

# Silvertown Road Tunnel Cycle Shuttle

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## Letter to Lorna Murphy, Director of Buses, TfL

CC: Will Norman, Walking and Cycling Commissioner

Dear Lorna,

Thank you to all of you at Transport for London (TfL) for arranging my recent visit and discussion with TfL officers about the Silvertown Road Tunnel Cycle Shuttle during the opening week, and for answering my queries. I have kept a close eye on the performance of the service, had casework from Londoners and reports from others using it for daily journeys. I would now like to use this letter to put some overall questions to you on the service.

There have been some reports in the media looking at the usage of the service, and in response TfL has said that thousands of people have already used the service and that they expect it to grow “as the weather improves and cyclists adapt and plan their routes”.<sup>[1]</sup>

I have made some suggestions in this letter about actions that TfL can take both directly and in conjunction with local boroughs. These could increase the number of people able to use the service, modernise local streets, and help meet the Mayor’s targets for active travel and vision zero.

TfL made clear commitments during the promotion and consultation of the Silvertown Road Tunnel that it would improve cycle routes on both sides of the Thames, particularly those leading to the cable car, before any cycle shuttle was proposed.<sup>[2]</sup> However, the cycle network that links to the cycle shuttle is weak, consisting of rebranded existing routes with a considerable deviation compared to direct routes.

The scale of the deviation needed when cycling from Greenwich or Lewisham to the cycle shuttle on the TfL cycleway route shows a lack of integration in the overall plans. Under the Development Consent Order (DCO) TfL had to complete a scheme of mitigation to avoid delaying motor traffic, however no junction or route was improved for people cycling in North Greenwich, and links from the upgraded Lower Lea Crossing are incomplete.

In North Greenwich, where Cycleway 14 crosses Blackwall Lane the direct route to the Cycle Shuttle on the south side is just 0.65km, but following the route on the official TfL map the route is 2.44km – nearly four times as far, with an extra distance of 1.79km.



Map showing three options to reach the cycle shuttle bus stop on Millenium Way: Green - direct on Blackwall Lane, Orange - via Boord Street, Red - signed cycleway – even Boord Street is over twice as far as the direct route.

There are a number of further issues with the cycle network on both sides of the river linked to the cycle shuttle, I have included more detail on these in an appendix to this letter. Please share this letter and appendix with your colleagues working on active travel and the Silvertown Road Tunnel, and ask them to respond on the points I

have raised.

When the announcement was made for the cycle shuttle to become the cycling provision through the Silvertown Road Tunnel, the proposal was for it to be a “turn up and go service” using a “bespoke cycle-bus”.<sup>[3]</sup> I do see the work that has been done to make the bus operational, and understand that you have hit some issues with regulations and available buses. These would be understandable for a rapidly delivered project, but I note the commitment to add the cycle bus to the road tunnel was made in 2016.

Shortly before the service opened, Wheels for Wellbeing publicly raised a number of concerns about the design of the cycle shuttle that was to be used.<sup>[4]</sup> It is a shame that the cycle shuttle cannot be truly inclusive of all cycles when the removal of barriers to cycling was a focus of the latest Cycling Action Plan.<sup>[5]</sup>

**What further progress have you made on adapting either the regulations or the vehicles to make them more accessible and easy to use, including in response to the concerns raised by Wheels for Wellbeing?**

The combination of local routes, road design and the vehicles used is imposing restraints on the way the cycle shuttle can operate. Considering the scale of investment and complete rebuilding of junctions it’s surprising how little was delivered to support the cycle shuttle in the main Silvertown Road Tunnel contract. No design alterations were made to simplify the operations and costs of both the cycle shuttle, and the bus services by providing a bus stop adjacent to the tunnel mouths.

**Can you explain the development of the cycle shuttle route and the bus routes, and what consideration was given to having bus stops adjacent to the tunnel, like bus stop M, Blackwall Tunnel / East India Dock Road<sup>[6]</sup> which is on the cycle shuttle map?**

Finally, I have received feedback on the operation of the bus, which may be affecting ridership.

Constituents tell me that the live timing at the bus stops has never worked reliably, for example displays at bus stops can skip the next service and give a wait time well over 12 minutes. People who have regularly checked the timings on the TfL website and other apps, also find no information has been given on the timing of the next bus. In many ways this bus works more like a train, so what Londoners need to know is if the bus is at the stop waiting and when the doors will close.

**Given that the service is set to run at twelve minute intervals all day, could TfL publicise these ‘clockface’ departure times, and consider a countdown to departure that could be given inside the vehicle?**

I understand that TfL has taken detailed records of the use of the bus in early weeks, and there are simpler records for other weeks.

**When does TfL plan to publish this use data, and what other data does TfL collect for comparison? - for example:**

- on use of the other cross-Thames public transport services with a folding cycle
- use of the Cable Car, Greenwich Foot Tunnel, Woolwich Ferry and Woolwich Foot Tunnel with a cycle

The TfL page on the cycle shuttle says “the shuttle will be free to use until at least April 2026”. I note that in the response to the consultation for the Silvertown Road Tunnel that it was unacceptable to TfL to charge people cycling for the construction or use of cycle infrastructure.<sup>[7]</sup>

**Given the targets for active travel in the Mayor's Transport Strategy, and the acknowledged lack of links across the Thames in East London, can you confirm TfL will not charge for using the cycle shuttle in future?**

With the cycle shuttle in operation, TfL needs to learn all it can from the people using the service. I have had several pieces of casework on the cycle shuttle, and I continue to hear detailed comments from Londoners who care about the service working well. There is no clear way to give feedback about the service obvious to people using the shuttle.

**Could TfL add stronger messaging on the bus, at bus stops communicating where and how to feedback on the service?**

I understand that due to the ban on electric cycles being carried on other TfL services there have been more announcements on the TfL transport network giving the cycle shuttle as an option. There have been posters advertising faster journeys through the tunnel for motorists and new bus routes through it in much of London, but no adverts for the cycle shuttle.

**Could you confirm what proactive marketing TfL has undertaken to tell Londoners about the cycle shuttle service?**

Yours sincerely,

**Caroline Russell**

**Green Party Member of the London Assembly**

[\[1\] Buses on route 108 are faster now Silvertown Tunnel has opened, TfL says](#), Greenwich Wire, 20 May 2025

[\[2\]](#) “Although the Silvertown Tunnel would not be suitable for cyclists and pedestrians, as part of the scheme we propose to enhance pedestrian and cycle connections in the areas around the tunnel entrances on both sides of the river. This would include the introduction of better routes and footways for walking and a number

of fully segregated cycle facilities to improve access and safety for cyclists. These improvements could improve access to the Emirates Air Line Cable Car.

We are also looking at ways to encourage the use of the cable car for additional regular pedestrian and cyclist work-related journeys. We would design the scheme to make it easy to deliver further improvements in the future as the area around the new tunnel changes and the numbers of pedestrians and cyclists increase. We will progress this element separately, and would not include details within our application for powers.”

Improvements for pedestrians and cyclists – [2015 Silvertown Consultation Booklet](#), p31, TfL

[\[3\] Mayor commits to building greener, public transport-focused crossings](#), Mayor of London, October 2016

[\[4\] TfL Silvertown Tunnel Cycle Bus: WfW Comments on Access](#), Wheels for Wellbeing, April 2025

[5] “We will publish new guidance on removing access barriers, such as chicanes and gates that restrict access. Too many of these barriers still exist across London and prevent access for disabled people using adapted cycles or people using cargo bikes to transport children or goods” – [Cycling Action Plan 2](#), TfL, July 2023

[6] [Blackwall Tunnel / East India Dock Road](#), TfL, accessed May 2025

[7] “There are a number of reasons that TfL does not charge cyclists for the construction or use of Cycle Superhighways (or the roads generally). There is no policy support for such an approach at either a national or London level. Indeed the MTS has an explicit objective of increasing cycling in London which could be undermined if a cycling charge were introduced.”, [Silvertown Tunnel Consultation Report](#) page 12-90, TfL, 2016

## **Appendix - Further issues with the cycle network**

In the current Mayor’s first Cycling Action Plan TfL was absolutely clear that without a river crossing supporting people walking and cycling in East London, many journeys would not be possible by active travel.[8] London Cycling Campaign have reviewed all crossings of the Thames in East London and highlighted the issues with them.[9]

**What does TfL consider to be the way forward on improving both the cycle shuttle and other crossings in East London to enable more cross river active travel journeys?**

It is also clear from the response to the consultation entered into the DCO submission that it was understood by TfL that cycling might be possible in the near future in the Greenwich and Woolwich Foot Tunnels (this trial was abandoned), and that TfL was planning to improve the walking and cycling networks for reaching the Cable Car.

When I have queried the cycling conditions and asked for improvements to alternative - more direct - routes like Blackwall Lane, which Londoners tell me they have resorted to using, TfL has told me “At the moment, there are no immediate plans to install further signage, as the routes would not meet the required criteria and we do not want to encourage cyclists to use potentially unsafe routes”.

**Could you explain the lack of action to date on routes and junctions that TfL knows to be unsafe to cycle through, not least as they were also assessed during the planning phase for the Silvertown Road Tunnel?**





Extract from Cycle Shuttle map showing the route to the shuttle in North Greenwich

The junction where Blackwall Lane runs underneath the Blackwall Tunnel Southern Approach is a very wide junction, which needs urgent review. I understand the junction would have had a signal timing review for the impact of the Silvertown Road Tunnel opening, but I cannot see any improvement to the cycling and walking facilities at this junction. The pavements and roads are covered in debris and abandoned cones and traffic signs, and the effective width of pavements is reduced by a mixture of outdated guardrail and overgrown vegetation. The area simply doesn't feel safe or appealing for walking, wheeling or cycling.

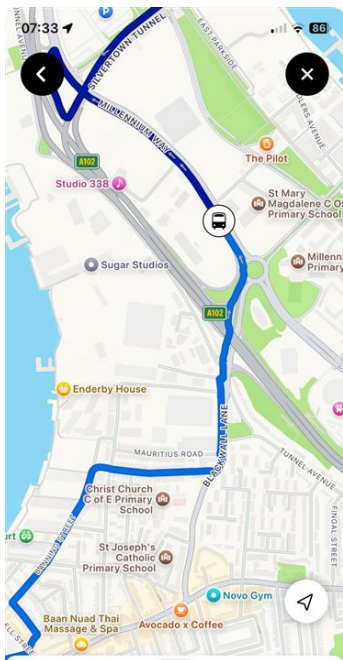
A thorough improvement of this junction may require consideration of adjoining land. It appears TfL and the wider GLA Group already has an interest in land in the surrounding area, which suggest some responsibility for improving these streets and the land alongside.<sup>[10]</sup>

TfL undertook a full analysis of the walking and cycling network in the area 2015.<sup>[11]</sup> In particular this highlighted the need to improve facilities on Blackwall Lane, and even then it was noted: "Existing cycling facilities are substandard (a cluttered shared use footway on one side), and there is nothing on the western side (a group of cyclists seen using the footway indicates that it is a desire line)".

What adds to my concern here is that despite TfL saying that they consider Blackwall Lane too dangerous to direct people to cycle on (even with existing facilities) it is the route that many users are directed to on the TfL Go app, perhaps because it is the most direct option.

People walking, wheeling and cycling need a direct, safe and quick way to cross under the Blackwall Tunnel Southern Approach at Blackwall Lane.

**When will TfL update the junction on Blackwall Lane and approaches to add a high quality direct cycle route, and improve pavements and crossings?**



51 min, 8.2 mi

TfL Go directing people to cycle up Blackwall Lane

On the north side of the Thames a different problem occurs – the map that has been produced to explain the cycle shuttle gives so much emphasis to the route that the bus takes that it obscures the local cycle network. This means people unfamiliar with the area are no clearer on where the bus stop is relative to the local cycle network.



an extract of the Cycle Shuttle map for the Royal Docks

TfL has now signed as a Cycleway a route past City Hall which has no clear connections to City Hall itself. I have been raising concerns about the junction outside City Hall in the Royal Docks for years – I understand it is possible that in future years it may yet be redesigned, but it sounds like this would come after the initial three year trial period for the cycle shuttle.

I am concerned that the signage and wayfinding for new cycle routes is unclear – particularly for confirming which route is best from the Lower Lea Crossing to Silvertown Way, the Excel Centre, City Hall and the cycle shuttle. There is actually less wayfinding signage at the bottom of the Lower Lea Crossing for people walking and cycling than there was before the Tidal Basin Roundabout was expanded for the Silvertown Road Tunnel.

**Given that the roads involved can be large and hostile, could you update me on what you can do to sign clearly the local cycle network and update mapping – including cycleways, other cycle routes and areas of the Royal Docks it is permitted to cycle on?**

A consistent problem on both sides of the tunnel, and especially in North Greenwich is the level of dust, debris and litter on pavements, cycleways and crossings. The inquest into the death of Ben Wales in 2018 was clear that such conditions need to be monitored and fixed.<sup>[12]</sup>

**Can TfL urgently review with local councils all pavements, cycleways and crossings in the areas near the cycle shuttle, remove debris and clean them, and plan for regular cleaning?**

It appears that the route to the cycle shuttle south of the river has a lot of deviation to avoid dangerous junctions and crossings, yet the route north of the river has a number of risky sections.

**Can you please share all documentation behind the selection of routes for the Cycleways linking to the Silvertown Cycle Shuttle, including how the Cycleway Quality Criteria were applied, routes were developed, and interventions considered?**

People have also raised concerns with me about crossing signal timings, including on Millennium Way where the crossing requires two sixty second waits to cross a road with intermittent fast-moving traffic. I have raised this with TfL on site, but no changes have yet taken place.

**What consideration has been given to reducing waits for people crossing the road to reduce the time it takes to reach the cycle shuttle?**

**Given that Transport for London commissioned a full audit of the walking and cycling networks on both sides of the Thames, can you explain what actions were expected prior to opening, what schemes are in development and on what timeframe the walking and cycling network in these areas will be brought up to scratch?**

<sup>[8]</sup> “the lack of river crossings for people walking and cycling in east London means that many journeys simply cannot be made by active travel” – [Cycling Action Plan 1](#), TfL, 2018

<sup>[9]</sup> [Trying to cross the Thames by bike in East London parts 1-7](#), LCC, April 2025

<sup>[10]</sup> [TfL - Property Asset Register Public Web Map](#), TfL, accessed May 2025



[\[11\]](#) “H.10 Summary and recommendations

H.10.1 This review has provided an overview of existing cycling facilities and conditions in the study area. The quality of such facilities have been observed to be quite mixed - quite typical of the situation in London, generally. There is some poor quality provision e.g. narrow, cluttered, shared-use footways without dedicated cycle crossings, some average quality (e.g. 1.5m cycle lanes, Toucan crossings), and there are facilities which are of a standard good enough to meet the Mayor’s Vision for Cycling aspirations (e.g. wide, ‘traffic free’ routes with clear segregation between pedestrian and cycling space).

H.10.2 The following list comprises suggestions for improved facilities and conditions, during construction and/or operational phases. Note that these measures could be delivered in a number of ways, and it is expected that many of these improvements could be addressed as part of wider development plans for the Greenwich Peninsula and Royals Docks areas.

Appendix H – CloS Assessment p161-184, [6.5 Transport Assessment Appendices](#), Silvertown Tunnel, TfL, April 2016

[\[12\] Muddy road contributed to Erith cyclist’s death on Silvertown commute](#), inquest finds, Newham Recorder, 2 November 2018

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