

Baroness Vere
Parliamentary Under Secretary of State
Department for Transport
Great Minster House
33 Horseferry Road
London, SW1P 4DR

3rd September 2020

Dear Baroness Vere

Re. Hammersmith Bridge Repair Works and Urgent Need for a Temporary Bridge

We are writing as the three Barnes Councillors with regards to Hammersmith Bridge. The bridge was to be closed as long ago as 2018 for long term repair and strengthening works. Delays to that work meant the bridge was closed suddenly to motor vehicles in April 2019, and closed suddenly again to pedestrians in August this year. In both cases, no warning was given to local residents, and no advanced mitigating plans could be put in place.

The Bridge is a vitally important river crossing connecting Barnes and Hammersmith, and provides a key route both into central London and to the west along the A4, and a connection to the A3 in the other direction. It is estimated that when open to vehicles there were 22,000 vehicle crossings per day, including 24,000 bus passengers. Since the closure to motor vehicles there have been an estimated 16,000 pedestrian and cyclist crossings daily.

It goes without saying that everyone's safety is of the highest priority and we understand that the bridge cannot be used until it is considered safe to do so. However, the numbers above demonstrate the impact is far beyond the immediate communities on either side of the bridge. The knock on effect into Richmond, Putney, Fulham, Chiswick, Kensington, and elsewhere has been significant. The closure has had a negative impact for many local residents and businesses. As schools are now reopening there will be significant further disruption for the many students attending schools on either side of the river.

The sudden closure of the bridge has led to numerous solutions being investigated by local schools and resident groups. This crisis has again proven the resourcefulness of our community. However, despite the solutions suggested, there appears to be little tangible progress from Hammersmith and Fulham or Richmond Councils, with confusion amongst residents about where responsibility for the bridge repair lies.

As a result of that confusion, we have lost sight of the fact that a solution exists - a temporary bridge. A plan for it exists and money had been allocated for it by TfL. It simply has not been acted upon. It is now time for decisions to be made, and a temporary bridge to be progressed.

There are three major issues that our residents need urgently addressing to move us forward:

- 1. Clarity on who is responsible for progressing the bridge repair works**
- 2. A temporary river crossing is urgently needed, and cannot wait for the discussions and negotiations for the main bridge repairs**
- 3. The responsibility and funding for the long term bridge repairs need to be finally sorted**

Given these three related, but separate issues, we are writing to both you and the Mayor of London. We are seeking your help to gain clarity on a number of questions, and we are asking both of you, putting politics aside, to work together for the good of residents impacted by the closure to move works forward on the bridge.

1. Clarity on who is responsible now for progressing the bridge repair works

Could you please clarify the responsibilities of the Government and TfL in relation to the repairs to Hammersmith Bridge, and who will be responsible for leading the works on both the temporary bridge and Hammersmith Bridge itself?

What actions have the Department for Transport been able to take to assess the current risk to safety for pedestrians? And have you been able to consider any options for temporary solutions to support residents who need to cross the river between Barnes and Hammersmith?

2. A temporary crossing is urgently needed, and cannot wait for the discussions and negotiations for the main bridge repairs

At this current time, we understand that Transport for London have not yet submitted the application for planning permission for a temporary pedestrian bridge which was originally planned to be submitted in June. Has a plan been presented to you with a request for funds, and if so can you assure us that request will be dealt with urgently? If not, is there anything you are aware of which may be holding up the planning submission for the temporary bridge?

Plans for the main repairs to Hammersmith Bridge are for it to be restored to allow motor vehicles and single decker buses to use the bridge. Therefore, given the clear indication that this river crossing point should continue to allow vehicles over the long term, and the estimated minimum 3 years for repair works, we believe if it is a feasible option then it makes sense to build a temporary bridge that can take vehicles. As you know, a highly experienced firm of marine engineers, Beckett Rankine, have put forward a proposal, and say that it can be done. This bridge would have the advantage of enabling emergency vehicles and buses to cross. What assessment has been made of their most recent proposal? Whatever happens, we ask that an assessment be made quickly, and a temporary bridge of some form be progressed urgently.

3. The responsibility and funding for the long term bridge repairs need to be finally sorted

This situation needs urgent action, and we are writing both to you and to the Mayor of London. We ask you both to prioritise the long term repairs to Hammersmith Bridge as part of Transport for London's future funding negotiations.

Going forwards we need clear ownership and accountability for Hammersmith Bridge. The delays and management to date show that the bridge is simply not a priority for Hammersmith and Fulham Council. Residents on the South side of the river are more dependent on the bridge due to the important transport links in Hammersmith, although the resulting traffic congestion from the closure extends across South West London. We therefore ask that you consider as part of your dialogue with Transport for London where ownership of the bridge best sits. Given the significant importance of the bridge to those in Richmond Borough, we consider that ownership

best sits with Richmond Council. Alternatively, given its strategic importance in London's road network, the second option is for ownership to sit with Transport for London.

We are writing to the Mayor of London to ask him the same, and we ask both DfT and TfL for your assurance that you will work positively and constructively together to make rapid progress on the matters above.

Thank you for your time in considering our proposals and your support in this matter.

Yours sincerely

Cllr Aphra Brandreth
Cllr Paul Hodgins
Cllr Rita Palmer

Barnes Ward Councillors, London Borough of Richmond upon Thames