

Councillor Chris Roberts
Leader of Greenwich Borough Council
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Woolwich
London SE18 6PW

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The Queen's Walk
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Our ref: CP/CR
Your ref:
Date: 4 September 2009

Dear Cllr Roberts

Closure of Greenwich Foot Tunnel

We are writing on behalf of the hundreds of cyclists, as well as the many pedestrians, who use the Greenwich Foot Tunnel every day in order to get to work at Canary Wharf and to other locations both north and south of the river. These people are very concerned by reports that both the Greenwich and Woolwich Foot Tunnels are due to be closed for up to 18 months for renovation and upgrading.

Alternative road routes for cyclists involve very long detours via busy and dangerous roads – for example via Tower Bridge or by using the Woolwich Ferry. The Blackwall Tunnel prohibits cyclists and the Rotherhithe Tunnel is far too hazardous to be used by cyclists. The DLR is an alternative form of transport, but it is not free and does not permit bicycles to be carried.

Thames Clipper boat services carry bicycles between Cutty Sark and Masthouse Terrace, however surveys suggest that about 200 cyclists per hour use the Greenwich Foot Tunnel in both the morning and afternoon peaks. Thames Clippers would need to provide extra capacity to deal with this demand – perhaps a dedicated shuttle service, but at current fares cyclists would incur quite a heavy bill over 18 months.

We are therefore writing to you to seek some action to provide alternatives, as at present there appear to be no practical arrangements in place for pedestrians or for cyclists to cross the Thames whilst the tunnels are closed.

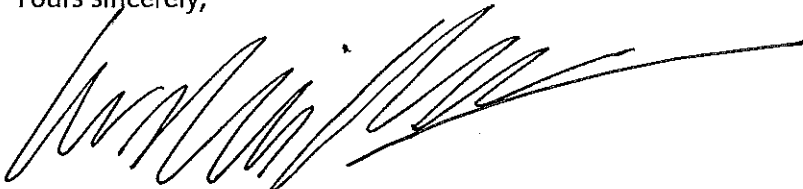
As an immediate priority, tunnel users require definitive information. They need to know what precise dates are proposed for each of the tunnels to be closed or partially closed. A recent Greenwich Council statement, which said the aim is to keep the disruption and inconvenience to a minimum, is obviously welcome, as is the claim that some work will carry on while the Greenwich Foot Tunnel is kept open, however specific detail is still needed. Clarification of the exact impact of the refurbishment work is long overdue considering Greenwich Council first announced that the tunnels would be refurbished at the beginning of this year.

Questions have been tabled in the London Assembly to the Mayor of London asking what funding or other assistance Transport for London can offer Greenwich Council in providing realistic alternatives for cyclists. For your information these questions are enclosed. We have pointed out to the Mayor that this is a vital strategic route for cyclists from several boroughs as well as an iconic visitor attraction given the status of Greenwich as a World Heritage Site. It seems to us entirely proper that TfL contributes some discretionary funding to provide a viable alternative. Has Greenwich Council been in contact with TfL to discuss this option?

We look to Greenwich Council to come forward with sensible alternative arrangements for pedestrians and cyclists whilst the tunnels are closed. Due to the urgency of the issue, we would like to meet you to discuss precisely how Greenwich Council will ensure that disruption is minimised for pedestrians and cyclists and that appropriate alternative arrangements are available during periods when the tunnels are closed.

We look forward to your prompt response and a meeting shortly.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Caroline Pidgeon', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Caroline Pidgeon AM
Chair, Transport Committee
Liberal Democrat Assembly Member

Also on behalf of:

Councillor Brian Woodcraft, Leader, Liberal Democrat group, Greenwich Council
Councillor Paul Webbewood, Greenwich Council
Councillor Chris Maines, Leader, Liberal Democrat group, Lewisham Council