

MAYOR OF LONDON

Florence Eshalomi AM
Chair of the London Assembly Transport
Committee
London Assembly
City Hall
London SE1 2AA

Our ref:

Date: 21st June 2019

Dear Florence

I am writing to inform you that today the Programmes and Investment Committee of the Transport for London (TfL) Board has agreed that TfL should pause development work on proposals for a walking and cycling bridge between Canary Wharf and Rotherhithe. The committee has concluded that the project should revert to the feasibility stage of development where strategic alternatives, such as a ferry service, can be reassessed.

Despite considerable effort to minimise the costs of a bridge at this location, the sheer scale and complexity of the engineering solution that would be required means it is currently unaffordable. The current midpoint cost estimate for the scheme is £463m, within a range that means final costs could be over £600m. This compares to a £350m allocation in the current TfL Business Plan. The bridge is therefore unaffordable in the short to medium term, particularly in the context of TfL's wider financial challenges.

Whilst various financial pressures will need to be managed as part of TfL's business planning process this autumn, I believe it is right to make this decision now given the significant costs of keeping the project going. To continue development of the scheme through the next phase of surveys, ground investigations and engineering design would have cost around £800,000 a month. It would have been irresponsible to incur these costs given the low likelihood that it will be possible to take the scheme forward in the near term. By making the decision at this point, it has been possible to avoid commencing a number of expensive tasks that were due to start imminently.

TfL has done everything possible to explore options for making this project viable. Considerable effort has been put into exploring options for lowering costs through different design options and value engineering. This has included looking at different bridge options, including the potential for a lifting, swing or bascule type bridge, the latter two of which would have been unprecedented in scale globally given the opening requirements for shipping on that part of the river. TfL has also assessed possibilities for additional alternative funding sources, which unfortunately are not adequate to address the funding gap. As you will appreciate, stubbornly high costs also have an impact on the quantified business case for the scheme.

Looking forward, it is my hope that we are able to develop a ferry option that is more affordable as a short to medium-term way of providing the walking and cycling connectivity that is needed at this location. TfL will be assessing all options for a ferry service, including a roll-on/roll-off style service using electric or hybrid vessels. This would be considerably cheaper than building a lifting bridge, and the service could be up and running more quickly. The valuable work that has been done to date to demonstrate the technical and operational feasibility of the bridge will be taken to a logical end point to ensure it can be used in the future should circumstances allow.

I understand that this is a significant decision and that it will be disappointing for those people – like me – who were excited about what a bridge could do to enhance opportunities for walking and cycling in a part of London which has been historically poorly served in this regard. This is still an important objective and I look forward to continuing to work with the local boroughs, not only in providing a new ferry service as soon as we can but also in constructing Cycleway 4, for which we confirmed a construction start date this week, progressing new routes between Rotherhithe and Peckham and Hackney and the Isle of Dogs and supporting the expansion of Santander Cycles.

I would be happy to meet members of your committee or come to a committee session to discuss this matter in more detail and would suggest that David Rowe from TfL accompany me.

Given likely media and community interest in this matter, I am making a copy of this letter publicly available.

Yours sincerely,



Heidi Alexander
Deputy Mayor for Transport

cc Councillor Peter John OBE, Leader of Southwark Council
cc Mayor John Biggs, Tower Hamlets Council