
Dear Rachael Rooney,

WATERWAYS AND THE LONDON PLAN – and the **Blue Ribbon Network**

Regarding the Just Space Conference on Saturday, I took note of your presentation which covered a wide range of issues. I thought it was very positive in outlook. At one point you said (and repeated) that “transport routes play a key role” with which I strongly agree, but perhaps in a different context from what you were directly referring to. In the context that I am focussed on, it aptly refers to the long term future and economic importance of the Thames and London’s canal network with the comprehensive development of water freight.

That may be wide of your mark, but the only thing that is going to save London’s canals from terminal decline is for them to make a reliable contribution to the economy of the capital, and the development of

water freight can achieve this. As far as the Thames is concerned, it will not fail in the same way as the canals of course, but it will continue to be downgraded and sidelined unless it gains respect and economic importance, which can be achieved most readily through development of wide scale localised freight activity. The waterways have to be brought back into life – and into full use – and not only in the limited central hot spots.

This is not reflected in the new London Plan.

Strategic importance

It is pointed out in the draft London Plan that “this network of linked waterways is of strategic importance for London” (Draft Policy SI 14, Para 9.14.1), and this is the right approach. But, it is not followed up and developed in any coherent manner.

You also said on Saturday that the London Plan “promotes London’s waterways”, and I am pleased that you brought this to the attention of the meeting. The new London Plan also states that the Mayor will promote positive action to achieve the removal of lorries from London’s roads (Policy SI 15, Para 9.15.4) although this is linked to the limited transport of freight from the estuary to the Safeguarded Wharves on the Thames.

However, it is all the other stretches of the Thames that could be usefully used for promotion of a localised freight industry that should be considered.

It also does not address the use of the canals for a wider range of freight operations, and unfortunately the canals are not even mentioned in the Mayor’s Draft Transport Strategy 2017, so what does this tell us about GLA’s knowledge and expectations about water freight. We will be starting at a very low point – there is much work to be done.

I have attached a copy of the Regents Network response to the Mayors Transport Strategy consultation, as quite a range of waterway issues are dealt with there and it saves repeating them, and it includes canal freight which is totally omitted from the strategy! It also reveals other weaknesses and omissions in the Transport Strategy, which to an extent identify some of the short-comings with the draft London Plan.

An open door

In the promotion of water freight Regents Network has not come up against any opposition or ill will. It is an open door – but GLA and other authorities have not gone through! Please enter, as someone has to lead the way and set standards.

The waterways are there waiting patiently and there is the required skill and knowledge available, but struggling with promotion of water freight from the ‘bottom up’. With interest and a lead from the top we could effectively meet in the middle and work to deliver a world class water transport infrastructure in London.

It may be of interest to note that a number of freight options are underway, including a lot of interest from the road lobby who are the experts in transport and unit loads, as well as the all-important logistics management, and who are keen to be involved with an extension of their profession onto water – which has many similarities with road transport.

It would make progress easier if everyone, including GLA, worked together. And it would be better established and endorsed if the new London Plan recognised the potential and was revised accordingly to become up-to-date and forward-thinking.

It would also serve to unify and promote waterway progress if the term **Blue Ribbon Network** was reinstated. It has been expunged with no reason given, and the effect is very negative. Do you know why it has gone without a trace?

A healthy city

One of the great advantages of water transport is that it is gentle, calm and relatively slow. It does not impinge negatively on every minute of our lives in the same way as road transport does - and it leads “towards creating a healthy city” which you also mentioned on Saturday.

Incidentally, bringing the waterways back to life with the waterways full of navigating boats as Regents Network promotes above does not detract from the charm and calm of our Blue Ribbon Network as everything moves so slowly and gently.

Implementation

You touched on implementation and added to Jules Pipe’s comments following my question at the Just Space Conference. We need all the help we can get when engaging with the local authorities, as that is where the decisions are made and where the London Plan should come into its own as the exemplary standard for decision-making based on sound policy. It would be helpful if we could politely (and confidently) put the London Plan under the planner’s and developer’s noses to establish the validity (and necessity) of complying with the regional policies and requirements that are so carefully drafted and consulted on.

I was not content with the GLA viewpoint on implementation on Saturday, when I consider that in any case we all (at every level) should be working together, to quote a phrase that I assert a number of times a week.

It occurs to me that we could all be wasting our time responding to the draft London Plan if it is going nowhere, unless we can rely on it having substantial credibility and taking a strong lead. We need a sound and significant London Plan.

More than a re-wording

A lot of thought has obviously gone into the drafting of the new London Plan, but as far as the waterways are concerned the focus and the intentions are not sound. Our waterways are treated as an aside to other social, economic, opportunity and cultural considerations that are the composition of London and the way forward to a worthwhile future.

As it stands, the new London Plan does not provide for the long-term active and meaningful prospects for the Thames and the canal network. It provides a certain amount of protection for the waterways, and it features them for some unstated reason. The Plan attributes the waterways with ‘strategic importance’ without saying why and how. It makes the plain assumption that the waterways will be there for the foreseeable future (of course) although in what state and in what capacity is not revealed.

To resolve and respond to a basic understanding and respect for the waterways does not need a lot of thought and philosophy, but just a realistic and focussed understanding of the needs, potential and their long term requirements.

In a way, the singling out of the waterways as the **Blue Ribbon Network** was sufficient in focussing on them without separating them out and being over-indulgent. It suffices to make the waterways individual but not too special. Please can the title be reinstated.

The GLA London Plan Team should take a second look at the waterways, and the involvement of Transport for London will be important. It will be helpful for revisions to be suggested from that quarter as the key to the waterways long term success lies substantially with transport. The transport on the Thames (passenger and freight), and in particular freight on the canals, was being comprehensibly developed by TfL in the days when Peter Hendy was Managing Director of Surface Transport, although all waterway contact was cut off abruptly in April 2008! Contact needs to be resumed and the loose ends gathered.

Regents Network will be responding in detail to the waterway matters in the Draft London Plan as time allows, and by the 2nd March deadline. But in the meantime could we find an opportunity to meet and

discuss this Cinderella subject to bring together some coherent way forward for the waterways and to lift them out of relative obscurity, as the fairy tale nearly goes.

I look forward to an active and useful future for London's waterways and the term **Blue Ribbon Network** being reinstated!

Regards,

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Del Brenner
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associate of the London Forum and Just Space
and founder member of the London Waterways Commission