

Caroline Pidgeon AM  
Chair of the Transport Committee  
London Assembly  
City Hall  
The Queen's Walk  
London SE1 2AA

24 December 2009

Dear Caroline

**TfL's response to the snow on 21 December 2009**

As we set out in TfL's response to the Committee's *Slipping Up* report in April, we took very seriously the need to learn lessons from the extreme weather conditions in February. The snow in that instance was the heaviest London has seen for 20 years and, very unusually, covered the whole of the Greater London area. Since then we have worked closely with London's Boroughs and London Councils to improve coordination and resilience in extreme weather. This meant we were well prepared for the cold weather and snow which affected London over the period leading up to, and during 21 and 22 December.

The London Technical Advisory Group (LoTAG), which comprises TfL and Borough representatives, has produced interim guidance for London highway authorities on winter maintenance provision.

This guidance includes a recommendation to create a resilience network of core gritting routes for use in extreme conditions, targeting key public transport and emergency service routes.

TfL identified key areas where gaps existed between gritting routes and key public transport and emergency service stations and garages. We have worked closely with the Boroughs and emergency services to ensure arrangements are in place to treat all of these priority areas. This includes areas of private road where bus garages or stations or emergency services' operational premises do not directly access the public highway. Our recently opened Surface Transport and Traffic Operations Centre ensured coordinated responses to the significant congestion across the road network, including non-TLRN roads; provided real-time information to the travel news media; and worked closely with our colleagues in the Metropolitan Police. It also provides traffic information and the ability to respond to issues on the road network 24 hours a day, every day of the year, including Christmas Day.

The Local Authority Gold for London, who was on this occasion the Chief Executive of Havering, had already asked for the Local Authority Coordination Centre (LLACC) to be activated, over the previous weekend, and it was reactivated in the evening of 21 December. The LLACC, which is based at the London Fire Brigade, did an excellent job of coordinating requests from ourselves and others for additional and priority gritting across London. You will recall that this mechanism was not in

operation in February in good time. This time, with revised procedures, it was; and it was extremely useful. In addition, I acted as a single point of contact for partners to better enable coordination across the whole transport network. I was in regular contact with the Mayor and his office to keep him and them updated on the situation on the ground. TfL's contingency arrangements for coordinating responses to severe disruptions to the network will include this sole senior point of contact going forward.

The transport networks managed by TfL generally worked satisfactorily on the evening of 21 December, subject, on the roads, buses and Tramlink, to delays and diversions caused by slow moving traffic, by broken down vehicles, and a few road closures. The river, Tube, DLR and Overground were generally good.

There was road traffic congestion, particularly in south and southeast London, as drivers slowed down, and in some cases, broke down, due to the poor weather conditions. We recognise that it was a tough journey home for people, but congestion in these circumstances is to be expected and in this case it was exacerbated by the higher volume of traffic before Christmas. I am satisfied that my staff responded well and that all measures within our control were successfully executed throughout the course of the day. I am not surprised by the relative absence of police and emergency services, said to have been noted by the Streatham Guardian. In circumstances of heavy snowfall, I would expect the police, fire and ambulance services to be concentrating on vehicular and personal accidents caused by the sudden heavy snowfall, and I am sure that is what they were doing on this occasion. London Buses supervisory staff were also deployed to deal with bus-related incidents.

TfL's Road Network Management team worked around the clock to ensure that preventative measures were implemented to mitigate the effects of snowfall on the TLRN.

Regular updates are received from the MeteoGroup to determine what gritting activities are required across the network. On the advice received from the weather office, gritting had commenced earlier in the day (prior to the evening rush hour) in the affected areas of London. This was done in full coordination with our partners in the Boroughs – another key lesson learned and acted upon from February.

The bus network also held up very well under the conditions on Monday, with relatively few disruptions caused directly by the snow itself. Bus frequency and reliability did, however, suffer as a result of increased congestion and there were a few instances of bus routes being curtailed or diverted because of treacherous road conditions. These were mainly in areas where hills caused very slippery conditions despite gritting, and where no amount of grit would have enabled heavy buses to drive safely uphill or downhill; Muswell Hill, which is referred to in your letter, is an example as were some of the hills in South London, around Crystal Palace for instance. Some smaller roads were unusable, for similar reasons, as gritting was concentrated rightly in the first instance on the major road network and major bus arteries by the Boroughs. You will appreciate that gritting in heavy traffic, itself slowed down by the conditions, means that it takes longer to complete the same territory than it would in the early hours; gritters can necessarily move no faster than the rest of the traffic they are in.

The Tube generally performed very well, with only a couple of service suspensions for relatively brief periods on small parts of the network – at the north ends of the Metropolitan and Northern lines, the latter caused by a defective train.

### Travel Information

Real time travel information across all modes was provided constantly via the TfL website. It was also syndicated out to news organisations who broadcast the latest position; and was communicated via our press team who were talking directly to the media. Stations had their real time boards updated and VMS messages were set on the TLRN strategic road network.

The Journey Planner on TfL's website is updated continually every day of the year, aside from Christmas Day, and drives all TfL's travel information provision (e.g. our Travel Information Centre and RSS feeds to news organisations). Each time there is a change to the transport network, whether it be a service disruption or a return to service, the relevant transport operation centre (e.g. the London Underground Network Operational Centre or Surface Transport and Traffic Operations Centre) alerts the Journey Planner team who then update the TfL website immediately. This is a continual process rather than something that happens at regular intervals. In addition, if TfL receives calls from customers to say there is a service disruption not yet listed on TfL's website, the Journey Planner team will check this with the relevant transport operation centre and then update the TfL website accordingly. As outlined in your letter, there were a number of bus services on diversion on 21 December and the details of these diversions were listed on TfL's website.

You also asked how TfL's Travel Information phone line functioned on 21 December. The Helpline did work well but it was busy and, as a result, callers wanting to speak to an operator would have experienced longer wait times than usual.

More generally, in recognition of growing demand, we have now launched a new interactive system that significantly improves the service by enabling customers to get through straight away. Callers will still have the option of speaking to an agent, but the new system, which will be progressively publicised from now on, will enable immediate answers, including at times of peak demand or major travel disruption.

From the start of business on Tuesday 22 December, we were running good services across the entire TfL network with some local bus diversions where minor roads, despite gritting, were not safely passable by heavy vehicles.

We are, of course, continuing to keep a careful watch on the weather over the coming days and are taking mitigation measures wherever necessary; and putting out real time information on a continuous basis.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Peter Hendy'. The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

Peter Hendy  
Commissioner