

Geoff Hobbs / Consultation Team
Head of Public Transport Service Planning
Transport for London
197 Blackfriars Road
London
SE1 8NJ

Wednesday 9th November 2018

Dear Mr Hobbs,

Consultation response to the Central London Bus Services Consultation and proposed withdrawal of the RV1 bus service

Better Bankside is deeply opposed to TfL's RV1 proposals and disappointed in the approach TfL have taken with the users and communities that use the bus.

The termination of the bus will remove one of the cleanest routes from London's streets and replace parts of the route with diesel buses, this is contradictory to the Healthy Streets aims and objectives in the Mayor's Transport Strategy. The loss of this bus may increase the use of Private Hire Vehicles (Ubers, Via Van¹ and Taxies) in the area. The loss of the bus will also result in the loss of the expertise and specific supply chains associated with running hydrogen buses in London.

The Bankside business community are supportive of a pan-London aim to make bus services faster, more reliable and integrate with the expanding rail network but not at the expense of more air pollution. Parts of Bankside are classed as air-pollution hot spots by the Greater London Authority, removing a clean bus route which links a growing residential and business neighbourhood with major rail network hubs would be a misstep.

TfL should disclose the air quality impact of removing the RV1 and replacing a part(s) of the bus route with extra diesel capacity.

Demand/passenger use

The RV1 was introduced in 2002 with support from Southbank/Bankside employment groups. Currently some of the busiest sections on the route are through the Bankside area, eastbound in the evening peak the busiest point is on Southwark Street by Southwark Bridge Road. In the westbound direction the busiest point in the morning peak is on Southwark Street at the Hop Exchange and in the evening peak the busiest point is on Southwark Street by Blackfriars Road. The primary reason for the withdrawal of the bus seems to centre around falling passenger numbers over the past two years, a review of these number show that this is a prejudicial reason for withdrawal. Figure 1 shows passenger usage and the bus kilometres travelled since 2010². Passenger use of the bus has declined since 2016, this is unsurprising when acknowledging that 30% of the original route is curtailed.

¹ Viavan launched in London in April 2018 and costs £3 in zone 1, <https://www.viavan.com/london-launch/>

² source: TfL Bus Service Usage (2018)

The RV1 has suffered from a multiple operational disadvantage which explain why people have been forced to choose routes alternative to the hydrogen bus.

- **April 2016 – 2018.** Tooley Street closed eastbound till 2018 for London Bridge works. Eastbound RV1 buses cross London Bridge instead of Tower Bridge.
- **September 2016 – Feb 2018.** RV1 operating to a 'temporary' timetable – with buses every 12 minutes – due to the long-term diversions at both Waterloo and London Bridge
- **October 2016.** City of London Corporation's shut Tower Bridge for over 3 months to road traffic. RV1 travel via London Bridge.
- **June 2017.** London Bridge terror attack.
- **February 2018.** RV1 frequency reduced to one every 20 minutes.

Since 2016 the RV1 has been scheduled to run every twelve minutes, it's reliability has not been 100%, in 2018 only 85.6%³ of RV1 buses have been running on time, below the twelve minutes frequency best practice guidance indicates that passengers will not treat the service as “turn-up-and-go”, further undermining ridership. After a temporary reduction in service frequency and upon the completion of works at London Bridge, the expectation is that a full resumption of the route and an increase in frequency will resume. The consultation should be robust in its modelling and either give the RV1 an opportunity to run at full frequency over a full route or work under the assumption that the RV1 is carrying passengers at levels similar to those prior to the 2016 route disruptions.

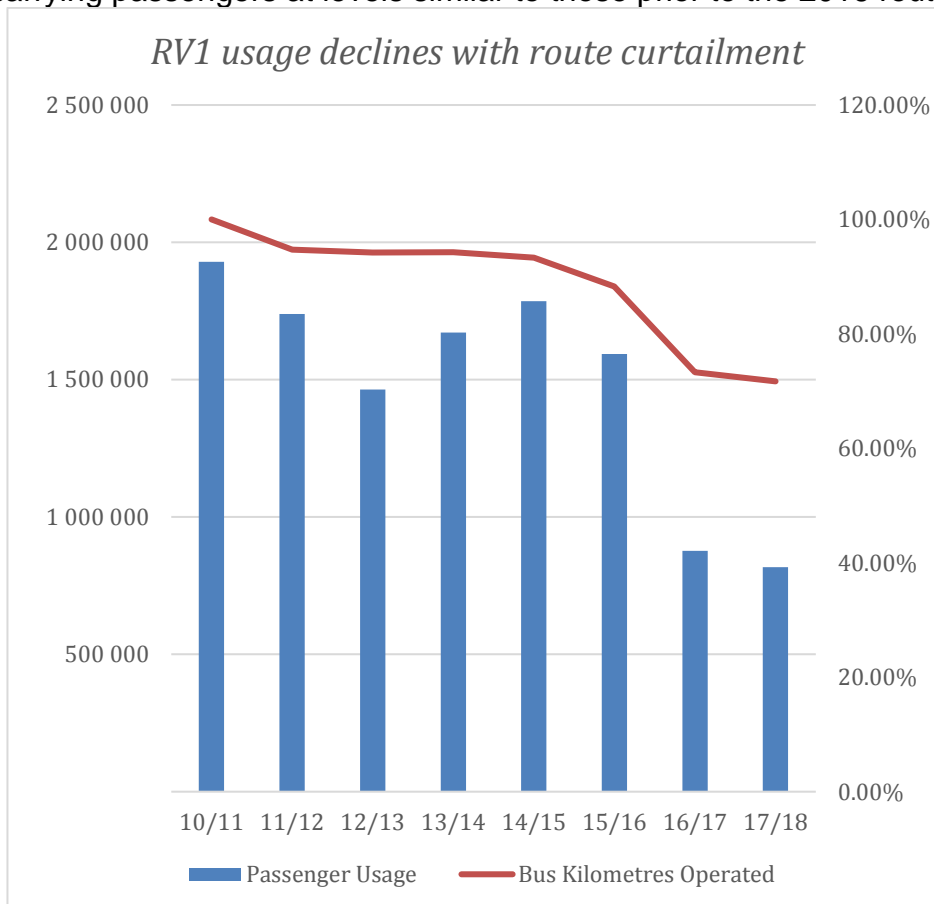


Figure 1 Demand has been suppressed during extensive roadworks. (RV1 passenger number and bus kilometres operated. Data source: TfL Bus Service Usage)

³ TFL Route RV1 – review of usage and service planning (Sep 2018)

Demand for the RV1 has been suppressed since 2016's extensive roadworks. TfL should be robust in its modelling and work under the assumption that the RV1 is carrying passengers at levels like those prior to the 2016 route disruptions.

Furthermore, if there is capacity to carry more passengers, TfL should explore opportunities for route improvement and increase passenger numbers. Suggestion include:

- changing the terminus from Covent Garden to Charing Cross/Trafalgar Square taking in the mainline station; and
- looking for alternative routes through Waterloo (e.g. Stamford Street as an alternative to Upper Ground) to improve journey time

Business Case

The business case for the changes proposed for all routes in the Blackfriars and London Bridges package, including the RV1, would save £3.7m a year in operating costs and results in an estimated loss in revenue of about £1.6m per year, as it is anticipated that some passengers will be disinclined to travel due to the loss of links.

This reduces the saving to £2.1 million per year, there would also be a loss of passenger benefits because of increases in journey times due to the need to change buses and having two sets of waiting times, this has been monetised at an estimated £4.0 million per year by TfL⁴. This results in a negative cost-benefit ratio (£1.9 million per year in the monetised cost of loss of passenger benefits) for the Blackfriars and London Bridges package, which includes the RV1.

Given the costs incurred by public transport users in time and convenience TfL should remodel and re-review the decisions in the Central London Bus Services Consultation, including the proposal to remove the RV1.

For the Blackfriars and London Bridges package specifically, including the RV1, analysis should be conducted into how many trips would move to other modes, including increases in Private Hire Vehicle trips and the associated air quality impacts of this.

Housing and growth

The RV1 travels across the Better Bankside / Bankside Neighbourhood Plan area, improving the Public Transport Accessibility Level (PTAL) helping to create a virtuous cycle of high-quality dense housing and good accessibility.

The Bankside area is likely to see its resident population potentially treble from just under 5000 (2013) to just over 14,000 people over the next decade⁵, Bankside and the areas the RV1 passes through is designated an Opportunity Area and is in the Central Activities Zone - both London Plan designations. Ridership figures on the RV1 route could be significantly improved. Documents supporting the Central London Bus Services Consultation do not state if there will be PTAL changes as a part of the changes.

⁴ Central London Bus Services Consultation – Updated Supporting Material (October 2018)

⁵ Bankside Neighbourhood Plan Capacity Study (2013)

TfL should use the Bankside Neighbourhood Plan Capacity Study to review how the Bus Review area, specifically how the RV1 route would serve the development sites.

Equalities Impact

Withdrawal of the RV1 would also remove the only direct step-free link between Bankside and Covent Garden. People requiring a step-free route between the aforementioned destinations must take route 381 to Waterloo and interchange onto route 76/4/26/172 to Aldwych, decreasing comfort and increasing journey time. Similarly, the diesel 343 route would also have to be extended to provide links to Aldgate that would no longer be possible on the withdrawn RV1. There is no commitment from TfL to ensure all interchange point are sheltered.

TfL should come forward with robust plans to mitigate any problems that might arise for passengers with disabilities or mobility issues if the withdrawal of the RV1 progresses.

The Central London Bus Services Consultation does not make a strong case for supporting economic development and population growth in central London, nor does it enhance the quality of life or improve transport opportunities for Bankside residents.

The cancellation of the RV1 service should be stopped to allow for further consideration. Contrary to its cancellation, TfL should implement a clean, efficient SE1 bus network, built off the back of the RV1 route. We look forward to your urgent response on this matter.

Kind regards,



Peter Williams

CEO Better Bankside

cc. Sadiq Khan, Mayor of London
Mike Brown, TfL Commissioner
Ward Councillors (Cllr. Adele Morris, Cllr. David Noakes, Cllr. Victor Chamberlain)
Amir Eden, Living Bankside