

Closure of the Greenway in east London, and diversions for people walking and cycling

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1. Closure of the Greenway in east London, and diversions for people walking and cycling

Chris Weston, CEO, Thames Water

Sadiq Khan, Mayor of London

Rokhsana Fiaz, Newham Council

Andy Lord, Commissioner, Transport for London

Will Norman, Walking and Cycling Commissioner

21 February 2025

Dear Chris, Sadiq, Rokhsana, Andy and Will,

Closure of the Greenway in east London, and diversions for people walking and cycling

I am writing to you together and copying relevant senior officers to raise my concerns about the ongoing and worsening impacts of the closure of the Greenway to people walking, wheeling and cycling in East London. Thames Water as landowner [closed the Greenway between Manor Road and Abbey Road on Wednesday 11 September 2024 after implementing an alternative route.](#)

People have written to me concerned that a popular traffic free route has been split by a complicated, busy and dangerous diversion. People rightly expected a flagship part of London's cycleway network to be a reliable route for their everyday journeys to school, hospital, work, shopping and other activities. Having adapted their trips to use the Greenway in a traffic free environment they now have to navigate a diversion with inconsistent signage, numerous requirements to dismount or make sharp turns, and interact with dangerously heavy and aggressive

traffic along narrow lanes.

The Greenway – also known as Cycleway 22 (C22) is a key part of the cycle network in East London and has no nearby alternatives – this is why careful planning for a diversion is so important, particularly when it is likely to be needed for at least eighteen months.

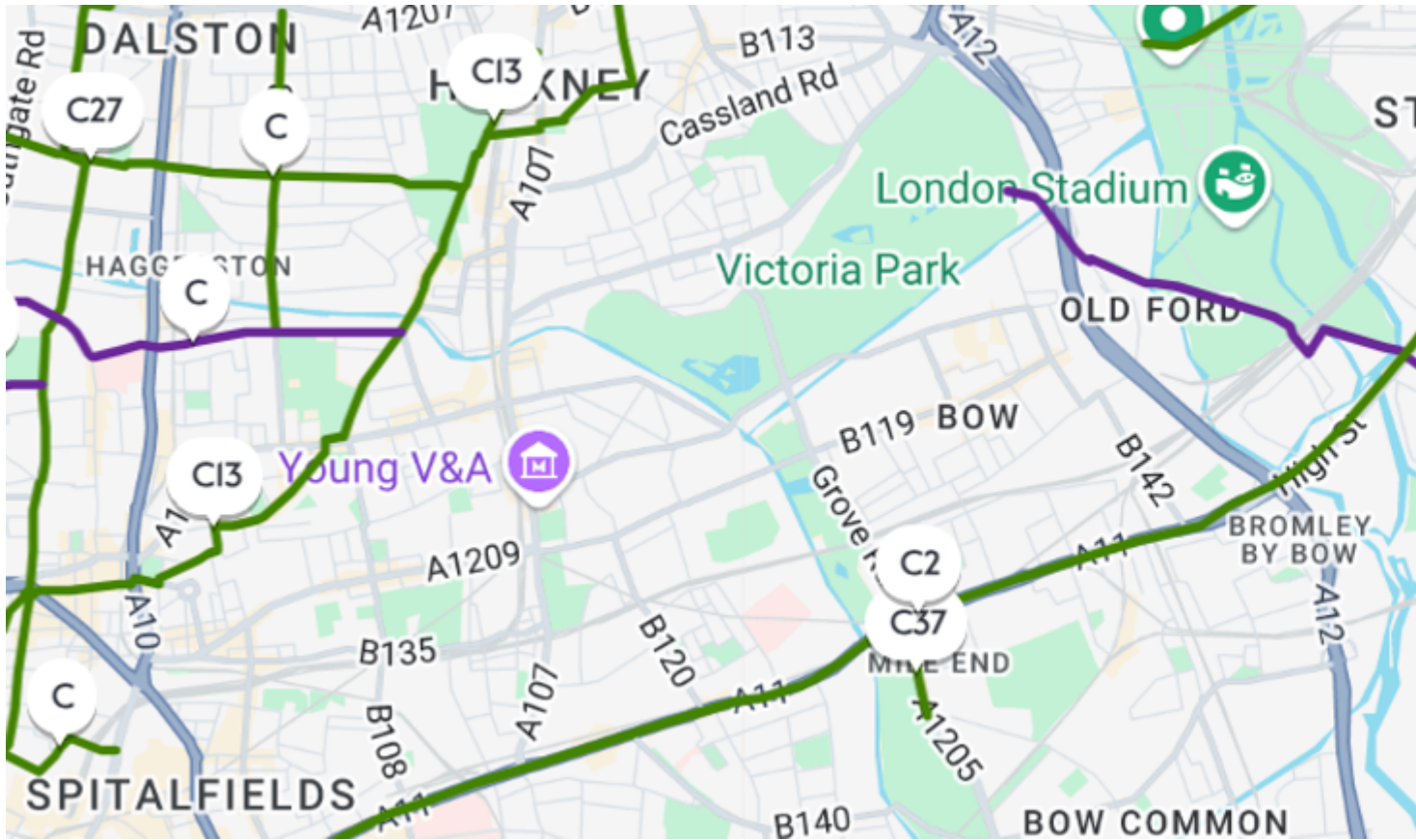


Figure 1 - a screenshot of the TfL cycle map from <https://tfl.gov.uk/maps/cycle>

This is not the first closure of the Greenway and closures of other parts of the Greenway have been very lengthy – [the section between Stratford High Street and Marshgate Lane was closed for over ten years](#).

The previous [Mayor’s Cycling Vision in 2013](#) made a simple and clear commitment to “avoid unnecessary disruption to cycle routes”. Since then we have seen new guidance in the [TfL Temporary Traffic Management Handbook](#), and associated approaches with lane rental on TfL roads, support from the GLA Infrastructure Coordination Team and borough councils. However, it seems that there is still a gap in delivering sufficiently high quality diversions for routes like the Greenway.

There are some lessons that should be learnt from some cases on highways – particularly with the Tideway Tunnel. Long-term diversions along the route of the newly opened Cycleway 3 (then Cycle Superhighway 3), showed that keeping continuity within a route, especially after investment to improve its usage, was [really important to maintain key links and keep the strategic network functional](#).

On that basis it seems that there are three options that could be considered further:

1. Ensuring that the diversion is at the same or better standard as the Greenway

On the first point, I have ridden the diversion route with Newham Cyclists. There are some good elements to what has happened, and I do not want to be entirely negative. It is welcome that the ramp from the Greenway down to Manor Road was widened, this ramp was too narrow – and ramps like these could have been improved as part of the investment for the designation of the Greenway as a Quietway route.

There are some significant issues after that ramp, a straightforward and safe route has been replaced by a complicated diversion with two sections that include traffic that can be aggressive and heavy.

The Temporary Traffic Management Handbook says “For designated cycle routes or streets with high cycle flows, a level of service reasonably equivalent to the permanent arrangement should be maintained.” This is the primary problem with the diversion – the level of service of the diversion is much worse than the Greenway route and that means that the route as a whole is now only as good as the worst parts of the diversion.



Figure 2 - the diversion map from Thames Water

Following the diversion route from east to west, the next challenge is Manor Road. When I visited the diversion in late January there was a lane closure underneath the Greenway bridge at Manor Road, and shuttle working through this section controlled by temporary traffic lights. This approach shows that during periods where the lane closure is not required (it is currently in use for a prop under the bridge) it would be possible to use shuttle working and reallocation of road space to provide a wide facility for walking and cycling in a closed off space in the carriageway. Alternatively – given that lights are being used to facilitate shuttle working, another way to provide separation for cycling is in time by having a cycle only phase.

There are some issues with the clarity of the signage and the diversion. On my visit, too many signs were either obscured by vehicles or too far away to be useful for wayfinding. given that the diversion is for at least 18 months I believe it would be better to use more permanent arrangements for signage of the diversion that are

more resilient. It may not help that TfL does not have standards for how a cycleway diversion should be signed in the main [cycleways signing guidance](#).

For Abbey Road, the issue is not just the level of traffic but the way in which that traffic behaves. On my visit to this part of the diversion we saw a lot of aggressive driving, and in some cases drivers ignoring red lights at the temporary pedestrian crossing. I understand that much of the motor traffic is using the road as a shortcut, but that efforts to consider a temporary closure have been objected to. I still believe this to be a reasonable solution, that would rectify the road danger most easily.

Given that there are already traffic lights with pedestrian phases at the bottom of the narrow bridge on Abbey Road, and a temporary pedestrian crossing at the other end of the bridge I would encourage further investigation of using a separate phase for cycling through these works if other options to reduce the level and speed of traffic are not able to address the road danger here.

I note that the [Thames Water web page on the diversion still says that “In response to public feedback, plans are underway to improve this diversion route”](#) – could you clarify whether there are still any plans underway to improve this diversion, if so what they are, and whether any options have been discontinued including reasons.

Thames Water also suggest another route to avoid the Greenway that involves using Cycleway 2 up to Stratford and then using Bridge Road to avoid the busy section of Abbey Road. In recent weeks Newham Council’s own network management team, along with the police [had to revoke a Thames Water roadworks work permit on Stratford High Street and arrange for the site to be cleared](#). This was in part because Cycleway 2 was blocked by the Thames Water diversion, and it was close to a junction with a recent collision that was fatal for the person who was cycling on that road.

That this has also happened during the diversion of the Greenway further suggests a lack of joined up thinking about networks, and shows a further need for Thames Water to improve their approach to roadworks and diversions.

2. Accelerating the provision of a new route using temporary infrastructure that can be used as a diversion

There is the possibility of accelerating the provision of a new route using temporary infrastructure that can be used as a diversion. I don’t believe that there are any obvious solutions that fall into this category, but I have heard comments from Newham Cyclists on the need to improve safety on Cycleway 2, particularly at the junctions with Warton Road and Carpenter’s Road.

However, given that the Greenway is used as a piece of strategic walking and cycling infrastructure, and the works were foreseeable, it seems only right to ask why given the investment in the Greenway itself, no consideration has been made of what local alternatives need to be provided as development changes the area.

For example, Tideway has a large site to the south of the Greenway nearby, and if the Greenway repair work was foreseen, a modest contribution from those works could have built a new route to the south of the Greenway, perhaps linking with a new bridge to Crows Road.

A [recent TfL review of bus routes](#) did consider reopening the Crows road for buses and cycles only. If there is to be any extension of the closure, I would encourage you to consider again any alternatives that would also provide safe new routes in the area.

3. Using the width of the Greenway route to provide a temporary route along one side

There is the possibility of repairing the Northern Outfall Sewer in a different way that could keep the Greenway open. Within the [advice shared by TfL from their lane rental schemes](#), they particularly [highlight work on the King's Scholars' Pond Sewer](#), where a conventional approach risked closing both an arterial road and a tube line – an alternative approach was undertaken and the lesson learnt was that “it is important to investigate all possible solutions to ensure that the most optimum is used”.

If this approach can be taken to avoid closing an arterial road, surely the same consideration could be given to avoiding the closure of a strategic cycleway.

The sewer infrastructure that the Greenway rests on lies in a wide corridor and is made up of multiple individual pipes. This surely provides some option to work on the pipes in stages, and I have seen that Thames Water are working in this manner at other locations on the Greenway.

Safeguarding the value of investment in the Greenway

In all of the above options I fully understand that costs, timescales and other considerations may be a factor. Over the years Newham Council has invested, and more recently [TfL invested £4.5m to upgrade the Greenway to Quietway standards](#). I would encourage everyone who has invested in the Greenway becoming a vibrant, green and active corridor to consider safeguarding that investment by working to maintain continuity of the route.

Newham Cyclists have been working to represent the people affected by this work for months, but have seen little supportive response to their efforts. It is wrong that safeguarding the safe operation of the cycleway network should rely on volunteers – Thames Water as landowner and the GLA and TfL as promoters of the cycleway network should be working in collaboration, along with Newham Council to ensure that where the strategic and local cycle networks are interrupted, routes remain available.

For the purposes of clarity, I have set out the specific questions my letter raises in an appendix, at the end of this letter. I look forward to hearing from each of you.

Yours sincerely,

Caroline Russell

Green Party Member of the London Assembly

Appendix of questions

Questions for all parties

- Could you clarify whether there are still any plans underway to improve this diversion, if so what they are, and whether any options have been discontinued including reasons?
- Is there any memorandum of understanding between you that reflects the importance of the Greenway as a local walking and cycling connection?
- What alternatives to the present diversion have you considered and what steps have you taken to support them?

- What is your role in regards to any closure and diversion away from the Greenway, and how do you discharge it?
- Where do you publish planned disruptions from your works, and how far ahead is such information available?

Questions for each party

For Thames Water

- How are you managing roadworks as an organisation and what extra steps do you take when interrupting a walking and cycling route?
- What future works are you expecting that could disrupt the Greenway?
- What risk is there that works on the Greenway need to be extended?
- What support has been available to you from the GLA and TfL given that the Greenway is a cycleway?

For Newham Council

- What has blocked the ability of you as a council to reduce traffic on Abbey Road?
- What support has been available to you from the GLA and TfL given that the Greenway is a cycleway?

For the Mayor of London

- What convening role are GLA officers involved in Infrastructure Coordination having in support of walking and cycling?
- What priority do you place on the continuity of the cycle network, as compared to other forms of transport like rail and bus?

For TfL

- When will the Temporary Traffic Management Handbook next be updated, and could it cover routes away from highways?
- When will the London Cycle Design Standards be updated?
- Would it be possible to update the Cycleway Signing Guidance with examples on roadworks and diversions?
- If none of the above documents will be updated soon, is there any other way you could provide clear guidance for landowners, utilities, highways authorities and others on how to handle disruption to Cycleways?
- What agreements can you reach up-front with landowners when investing in walking and cycling networks that cross their land?
- How is TfL engaging proactively with major utilities like Thames Water to plan ahead for how their utilities works affect strategic transport links like Cycleways?

- Does TfL engage with utilities like Thames Water proactively where they block or close Cycleways for longer than a week, or where closures are extended?