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Caroline Pidgeon AM

City Hall
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Our ref: MGLA231209-9902

Date: 25 JAN 2010

Dear Caroline

Re: Funding Victoria-Bellingham Rail Service

Thank you for your letter of 18 December 2009 following on from December's Mayor's Question Time about the funding of a Victoria-Bellingham rail service.

In his letter confirming the discussion at the meeting, the Minister of State for Transport stated that he would "propose to include the proposed Bellingham service as a priced option in the franchise competition for the next Southeastern franchise starting in April 2014". The letter does not say that the Department for Transport will fund the service.

As you are aware, Transport for London are working with London TravelWatch to identify ways of closing the gaps in service that will result from withdrawal of the South London Line, due to the DfT's Thameslink programme works at London Bridge. It would be premature to commit to the Victoria-Bellingham service before this work has been completed, as it may not be the best option to mitigate the gaps in service. The Victoria-Bellingham service is one of the short-listed options that is being analysed by TfL, along with DfT and Network Rail, and it is anticipated that this work will be completed in late February. Following this evaluation, Network Rail will examine whether the preferred option can be timetabled, and TfL will liaise with the DfT on possible franchise amendments.

In response to your second question, the transport budget is fully committed on important projects that deliver benefits across London such as Crossrail, the Tube upgrades, and operation of the bus network. With the current economic situation, there is no way that funding could be allocated to the Victoria-Bellingham service without cutting back on services or projects elsewhere. Therefore, if I were to fund the Bellingham service I would have to reduce the budget for something else.

Finally, with regards to the plans for London Bridge, if there were an affordable way to increase the number of available train paths to improve capacity at London Bridge I would support it.

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I understand that the DfT has put considerable pressure on Network Rail to ensure that train paths into London Bridge station are maximised and that the best possible use is made of those that are available. I'm also advised that Network Rail have examined a range of operational changes suggested by stakeholders, as part of the joint study with London TravelWatch. I will of course continue to press for the best possible solutions, recognising that any options generally involve a cost and possibly other passenger disbenefits.

I understand your great interest in this matter. I would suggest that, for now, a positive engagement with the joint study would be the best way of carrying forward the ideas that you have.

Yours ever,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'Boris Johnson', with a stylized flourish extending to the right.

Boris Johnson
Mayor of London