

LONDON ASSEMBLY

Caroline Pidgeon MBE AM, Chair of the Transport Committee

London Assembly
City Hall
The Queen's Walk
London SE1 2AA

5 September 2016

Sadiq Khan
Mayor of London
City Hall
The Queen's Walk
London SE1 2AA

Dear Sadiq,

I am writing to share the views of the Transport Committee on your emerging plans for pedestrianising Oxford Street. As you may be aware, the committee has been discussing this topic with a wide range of stakeholders in recent months, including representatives of local businesses, residents, road users, Transport for London and Westminster City Council.

In summary, in this letter I will set out:

- The need to take a strategic approach to managing traffic around Oxford Street and across the West End.
- The importance of developing a shared vision for pedestrianisation across the full range of local stakeholders.
- The immediate priority for TfL to reduce the number of buses on Oxford Street without creating additional congestion elsewhere.
- A number of other issues that need to be addressed, including wayfinding at Crossrail stations and the need for safe cycling routes.

It is clear that the status quo on Oxford Street cannot continue. Despite recent public realm improvements, road safety remains a major concern, with alarming casualty rates among pedestrians and cyclists. Levels of air pollution are extremely high, caused by emissions of NOx and PM2.5s as result of heavy and slow-moving traffic, particularly diesel vehicles.

These trends have serious human costs, and also have a negative impact on London's economy. Oxford Street, Regent Street and Bond Street constitute a global retail destination and a major employment centre. Without significant change to make the area cleaner and safer for Londoners and visitors to the city, its success will be at risk.

We welcome the bold ambition you have set out for the pedestrianisation of Oxford Street. Alongside other changes, pedestrianisation has the potential to transform this area and ensure Oxford Street, Regent Street and Bond Street provide a fantastic environment for people to live in, work and visit. When we met Val Shawcross, the Deputy Mayor for Transport, in July, we were pleased to hear that you are developing specific and timed plans to deliver this objective. It is right that you take a lead on this issue as Mayor, addressing a long-term strategic issue that has proven very difficult to solve over many years.

You will be aware, of course, that many challenges lie ahead. It is clear that key stakeholders have concerns about your plans and their implications. It is vital that, as far as possible, you develop a shared vision among businesses, residents, Westminster City Council and others about the future of Oxford Street. We would urge you to address the concerns of local stakeholders in order to do this.

The overriding sentiment of the committee's discussions with stakeholders is that Oxford Street cannot be considered in isolation from the rest of London's West End. For instance, there are a number of major transport schemes affecting traffic patterns in the West End, including the Baker Street Two Way project, Crossrail, and potentially Crossrail 2. Each will have significant benefits, but without coordinated planning there could be unintended consequences that could make congestion worse, not better.

The most important strategic priority for the immediate future is for Transport for London to deliver a sizeable reduction in the number of buses on Oxford Street. It is impossible to conceive of a pedestrianised Oxford Street until this happens. In doing this, large-scale diversion of buses into surrounding streets should be avoided, given the impact this would have on local communities and traffic congestion.

We believe that innovative changes to bus routes and service patterns will be required to achieve this objective, as displacement to surrounding roads would not be acceptable, and welcome the consultation you are planning in the autumn on this topic. It is vital that the space on Oxford Street vacated by buses is not immediately filled by other vehicles. A comprehensive plan to manage all forms of traffic accessing Oxford Street and the surrounding area is required.

We would also urge you and TfL to consider the following suggestions as you develop your plans for Oxford Street:

- Those with mobility problems including older and disabled people are likely to need support to get around on Oxford Street after it is pedestrianised. Some people may currently rely on bus or taxi services to travel to specific points. Taxis in particular provide a valuable door-to-door service for many visitors, so a comprehensive review of taxi access should be completed. Other options for supporting people with mobility issues could be explored.
- New Elizabeth Line stations at Bond Street and Tottenham Court Road are expected to bring many more people to the area. It is vital that these stations have comprehensive and accurate wayfinding within and around them to enable people to find the entries and exits they need. Failure to do this may increase pedestrian congestion, which is likely to

remain a challenge even after pedestrianisation.

- It is currently difficult for pedestrians to get between Oxford Street and Hyde Park, not least because of a lack of safe crossings. This is a lost opportunity for improving the visitor experience, and should be addressed by TfL working with the Royal Parks, New West End Company and Westminster Council.
- London still needs more and safer east-west cycle routes through central London. Oxford Street is used by many cyclists at present, despite it being one of London's most dangerous roads. TfL should develop plans for improved cycle routes as part of the wider strategy for roads in the area. These should be delivered in a way that avoids adding to congestion, for instance through removing road space without a corresponding plan for reducing or re-routing traffic.¹

I hope you find these views useful as you work with partners to develop plans for Oxford Street. I expect we will hear more about your proposals for pedestrianisation in the coming months, and the Committee looks forward to responding to your consultation in due course. I would welcome to any further discussions on this topic.

Yours sincerely,

Caroline Pidgeon MBE AM
Chair, Transport Committee

¹ The case for new east-west cycle routes is supported by the majority of the Committee. David Kurten AM of UKIP believes London may benefit from these but that further assessment is required to ensure that there is no concurrent increase in traffic congestion or vehicle journey times from the loss of traffic lanes.