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RESPONSE TO TfL PUBLIC CONSULTATION ON BUS NETWORK PROPOSALS FOR WHEN THE “SILVERTOWN TUNNEL” OPENS

At the State of London Debate on 28/06/22, broadcast live on LBC, the Deputy Mayor for Transport promised, in the presence of the Mayor of London and other Deputy Mayors a frequency of 22 reliable double-deck buses per hour when the Silvertown Tunnels open, with maybe more buses later. That figure of 22 was already a significant reduction from the 37.5 cross-river buses per hour mentioned in this document: -

<https://infrastructure.planninginspectorate.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/projects/TR010021/TR010021-001649-TfL%208.82%20Bus%20Strategy%20R1.pdf>

The proposals in the current consultation appear to be for only 20 buses per hour (5 on route 108 and 7.5 each on routes 129 and X239).

The current frequency of route 108 is 6 buses per hour but the consultation contains no explanation for reducing the frequency. The Mayor of London is reported to have said that “hardly anyone uses it” That is far from the experience of our Hon. Sec. (a frequent user of sections between Lewisham and North Greenwich). Besides, its reputation as “the most unreliable bus route in London” might explain the reluctance of more passengers to use it.

Moreover, as the proposal is for route 108 to continue to operate through the Blackwall Tunnels in both directions, we must assume that it would remain constrained to single deck buses, so the total double-deck frequency now proposed would be only 15 buses per hour, far fewer than the Deputy Mayor publicly promised London at the end of June, as stated above.

Future Transport London (FTL) is further disappointed that the Silvertown Tunnels (if both are completed) would bring the total number of cross-river traffic lanes at this location to **eight** but with **no legitimate bus lanes nor provision for active travel** (pedestrians and cyclists) at this location. *How does this help net zero targets or make cross-river bus services “reliable” in accordance with the Deputy Mayor’s promise stated above?*

Instead. FTL proposes general traffic (and the tolls) be confined to two of the four operational tunnels when those at Silvertown open, and that two tunnels be repurposed as follows

The existing northbound Blackwall Tunnel (with its restricted height clearance and substandard horizontal curves)

This should be repurposed for exclusive use by pedestrians and cyclists. *Ideally, the ventilation shafts either side of the river should also be repurposed to provide staircase and lift access to/from the surface, so that the walking distance in tunnel under the river is minimised.*

One of the three other tunnels (without the height restriction)

This should be repurposed for the exclusive use of at least 22 reliable, emission-free, double deck buses per hour from when the Silvertown Tunnels open, operating on a two-way basis, with possibly more buses (and/or trams) later, in accordance with the Deputy Mayor for Transport's public promise.

With legitimate bus priority, the cross-river routes should gain a reputation for reliability (unlike the existing route 108) and grow demand: more of the bus routes currently terminating at North Greenwich might reasonably be extended north of the river in due course.

Obviously good interchange at North Greenwich bus station between the cross-river routes and the routes which continue to terminate there (as well as to/from the Jubilee line) will be even more important.

Equally important will be high-quality bus priorities to/from the portals on both sides of the river, to avoid congestion on the local surface road network and provide the most attractive, reliable journey times via whichever tunnel is repurposed for public transport.

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