

Building bridges?

A London Assembly response to the Thames Gateway Bridge consultation
August 2003



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**Greater London Authority
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Chair's Foreword



Anyone who has sat fuming at peak times in the long traffic queues leading into the Blackwall Tunnel, or has sat idly with their engine turned off awaiting the Woolwich Ferry, will understand that there is a problem with river crossings in East London. Historically many more bridges were built across the Thames in affluent West London. Now that Thames Gateway regeneration is under way, the question of what is a suitable and appropriate package of river crossings in East London needs a solution.

The Assembly's Transport Committee held an evidentiary hearing to examine Transport for London's proposal for the Thames Gateway Bridge – a road bridge crossing the Thames at Gallions' Reach, linking the A1020 and A2016 dual carriageways. This is a project with an estimated cost of £425 million. Its backers regard it as vital to the economic regeneration of the area, while its opponents see it as a stealthy move to create a "second Dartford crossing" which will attract long-distance traffic with its attendant congestion, noise and pollution.

We heard evidence that a consensus has been established on both sides of the river between the democratically elected local authorities and the business community in the area that they support a package of river crossings of which the Thames Gateway Bridge is one. The other three are the Silvertown crossing, the extension of the Docklands Light Railway to Woolwich and the crossing taking CrossRail from the Royal Docks towards Ebbsfleet. Transport for London (TfL) told us that 88% of the crossings package would be devoted to public transport modes.

We heard that there is concern in the area that the massive regeneration in East London, which will bring many thousands of new jobs and homes, should be beneficial and environmentally sustainable. We regret the environmental impact assessment studies being carried out by TfL are not yet available. Other important information about traffic flows and air quality is also awaited.

A major concern of objectors to the bridge is that it will attract long-distance traffic travelling between the North, the Midlands and the Channel ports. The Thames Gateway London Partnership is adamant that a flexible tolling regime with differential tolls must be in place to discourage long-distance traffic and to manage traffic flows. We believe this principle should be enshrined in any enabling legislation.

We heard that two public transport lanes will be constructed alongside the four-lane dual carriageway for general traffic, and that these will connect the Mayor's proposed East London transit to the north of the river, and the Greenwich Waterside transit to the south. We believe it is quite vital to the project that these public transport lanes are guaranteed, and look forward to their being upgraded to a fully-fledged tramway in due course.

The current TfL public consultation ends on 12 August, but this will be by no means the last opportunity for Londoners and others to make their views known. If there is a hybrid Bill there will be Parliamentary hearings, and if the procedure is through the Highways Act there will be a public inquiry. However, the Committee would urge all with a view on the bridge proposals to respond to the TfL consultation.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Lynne Featherstone'.

Lynne Featherstone
Chair, London Assembly Transport Committee

Membership of the Transport Committee

Lynne Featherstone - Chair (Liberal Democrat)

John Biggs - Deputy Chair (Labour)

Tony Arbour - Conservative

Roger Evans - Conservative

Sally Hamwee - Liberal Democrat

Samantha Heath - Labour

Jenny Jones - Green

Eric Ollerenshaw - Conservative

Val Shawcross - Labour

The Transport Committee's general terms of reference are to examine and report on transport matters of importance to Greater London and the transport strategies, policies and actions of the Mayor, Transport for London, and the other Functional Bodies where appropriate. In particular, the Transport Committee is also required to examine and report to the Assembly from time to time on the Mayor's Transport Strategy, in particular its implementation and revision.

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Executive summary

1. There is a contrast between provision of river crossings in West and East London, which reflects the historic imbalance between affluence to the West and poverty and deprivation in the East. There are no crossings of the River Thames between the Blackwall Tunnel and the Dartford crossing, other than the Woolwich Ferry and Jubilee Line extension. The proposed Thames Gateway Bridge would serve an area of East London with high levels of deprivation.
2. It was clear from the evidence presented to the Committee that there are strong feelings for and against the proposal for a Thames Gateway Bridge at Gallions' Reach. The weight of evidence suggests that a considerable majority in the boroughs adjacent to the proposed bridge, and among the business community, favoured its construction.
3. However, support for a bridge is based upon its regeneration and local transport benefits to the immediate area. The risk that the Bridge will become, in fact if not in name, a part of the national trunk road network remains a cause of local concern. We believe that Transport for London (TfL) need to refine their proposals to explain how the Bridge will serve local needs.
4. **The majority of the Committee are in favour of the Thames Gateway Bridge proposal.** We have, however, a number of concerns that we wish to put to the Mayor and TfL before a formal proposal is submitted to secure powers of construction.
5. We welcome the extensive public consultation exercise being carried out by TfL but remain concerned that key reports (on environmental impacts and forecasts of traffic flows) are not yet available to those being asked to give their views on the proposal. Further consultation must take place when reports on the environmental and traffic impacts are available.
6. The Committee believes that TfL must reconsider its definitions of local and non-local traffic using the Bridge. Differential tolling must be used to deter long-distance traffic with the lowest rates being applied to local residents and businesses. The tolling regime must be flexible enough to allow the operators of the Bridge to keep traffic down to acceptable levels through higher tolls if necessary.
7. Finally we believe that there must be a permanent and separate public transport element on the Bridge. A dedicated two lanes on the Bridge for the sole use of public transport must be a requirement of the formal powers for construction.
8. We look forward to reviewing the results of this stage of the consultation and being given the opportunity to comment further on a more detailed scheme prior to the Mayor seeking enabling legislation for the construction of the Bridge.

The Thames Gateway Bridge Consultation London Assembly Transport Committee's Response

1 Background

- 1.1 The proposed Thames Gateway Bridge is one of the biggest transport infrastructural projects this decade that Londoners will have to decide on. The genesis for this project goes back to 1943 and Sir Patrick Abercrombie's proposal for a crossing to link proposed North and South London motorways, with a more recent incarnation as the East London River Crossing in the 1980s. This project was successfully opposed by the GLC.
- 1.2 There is a contrast between provision of river crossings in West and East London which reflects the historic imbalance between affluence to the West and poverty and deprivation in the East. There are no crossings of the River Thames between the Blackwall Tunnel and the Dartford crossing, other than the Woolwich Ferry and Jubilee Line extension. The proposed Thames Gateway Bridge would serve an area of East London with high levels of deprivation. Indeed, three of the London Boroughs close to the Bridge have some of the worst social deprivation in the United Kingdom. This is an area with a history of physically, socially and economically isolated communities.
- 1.3 The Blackwall Tunnel frequently suffers from horrendous congestion. Breakdowns or maintenance work within the tunnel cause huge tailbacks. People trying to get across London on business are held up for hours and London's economy inevitably suffers. There is therefore a strong case for relieving this bottleneck for both economic and transport reasons.
- 1.4 The Thames Gateway Bridge is described as a "local link with the primary purpose of supporting the regeneration of the Thames Gateway". It is situated at Gallions' Reach, where there is a gap in the escarpment on the South side, to link Beckton in the borough of Newham to Thamesmead in the borough of Greenwich (Appendix A shows location maps of the proposed Bridge). It is designed as a six lane bridge, with two of these lanes dedicated for busway use to join up the proposed East London and Greenwich Waterfront Transit facilities. The bridge will have separate provision for cyclists and pedestrians and will be designed to be light rail compatible (though the project cost does not include running a light rail on the bridge).
- 1.5 The full project costs are put at £425m. The proposal is to toll the bridge to help fund the facility and manage demand. Current proposals are that toll costs will be lower for local traffic.
- 1.6 The Thames Gateway Bridge project has to be seen as part of an integrated package of river crossing projects. Indeed, 88% of the capacity within the proposed river crossings is for public transport. They include the Silvertown Link, extensions to the Docklands Light Railway, Crossrail, which is fundamentally important not only to London as a whole but to the regeneration of the Thames Gateway area, and new bus ways being planned by Transport for London.

- 1.7 The current consultation exercise being carried out by Transport for London's Consultation Unit has involved nearly half a million flyers distributed across 10 boroughs, 40,000 brochures delivered and 10,000 placed in libraries, over 700 stakeholders contacted and 7,000 visitors to the road show so far. This exercise ends on 12 August 2003. It should be stressed that this is not the formal consultation. Before a decision is finally taken there would need to be detailed and formal consultation based on finalised proposals from Transport for London.
- 1.8 TfL have asked London Assembly members to respond to the current consultation. The Transport Committee is determined to make a significant input into the on-going debate on this project. This is the Transport Committee's initial contribution to what is essentially a continuing stakeholder exercise and public information campaign (see section 3).

2 The vision

- 2.1 It was clear from the evidentiary hearing that different groups have very different visions of what river crossings are needed in the Thames Gateway. The Mayor, Transport for London and the Office of Deputy Prime Minister (ODPM) are strongly committed to this project. The Thames Gateway London Partnership, representing 13 democratically elected local authorities and their business partners, support the bridge. However, we were told that the consensus reached within the TGLP depends upon public transport facilities being guaranteed on the bridge and upon a flexible tolling regime being put in place.
- 2.2 Opponents of the bridge project, represented by People Against the River Crossing, Transport 2000, and Friends of the Earth, believe it will generate unacceptable traffic volumes and that the resulting congestion, noise and deterioration to air quality will damage the quality of life for people living both north and south of the river. They fear that it is “a strategic road scheme converted into a local scheme” and that it will all too readily develop into a trunk road. They argue that this £425 million project is vastly in excess of anything that local people need, and a river crossing at this location would suck in long-distance traffic from the Channel ports heading north towards the Midlands.
- 2.3 The role of the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister in sponsoring regeneration in the Thames Gateway fits into the context of the Mayor’s and the GLA’s strategies. Although the ODPM’s Sustainable Communities document sets out Government’s aspirations for the Thames Gateway, the Committee would have found it very helpful to have heard evidence from the ODPM about their ‘masterplan’ which would essentially include the Mayor’s strategies and his vision for the London part of the Thames Gateway. Unfortunately the ODPM felt unable to send a representative to the hearing. The Committee hopes to be in dialogue with the ODPM on this issue.
- 2.4 We accept that judgements as to the impact of large infrastructural projects on growth and employment prospects are necessarily imprecise. The Thames Gateway London Partnership said that reducing the amount of time that it takes people to travel to work will improve employment prospects for local residents. We heard evidence that journey times in the area might be cut by as much as 30 minutes.

3 Transport for London's preliminary consultation process

- 3.1 The Committee welcomes the very extensive public consultation process being undertaken by TfL. It was made clear at the hearing by Bill Hamilton, Head of Group Affairs at Transport for London Public Affairs, that TfL's current public consultation is a preliminary consultation to advise the Mayor of London in principle. TfL will be publishing a detailed consultation report. It was explained that this is part of a longer process, and preliminary to any legal and formal consultation.
- 3.2 TfL's Project Director, Michael Clark, outlined the two processes that could be used: either a hybrid Bill with hearings in Parliament, or an application under the Highways Act, involving a public inquiry. He believed that under the hybrid Bill process the bridge could be built by 2010, whereas if a public inquiry were involved it might take up to three years longer. He confirmed that under either process it would be possible for people with strong views about the Bridge proposal to make representations. In no way does the present consultation remove from people their right to play an active part in the hearings or public inquiry that will take place.
- 3.3 However, we have concerns about the current public consultation carried out by Transport for London. Our principal concern lies with the over simplistic use of a "tick-box question" as the lead-in question on feedback forms, that is to say "*I support the building of a bridge at this location*". Many people may support the building of a bridge but would wish to qualify their support in a range of ways. We are concerned that without giving people the opportunity to consider other options, or combination of options, there is a danger of skewing the results of the consultation. **The Committee will seek confirmation from the Mayor that he will not treat this consultation response as a referendum.**
- 3.4 We feel it is unreasonable for the consultation document not to outline the other river crossings along this stretch of the Thames which Transport for London are planning; the Silvertown, CrossRail and DLR crossings. The local consensus between community leaders and key stakeholders is based on an understanding that the proposed crossings are a package. However, the half a million people receiving flyers about the Bridge proposal cannot be expected to make an informed response to the consultation if they are unaware of proposals to build crossings at other locations.
- **Transport for London should publish a clear outline of all its proposals for the package of four river crossings in the Thames Gateway with an account of how it is proposed that they should be used and whether it is proposed that they should be tolled.**
- 3.5 We are also concerned that the environmental impact assessment, which is surely information essential to an informed choice, is not expected until later this year. In effect the brochure published by TfL describes a "preferred option". We are concerned that to consult before more environmental information is available is a less than perfect process.

3.6 A further concern is that Transport for London's work on traffic flows has not yet been completed. There are forecasts of the traffic in 2011, both with and without the bridge, and there is further modelling and traffic forecasting being done for 2016. We note that the original prediction of traffic flow in the peak period was for 4,400 vehicles per hour. The prediction is now for 6,000 vehicles per hour. An average uninterrupted carriageway can take 2,000 vehicles per hour, and there will be four lanes on the Bridge for general traffic. It is at present unclear how much of the peak period flow will be travelling in one direction.

- **We believe that there is a case for further consultation once a more developed set of reports on both environmental impact and traffic flows is available.**

4 Public transport on the Bridge

- 4.1 Peter Morley of the Thames Gateway London Partnership gave evidence that “there is concern about whether there is a Government commitment to the bridge being as public-transport-friendly as we would like.” This claim was made twice at different times during the hearing. He stressed that the boroughs were very concerned that public transport must figure very highly in the Bridge. The two public transport lanes are additional to the four-lane dual carriageway that carries ordinary traffic. The Bridge is approached by four-lane dual carriageways from both north (A1020/A406) and from the south (A2016). We were told that in order to allow traffic to flow freely once on the Bridge a four-lane carriageway, of the same capacity as the approach roads, is required across the length of the Bridge.
- 4.2 The Mayor has decided that the East London Transit and the Greenwich Waterfront Transit schemes should take the form of less expensive intermediate mode guided busways rather than a fully-fledged tram scheme. We heard evidence from Transport for London that the Bridge is being designed so that it could be suitable for trams, and that the gradients, radii and weight-bearing will be such that trams could be accommodated. Growth elsewhere in Docklands has shown that inadequate public transport capacity is a recurrent problem. There must remain a risk that a guided bus will simply not provide the public transport capacity the crossing will eventually need. We did not take detailed evidence on this matter but it must be an area for examination of the final Bridge proposals.
- 4.3 Transport for London’s visual imaging of the Bridge shows the public transport lanes as being either side of the four-lane dual carriageway for ordinary traffic. Those opposing the Bridge proposal argue that these public transport lanes could very readily be converted to lanes for ordinary traffic thus realising the dream of many transport planners for a second Dartford crossing – a six-lane motorway bridge for long-distance traffic.
- 4.4 We believe that if a future Mayor were to commit to a fully-fledged tram scheme on the Croydon model, instead of the ‘guided bus’, for the East London and Greenwich Waterfront Transits, this would go some way to reassuring doubters that the commitment to public transport on the Bridge was genuine and permanent.
- 4.5 TfL gave evidence that the busways provided on the Bridge link into the transit routes, the East London Transit to the north of the river, and the Greenwich Waterfront Transit to the south. There are arguments for running the two tracks side by side, separate from general traffic, to facilitate interchange, and this might possibly provide a less expensive option.
- 4.6 Although we are not yet at a stage where the Committee is responding to a finalised scheme, we feel it appropriate to lobby for the principle of appropriate clauses guaranteeing public transport facilities on the Bridge in the enabling legislation.
- **The Committee was told that since provision for a tram or light rail scheme is designed into the Bridge, that the two lanes for public**

transport should be segregated from the roadway in a way that maintains their use as a permanent, dedicated public transport corridor.

- **The Committee believes that the case for a tram or light rail scheme rather than a dedicated busway needs to be examined as a part of the process leading to formal powers for the Bridge.**
- **To secure a permanent public transport element in the Bridge, the dedication of two lanes for the sole use of public transport should be a requirement of the hybrid Bill or Highways Act proposal.**

5 The tolling regime

- 5.1 There is a challenge between meeting local needs through a bridge at Gallions' Reach while avoiding the creation of a trunk route. It was evident that the tolling regime for the Bridge is a vital mechanism for differentiating between local and long-distance usage. The Thames Gateway London Partnership Board was strongly of the view that a tolling regime was needed, which would differentiate between local and long-distance traffic. They believed it was essential that the legislation underpinning the tolling regime was a flexible one. Transport for London must be able to vary tolls to respond to traffic volumes.
- 5.2 In particular, we are not convinced that a £2 toll for long-distance car traffic is sufficient deterrent to keep long-distance traffic away. If the finance/business sector expands (for example into the Royal Docks) there is a danger of large numbers of people commuting by car from Kent and Surrey. It is important that the premium imposed on long-distance through traffic – especially freight lorries – should be set at a level which will ensure that the Bridge does not become a second Dartford crossing. Again, the regime needs the flexibility to vary tolls in the light of the traffic flows that develop after the Bridge opens.
- 5.3 While we support the principle of differential tolling this throws up a number of problems of definition. Michael Clarke, TfL's Project Director for the Thames Gateway Bridge was questioned about TfL's definition of "local" for the purposes of their modelling. He explained they are defining 'local' as "that traffic which either starts or finishes its journey, including commercial traffic, in the four boroughs adjacent to the Bridge".
- 5.4 Mr Clarke conceded that *'anywhere in Britain to one of the boroughs'* would be regarded as 'local' because it was part of regeneration and job creation, including the distribution of goods. Several members of the Committee felt this was unsatisfactory, and the suggestion was made that the 'local' might be defined as those vehicles which were registered and insured within the area, as with the congestion charge.
- 5.5 Evidence from London First, representing 313 member companies, showed that many businesses south of the river have up to 70-80% of the customers on the north side of the river. However, distribution of goods and services, whether by long distance lorries, delivery vans or company cars, may well involve travelling from locations north or south of the river, crossing the Bridge and then going on to destinations many hundred miles away (or even on the Continent). The same applies to journeys begun far away and arriving at business locations near the Bridge. If TfL's definition of 'local' as outlined by Mr Clarke is adopted in practice, it would grant such large-scale exemptions that the Mayor's commitment to sustainability would be brought into disrepute.
- 5.6 Michael Clarke of TfL confirmed to the Committee that further work was being carried out by TfL on this problem of the definition of 'local' and how the differential tolling will work. There are various electronic schemes currently in operation in other parts of the world that have the facility to monitor where the traffic travels from and to, and also to set a system whereby they have different charges according to either usage or journeys.

- **The Committee believes that Transport for London needs to reconsider its definitions of 'local' and 'long-distance' journeys for the purpose of developing a tolling regime for the Bridge.**
- **The Committee recommends that Transport for London should be much more targeted in its approach to differential tolling. The tolling regime needs to reflect differences between groups of potential users. Lower rates should be paid by residents and businesses registered within the four boroughs adjacent to the Bridge, and higher rates for through long-distance traffic should be set at levels which will discourage such traffic.**
- **The Committee calls for clauses in the hybrid Bill to specify that long distance vehicles (whether cars or lorries) should be tolled at a factor above that of local vehicles sufficiently great to be likely to discourage them from using the Bridge.**
- **The Committee calls for the tolling regime specified in the legislation to be flexible to allow the operators of the bridge to respond to traffic flows.**

6 In conclusion

6.1 It was clear from the evidence presented to the Committee that there are strong feelings for and against the proposal for a Thames Gateway Bridge at Gallions' Reach. The weight of evidence suggested that a considerable majority in the boroughs adjacent to the proposed bridge, and among the business community, favoured its construction.

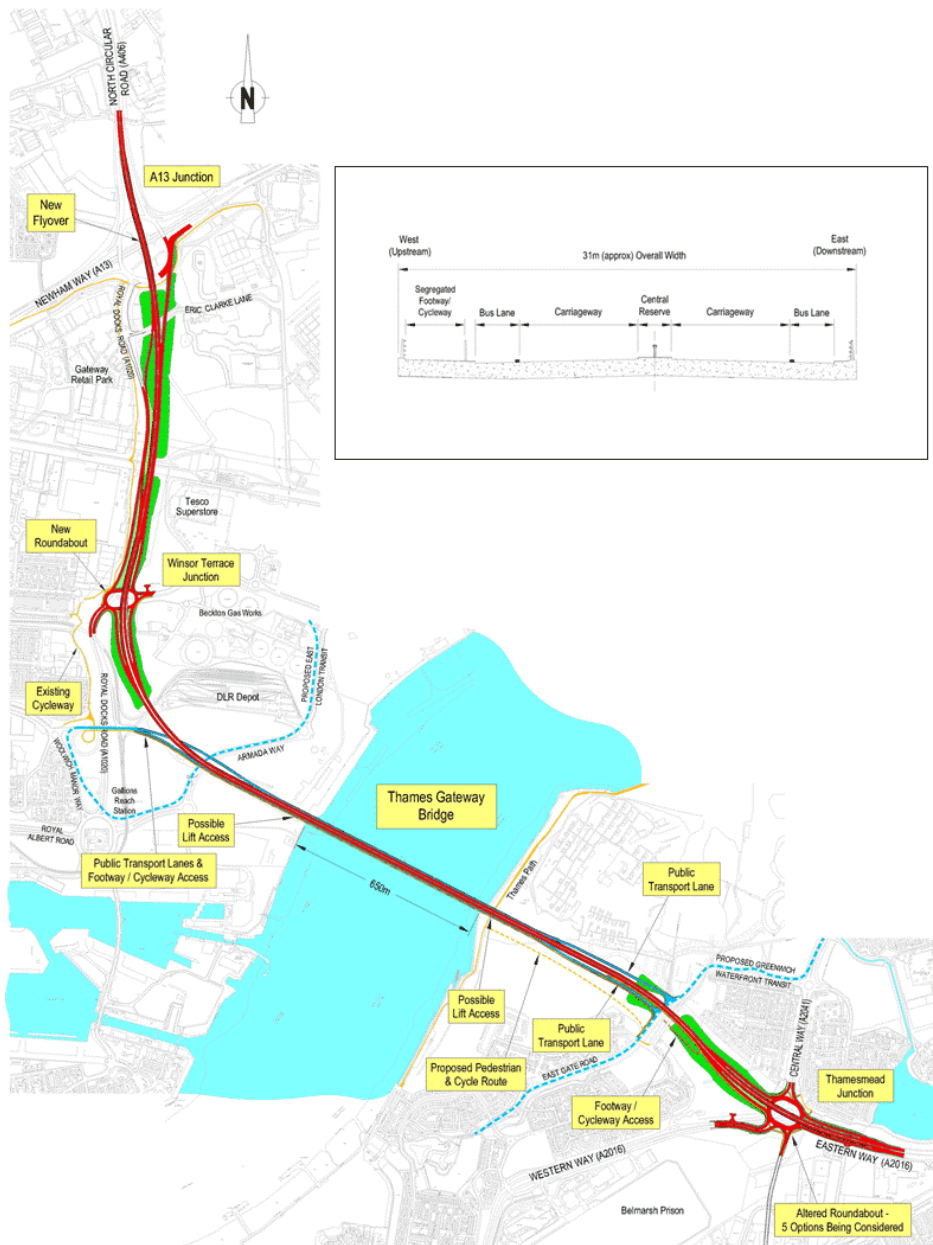
6.2 However, support for a bridge is based upon its regeneration and local transport benefits to the immediate area. The risk that the Bridge will become, in fact if not in name, a part of the national trunk road network remains a cause of local concern. We believe that Transport for London need to refine their proposals to explain how this risk will be minimised.

- **On balance a majority of the Committee is in favour of the Bridge proposal.**
- **The Committee wants to see further clarity on tolling proposals, environmental measures, and the form of public transport provision on the Bridge before a formal proposal is submitted to secure powers.**

Appendix A: Proposed Thames Gateway Bridge location maps



Source: Transport for London
<http://www.tfl.gov.uk/tfl/tgb-whywhere.shtml>



Appendix B: Transport Committee evidentiary hearing

Evidentiary Hearing 19th June 2003

Witnesses:

- Mike Clarke, Project Director, Thames Gateway Bridge, Transport for London
- Sara Price, Consultation Manager, Transport for London
- Bill Hamilton, Head of Group Public Affairs, Transport for London
- William McKee, London First
- Stephen Joseph, Deputy Chief Executive, Thames Gateway London Partnership
- Peter Morley, Senior Transport Consultant, Thames Gateway London Partnership
- Richard Bourne, Transport 2000
- Barry Gray, People Against the River Crossing
- John Elliott, John Elliott Consultancy

A transcript from the evidentiary hearing is available on the London Assembly website at:

<http://www.london.gov.uk/assembly/transport/2003/transpjun19/minutes/transpjun19minsappa.pdf>

Written evidence received:

Barry Gray, People Against the River Crossing

George Stern

Jenny Bates, Friends of the Earth London

John Elliot, John Elliot Consultancy

London First

Thames Gateway London Partnership

Transport for London

Appendix C: Orders and translations

For further information on this report or to order a bound copy, please contact:

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Appendix D: Principles of Assembly scrutiny

The powers of the London Assembly include power to investigate and report on decisions and actions of the Mayor, or on matters relating to the principal purposes of the Greater London Authority, and on any other matters which the Assembly considers to be of importance to Londoners. In the conduct of scrutiny and investigation the Assembly abides by a number of principles.

Scrutinies:

- aim to recommend action to achieve improvements;
- are conducted with objectivity and independence;
- examine all aspects of the Mayor's strategies;
- consult widely, having regard to issues of timeliness and cost;
- are conducted in a constructive and positive manner; and
- are conducted with an awareness of the need to spend taxpayers money wisely and well.

More information about the scrutiny work of the London Assembly, including published reports, details of committee meetings and contact information, can be found on the GLA website at <http://www.london.gov.uk/approot/assembly/index.jsp>

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