



Marina Ahmad AM

Chair of the Economy, Culture and Skills Committee

Sadiq Khan
Mayor of London
(Sent by email)

8 May 2025

Dear Sir Sadiq,

I am writing to you as Chair of the London Assembly Economy, Culture and Skills Committee during 2024-25, following the Committee's recent meeting on broadband connectivity in London.

We wanted to use this meeting to gain a better understanding of how well London is connected to high-speed broadband and how this impacts the city's residents and businesses. We learnt that the majority of households and businesses in London have access to broadband speeds of at least 30 megabits per second (Mbps), the minimum speed required for video calling and streaming. However, there remain areas in London with speeds considerably lower than that, where businesses and residents are unable to obtain a better connection. The Government's target is for all of the UK to have access to 'gigabit-capable' connections (capable of download speeds of at least 1 gigabit (1,000 Mbps) per second) by 2030. Our evidence suggests that London is currently not on track to meet this target.

We heard that this is due to a number of factors, including low levels of commercial investment, a reluctance of landowners to grant operators access, and a lack of subsidies. We heard that poor broadband connectivity significantly affects London's small businesses, causing disruption and making it difficult to serve customers effectively. Unreliable and slow broadband can also contribute to digital exclusion, whereby residents are unable to use the internet to participate fully in society.

The lack of availability of fast broadband is further exacerbated by a lack of digital skills and affordability concerns, making it difficult for people to make use of even the existing broadband connections.

The urgent need for financial support from government to rollout gigabit-capable infrastructure in London

The Committee is aware that the Government's 'Project Gigabit' programme has made available funding to provide gigabit-capable full fibre broadband infrastructure in "hard-to-reach" areas. However, we heard that London has not benefitted from this so far, with the Government directing funding towards more rural areas.¹

Although guests at our meeting generally agreed that coverage in London has been improving, we heard that the current picture is not one of steady progress. For example, Trevor Dorling told us that around 20,000 homes out of 100,000 to 120,000 homes in Greenwich do not have access to a gigabit-capable connection.² He stressed that progress has been slowing down considerably over the last 18 months.³

One way that local authorities can help boost broadband connectivity is by agreeing 'wayleave agreements', which allow network operators to access public land to install broadband infrastructure. However, Stacey McAdie, Digital Connectivity Lead at the South London Partnership, told us that although local authorities have agreed multiple wayleave agreements, there have been various instances of operators not making use of these and not building the necessary infrastructure.⁴

In his response to a recent letter we sent to the GLA, the Deputy Mayor for Business and Growth told us that as of March 2025, 26 boroughs had signed 'master wayleave' agreements for their social housing stock, with 97.1 per cent of borough-owned social housing covered by an agreement. Although this falls slightly short of the Mayor's target for 100 per cent of all borough-owned social housing stock to be covered and 29 boroughs to be covered by agreements, this represents a considerable improvement from 2017, when only two boroughs had such agreements in place.⁵ The letter notes that, in addition to wayleave agreements, commercial viability and costs associated with installation also played a role in explaining the persistence of pockets of poor connectivity.⁶

Our guests also emphasised that a lack of funding for broadband infrastructure projects is a key challenge. Trevor Dorling stated the pace of installation had slowed due to lenders shying away from providing funding to network operators, stating that "there is grounds to be less optimistic at this moment in time than there were a couple of years ago".⁷ Graeme Oxby, Chief Executive at Community Fibre, likewise stated that one of the main reasons network operators are not expanding

¹ London Assembly Economy, Culture and Skills Committee, [Transcript of Agenda Item 6 – Broadband Connectivity in London \(Panel 1\)](#), 11 March 2025 (p.11)

² London Assembly Economy, Culture and Skills Committee, [Transcript of Agenda Item 6 – Broadband Connectivity in London \(Panel 1\)](#), 11 March 2025 (p.3)

³ London Assembly Economy, Culture and Skills Committee, [Transcript of Agenda Item 6 – Broadband Connectivity in London \(Panel 1\)](#), 11 March 2025 (p.3)

⁴ London Assembly Economy, Culture and Skills Committee, [Transcript of Agenda Item 6 – Broadband Connectivity in London \(Panel 1\)](#), 11 March 2025 (p.5)

⁵ Letter from Howard Dawber, Deputy Mayor for Business and Growth to the London Assembly Economy Committee, sent by email on 11 April 2025

⁶ Letter from Howard Dawber, Deputy Mayor for Business and Growth to the London Assembly Economy Committee, sent by email on 11 April 2025

⁷ London Assembly Economy, Culture and Skills Committee, [Transcript of Agenda Item 6 – Broadband Connectivity in London \(Panel 1\)](#), 11 March 2025 (p.2)

their network is access to funding.⁸ He posited that the shortfall in funding is primarily due to the current elevated level of interest rates.⁹

Our guests expressed scepticism that private funding alone would be sufficient, and that public funding could address current shortfalls.¹⁰ We heard from Stacey McAdie that public funding provided by the Mayor of London through the Strategic Investment Fund (SIF) to connect public sector buildings in the South London Partnership area had been crucial in improving connectivity. However, whilst this showed the potentially positive impact of public funding, she stressed that there was a need for more.¹¹ Graeme Oxby added that public funding would be particularly beneficial in less densely-populated areas in outer London.¹²

In his letter to us, the Deputy Mayor highlighted the GLA's Connected London team's efforts to attract private investment through one-on-one engagement and sub-regional workshops.¹³ The letter points out that since 2017, £1.5 billion in private investment has been mobilised with the number of premises with gigabit-capable connections rising from 4 per cent to 71 per cent. However, the letter also notes the importance of public funding for addressing remaining gaps, stating that Project Gigabit has so far focused on rural areas. It states that the GLA "will continue to engage with government to address our urban "not spots" by allocating sufficient funding as we know some parts of London and other urban areas share similar challenges to rural areas where the market will not invest."¹⁴

Based on our evidence, we conclude that relying entirely on an approach centred on private funding risks leaving Londoners behind. There is an urgent need for more public investment to address current shortfalls in provision in the capital. The Committee believes the Government should work with the Mayor and London's boroughs to conduct an assessment of connectivity gaps and provide funding adequate to address these gaps, whether through direct procurement or a voucher scheme. The Committee is aware that the Mayor has previously lobbied the Government on this issue. Based on what we heard, we believe further sustained pressure from the Mayor is necessary to secure funding.

Recommendation 1: The Mayor should continue to lobby the Government to work with the GLA and London's local authorities to carry out an assessment of the broadband connectivity gaps in London and provide adequate funding to address these as part of its Project Gigabit programme.

The impact of poor broadband connectivity on London's residents and businesses

⁸ London Assembly Economy, Culture and Skills Committee, [Transcript of Agenda Item 6 – Broadband Connectivity in London \(Panel 1\)](#), 11 March 2025 (p.12)

⁹ London Assembly Economy, Culture and Skills Committee, [Transcript of Agenda Item 6 – Broadband Connectivity in London \(Panel 1\)](#), 11 March 2025 (p.3)

¹⁰ London Assembly Economy, Culture and Skills Committee, [Transcript of Agenda Item 6 – Broadband Connectivity in London \(Panel 1\)](#), 11 March 2025 (p.15)

¹¹ London Assembly Economy, Culture and Skills Committee, [Transcript of Agenda Item 6 – Broadband Connectivity in London \(Panel 1\)](#), 11 March 2025 (p.13)

¹² London Assembly Economy, Culture and Skills Committee, [Transcript of Agenda Item 6 – Broadband Connectivity in London \(Panel 1\)](#), 11 March 2025 (p.15)

¹³ Letter from Howard Dawber, Deputy Mayor for Business and Growth to the London Assembly Economy Committee, sent by email on 11 April 2025

¹⁴ Letter from Howard Dawber, Deputy Mayor for Business and Growth to the London Assembly Economy Committee, sent by email on 11 April 2025

We were concerned to hear that London's households and businesses do not all have access to adequate broadband speeds. We heard that this has a significant impact on London's economy, with small businesses particularly affected. Laura Timm, Greater London Representative at the Federation of Small Businesses (FSB) stressed that a fast, reliable broadband connection is becoming ever more important for small businesses in all sectors of the economy. This is because video calling, cloud-based services and online payment systems are becoming more widespread.¹⁵ She referred to data collected by the FSB as part of a survey of over 1,000 small businesses in the UK, which found that approximately one in three small businesses in urban areas say their broadband is unreliable.¹⁶ Alarming, feedback collected by the FSB from individual businesses in London indicates that this issue is particularly acute in the capital. For example, one business reported their connectivity had become "quite poor" after moving from Milton Keynes to Newham.¹⁷

We also heard that having fast and reliable broadband is vital for Londoners to fully participate in society. However, Emma Stone, Director of Evidence and Engagement at the Good Things Foundation, stressed that in order for people to make use of their broadband connection, they must also have access to a device and be able to pay for broadband.¹⁸ She added that this means that access to broadband is often correlated with other factors, such as income, age, family size and circumstance, with marginalised groups more likely to be affected.¹⁹ She emphasised that access to fast and reliable broadband is particularly important for households with children, which require a reliable internet connection to access educational materials, as well as entertainment, such as gaming.²⁰

The Committee is aware that the Mayor, in collaboration with the Good Things Foundation and the London Office of Technology and Innovation (LOTI), has launched the Get Online London programme, aimed at providing Londoners with digital skills, devices, as well as an internet connection through Digital Inclusion Hubs. Between July 2022 and December 2024, the programme established 1,106 Digital Inclusion Hubs to provide Londoners with free internet access and digital skills, exceeding its target of 650.²¹ We welcome the Mayor's decision to extend the programme until December 2026.²² Given the importance of digital access and inclusion, it is vital that this programme continues to expand digital access for Londoners.

However, we were concerned to hear from Emma Stone that there is currently a lack of data regarding digital access in London.²³ She told us that there currently is no data being collected on how people's digital access and skills impact their lives, which means research has to rely on proxy

¹⁵ London Assembly Economy, Culture and Skills Committee, [Transcript of Agenda Item 6 – Broadband Connectivity in London \(Panel 2\)](#), 11 March 2025 (pp.9-10)

¹⁶ Federation of Small Businesses, [Lost Connection](#), October 2019 (p.24)

¹⁷ London Assembly Economy, Culture and Skills Committee, [Transcript of Agenda Item 6 – Broadband Connectivity in London \(Panel 2\)](#), 11 March 2025 (p.10)

¹⁸ London Assembly Economy, Culture and Skills Committee, [Transcript of Agenda Item 6 – Broadband Connectivity in London \(Panel 2\)](#), 11 March 2025 (p.1)

¹⁹ London Assembly Economy, Culture and Skills Committee, [Transcript of Agenda Item 6 – Broadband Connectivity in London \(Panel 2\)](#), 11 March 2025 (p.1)

²⁰ London Assembly Economy, Culture and Skills Committee, [Transcript of Agenda Item 6 – Broadband Connectivity in London \(Panel 2\)](#), 11 March 2025 (p.4)

²¹ Mayor of London, [MD3355 Appendix 1: Proposal for 18-month extension of Get Online London service](#), 21 March 2025

²² Mayor of London, [MD3355 Extension of the Mayor's Get Online London programme](#), 21 March 2025

²³ London Assembly Economy, Culture and Skills Committee, [Transcript of Agenda Item 6 – Broadband Connectivity in London \(Panel 2\)](#), 11 March 2025 (p.12)

indicators. As an example, she mentioned that it is currently not possible to understand how digital access and skills affect educational and health outcomes, as existing research into these areas does not address how these outcomes link to people's digital access.²⁴

Given there is some strong evidence that inadequate access to fast and reliable broadband can contribute to social exclusion and negatively impact London's small businesses, the Committee feels strongly that the Mayor should work to collect and publish data on the impact of digital exclusion in London on an annual basis. One way of doing this would be to work with key stakeholders like the Good Things Foundation and the FSB to commission an annual survey with questions relating to how poor digital connectivity affects Londoners and London's businesses. This would also help the GLA to evaluate the effectiveness of the Get Online London programme.

Recommendation 2: The Mayor should work with partners, such as the Federation of Small Businesses and the Good Things Foundation, to collect data on the impact of poor digital connectivity on London's residents and businesses. This data should be published on an annual basis and used to implement solutions to poor digital connectivity.

The Committee would welcome a response to this letter by Friday 27 June 2025. Please send your response to by email to the Committee's clerk, Saleha Fazal (Saleha.Fazal@london.gov.uk).

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Marina Ahmad', is displayed on a light blue grid background.

Marina Ahmad AM

Chair of the Economy, Culture and Skills Committee

²⁴ London Assembly Economy, Culture and Skills Committee, [Transcript of Agenda Item 6 – Broadband Connectivity in London \(Panel 2\)](#), 11 March 2025 (pp.4-5)