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## Development & Renewal

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5 September 2014

Dear TfL River Crossings Consultation Team,

### **London Borough of Tower Hamlets Council's Response to the Mayor of London's TfL River Crossings Consultation**

#### **1. Introduction**

- 1.1 Further to the consultation proposal for East London River Crossings presented by TfL between 7 July 2014 and 12 September 2014; Tower Hamlets Council supports the intention to improve connectivity in East London.
- 1.2 In this response, the Council aims to outline its preferred two options of the four suggested in the consultation (Gallions Reach Bridge and Belvedere Bridge). In addition, this response will address some other key concerns moving forward with these proposals. Tower Hamlets Council recognises the projected growth in traffic associated with new developments and population forecasts for East London and the anticipated demand for crossing river movements; but also recognises the need to mitigate the impacts collectively, working together as public organisations to ensure the best measures to meet both strategic and local demands.
- 1.3 The Council is concerned that certain actions and cautions, namely tolling, future proofing, and potential impacts on the existing road network (e.g.A12) must be taken into full consideration in order for the suggested proposals to be carried out in a beneficial manner for local residents and businesses; as well as for more strategic benefits.

#### **2. The Council's Preferred Option 1: Gallions Reach Bridge (Option 3)**

- 2.1 The Council's first preferred option is the Gallions Reach Bridge, which is a new road bridge between Thamesmead and Beckton. As the land required to build new

terminals and access roads has already been safeguarded, it is envisioned that this project could come forward earlier than other crossings and be implemented in the 2020s.

- 2.2 The Council notes that the Gallions Reach fixed-link option would provide greater connectivity within the Thames Gateway area, supporting regeneration plans and helping accommodate future growth. We believe that the Gallions Reach fixed link proposal should continue to be developed along the same timeframe as the Silvertown Tunnel in order to support regeneration and reduce congestion at an earlier stage. This option would allow more radical treatment of the A12 to take place in the Lower Lea growth corridor, given the current constraints of the A12 corridor, in light of the GLA's published growth targets; having regard to the TfL A12 Roads Task Force and the emerging GLA Housing Zone initiative which both seek to reduce the existing severance of the A12.
- 2.4 There are two main concerns with this option. Firstly, the design of this link should not solely focus on car-borne transport. More emphasis should be put on sustainable transport with options for walking, cycling, public transport and sustainable freight travel to assist the regeneration of this part of London. The Council would urge TfL to include provision for pedestrian/cycling access on this bridge.
- 2.5 Secondly, the Council would urge that the Woolwich Ferry Service remains open until the construction of this bridge is complete, so as not to cause unnecessary disruption and exacerbated congestion at the Blackwall Tunnel and A12 during the construction phase of the bridge. Additionally, it is considered that it would be beneficial to keep this service open in perpetuity with the option to charge a minimal toll, to encourage a better service provision. The existing Woolwich Ferry provides a useful service for north-south link. Therefore, both options would be beneficial to support London's growth in a managed and sustained way.

### **3. The Council's Preferred Option 2: Belvedere Bridge (Option 4)**

- 3.1 The second preferred option would be Belvedere Bridge, which is a new road bridge between Belvedere and Rainham. Like Gallions Reach Bridge, it would potentially reduce some of the current pressure in East London from the Blackwall Tunnel and M25. However, as the land for this option is not currently safeguarded, the Council has concerns that this scheme will not be delivered in a sufficiently timely manner, in order to successfully address current traffic problems of the area, earliest starting date being 2025 to 2030. There is a real concern that TfL may not be able to safeguard this land in the foreseeable future, and this calls into question the validity of this option.
- 3.2 This option is the most expensive of the four proposed. It is important to note that higher initial costs with lower maintenance costs (as proposed for both bridges) are potentially cheaper options in terms of whole life costing, over the ferry-based options. As the Belvedere Bridge proposal is geographically further from Woolwich, it may (again) be necessary to retain the Woolwich Ferry Service. If this were to happen, this option could become even more costly. The Council suggests TfL embed this option into the sub-regional economic strategy, to support future growth in that specific area.

#### **4. Tolling**

- 4.1 It is noted that TfL proposes to use tolls at the Silvertown and Blackwall Tunnels from 2021 to help fund the construction of the new crossings.
- 4.2 Use of tolls at the Silvertown and Blackwall Tunnels may displace traffic to Rotherhithe Tunnel and cause both local and strategic congestion, as a result. Nevertheless, if tolling is essential to fund these projects, the Council believes that discounted tolls must be made available to ensure local movement is not adversely affected. We support reductions of toll charges for local residents and businesses. Without discounts for local residents and businesses, tolls would penalise the very movements which the proposed river crossings are seeking to improve. Such an approach should be consistent with the discount within the TfL central London Congestion Charging Zone.

#### **5. Future-Proofing**

- 5.1 The Council considers that if any new river crossings are to be further developed, TfL should consider future-proof multi-modal bridges (and Silvertown Tunnel) which would help provide a more long-term sustainable transport solution. This would entail any future river crossings not being limited to car-borne transport, but allow for as many other public transport options as possible and viable. This approach would, for example, greatly improve the reach of the DLR network for passengers in east and southeast London. It would increase rail capacity (and provide for better walking and cycling connectivity); as well as reduce pressure on the existing limited rail river crossings in this part of London. Additionally, complementary measure on approaches to new bridges should be taken into consideration to provide an easy experience for cyclists, pedestrians and bus passengers. It would be short-sighted not to include such provisions, given the growth agenda in East and South East London and Thames Gateway area.
- 5.2 Furthermore, the Council deems it necessary with any bridge crossings to provide new bus links that will facilitate further public transport connectivity as an option with this crossing and link nearby areas, including Tower Hamlets.
- 5.3 During construction and beyond it is important to reduce any knock-on effects for local residents. As TfL is more than aware, Blackwall Tunnel and the A12 are strategically essential routes for residents of East and South East London as well people and freight traveling to and from London. In particular, the Blackwall Tunnel is used at and beyond capacity on a daily basis. Many upgrades need to be made to ensure the longevity of this tunnel while construction of other river crossings are taking place and even once construction is complete.

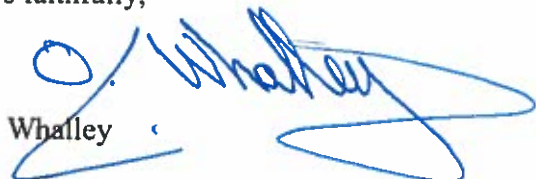
#### **6. Conclusions**

- 6.1 Tower Hamlets Council requests a more detailed and consistent engagement with TfL, on the development of the emerging River Crossings proposals. The borough is significantly impacted by traffic moving north to south via the borough's

strategic and indeed local routes.

Officers look forward to hearing you, in due course, regarding arrangements for future engagement.

Yours faithfully,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Own Whalley', with a large, stylized flourish extending from the end of the name.

Own Whalley

**Head of Planning & Building Control**