

Greater London Assembly – Transport Committee Investigation into traffic congestion in London

Response from Better Bankside

2 September 2016

Introduction

Better Bankside is the third business improvement district in the UK, and was the first one south of the river in London. Better Bankside has over 625 member businesses, who collectively contribute over £1.5m of BID levy annually to the neighbourhood.

Bankside's location, firmly within London's Central Activities Zone, plays an important role in connecting and linking up surrounding growth areas including London Bridge, Waterloo, Elephant and Castle and the City of London. The area has some of Central London's busiest road and cycle routes – including Borough High Street, Southwark Street and Blackfriars Road.

Today we know that there are some 6,000 residents living in Bankside, over 60,000 employees working here, and over 20 million visitors to the area annually. We expect the area to continue to grow over the next 15 years, bringing significantly more residents, businesses and visitors to the area.

Better Bankside already coordinates Bankside Urban Forest, a long-term strategy and partnership for improving the network of streets and open spaces linking the riverside to Elephant and Castle, on behalf of a wider partnership of local and strategic agencies. Our Smarter Travel work seeks to increase rates of cycling and walking, both for the commute and business travel purposes. Guided by targets set by a five year plan, we provide a wide range of cycling services including cycle maintenance, training, parking solutions, cycle freight and cycle loan schemes. The work is complemented by a number of newer initiatives to help our member businesses manage their freight and delivery requirements more efficiently.

1. How has traffic congestion changed in London in recent years? Are there differences in the amount, time, type and/or location of congestion?

Every 5 years, Better Bankside carries out an employee travel survey for its members. The result of the last survey carried out in 2015 suggest the mode share for commuting to Bankside by car is even lower than 5 years previously (0.9% versus just 2.6% in 2010). As in many parts of central London, we appear not to be experiencing an increase in congestion due to individual car use, but due to other factors.

2. What are the key causes of these changes in congestion?

We are not able to be clear about the causes of congestion in our area. This is frustrating and ultimately hinders our ability to implement and influence measures to mitigate it. We are, for example, not able to determine the extent to which traffic in the area has an origin or destination in our area or whether it is using Bankside roads as a through route to other areas. We understand that TfL can only provide this level of information if a specific origin and destination survey has been carried out. We would strongly endorse a more thorough programme of data collection that could help inform measures to reduce congestion in central London. At the very least, we would welcome a greater level of data sharing to enable all those with a role to play to target measures more effectively.

3. What impact does congestion have on Londoners, the city's economy and its environment?

Our 2015 Employee Travel Survey asked respondents about the frequency of their trip being delayed. Of those who travelled by car as their usual mode, 50% were delayed frequently or nearly every trip. For those travelling by bus, the figure was 46% and motorcycle, 42%. The only (non-road) public transport mode that was near these figures was train, where 57% those using this as their usual mode reported they experiences delays frequently or nearly every trip.

These figures suggest that Bankside commuters travelling by road are regularly affected by congestion to the extent that their working time is reduced or that their commute time is lengthened. With those working in London having the longest commute journeys in the UK, this is contributing to negative impacts such as less time for family, sleep and physical activity¹.

7. How might the Ultra Low Emission Zone and Emissions Surcharge affect congestion levels?

We fear that whilst the ULEZ and Emissions Surcharge will be useful tools to combat polluting emissions from the oldest vehicles in the fleet, these measures will only have a very small impact on congestion in our area. This is because fleet and logistic operators are in the best position to simply upgrade their vehicles if required, with no associated changes to their operations in terms of reducing the number of vehicles on the road.

9. How can the Mayor and TfL reduce the number of delivery vehicles on London's roads, especially in congested areas at peak times?

Better Bankside is already working with partners such as Cross River Partnership and other central London Business Improvement Districts to share information and develop good practice on delivery and servicing plans.

We are in the process of implementing a pilot 'personal delivery' service and have already tested an innovative cargo cycle for local business to business deliveries.

Our efforts are sometimes made more difficult by a number of factors including:

- Restrictions in place for night time deliveries due to very understandable resident noise issues. Whilst TfL has already invested in studies to develop good practice in this area, the results have not been adequately promoted, shared or further developed for different types of commercial area. We would welcome a much more widespread trial of different 'quiet delivery' practices and would be interested in hosting an element in our area.
- Loading and unloading for larger developments being enforced primarily through the planning process. Our experience is where deliveries are supposed to take place within the confines of loading bays, often at peak times on-street unloading takes place leading to localised congestion. At present, this appears to be only possible to enforce by reference to the original planning obligation. We would welcome further consideration as to how loading and unloading for large developments (over a certain sq ft or employee number) would be prohibited on street and could only take place within loading bays. We believe some kind of enforcement regime would be required with the receiving business / building owner being fined rather than the operator making the delivery.

¹¹ See the recently published report by the Royal Society for Public Health "Health in a Hurry" August 2016 <https://www.rsph.org.uk/about-us/news/new-report-highlights-health-impact-of-rush-hour-commuting.html>

12. To what extent could greater efficiency in the provision of bus services help reduce congestion, and how?

Bankside is well served by north-south bus routes, on Blackfriars Road, Borough High Street and one route on Southwark Bridge Road. However, there are only two east-west routes (RV1 and 381). Both routes have a usual frequency of more than 10 minutes. The current congestion on Southwark Street and Stanford Street is contributing to less reliable journey times. However, assuming that this could be addressed, short east-west journeys by taxi could easily be replaced by a frequent bus service. We would therefore welcome a review of bus services across London to check that they are meeting current journey needs and helping to reduce journeys by car or taxi.

13. How can TfL further encourage a shift from private car use to public transport or active travel modes?

As noted above there has been a significant shift from car to other modes in Bankside over the past 10 years.

Better Bankside has played a part (working with TfL) to encourage this through our range of services to promote cycling and walking. Whilst private car use is very low, we are able to play a role in enabling more public transport users to move to active travel modes, in turn to enable more capacity for private car users to move to public transport use where that is the best option. The current TfL investment programme in cycling infrastructure is very welcome. We would urge that the investment provided for the Quietway network be prioritised as this provides the greatest number of potential cyclists with safe routes to work. We would also like to see an upgrade to Cycle Superhighway 7 (Merton – The City), which falls well below the standards applied to the more recent Cycle Superhighways.

18. What effect has the additional space provided for cycling and pedestrian infrastructure had on congestion?

As set out above, we are very supportive of the investment programme in cycling infrastructure. We also are strong supporters of increasing the space allocated to pedestrians. Our Smarter Travel and Bankside Urban Forest work over the last ten years has been grounded on the principle that walking and cycling are the most efficient modes for personal travel for Central London.

However, we are concerned that the zeal for improving cycle routes may have had some adverse impacts which are not being adequately mitigated for in the short to medium term. In particular we have observed higher levels of congestion on Southwark Street since the completion of the East-West Cycle Superhighway along the Embankment, Castle Baynard Street, Upper and Lower Thames Street. Our understanding is that this was predicted in the modelling carried out as part of the business case appraisal in 2014. We would have welcomed a greater openness about this and therefore a more informed debate with all concerned about how traffic levels could be reduced both for the Cycle Superhighway route and the routes which would be seen as alternatives.