

# MAYOR OF LONDON

**Cllr Danny Thorpe**

Leader of the Council  
Royal Borough of Greenwich  
Town Hall  
Wellington Street  
Woolwich SE18 6PW

**Our ref:** MGLA171019-5133

**Date:**

21 NOV 2019

Dear Danny,

Thank you for your letter of 15 October about the Silvertown Tunnel.

The current issues of congestion, poor reliability and lack of resilience at the Blackwall Tunnel have significant negative impacts on our environment. The daily queues of stationary traffic pumping out toxic fumes and carbon dioxide mean that air quality at the Blackwall Tunnel is some of the worst in London. I am sure you agree that this situation cannot continue.

You will be aware that options to address these issues, particularly the poor reliability, have been explored in depth over many years. A significant number of closures are due to prohibited vehicles trying to use the Blackwall Tunnel. To date, measures implemented to address this issue include physical barriers, signage and 'escape routes' to dissuade and help filter prohibited vehicles away from the tunnel. There is an enforcement site on the tunnel approach enabling a dedicated Metropolitan Police Service Commercial Vehicle Unit Team, shared with the Driving Vehicle Standards Agency, to carry out targeted on-site operations to reduce and manage incidents. In addition, over-height vehicle detectors are in operation along the main approach routes, together with Automatic Number Plate Recognition cameras and dot matrix signs, so that when over-height vehicles are detected, messages are displayed showing their number plate and advising they are on an unsuitable route and need to use an alternative river crossing. Despite these measures, closures of the Blackwall Tunnel are still far higher than elsewhere in London.

Transport for London (TfL) undertook a thorough options appraisal to consider the best long-term solution to the issues of congestion, poor reliability and the need for improved connectivity. This included exploring the option of user charging at the Blackwall Tunnel (without building Silvertown). TfL's assessments clearly show this would only partially address the congestion problem, which would not materially impact on the number of traffic incidents which force the Blackwall Tunnel to be closed regularly. This would not provide a viable alternative to improve river-crossing resilience or enable improved public transport provision. It is therefore hard to see how the imposition of a charge could be justified to local residents and businesses without the realisation of any notable benefits.

TfL also tested a 'public transport max' package, together with user charging at the Blackwall Tunnel. This option included an extensive package of cross-river public transport improvements, such as a Docklands Light Railway (DLR) extension from Canning Town to Falconwood, an

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Overground extension from Barking Riverside to Abbey Wood, the Bakerloo line extension, Crossrail 2 and a Greenwich Waterfront Transit scheme, as well as several other rail-based extensions and enhancements. This represents many billions of pounds worth of investment, but again the modelling demonstrated it would not be anywhere near as effective as the Silvertown Tunnel in addressing the current problems at Blackwall.

The Silvertown Tunnel scheme has also been long recognised in the London Plan, my Transport Strategy and indeed your own local planning policy. Most recently, the Royal Borough of Greenwich (RBG) Local Implementation Plan 2019 states *"The proposed package of three crossings at Silvertown, Woolwich and Thamesmead remains critical to successful economic development, through improved access to employment opportunities north of the river"*.

Consent for this nationally significant project was granted by the Secretary of State in May 2018. This followed a formal public examination led by an independent review panel appointed by the Planning Inspectorate that considered all the evidence and stakeholders views, including on issues such as option appraisal and air quality. The air quality assessment was repeated in 2018, after the examination had concluded, to ensure it took account of the latest air quality modelling tools. After considering the report from the Planning Inspectorate and the subsequent air quality assessment, the Secretary of State considered that there was a clear justification for the scheme.

Now the suspension on the award of the contract has been lifted by the courts, it is essential there are no further delays and that TfL proceeds with delivery of the scheme. Any further pause will delay the benefits the scheme will bring to Greenwich residents and businesses, as well as resulting in significant additional costs to the public sector. As part of the scheme, TfL has committed to improving cross-river connectivity for pedestrians and cyclists. Work has already begun with your officers to develop these plans, which you will be able to approve before the Silvertown Tunnel is allowed to open. This is in addition to the wide range of walking, cycling and urban realm improvements already being delivered as part of the scheme to ensure the local road network becomes a healthier and more pleasant place for existing communities and for significant new developments coming forward in the area.

I understand that TfL officers have also been working very productively with your officers to ensure the scheme delivers the forecast benefits. This includes a recently finalised Legal Agreement, which secures additional enhancements for the local area. The agreement details measures such as ensuring there is an overall positive contribution to biodiversity following principles set out in the Greenwich Biodiversity Action Plan, the provision of pocket parks and various walking and cycling improvements.

In line with the commitments enshrined in the Development Consent Order, TfL will also undertake further modelling, monitoring and, if required, appropriate mitigation to ensure the Scheme outcomes accord with the forecast contained in the Environmental Statement.

While it is vital that TfL proceeds with delivery of the Silvertown Tunnel with no further delay, I recognise that it is only one of the improvements required to address the transport and infrastructure needs of the borough. I understand my Deputy Mayors for Transport and Environment and Energy, Heidi Alexander and Shirley Rodrigues, addressed a meeting of the Greenwich Labour Group on 7 October to discuss these enhancements and investments. These include the new Elizabeth Line, a potential DLR extension to Thamesmead, bus rapid transit at Thamesmead, the new fleet of high capacity DLR trains, proposed devolution and metroisation of rail, the expansion of the Ultra Low Emission Zone, a new Greenwich to Woolwich cycleway and new 301 and 335 bus routes.

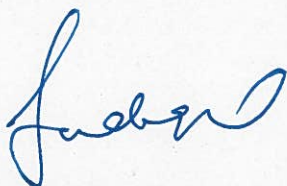


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It is important that we work together to deliver these schemes, particularly for areas such as Thamesmead. I have asked TfL and Greater London Authority officers to set up a senior level strategic steering group to drive this forward with you, local developers and other stakeholders. Importantly, this group will need to develop and agree an effective funding package for the transport infrastructure required at Thamesmead. This could include business rates or stamp duty retention, Community Infrastructure Levy or applications to the Housing Infrastructure Fund. In time, this is exactly the kind of investment that could be supported through any surplus revenue from the Silvertown/Blackwall user charge once the new crossing has been paid.

My Deputy Mayor for Transport and TfL officers remain happy to discuss any of these issues with you. I have also asked TfL to progress more proactive community and stakeholder engagement as the Silvertown Tunnel contract is awarded in the coming weeks and the next stages of design and construction progress.

Yours sincerely,



**Sadiq Khan**  
Mayor of London