



Department for Transport

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From the Permanent Secretary

Sarah Olney MP

Member of Parliament for Richmond Upon Thames
House of Commons
London
SW1A 0AA

01 August 2023

Dear Sarah,

I am writing in response to your questions at the meeting of the Public Accounts Committee (PAC) on the 19 July on the closure of Wandsworth Bridge.

You asked what conversations the Department has been having with Transport for London (TfL) and others regarding the increased congestion closure of Wandsworth Bridge may cause in south London, and what might be done to mitigate it.

My Department recognises the effect the closure of Wandsworth Bridge may have on levels of congestion in South London. However, the responsibility for the maintenance and repair of Wandsworth Bridge lies solely with Wandsworth Borough Council (WBC). It is for the Council to decide how best to mitigate the effect of any increased congestion in conjunction with TfL.

We understand from TfL that it has been working closely with WBC to keep the closure of the bridge as short as possible and to reduce the impact of the closure where feasible, so that any inconvenience to customers using the road network and footways is kept to the bare minimum.

To manage the increased level of congestion, TfL has made changes to relevant bus services to avoid the closure of Wandsworth Bridge. In addition to this, it has arranged for additional officers to be placed both on the street (at key points around the closure) and in its Control Centre – this will allow TfL to monitor the performance of the surrounding road network and make real time adjustments to the traffic signal timings to alleviate any performance issues.

You also asked why it has been easier to arrange for the repairs to Wandsworth Bridge than it has been for Hammersmith Bridge. These repairs are fundamentally different to the Hammersmith Bridge repair project, both in terms of the cost of the works and the nature of the required repairs. Unlike Wandsworth Bridge, Hammersmith Bridge was never built to withstand the significant demands of carrying modern motor traffic. Hammersmith Bridge is primarily constructed from cast iron, a material rarely used in modern construction due to its susceptibility for defects, whereas Wandsworth Bridge is made from durable steel.

As you know, it was due to the discovery of fractures in the cast iron pedestals of Hammersmith Bridge that the Bridge was first closed for safety reasons in 2019.

Given the age and fragile nature of Hammersmith Bridge, the strengthening works that are needed to restore the Bridge to all users (including motor vehicles) are more substantial, costly, and complicated to arrange than the relatively contained programme of repairs required for the safe operation of Wandsworth Bridge. Repairs to Wandsworth Bridge are projected to last 10 weeks and primarily relate to the replacement of the weight-bearing parts of the structure.

I hope this is helpful.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read "Bernadette Kelly". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with a long, sweeping tail on the final letter.

Dame Bernadette Kelly DCB
Permanent Secretary