

London Assembly
City Hall
The Queen's Walk
London SE1 2AA

Sadiq Khan
Mayor of London
City Hall
The Queen's Walk
London SE1 2AA

7 August 2018

Dear Sadiq

London's River Bus services

London's river has fantastic potential to enhance our transport network, but it is being under-utilised. On 16 May 2018, the Transport Committee discussed this topic with representatives of Transport for London, Port of London Authority, MBNA Thames Clippers and River Bus passengers. The committee also attended a site visit on 28 June 2018 to experience the River Bus service. I am writing to share the views of the committee on the River Bus and the opportunities to increase passenger journeys.

In this letter, I will set out:

- The need for a River Ambassador to provide the leadership required to promote river passenger transport.
- The importance of improving publicity, passenger information and accessibility.
- The critical priority for TfL to address congestion around piers in central London.
- The need to reduce harmful emissions from river vessels.

Once people have tried river transport, they like it. Emma McFarlane, the passenger representative we met, described journeys on the River Bus as a highly positive experience:

"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... 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."

We heard that the Thames has much unrealised potential for passenger journeys and that the river could be used as a Tube line, akin to an aquatic Hammersmith and City Line. Though passenger journeys have been increasing, the committee was informed of a number of issues that need to be addressed to achieve the PLA's ambitious target of doubling passenger journeys on the Thames, which your Transport Strategy endorses. We would urge you and TfL to consider our findings as you set the priorities for the Thames and London Waterways Forum and develop the Pier Strategy.


TfL should work with partners to actively manage congestion around the central piers.

The committee heard that one of the biggest problems was congestion around piers in central London, between Tower Bridge and Westminster. A number of possible solutions to relieve the pinch points were discussed including: upgrading and extending piers to enable more efficient utilisation of limited space; seeking efficiencies in timetables, the River Bus routes and the time taken for boarding and alighting; and prioritising River Bus services over tourist services during peak hours. Emma, the passenger representative, told us that reliability was essential. TfL should work with partners to ensure that delays are reduced and the higher frequency of boats during peak hours are maintained.

TfL should work with partners to reduce river emissions. The PLA told the committee that river vessels tend to emit lower levels of Carbon and particulate matter compared to road transport. However, river vessels emit higher levels of Nitrogen Oxides due to less stringent engine standards. TfL should work with partners to develop river-specific emissions standards to reduce all river vessel emissions and use its licencing powers to incentivise take-up of improved technologies. Proactive engagement with the Maritime and Coastguard Agency is also required to ensure the MCA recognises the benefits of encouraging new, cleaner technology. Without this, there is a risk that a boom in river travel – which we would welcome – could undermine your own efforts to reduce dangerous emissions.

Given the importance of the river and the pressure on other modes, we think it is essential for River Bus services to be given more support as outlined above. We look forward to your response to our suggestions to improve river services for passengers.

Yours sincerely,



Caroline Pidgeon MBE AM
Chair, Transport Committee