as well have discussed in some detail about opportunities. TfL is currently procuring some work around Embankment Pier to find out what the options are to extend it.

Caroline Pidgeon MBE AM (Chair): Great, thank you. Sean, did you want to comment on that?

Sean Collins (Managing Director, MBNA Thames Clippers): Yes. I would just like to go back to the capacity point. We are suffering a bit on the Thames of going through an era where it just completely died. There was very little traffic on it at all 25 years ago. In the last 20 years, it has significantly grown, pleasingly, and it is growing more, as Robin has said, from a freight perspective. Therefore, there does need to be some more thinking and some more planning and strategy as to how this can all work together.

One of the things that we often get asked is why the river cannot be used more. When I am walking to work or cycling to work or walking over a bridge, the river is empty, and there are a lot of commuters who have that perception and the river gives that perception. We know that there are peaks and troughs in there and we have to start thinking as to how we can accommodate the future. It is very pleasing to hear that the PLA is pushing as much freight through the night. When you look at the railways and how busy they are and the relatively small tracks, how many tracks could you get out there on low tide? Equally, we have to remember that the river expands and contracts in width and so we have to work on a low-tide basis because on the other side of it, on high water, the shore arches of the bridges are non-navigable for most vessels. However, we need to look to plan as to how it can accommodate that and ensure that infrastructure and moorings are not put in a position that could potentially restrict the growth of such services in the future because that has happened in years gone by and we are now paying the price for that.

Caroline Pidgeon MBE AM (Chair): For TfL, Danny has talked about some of the work that is going on, but do you think there is enough grip around getting this comprehensive strategy and action plan that is needed?

Sean Collins (Managing Director, MBNA Thames Clippers): Yes, I do. There was a significant change about five or six years ago in TfL when TfL recognised the importance - it was on the back of one of these meetings - and put a focus on the river and recognised that the river needed some good strong management. We had that. As we have heard, due to cutbacks, we have had a wobble. We have had 18 months of not-so-strong steer, but Danny does have a very good structured team there now. Equally, the PLA has issued a vision now for the river that encompasses everything, not just passengers. Therefore, I would like to think that everybody now is going to start talking, collaborating and working towards sustainable river growth, as I have just articulated.

Caroline Pidgeon MBE AM (Chair): Emma, you wanted to come in and then I have other Members who want to come in.

Emma McFarlane (Passenger representative): Yes, just on the passenger side, of course, as commuters, what we need is a reliable service. Every morning when I am waiting for the 8.19am boat, I have a conference call at 9.00am with Russia or Iran or anywhere else and so I need to be able to get there on time. When all these things are being taken into account, we must remember that. On the other side when I am commuting home for the 6.02pm or whatever, if it is a nice sunny day, you suddenly get an influx of people that nobody recognises because it is nice and sunny and they want to go on a boat. Often, we get pushed out. If there are whole loads of tourists in front of me or people just looking to take a trip to Putney for the afternoon, I cannot get home on that boat after a long day at work. That needs to be taken into account.

Caroline Pidgeon MBE AM (Chair): Thank you.

Caroline Russell AM: Thank you. I want to have a look at the environmental impacts of these river services. In terms of carbon emissions, water transport is incredibly efficient. It has 17% of the carbon emissions of road transport and 50% of the carbon emissions of rail transport. However, if we look at the nitrogen oxide (NOx) emissions, then there is possibly more of a question there. Because the Port of London Authority has done a draft Air Quality Strategy last December, would you like to say a bit about the situation with air pollution?

Robin Mortimer (Chief Executive, Port of London Authority): Sure. It is a really important issue. We published a draft Strategy and we are about to launch the final Strategy following the consultation. I have just a little bit of facts and figures on it. One of the things we did was to compare on the freight side a tonne of goods transported on the same journey whether by river or by heavy goods vehicle (HGV) and we modelled that for a number of different journeys. As you say, on the carbon side, it is a clear winner because you are using tidal energy to transport the goods. On the particulate side, it is also much improved.

NOx is the real focus issue for us now. What the study showed was that at the point at which the emissions are emitted, on a like-for-like comparison basis, vessels produce more NOx than the equivalent HGV. However, if you then do the dispersion modelling, which TfL does and which the Department for Transport does, to look at the air quality impacts of those emissions, because the river is wide and the traffic tends to

be in the middle of it, at the point you get to the receptors on the land side it is five to six times better from a NOx perspective. That is quite important story in a way but it is not straightforward to tell because it is certainly true that the regulations around engine standards on the vessels are less strict than on the equivalent HGVs. However, from an overall air quality point of view, we can safely say that the river is a better mode in all of those pollutants.

Having said all that, we are not saying that that means that there is no problem. At the moment, from a NOx perspective, the river accounts for around 1% of London's total emissions. If nothing else happens, if no other action is taken, that 1% will increase to 2% simply because there is a lot tighter regulation around the Low Emission Zone, etc, on the road network and because of growth in river traffic. We will become an increasing part of the issue.

What the Strategy basically says is that we need to get a grip on this and the first thing we need to do is to establish what is technologically possible. As I say, there is a whole set of international - currently European - and domestic regulations around vessel engine standards. There is an option to put additional incentives in place to encourage the speedy take-up of those improved, more modern standards. That is one option which we are committed to looking at.

The second is things like abatement technologies, particularly selective catalytic reduction (SCR). Is it technically possible to fit that to vessel engines or do you have to change the engine, which can be prohibitively expensive? We are committed to doing a detailed study to look at that.

As I have said to many colleagues in the GLA, what we need to do is to make sure we have that evidence in place before we decide on the best package of regulatory and incentive measures because, at the moment, there is not the evidence to know which the most effective solution would be. That is what we are committed to doing.

Caroline Russell AM: What about exposure? You say that by the time the NOx reaches land it is not as bad as living by a main road and so that is good for the people who are living alongside the river. However, for the people who are working on and travelling on the boats, the exposure when the NOx is emitted is higher than the NOx levels on roads. We know that the exposure for people who are, for instance, inside vehicles on the road is worse than the exposure of people who are outside walking along the street.

Have you looked at the health impacts for both the passengers and the people who are working on those boats in terms of the NOx when they are exposed to it on the boats?

Robin Mortimer (Chief Executive, Port of London Authority): We have and this is a direct issue for us as an employer as well because there is a health and safety issue for our staff, many of whom work afloat. Over the last four months, we have been doing a study. We put monitoring points on our vessels and we have been monitoring the effects of that, for which we will get the results of the end of May. The first set of results we had showed that the NOx exposure was lower than on the land, again, the reason simply being because the emissions tend to be behind. Therefore, the actual impact on the river we do not think is particularly significant, but we will have the full set of those results in a couple of weeks.

Caroline Russell AM: Will they be published in a couple of weeks?

Robin Mortimer (Chief Executive, Port of London Authority): We can certainly share some data. This was specifically an internal study to look at the impacts on our own staff, but there could be some wider lessons for other operators. We will certainly be happy to share some data on that.

Caroline Russell AM: That is great.

Sean Collins (Managing Director, MBNA Thames Clippers): I would also like to add that it does not just stop with a simple engine and power solution. We have reduced significantly in our recent build of vessels and a lot of it is to do with their design and weight. Weight is one of the biggest issues that requires more power. There are regulations that are being brought in that do not necessarily lend well to that fact. We want the safest boat possible, but when we have duplication of certain pieces of equipment that have been designed for an open-water transit where you are a long way away from land and it has just been blanket applied to an inland waterway, it is an area that is becoming very inefficient. The lighter we can make boats and design boats in the future, the less power we are going to need to move them.

Caroline Russell AM: You are saying that the boats are being constructed for travelling on open water and the sea --

Sean Collins (Managing Director, MBNA Thames Clippers): No, the regulations --

Caroline Russell AM: -- to those regulations and they could be --

Sean Collins (Managing Director, MBNA Thames Clippers): Yes. You could not take one of our boats and sail it across the Channel on a daily basis, but what I am saying is that the regulation and the requirements in the build have to follow the same requirements of those larger vessels. We have to look at everything in the round moving forward to ensure that we are improving the efficiency of our mode.

Caroline Russell AM: Whilst staying safe.

Sean Collins (Managing Director, MBNA Thames Clippers): Absolutely.

Caroline Pidgeon MBE AM (Chair): Before, Caroline, you move to your next question, could I just welcome pupils from Bonus Pastor Catholic College from Lewisham? Welcome today. This is the Transport Committee and today we are looking at river services and looking at how we can increase the number of passengers who are using the river as a way of getting to work or going about London.

Caroline Russell AM: My next question, a slight shift in emphasis here, is whether there is any potential for a demand-responsive river taxi service. Now, having heard earlier about the congestion on the piers, I was thinking that that probably blows that idea out of the water. However, just to investigate it, I gather that the Mayor has had some conversations with a company called SeaBubbles, which has been talking to Paris. It is some kind of hydrofoil taxi service that would work a bit like Uber. It has room for a pilot and four passengers. It does not seem to be happening in Paris, but what is your response to this idea?

Danny Price (General Manager of Sponsored Services, Transport for London): We are discussing it. Someone has approached us with an idea of a taxi on the river. It is not the first time we have been approached. It would be quite an interesting concept. I am particularly interested in Sean's response to

this. Arguably, we have private hire vessels there. It is not quite on demand, but if you want to hire at relatively reasonable expense – or some would say reasonable value – you can hire small vessels to take you from one place to another. That does take quite an advanced booking system and we help support that with those boat operators, but no river taxi as of yet.

Robin Mortimer (Chief Executive, Port of London Authority): I was just going to add that we are also going to look at that and that particular one. I have to say that sometimes we are surprised when we get approaches for not just river taxis but other river uses. Companies are not always aware of the basics of the River Thames, particularly the tidal flow. You can have a taxi which will work brilliantly on a lake or an impounded river where there is no tide, but it is pretty quick. You only have to stand and look over London Bridge to see how fast the tide moves. You need a lot of power in that environment to be safe. Whether or not this particular proposal is viable I do not know at the moment, but that is one of the things we need to look at.

Sean Collins (Managing Director, MBNA Thames Clippers): I am all for it. The more the river is used and the more the river becomes a focal point, the better it is going to be for everybody, but we do need to come back to safety and commercial viability. As Robin said, it is a very fast-flowing river. There is not a day or a week that goes past that we do not get a fouled jet or a fouled prop just because of the debris that gets washed into the river further upriver during heavy rain seasons and things like that. The smaller boats are always going to be very much more susceptible to damage and breakdown.

Then, from a commercial perspective, I would struggle to see how it would be viable without very excessive fares, purely because of the fact that the regulation requires that you have to have two people, even with a vessel of four passengers. Unless the captain can dock the vessel and let the passengers off without leaving the conning position, then he or she needs a second person to assist with that. It would require best boat docks as well and that is a positive because what you do not want is a lot of small boats buzzing around piers where there are bigger boats because that is when incidents could happen. If it were to happen, it would be great for them to have smaller dedicated piers and docks that may be able to add to their efficiency as well.

Caroline Russell AM: If you were trying to address the issue that Emma raised earlier of turning up and finding there was not enough capacity on the boat to get home, if you were starting that from scratch, you would make sure that you provided more of the big boats rather than trying to set up little demand-responsive boats?

Sean Collins (Managing Director, MBNA Thames Clippers): Absolutely, and then, going back to your environmental point and as Robin touched on, you would need fairly significant power to move four people at a speed that is going to be acceptable to the customer.

Emma McFarlane (Passenger representative): You can watch the bicycles going by, yes.

Caroline Russell AM: Yes. What is your view as a customer, Emma?

Emma McFarlane (Passenger representative): It is the same thing: I need reliability and I need to get to work on time and I need speed. Small boats are fine if they can compete with the Thames Clippers but, right now, I am not sure that that is the case. I know how fast that river runs. If you stand on any jetty

when the tide is changing and the tide is coming back in, those houseboats and other jetties are thrown around massively. It is a very fast-moving river.

Keith Prince AM: It is a question to Danny, really, but it is probably a bit unfair and he probably will not know the answer, but you are here from TfL today. As we know, the diesel engines on the boats are not Euro 6 and so are there plans to make them subject to the Ultra Low Emission Zone (ULEZ) when it is introduced because they will be within the ULEZ? Also, why is it that they are not subject to the T-Charge as well?

Danny Price (General Manager of Sponsored Services, Transport for London): I will satisfy your question by saying that I cannot answer that one. What I can say is that Thames Clippers and TfL are working on an emission abatement trial. We are just going through the project discussions, but this would be funded by TfL. It is at least to see what it is we can do to support what can be done there.

I will also mention that we will be welcoming two new Woolwich Ferry vessels towards the end of this calendar year with improved pollution levels. At 1.00am this morning, I was told that they float, which is really good news.

Keith Prince AM: That is reassuring, I suppose, yes.

Robin Mortimer (Chief Executive, Port of London Authority): Just to follow up on that, we did look at this in our Air Quality Strategy. The regulation is pretty Byzantine. There is International Maritime Organization (IMO) regulation, there are European Union (EU) inland waterway vessel standards, there are UK-level, and they are just basically different from the Euro standards that are applied on the road. One of our messages, really, in the Strategy is to make sure that we explore what the art of the possible is first in terms of abatement of the emissions on these vessels because, if you were simply to apply the same regime as are on the ULEZ and the T-Charge, the risk is that you drive traffic off the river. Particularly when it comes to freight, that will then go on the road. As I have just explained earlier, the emissions of carbon particulates and NOx would all be worse. The perverse consequence of ineffective regulation on the river would be to worsen London's air quality.

Therefore, what we think we need to do is to build up the evidence base and then look at a river-specific set of incentives and regulation which will work rather than something which gets translated directly from the road system.

Keith Prince AM: It is a fair point that no regard is being given to small businesses and people on low incomes when this charge is being levied.

Caroline Pidgeon MBE AM (Chair): OK. Let us keep the focus on the river.

Joanne McCartney AM: This follows on from that about the standards and something Sean said earlier about boat manufacturers. You cannot just go and purchase a new boat with a better engine. Has TfL done any lobbying to manufacturers, as it does with motor vehicles, to try to get them to offer something different?

Sean Collins (Managing Director, MBNA Thames Clippers): To be fair to the manufacturers, their hands are tied from a construction perspective. They have to build to a standard. Our vessels are built to the High Speed Craft Code, which is an international code predominantly designed for international voyages, and it has been applied to our operation from an inland waterway perspective.

Ironically, we have exactly the same engine in our boats that is in a coach in a Euro 6 environment. For some reason, it is just graded differently because it is marine. It is exactly the same engine. We are lobbying those manufacturers even to the point that we have just placed an order for a new boat and we were trying to get the suppliers to compete on what they could provide us not on price but on air quality. As Robin articulated, the marine industry internationally is slightly behind the land drivers.

Joanne McCartney AM: It would seem to me that TfL with lobbying and whatever, if you could get somethings that could be held up as a best-practice example, it might shift it. It would be interesting to see, Danny, whether TfL are prepared to do anything about that.

Danny Price (General Manager of Sponsored Services, Transport for London): We will take that back. We have worked quite closely with Thames Clippers about what it is we can do jointly because we find the resource as it is on the river has an expertise which TfL can bring in to help with that. We will take the particular lobbying point.

Sean Collins (Managing Director, MBNA Thames Clippers): There has just been a significant amount of funding from the EU to a Norwegian-led organisation that we have been asked to be part of and have agreed to be part of that. They are looking at designing the future vessel and have chosen us above any other operator in Europe because of the complexities of the Thames. We heard about the speed of the tide, the lack of height of bridges at high water and the lack of water at low water. They have chosen us because we are such a difficult box to tick to ensure that whatever is developed can be utilised pretty much on any waterway. There are some very good organisations internationally that are involved in that. Wärtsilä is the engine manufacturer that is going to play a part in the technology that will operate.

Battery power is an obvious answer, but currently, as I articulated earlier, weight is an issue. They have to be buoyant and they have to be safe. If you add the batteries that are needed to propel the vessel, then you cannot carry any passengers.

Robin Mortimer (Chief Executive, Port of London Authority): We have just been through the *Official Journal of the European Union* process on procuring a pilot cutter. This is operating outside the London boundary, taking the pilots out to service the big ships that come into the port. We are trying to procure what we think is the world's first hybrid pilot cutter because they have to operate in quite heavy waters at speed. It is a commercial process, but the only bid and the successful bid in that process was from a British boatyard, which can build that for us, which is great. The technology is developing and hybrid in particular could offer a solution to some of these issues.

Danny Price (General Manager of Sponsored Services, Transport for London): What TfL will consider or certainly within the London Pier Strategy is what we do with the pier infrastructure to enable this and how we influence operators within licence fees and all those sorts of things to encourage improved emissions.

Joanne McCartney AM: They may have to plan for electric charging points as well.

Sean Collins (Managing Director, MBNA Thames Clippers): We have actually only yesterday installed a new pier at our base that is going to provide electric power for the entire fleet overnight and so there will be no generators running. All the engineers' overnight works will all be carried out being supported 100% by electric. There are a lot of things that we are doing to improve.

Caroline Pidgeon MBE AM (Chair): OK. Let us move on now to talk about passengers and how we can improve their experience.

David Kurten AM: Thank you, Chair, and good morning. I will first of all direct my questions at Emma because you are a passenger representative. Just in general terms, what do you think would make river bus services better for passengers?

Emma McFarlane (Passenger representative): How can I describe it to you? You queue up. You get on the boat. You have a lovely seat. You may or may not get a window seat. If you are feeling thirsty, you pop in and have a coffee, a tea, a pastry, something hot. If you have had a bad day at work, at the end of the day you get back on the boat and you can have a gin and tonic. I cannot really complain. The experience itself is amazing and everybody I have spoken to - and I have spoken to a lot of passengers - has really loved the service.

What they need, as I have already said to you *ad nauseam*, is reliability and speed to get to work on time. That is it, really. They need to be able to get on the boat, obviously.

David Kurten AM: You make it sound like the most luxurious method of travel.

Emma McFarlane (Passenger representative): No, really, please, if you all have a chance to go on the boat to work one day, please try it.

David Kurten AM: Fantastic. What about the frequency of the service? Is that an issue as well as reliability?

Emma McFarlane (Passenger representative): Again, the Thames is quite long and people commuting from Putney have to get all the way to Canary Wharf, for example. It is quite a long journey and so there is a restriction on that side, but I have an option from my jetty at Cadogan, which is Albert Bridge. I live in Battersea. I cross through the park over the bridge to Cadogan. Basically, I have a 7.56am, an 8.02am, an 8.19am and an 8.56am. That generally covers us, but of course we would always like to have more. We are greedy passengers, so to say.

David Kurten AM: That sounds as though there are more services in the peak times and then, as you get to the end, there is a lower frequency?

Emma McFarlane (Passenger representative): Correct, yes.

David Kurten AM: I understand there has been a new timetable implemented at the end of April. Have there been any issues with that at all that you can think of?

Emma McFarlane (Passenger representative): On the passenger side, I would not say so. We did lose a service that ran from Vauxhall at the weekends and up to Tower and Swan, but that has been replaced by Battersea Power Station, which is lovely. I use that quite frequently and others do as well. It is great to have that opportunity. People are asking if we can have services during the week. That is a different question that we will have to look at.

David Kurten AM: How about the fare structure? At the moment, I understand, it is not that well integrated into the whole TfL structure in that it does not count towards pay-as-you-go. Is that correct? Is there any way that the fare structure could make travelling by boat or river bus more attractive to passengers, do you think?

Emma McFarlane (Passenger representative): Personally, I use the Thames Clippers app. I have that on my phone and then I would just load up on a weekly basis my weekly Travelcard if I need it or a single or whatever. Other people do use their credit cards and just direct debit. I have seen people with Oyster cards that they have loaded up and put money on there. As far as I understand it, it is open to all. If you pitch up with cash, that is slightly more difficult. Say if the boat was there, you would have to rush and try to buy a ticket in time. You may or may not be able to do that on time.

David Kurten AM: Danny, do you have any comments about that? At the moment, it does not count towards the pay-as-you-go capping system. That is what I mean. Is that something you are thinking of introducing in the future or not?

Danny Price (General Manager of Sponsored Services, Transport for London): It has to be economically viable to do that, similar to cycle hire and cable car, in a way, as to how those areas are funded or indeed if it would need to be a subsidy. The connectivity with TfL is really important and that is a key focus area. Just generally, people see the river as a line and as transport link and very much on par with other forms of transport. That is a key focus that we are looking into at the moment.

Access to tickets, as you say, for those in the know who know how to download and particularly with the river bus service, that works quite well, but for a number of visitors to London there are still challenges. If you were to walk outside Westminster Station and you were faced with a row of ticket vending units, it could be quite a confusing proposition. These are some of the key areas of customer experience that we will be looking at within the London Pier Strategy. The view is, even if it is not integrated with the wider TfL offering, contactless is obviously a familiar message. For those other operators and river tours, it is also ensuring that people know they can purchase tickets in advance through a variety of means and getting that done before people arrive.

David Kurten AM: Sticking on connectivity, in your TfL Journey Planner, I understand that sometimes river buses do not come up unless the user specifically asks it to show the river journeys. For example, there might be an option that is quicker from one point to one point, but it does not come up in the initial search. Is that something that you are looking at?

Danny Price (General Manager of Sponsored Services, Transport for London): It comes as a default for the fastest journey, but that is something that we are discussing in terms of how the river connects. Again, it is like cycle hire and like cable car, in a way, because they all sit with my team, but in TfL we have

to look at how we communicate those options so that people can see the river is a viable option. If it is scrolling down and it is not there on the first page of options of transport from one place to another, it does make it more challenging. We are looking at how we promote the river internally and also how we connect key transport hubs, the communication and the wayfinding. I am pleased that we have put aside around £100,000 to improve some signage and paying points to help promote wayfinding in some key locations on the river, just to improve the identification of where the piers are.

Emma McFarlane (Passenger representative): Just to say that word of mouth is very important as well. There have been articles in the *Evening Standard* about the service. If you see a person in a suit wandering around the jetty looking a bit confused, people immediately say, "Let me tell you about the Thames Clippers and how I get to work quickly". Word of mouth is massively helpful.

David Kurten AM: What do you think about the maps and the TfL Journey Planner signage at the piers and accessibility as well? Do you think that they are all good or do you think there are areas for improvement?

Emma McFarlane (Passenger representative): Yes, it is difficult to say. I suspect as a tourist I might be a bit confused, but when you come on to a jetty there are always people there who can help you and answer questions. There are maps up and generally they do show various areas where you might want to visit as a tourist or whatever. On commuters, again, if you went to a jetty, there are maps there that show you where you need to go. People are not helpless. You can look up where this jetty ends and what is near it and so on and so forth. People can do their own research.

David Kurten AM: I suppose for people who are used to using it and are using it regularly then it is not a problem because people know what they are doing. I am thinking about attracting new people into it. What could be done to make access easier for people who want to start using it?

Emma McFarlane (Passenger representative): I did notice after the last article in the *Evening Standard* a year or so ago that more people did appear on the piers. Anything like that helps; very much so.

David Kurten AM: Yes, after an article everyone thinks, "That is exciting".

Emma McFarlane (Passenger representative): Talking about gins and tonics, yes!

David Kurten AM: Yes. Finally, coming back to you, Danny. I understand that there are 22 piers and 19 of them are wheelchair accessible. Do you have any plans to make the other three wheelchair accessible as well?

Danny Price (General Manager of Sponsored Services, Transport for London): All of TfL piers are fully accessible. Some of them are privately-owned piers. There has been an improvement and there has been an increase in accessibility to those piers, but there are one or two changes that we need to try to help influence. We do not necessarily have complete ownership and control over those that are privately owned, but there is influence.

David Kurten AM: OK. The TfL ones are all wheelchair accessible, but there is a bit of work for some third parties?

Danny Price (General Manager of Sponsored Services, Transport for London): Yes, as well as boat operator services.

David Kurten AM: Yes, OK.

Emma McFarlane (Passenger representative): I can give you an example of that. On my particular pier in Cadogan, at the beginning of Thames Clippers ramping up their services, they did have a lot of problems with that pier. It is a privately-owned pier. They were saying, "We are not particularly keen on having additional volumes". I do not know how Thames Clippers or TfL got over that, but they did, thank God. There were issues and so that is something else to bear in mind.

David Kurten AM: Would you other gentlemen have anything to add or are you happy with the discussion?

Robin Mortimer (Chief Executive, Port of London Authority): Yes. The point about the search on the app and coming up with river options was really important. What needs to happen technically to achieve that? If it is not on the first screen, then people do not tend to find it, do they? Anything that Danny and his team can do to get that really integrated into the app system would be fantastic.

Sean Collins (Managing Director, MBNA Thames Clippers): We have heard, if we can create a vision for the future of the Thames as a Tube line, that would have far more impact than what the "river bus", as it is, currently does.

Danny Price (General Manager of Sponsored Services, Transport for London): Just to add, a lot of these subjects are absolutely key ingredients to the London Pier Strategy, which later this year we would hope would be published by then. We are not self-inviting ourselves to return, but it would be quite a good idea if possible to perhaps return once that Strategy is shared so that you can see the progress and what we are focusing on.

David Kurten AM: Good idea.

Caroline Pidgeon MBE AM (Chair): Our report from this will be trying to influence some of that. Could a licence condition be linked to the accessibility issue so that you do not use those piers if they are not accessible and you look at not licensing? That could be a tool.

Sean Collins (Managing Director, MBNA Thames Clippers): The PLA would -- because they are the custodians of where that infrastructure sits. LRS and TfL did produce a pier design build document a couple of years ago that is communicated to the developers that are building their own piers. Pretty much all of the new piers that have been built are being built to a good standard for accessibility. During the Olympics we carried a significant amount of people that had accessibility issue and the river was deemed to be very successful. If we can just loop out those odd few piers in the future, because at the end of the day they are requiring refurbishment or replacement anyway, so there is an opportunity there to do that.

Keith Prince AM: Danny, in relation to the Journey Planner, I was a big advocate of that until I went out with a couple of guys from TfL who said, "We do not use that. We use Citymapper". Citymapper uses

information supplied by TfL and so whatever they do, Journey Planner could do. I have just typed in a couple of points from Greenwich to London Bridge. It gives me the trains, but also it does give me the ferry option as well. In fact, I can even do it by jetpack in nine minutes, apparently.

Caroline Pidgeon MBE AM (Chair): Very good. Thank you. Let us move on to management and co-ordination.

Florence Eshalomi AM (Deputy Chair): Danny, you cited the London Pier Strategy, which will be announced later this year. I would say one of the issues with the river service is that the management and co-ordination was led by different departments and different bodies. You have LRS responsible for the licensing; you have Thames Clippers operating the river bus, and PLA responsible for the waters. In September last year, the Mayor established the Thames and London Waterways Forum. That Forum replaced the Waterways Commissions and Rivers Co-ordination Forum. How do you feel that that Forum has improved some of the strategic issues and activities in helping to co-ordinate all the different services?

Danny Price (General Manager of Sponsored Services, Transport for London): Started. The reason I say that is because it is not a huge amount of time for something that is quite a strategic group. We have had some good workshop groups. As part of the Forum there are three main leads, of which passenger service is a key one, which I chair. Very recently we had a very good working session on the Pier Strategy with a lot of good, innovative ideas in terms of partnership and what we can do with some of the planning points. Interestingly, a number of the things that we have mentioned here about connectivity and TfL have come up. We have these meetings on a quarterly basis. The Pier Strategy in draft form will be shared with the next steering group in the summer. We are hoping very soon after that it will be published. Of course, it needs to go through the steering group first of all. The London Pier Strategy is a strategy. Underneath that a lot of our time within the Pier Working Group is spent looking at actions and getting thoughts and ideas to turn that into a plan of activity. One of the things that is really clear, in the success of the river doubling its volume over the last ten years, has been a real collaborative working group with an energy and a pulse. We want to keep that pulse going. It is early days, but we have a tangible Strategy which will be published later this year. We have a broad spectrum of river stakeholders as well borough representatives with water frontage involved.

Florence Eshalomi AM (Deputy Chair): Do you feel that the PLA being part of that wider group has benefits?

Robin Mortimer (Chief Executive, Port of London Authority): Yes, definitely. We chair a third of the working groups, the people and places. All I wanted to say is that the leadership from the Mayor down really is important in this. We have been lucky in Val Shawcross [Valerie Shawcross CBE, Deputy Mayor for Transport], who has been personally really passionate about it and committed to it. Continuing that leadership is really important. Part of what will make a success of the vision, as well as addressing all the very specific issues we have been talking about, is the wider picture; things like the illuminated bridges project and making the river exciting and attractive at night or in the winter when passenger numbers are lower; the Culture Strategy, getting the river at the centre of that; the fact that you can get to World Heritage sites by river and you can create excitement around that. Some of these wider GLA responsibilities are really important to bring into the picture to make that demand happen.

Florence Eshalomi AM (Deputy Chair): Do you feel that those concerns are being addressed at that Forum?

Robin Mortimer (Chief Executive, Port of London Authority): Yes, they are. The value of it is to bring all those issues together in one place. It is not a criticism, but with Val moving on, we just need to make sure that momentum is maintained, really.

Florence Eshalomi AM (Deputy Chair): Yes. We will definitely feed that back to the new Deputy Mayor when she starts. Just a final comment on the co-ordination and management; again, I am mindful that you mentioned that it is a bit too early to look at how that is progressing, but in terms of the directives set by that forum, how will they be measured?

Danny Price (General Manager of Sponsored Services, Transport for London): They will be measured ultimately it is delivering the Thames vision, which the Mayor's Transport Strategy endorses, in terms of improving and increasing river volume.

Florence Eshalomi AM (Deputy Chair): Policies?

Danny Price (General Manager of Sponsored Services, Transport for London): Yes. Sitting behind a number of policies is bringing the policies to life and underneath that having some clear actions and directions of what needs to be done to deliver that. It is very policy driven. It is part of the Mayor's Transport Strategy document. It is very much aligned with the other TfL documents that are being produced.

Caroline Pidgeon MBE AM (Chair): From what you have said, Val has really taken a lead on this in the last two years. Before that we had Richard Tracey, [former] Assembly Member, as an ambassador for the river. Do you think that sort of role needs to be recreated to make sure the river is being constantly considered in TfL? Sean is nodding.

Sean Collins (Managing Director, MBNA Thames Clippers): Absolutely. Richard really promoted the need and the opportunities that river transport can provide certain boroughs. He very much looked at the west and was instrumental in getting that service up and running. He was absolutely right the proof is there in the demand that we see. I would very much welcome a similar sort of ambassador moving forward. One of the biggest issues that the previous model, the Concord app, faced -- yes, from an operator's perspective we have TfL, we have the MCA and we have the PLA all regulating us for different aspects. It is not easy, but it is achievable. They are talking to each other more and more. Those that are not talking to each other are the boroughs. I see those as the biggest stumbling block. They see the river as this demarcation line and their next-door boundary being a demarcation line and there is no joined-up thinking in that regard. I am a bit disappointed in the lack of input, for instance, from Tower Hamlets and Southwark in the consultation of the river crossing between Rotherhithe and Canary Wharf. The cost of that bridge is so significant compared to what a totally electric cross-river ferry service could deliver with no significant infrastructure. This has to be a swing-bridge to allow ships and large vessels to come up through. There is an opportunity there to start looking at how the river can play a part in connectivity from one shore to the other. That could be a pilot which will eventually be delivered, as it is in the Mayor's plan between the Greenwich Peninsula and Canary Wharf and the north shore. That could be replicated all the way down the

river as developments expand; Barking, Thamesmead, all the way down, as the corridor expands from housing. The more of that you get, the less the river will be seen as a boundary.

Caroline Pidgeon MBE AM (Chair): The idea of having an ambassador pulling that all together everyone think is a good idea. Let us move on to TfL support for river bus services.

Tom Copley AM: Thank you, Chair. First of all, to Danny, how does TfL invest in river services, both in terms of investment and infrastructure and the operating subsidy?

Danny Price (General Manager of Sponsored Services, Transport for London): In infrastructure, of course, the Business Plan would invest up to £1 million each year of the Business Plan in renewal works and maintaining the piers, which is really important. A lot of the infrastructure that TfL does needs to be maintained for safety. We also invest this year, short term, in what we can do to improve connectivity signage, wayfinding, just to try and improve how our customers find the river, partly linking Westminster or other key station locations. That is some funding that we have already identified and put in place for this year.

Tom Copley AM: Do you invest in promoting the river as well? We touched on this with Florence's question. TfL is one of the most brilliant advertisers in terms of the marketing it produces and a great history. It still produces great marketing and advertising. I do look, but I do not very often see adverts for river services. Often, they tend to be for tourists. Do you invest anything in promoting the river to commuters, for example?

Danny Price (General Manager of Sponsored Services, Transport for London): A lot of our focus comes as part of wider digital investment, which TfL uses to ensure the website is competitive against other potential websites that may want to relay transport information. There has been an improvement on promoting the river in our digital channels and on that side. As I say, you will identify there are some improvements that could be made to signage more locally, which we are trying to address now. We do need to look at how we promote the river. In my view, it is the connectivity part and certainly involved in sharing internally with TfL what we can do. Sean Collins, on my right-hand side, would love the river line to be on the Tube map, for example. We have to look at what can be achieved and to make it connect with how far we can go. Certainly, the river should be an option. It is less, I suppose, about just finding money to put a marketing promotion in place, which some would say should happen in the summer when the river is busy anyway, but it is our business-as-usual connectivity and so it feels part of the wider network, which is where we are focused at the moment.

Tom Copley AM: The idea of putting it on the Tube map is really interesting. Although, of course, the challenge there is the Tube map is already incredibly congested and is going to get more congested. Being on the Tube map immediately puts it into people's minds as something that they could use as an alternative to getting on a crowded Tube train.

Danny Price (General Manager of Sponsored Services, Transport for London): Another option is also about whether there is a possible link or TfL has a role of selling tickets as it does do with certain visitor attractions. There are a number of these things coming out of these workgroups which we will be taking back within TfL to see what is feasible over the next few months.

Tom Copley AM: When a company, like Thames Clippers, comes to you and say, “We want to do this route”, do you also go to them and say, “We want you to do this route and we will provide you a subsidy to do that”? Is it a two-way thing?

Danny Price (General Manager of Sponsored Services, Transport for London): Yes. The Putney to London Bridge subsidy came through a tender process, which Thames Clipper bid for and was successful. Overall subsidy for the river has gone down in recent years with river bus volume going up. It is showing that that has worked particularly well. Our agreement is that we will look where we can to phase out subsidies, as part of its strategy working quite closely with Thames Clippers. We need to go through an official procurement process for any sort of level of subsidy. That comes from a particular contracted service that we run, whereas most of our other services are run on licences.

Tom Copley AM: How do you promote competition between different companies that offer river services?

Danny Price (General Manager of Sponsored Services, Transport for London): We go out to market. I do not know exactly; five years ago what we did was the Putney, we certainly went out to market to try and engage people and other operators, wider than just London and people that we know. There is an official process that is always gone through to make sure it is open, fair, and for us competitive because that is where the value comes from, making sure there is competition.

Tom Copley AM: Has any consideration ever been given and would it be desirable, do you think, would it be advantageous to TfL, for example, in having its own company that offers river services and competed with other companies as well or do you think the model where you get other companies to bid is the best way to do it?

Danny Price (General Manager of Sponsored Services, Transport for London): From the river, the contracted or the licensing model because the vast majority of services are licences which gives them access to the piers and it also allows the businesses to run them and be driven by making sure they are economically viable. It is not a plan that we currently have. We operate and own the Woolwich Ferry, but that is a free ferry service, so that is something that will always need subsidies. That made sense in that space, but is not something that we are planning to introduce yet.

Tom Copley AM: OK. How are improvements to your infrastructure, particularly the piers, made and funded? How is that done?

Danny Price (General Manager of Sponsored Services, Transport for London): It is within our Business Plan, within TfL’s accounts. It is looking at what the priorities are. Recently, the Greenwich pier life extension, we spent £1.3 million on that, which was completed in March [2018]. There are some absolutely fundamental needs of pier river infrastructure and the Business Plan secures that funding to ensure that we have safe facilities there.

Tom Copley AM: Yes, it is incredibly important, the experience with the London Overground, where once the investment had gone in to improving the experience, the trains, the stations, improving the staffing levels, the fact that it was on the Tube map and the fact that frequencies were higher as well, of course, all led to huge increases in passenger numbers on there.

What lessons have you learned from other cities around the world? Our briefing talked about Brisbane, where they have a population of one-seventh of London's but they have double the number of river bus users annually. What learning do you have from around the world as to how we can improve and grow passenger numbers?

Danny Price (General Manager of Sponsored Services, Transport for London): In 2015, Thames Clippers went out; Brisbane was one of those stops. Thames Clippers was looking at benchmarking services. There were some learnings about customer communications. There is quite a heavy focus on infrastructure on some of those areas and investment was quite significant. We have replicated that in some of the pier extensions. There have been some quite significant investments that TfL have made since. A challenge for us is to continue to do that and not just looking at other locations, but also tying in other technology innovations and digital innovations and looking at what impact that has on the river. That is something that we will benefit from being part of the plan for TfL.

Robin Mortimer (Chief Executive, Port of London Authority): Unfortunately, the Brisbane study tour was before I started. As I understand it, the chief harbour master of the PLA went to Brisbane. One of the lessons learned was the building-in at the early stage of planning. So, it goes back to Sean's point about the riparian boroughs. How far is it really central stage, if we are looking at Barking Riverside, Erith, Purfleet or all of the developments to the east, which are going to be so significant? If you talk to the Director of Planning or the Chair of the Planning Committee, where on the list of priorities is the river? I suspect in most cases it is still pretty low, if there at all. That is one of our efforts. We have increased our planning resource in PLA in the last year or so, just to be able to be a bit more proactive and get out and talk to the boroughs and say, "Look, you have a lot of housing growth --" not just about piers, but about water sports, using the river for recreation, creating communities around the river. That is really important. As I understand it, it is one of the things Brisbane has been really good at is that it is really central in their policies and planning systems.

Tom Copley AM: Absolutely, developments around Thamesmead, things like that?

Robin Mortimer (Chief Executive, Port of London Authority): Yes.

Tom Copley AM: Is that just something where we need more in the London Plan, perhaps, more policy and more guidance on that to move that up the agenda in terms of what the boroughs are thinking in terms of planning?

Robin Mortimer (Chief Executive, Port of London Authority): The London Plan says the right things. It is the amount of political attention that it gets --

Sean Collins (Managing Director, MBNA Thames Clippers): It says the right thing, but is it going to be acted upon? That is my concern. For instance, the Royal Wharf at Silvertown, the developer there is committed to putting a significant pier in. It is going to be really good connectivity to other mobile hubs as well. There was no consideration initially given by the planning and transport advisers, as to delivering people by bus locally to the pier head. Thankfully, it was at the last phase of the development and we have managed to get a bus route that is going to drop off within less than 100 metres from the pier, which was deemed to be a success. Equally, in the future you take the Brisbane model. All over Australia and the

United States, the buses drop off right at the pier heads and so people have a seamless interchange in connectivity. This heavily supports local communities.

Tom Copley AM: That is very interesting.

Caroline Pidgeon MBE AM (Chair): Thank you very much. Our last questions are about expanding services to the east.

Joanne McCartney AM: If I look at your map of scheduled services, everything stops at Woolwich. A lot of the housing development in London is going to be beyond that, to Barking Riverside and the Thames Gateway. I would like to ask a general question first and then come into some specifics, if I can. What are the benefits and challenges of doing that expansion further to the east? Sean, do you want to start?

Sean Collins (Managing Director, MBNA Thames Clippers): We have to look at the heart first and we have to make sure that the centre of London has the ability to cope with those vessels coming in. There needs to be support, infrastructure, piers and access to those piers. Assuming that is delivered, we have already embarked on a programme with quite a few developers. As I said, Ballymore and Oxley have delivered this pier at their cost and so we are really working commercially with others to deliver the piers outside of London and services that are not necessarily drawing on the public purse.

We have demonstrated previously that, yes, there is often the need for subsidy but it is seed core funding in that the majority of our routes now do not require a subsidy. They have become viable and been able to stand on their own two feet. Moving forward, a similar sort of programme needs to be put in place to support the expansion of river services out to the east, where there is a strong business case that demonstrates that, over time, these services can stand alone without subsidy and deliver a high level of service to the customer.

Joanne McCartney AM: You said that the central London route needs sorting out. Would it be a case for a shorter service from the east outside London just down to Canary Wharf or would that not be viable?

Sean Collins (Managing Director, MBNA Thames Clippers): Yes, I see that that has a lot of potential. We did a trial last year. New boats were waiting to be delivered and we were waiting for completion of Battersea Pier, and so we took that opportunity to do some market research on one of the biggest questions we are always asked: what about a service from Gravesend or the outer estuary? It was very successful and we got a lot of feedback from that trial. There is nothing like actually doing one. The indication was that there was a significant number of commuters who would use that service. Equally, we would not want to be stopping at too many piers because it would make it a long journey. We did that trial. We came into London at Tower Pier. We came into Blackfriars and Embankment and that was very successful.

I do not see it being a requirement for every pier to be expanded or for every pier to have a stop for every route. Equally, as the existing routes develop and expand, not all of those stops need to be included. We have done a lot of work on developing a network for the future so that the river bus services in their own right have the ability to integrate with each other to provide accessibility because, you are quite right, the journey time from, say, Gravesham or Erith into Canary Wharf is very competitive, even a lot quicker than other forms of transport.

Joanne McCartney AM: I suppose the ideal would be to have a full-length service but capacity in the central map. I suppose it is very hard to then decamp passengers from one boat or another. You are not very mobile like the bus or Tube.

Sean Collins (Managing Director, MBNA Thames Clippers): Exactly, and some of the piers have been developed in a way that they really are quite an inviting structure in their own right. I believe that in the design for Royal Wharf, for instance, there is going to be a small kiosk on the pier so that you can get a coffee while you are waiting for the boat, which is just brilliant. That is the sort of thing that is going to complete the circle in a proper waterborne transport offer.

Joanne McCartney AM: I was aware of your four-day trial out to Gravesend. Are you planning on publishing the results or could you give us an indication of your results, perhaps after this meeting?

Sean Collins (Managing Director, MBNA Thames Clippers): Certainly, yes, I am more than happy to.

Joanne McCartney AM: That would be very helpful. Can I go to Danny and then Robin about what is needed to try to get these piers further out to the east and to Thames Gateway?

Danny Price (General Manager of Sponsored Services, Transport for London): First of all, as Sean mentioned, until we have an engaged developer that is very important from TfL's perspective, the likelihood of us perhaps building piers going east is very small but working very closely with developers and with river bus services to enable that to happen is important. That includes the connectivity of where the bus comes in. That whole package of offer we need to support on, including the standard of which piers are built to, accessibility and those things.

In terms of where there is a business case for a subsidised service, it is going to come down to what the business case says and the value for that. I am also very keen to see the results of the Gravesend trial personally and Sean has said he is going to share that with us. Our role is to engage in the main core for those connections to happen and then promote those services.

Joanne McCartney AM: When there is a development of particular significance going ahead, TfL is an automatic stakeholder for any planning authority.

Danny Price (General Manager of Sponsored Services, Transport for London): Yes.

Joanne McCartney AM: Are your responders in TfL to those planning, I suppose, stakeholder engagement, are they very clear that they need to put river services on an equal footing with bus and Tube and train or whatever at that very early stage?

Danny Price (General Manager of Sponsored Services, Transport for London): Absolutely. It is very clear in the Mayor's Transport Strategy that the river has a key part to play. What we know the Transport Strategy does do is to make it clear as to where that connects with other policies that we have, and so everybody is very focused on that.

Joanne McCartney AM: Robin, continuing with you.

Robin Mortimer (Chief Executive, Port of London Authority): We would be particularly keen on a Gravesend service because the PLA's headquarters are in Gravesend and so that would be a door-to-door service, I am sure.

There are two further points, one just to reinforce this issue about central London. If we do not sort out central London, then we will not have the capacity to develop to the east. The one single place where we need to act urgently is Embankment. If we do not find a solution to that, then we have a real constraint issue and so that is really important.

The broader point for me would be engaging with the developers. Sometimes it is about education as well as information in the sense that some developers are very familiar with the river and its potential and others are less so. We have been talking, for example, to Peabody [Group] about the Thamesmead next phase, just to think through with them not just what the river bus could do for their residents, their tenants, but also, as I said earlier, the potential of the river for a water sports centre adding to the quality of life. At the moment, unfortunately, the first phase of that development looks away from the river to some extent, which is a missed opportunity in the sense that you have this wonderful resource of a global river on your doorstep and you are not making use of it.

Part of our messaging is around that and I guess we can do our bit on that. We are a fairly small organisation. Sean does his own engagement with developers, but if there is anything more that the Assembly, the GLA and the Mayor's office can do to engage at that high level to say, "Look, really think through the river opportunities at an early stage", it would be really helpful.

Joanne McCartney AM: Could the Waterways Forum be a body that could look at that?

Robin Mortimer (Chief Executive, Port of London Authority): Yes.

Sean Collins (Managing Director, MBNA Thames Clippers): Coming back to the point of a river ambassador, certainly looking at the future for the east is very, very important to make sure that that communication is being fed in to the Mayor and the boroughs that it is associated with. We have been lobbying for a pier within the Poplar area, the eastern side of Canary Wharf, for nearly 15 years now. We were very fortunate that we got a pier twice the size replaced at Blackfriars as a result of the Tideway Tunnel works at the upper side of Blackfriars. That then made a relatively new millennium pier redundant.

I suggested that we try to get a local business or beneficiary of that pier to provide the funding to get it installed in another location. This was achieved. The Radisson Hotel Group agreed to pay for the installation of the old Blackfriars Pier at East India. This would have given journey times for customers from Woolwich, for instance - currently it takes them 20 minutes because they have to go all the way round the Isle of Dogs to what we call Canary Wharf west, they would have been there in 10 minutes. We have hit objection after objection after objection for putting that pier in and there is no real reason for it, other than, "The development is completed and we do not want it on our doorstep". It is very short sighted. In that instance, we were trying to get something in once the development was completed.

I strongly urge that the plan ensures that there is clear scope for a pier to be put in in those areas and on those sites that are identified to be key players. There is no point putting piers in a location where you have a significant competing mass transit system. There are going to be places all the way down the Thames

corridor where we are going to be seeing significant housing developments come up. The river can contribute to significant volumes of transit. For instance, Barking - and this is where we have to think outside the box - to Woolwich is six minutes by clipper. You will then be able to get off and get straight on Crossrail within three minutes' walk of the pier. That is the sort of vision that we have to start looking to deliver.

Joanne McCartney AM: Can I then ask Danny and Robin? We talked at the moment about looking at future developments and whether you could put a pier in. Has there been any piece of strategic research just looking along the river saying where you would ideally like to put piers in?

Robin Mortimer (Chief Executive, Port of London Authority): That is quite an important part of the River Strategy that we have. Just to mention in terms of the potential Radisson pier, we are working quite hard to find a planning solution for that pier. It has also been in the Mayor's Transport Strategy to investigate a solution for that and we are working quite hard. There is some opposition, but we recognise that at a general location there would be demand for that.

Joanne McCartney AM: There is a strategic plan to say where you would like new piers to be?

Danny Price (General Manager of Sponsored Services, Transport for London): Piers that we want marked on it, yes.

Joanne McCartney AM: My final question then - and there have been quite a number of recent articles - the obvious stop missing is City Airport. Is that something that is being looked into at all?

Sean Collins (Managing Director, MBNA Thames Clippers): The Royal Wharf Pier is going to be quite close to that. City Airport, while it is perceived to be on the river, is actually set back quite a way from the river. It has a massive industrial wharf between it and the river, being Tate & Lyle, and so it is not without its challenges. We think that having the bus stop now quite close to the pier at Royal Wharf is going to potentially give us an opportunity to connect up there to the airport, especially given its expansion as well. We see that as an opportunity to run a shuttle service to Royal Wharf so that passengers can access because - you are quite right - you look at the journey time from there to the Greenwich Peninsula and from there to Greenwich, Surrey Quays and Southwark, it will be quicker by river than any other form of transport.

Danny Price (General Manager of Sponsored Services, Transport for London): Just to add, we look at all options as to where demand is. The Docklands Light Rail (DLR) will take you to London Bridge within 20 minutes. That is actually something that people are not always aware of when they arrive because people have the opportunity to take private taxis and there is a lot of work that the DLR team has done to put a lot of focus on moving people by rail, but certainly I have not seen a huge demand. I was told that in the 1980s there was a service that did run, but that is quite a long time ago.

Sean Collins (Managing Director, MBNA Thames Clippers): And pre-DLR.

Danny Price (General Manager of Sponsored Services, Transport for London): And pre-DLR, of course.

Sean Collins (Managing Director, MBNA Thames Clippers): Pre-pretty much everything, actually.

Joanne McCartney AM: Thank you.

Caroline Pidgeon MBE AM (Chair): Thank you very much. We have come to the end of our questions. Were there any points - and particularly Emma because with some of it we have been getting into some technicalities - any of our panel wanted to raise? No. We have covered everything. That is fine. Can I thank you very much, Emma, Sean, Danny and Robin for your contributions today? It has been a very useful discussion with lots of ideas coming out from it.

We will be shortly arranging to do a trip on the Thames Clippers. I was planning in the morning to have tea and coffee, but I think I am now going to be under pressure to get a different time! We wanted to come out and have a look.

Tom Copley AM: For gin and tonic, yes.

Caroline Pidgeon MBE AM (Chair): I think there is going to be a little bit of pressure there. I will come out to chat with you whilst we are on the river having a look at the services and the boats, as some of our Members maybe do not use the boats or have not for a while. Thank you very much for your contributions.