

New river crossings in east London
Transport Committee response to TfL's consultation

February 2013



Introduction

The Transport Committee held a seminar on Wednesday 9th January at City Hall to respond to the proposals by the Mayor and TfL to develop new river crossings in east London. Based on the issues raised during the seminar, this report provides the Transport Committee's response to TfL's consultation seeking views on proposals for a new Silvertown Tunnel, a new ferry at Gallions Reach, and a range of other options.

The seminar comprised two guest panels, covering two broad areas relating to the Mayor and TfL's proposals as follows:

Panel 1: Exploring the need for new river crossings in London

- Michèle Dix, Managing Director, Planning, TfL;
- German Dector-Vega, London Director, Sustrans; and
- John Dickie, Director of Strategy and Policy, London First.

Panel 2: TfL's proposals for new river crossings in east London

- Michèle Dix, Managing Director, Planning, TfL;
- Richard Bourn, Traffic and Planning Campaigner, Campaign for Better Transport; and
- David Quarmby, Chairman, RAC Foundation.

Approximately 80 delegates – including representatives of stakeholder organisations and members of the public – attended the seminar. We invited delegates to make contributions from the floor, and a small number of those attending provided written information using comment forms. We also received written submissions from stakeholders and members of the public.

Our consultation response suggests that the Mayor and TfL should take into account three key principles when making decisions about new river crossings in east London. TfL should:

- establish clear objectives in its proposals for new river crossings;
- be transparent in the consultation process; and
- learn from the successes and failures of past proposed river crossings.

In the appendix, we summarise of the views expressed by panellists and delegates. The summary provides a flavour of the topics raised in the discussion, rather than a full account of the seminar. A full transcript of the seminar discussion can be downloaded on the Assembly website.

The Transport Committee looks forward to seeing the results of the consultation and calls on the Mayor and TfL to take the principles outlined in our response into account.

Principle 1: TfL should set out clearly the objectives of its proposals for new river crossings, and their different impacts

The need for TfL to define clearly the purpose and objectives of new river crossings emerged as a strong theme in our seminar. The different options for new river crossings proposed in TfL's consultation may not have the same rationale. For example, while the proposed Silvertown Tunnel may provide strategic road capacity – connecting roads in southeast London to large areas of east, north east, and inner east London – the proposal for a new ferry at Gallions Reach would be likely to cater for local traffic.¹ It will be important, therefore, for TfL to define the purpose and differential benefits of the proposals under consideration, including the wider range of options beyond its principal proposals for the Silvertown Tunnel and Gallions Reach Ferry.

Furthermore, different crossing options are likely to produce different effects on regeneration, congestion, air quality and local economic development. Consultation material on potential schemes should acknowledge the different impact the proposed options could have on local communities in east and south east London. The options should be presented clearly to help Londoners make informed responses. This principle also applies to the practicalities of TfL's river crossings package. We would like to see more information on the delivery implications for each of its proposals, including cost, funding mechanisms, and timescales, which could help Londoners to distinguish between the benefits and disadvantages of different schemes. We would also welcome evidence of TfL's work to manage demand for river crossings, including other modes of transport as well as motorised vehicles. For example, in addition to options for tolling, we heard that TfL should examine other ways to manage existing supply and demand, including conducting analysis on journeys currently made by car that could be made by public transport or walking and cycling.²

Principle 2: TfL's consultation processes must be transparent

There is considerable scope to improve the transparency of the consultation process and the level of information provided to stakeholders and members of the public. We note concerns that TfL's Assessment of Options document was published only shortly before the seminar,³ more than two months into the consultation. The information used to underpin the Mayor and TfL's proposals should be available for the duration of the consultation process, because it has a direct impact on Londoners' ability to respond to the issues. Furthermore, a number of speakers at the seminar raised concerns about the lack of modelling information on the traffic changes and resulting congestion and environmental impacts that may result from TfL's proposals. We note that the consultation material – as published – contained almost no information on the potential traffic and environmental impacts of the proposals. The more information TfL provides on the impacts of the new crossings, the more legitimate it will make the consultation process.

¹ Seminar transcript, p. 24

² Seminar transcript, p. 17

³ The Assessment of Options paper was published on the consultation website on 8th January

In addition to accounting for motor vehicle travel, we call on TfL to include modelling on the demand for cycling within its calculations, following concerns that cycling information has been neglected due to historically low levels of cycling in London.

Londoners deserve to have full access to the supporting modelling information which will form the basis of the Mayor and TfL's decision-making process. TfL should place this information – including the raw data – in the public domain to demonstrate the evidence base on which its proposals have been based. If TfL has concerns about the robustness of the modelling, it should clearly explain any caveats relating to the margin of error that may need to be taken into account when interpreting the figures and how it believes the modelling results should be used. This will help respondents to make better judgements about the information provided and take informed views of TfL's proposals.

Principle 3: TfL should learn from the successes and failures of past proposed river crossings

East London has witnessed several proposals and consultations about the potential for new river crossings in recent years, and therefore TfL's current consultation on new river crossings shares many issues in common with those arising previously.

Recalling the consultation on the previously proposed Thames Gateway Bridge, our delegates called on TfL to consider the conclusions reached in the Inspector's Report, such as those relating to impacts on regeneration and the environment. Likewise, it was noted that TfL should acknowledge the impact that previous new river crossings have had on the problems it is seeking to address through its current proposals. For example, we heard that the expansion of the Blackwall Tunnel from two to four lanes led to a doubling of traffic within a year.⁴ Given that questions relating to the economic, congestion, and environmental benefits are likely to overlap significantly between previous proposals and TfL's current proposals for new river crossings, it will be important not to neglect lessons from both past proposals and schemes that have been delivered.

In discussions about TfL's plans for tolling current and future road crossings to help manage demand, some guests made the case for TfL to trial the use of tolling at existing crossings, rather than waiting until new crossings are constructed. They suggested initial tolling pilots could allow TfL to assess the effect that tolling crossings to the west of the Dartford crossing has on levels of congestion.

⁴ Seminar transcript, p. 14, and written information received from John Elliott

Appendix: Summary of panel discussions

In the section below, we summarise the key themes from the discussion in both parts of our seminar.

Panel 1: Exploring the need for new river crossings in east London

A number of arguments were put forward both in support of, and against, the need for new river crossings. The issues raised were: economic development in east London; balancing the needs of different types of road user; and the use of existing data and modelling techniques to assess need.

Economic development in east London

There were differing views on the relationship between river crossings and economic development. Some said that crossings were needed to kick start development. John Dickie from London First began by suggesting that regeneration in east London – whilst experiencing a boost through developments such as the Excel, the O2, and Westfield – is hampered by the barrier posed by the river and a continuing lack of sufficient crossings in the sub-region. He noted problems with congestion – citing TfL’s estimated cost of congestion at the Blackwall Tunnel of £60 million per year – and claimed that some journeys were not taking place, thereby restricting development. Echoing this view, Michèle Dix from TfL added that despite population and employment growth in east London, opportunities to access jobs from homes in the region have been restricted by a shortage of crossings. Both John Dickie and Michèle Dix pointed out that the census showed that London’s population growth had exceeded predictions in the London Plan, and they drew attention to the fact that a fifth of growth in the city would be in east London. Stephen Nelson, representing South East London Chamber of Commerce and Industry, said that the imminent opening of Dubai Ports would lead to a greater need for new capacity, and said that 90 per cent of their members believe there is a need for more river crossings.

Others argued that there was not a direct causal link between crossings and development or regeneration. Sustrans’ German Dector-Vega, for example, challenged the idea that congestion is a brake on development, observing that growth had not been constrained in some of the world’s most congested cities such as Jakarta, Mexico City and New York. He urged delegates to appraise critically any claims about the intended benefits of new crossing capacity, noting that intention alone was not a sufficient predictor of growth.

Crossings for road users and other modes of transport

Seminar delegates noted that the impact new crossings could have on local areas would depend on the type of crossings and traffic for which they were designed. German Dector-Vega warned that decision-making should take account of differences between crossings used for local journeys, and those which catered for people making journeys to a wider area.⁵ Councillor Ian Bond from the London Borough of Redbridge reiterated this view, acknowledging that crossings

⁵ Seminar transcript, p. 10

can influence traffic levels across a wider area than the immediate locality, and therefore impact studies should take account of a wider geography.⁶ He added that it is better for through traffic to pass outside London, stating that *'there is nothing regenerative about through traffic.'*⁷ Conversely, TfL argued that new crossings would help to reduce congestion problems occurring at existing crossings such as the Blackwall Tunnel, thereby improving connectivity for local communities, as well as through traffic.⁸ German Dector-Vega drew attention to the high opportunity costs arising from decisions to invest in large infrastructure projects like new river crossings. He called for assurance for Londoners that all other alternatives – including behaviour change measures to reduce demand, and public transport options – had been examined before embarking on building new road crossings.⁹

Linked to the discussion on congestion, questions arose on the type of vehicles that may require additional road capacity, and whether different transport modes were included in TfL's planning and modelling assumptions. TfL asserted that while new crossings catering for public transport modes had been constructed in recent decades – including the DLR extension, the Jubilee Line, High Speed 1, and the forthcoming Crossrail – there had been no increase in road capacity. In its view, much of the demand for new river crossing capacity came from business needs, with increased demand from Light Goods Vehicles.¹⁰ Claims about a lack of parity of provision for different modes of transport were rejected, however, by groups promoting sustainable transport and others. Jenny Bates from Friends of the Earth called for more investment in public transport as a response to population growth. But John Dickie from London First noted that – in addition to assisting drivers – new road capacity could benefit public transport, particularly buses which can *'be a very effective and very quick mechanism to support development and regeneration because you can put a bus route on very quickly to connect A to B.'*¹¹ There was further debate around the need for TfL to include all types of road users in its modelling assumptions. TfL responded to particular concerns about failure to take account of the demand for cycling, by acknowledging that it could improve its cycling modelling which has been historically poor due to cyclists representing a small proportion of road users.

Data and modelling on any need for new river crossings

Cycling was part of a wider discussion around the need for (and use of) high quality and robust data to inform TfL's consultation and decision-making process. Several speakers noted that there was little information in the public domain about the evidence base TfL had used to develop its proposals. Many arguing against the need for new river crossings suggested that there is a weak case for new river crossings on the basis of traffic demand, and congestion relief. Jane Richardson, Deputy Director for Strategic Planning and Regeneration at Bexley Council was among delegates supporting calls for further modelling information.¹² She also called for the consultation to take account of findings from the Inspector's Report on proposals for the Thames Gateway Bridge, noting that the nature of the environment in Bexley (containing some steep

⁶ Seminar transcript, p. 15

⁷ Seminar transcript, p. 16

⁸ Seminar transcript, p. 10

⁹ Seminar transcript, p. 4

¹⁰ Seminar transcript, p. 12

¹¹ Seminar transcript, p. 9

¹² Seminar transcript, p. 18

roads and areas of ancient woodland) would remain pertinent to TfL's current consultation. In response to these concerns, Michèle Dix noted that modelling had been carried out and analysed at different levels. She added that TfL's modelling information was evolving and that TfL was drawing on both strategic modelling via the Local Transport Strategy (LTS) methodology, and the East London Highway Assessment Model, which she argued provided a more realistic view of traffic demand.¹³

Panel 2: TfL's proposals for new river crossings in east London

Our second panel discussion explored views and opinions on TfL's proposed options for new river crossings. We explored views on the location and predicted impact of TfL's principal proposals for the Silvertown Tunnel and Gallions Reach Ferry, the costs of these crossings, crossings for different types of road users, and other suggestions for dealing with river crossing capacity.

TfL's proposals for the Silvertown Tunnel

The role of a new road crossing near the Blackwall Tunnel – the proposed Silvertown Tunnel – was hotly debated by the panel and delegates. Michèle Dix from TfL explained that the Silvertown Tunnel would be a two-lane road crossing that could be used by Heavy Goods Vehicles (HGVs) and provide resilience for the Blackwall Tunnel, doubling road crossing capacity in the area. While David Quarmby from the RAC Foundation welcomed the Silvertown Tunnel proposal, he stressed that there should be a plan to manage actively demand to 'lock in any benefits of new capacity'. The risk is that any new capacity becomes quickly absorbed, leading to continued queuing on local roads. Although Howard Potter from the Institution of Civil Engineers described the area around the Blackwall Tunnel as being in a 'hyper-critical state of congestion,' he told us that a new crossing near the Blackwall Tunnel could 'over-concentrate' capacity in the area. Howard added that any transport investment analysis should be underpinned by research on the impact it would have on both retaining existing employment and investment, and encouraging new inward investment.¹⁴ Likewise, Tom Bogdanowicz from London Cycling Campaign called for TfL to model the effect the Silvertown Tunnel could have on induced traffic (raised earlier in the discussion by Friends of the Earth on the increased demand that results from new road building).¹⁵ Members of the public voiced particular concerns over current poor pollution levels in Greenwich. One respondent cited evidence from local monitoring stations showing Greenwich to be in breach of air pollution limits, which they believed would be exacerbated by a new crossing.

Proposals for tolling new and existing crossings

Delegates had different views on TfL's proposals for managing demand for river crossing capacity through introducing a toll on the new crossings and the existing Blackwall Tunnel crossings. Speakers from both the panel and floor identified current problems with high volumes of traffic using crossings west of the Dartford tunnel to avoid tolling charges there, which leads to congestion. Delegates spoke about different options for tolling. One suggested that lifting the tolls at the Dartford crossing (noting that this was promised when the crossing was built) could

¹³ Seminar transcript, p. 11

¹⁴ Seminar transcript, p. 34

¹⁵ Seminar transcript, p. 29

remove the incentive to use crossings further west of Dartford.¹⁶ Others suggested options for increased tolling could be introduced sooner rather than later. While TfL's proposals – as they stand – recommend introducing tolling on any new crossings and the Blackwall Tunnel once the new crossings are in place, David Quarmby from the RAC Foundation suggested that tolling could begin when construction work starts.¹⁷ Linked to this, John Elliott noted that significant reductions in congestion can be achieved through small reductions in demand, and also generate economic benefits, citing the case of traffic reduction on Oxford Street.¹⁸

TfL's proposals for a new crossing at Gallions Reach

Views on a new ferry crossing at Gallions Reach were equally wide-ranging, with many delegates making observations on the benefits and disadvantages of a ferry versus a fixed crossing. Michèle Dix described how TfL's proposals for a new ferry in this location arose from the need for a crossing further east, coupled with the fact that the existing Woolwich Ferry needs to be replaced. TfL suggests that Gallions Reach is more appropriate than Woolwich for a new ferry crossing because it would cause less local congestion. Michèle Dix also explained that following its initial consultation in spring 2012, TfL had revised the options for a Gallions Reach crossing to include the potential for a fixed link bridge which could be introduced after – or instead of – a ferry crossing at the site.¹⁹

Several of those commenting on the potential for a fixed crossing at Gallions Reach raised the need for high quality modelling on the impact it would have on traffic levels. Councillor Linda Bailey from the London Borough of Bexley expressed concern about the impact of a fixed crossing on rising traffic levels in the area, stating that it would result in over-capacity and significantly higher levels of traffic. David Quarmby highlighted the limited capacity on the south side of the Gallions Reach site at Thamesmead, where he suggested there were too few routes to cope with the dispersal of larger volumes of traffic that may result from a fixed crossing. We also heard calls for robust evaluation methodology that would take account of the estimated public health and environmental impacts of new crossings, beyond any minimum requirements required by the Department for Transport.²⁰

Other contributions in respect of a crossing at Gallions Reach related to the potential economic benefits of a new crossing. Jo Negrini from the London Borough of Newham highlighted the need for any proposal for a fixed link to be supported by robust data on the economic benefits to the boroughs of both Newham and Greenwich. This would address concerns about the strength of the economic case as witnessed in the Inspector's report on the Thames Gateway Bridge.²¹

¹⁶ Seminar transcript, p. 16

¹⁷ Seminar transcript, p. 25

¹⁸ Seminar transcript, p. 35

¹⁹ Seminar transcript, p. 26-7

²⁰ Seminar transcript, p. 28

²¹ Seminar transcript, p. 30

The costs of new crossings

Delegates drew attention to the costs of developing new crossings. Richard Bourn from the Campaign for Better Transport questioned the doubling of estimated costs for the Silvertown Tunnel which he said were £300 million in 2009 and had now increased to £600 million. Kim Smith from the Royal Borough of Greenwich noted that the costs of building a ferry at Gallions Reach represented funds that could be spent on a fixed crossing, which Greenwich council believed would be more beneficial.

Other options to address river crossing capacity in east London

Crossing options for other modes of transport arose in debate about the merits of TfL's proposals. Richard Bourn highlighted that TfL's proposals for new road capacity were made despite a 10 per cent fall in traffic, and 9 per cent shift from private car use to cycling, walking and public transport.²² German Dector Vega described proposals developed by Sustrans with TfL for a new pedestrian bridge between Rotherhithe and Canary Wharf in the first panel discussion. Some written submissions from members of the public also showed support for a crossing providing for cyclists. German added that notwithstanding the challenges of freight transport, TfL could consider a 'no-car' option which accommodates public transport, cycling and walking.²³ A Greenwich resident suggested that a fixed link at Gallions Reach could provide scope for a DLR crossing at the same site.²⁴ Commenting on crossing facilities for cyclists, another resident from Greenwich called for cycling to be permitted in the existing Woolwich Tunnel, pointing out that the cable car between the Greenwich Peninsula and the Royal Docks did not provide a quick crossing for cyclists.²⁵ Another contributor from the floor asked TfL to ensure there was an appropriate gradient in any new tunnel if pedestrians, disabled road users, or cyclists were to be enabled to use it.²⁶ TfL responded that it did not intend the Silvertown Tunnel to be used by cyclists, and that the introduction of the cable car provided a pedestrian and cyclist crossing. TfL will also need to take account of the need to provide safe space for cyclists and pedestrians if it makes changes to local approach roads which may widen the carriageway for motorised vehicles.

Seminar delegates also highlighted other suggestions to accommodate any need for additional crossing capacity. Ray Hall from People and Places International noted that his organisation had proposed a bridge at Gallions Reach funded from the green energy industry. Other proposals included a 3-lane tunnel crossing in the Lower Thames Gateway area that could cater for freight, other road transport, and high speed rail.²⁷ We also heard from Ian Blower who proposed that congestion problems at the Blackwall Tunnel – often caused by high trucks being unable to enter the Tunnel – could be avoided by more effective traffic management. Michele Dix's response showed that while TfL had sought to address the issue of HGVs using the Tunnel in the last year, they continued to face problems with drivers not heeding warning notices.

²² Seminar transcript, p. 22

²³ Seminar transcript, p. 5

²⁴ Seminar transcript, p. 29

²⁵ Seminar transcript, p. 33

²⁶ Seminar transcript, p. 34

²⁷ Written information from Peter McBeath

The Transport Committee

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Assembly Members John Biggs AM and Nicky Gavron AM also participated in the Committee's seminar on 9 January 2013

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