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Rt Hon Boris Johnson MP
Prime Minister
10 Downing Street
London
SW1A 2AB

Dear Prime Minister

Hammersmith Bridge

We write to seek the constructive engagement of the government to help resolve the serious problems with Hammersmith Bridge.

Urgent safety issues

As you know, Hammersmith Bridge had to be closed to all pedestrian and river traffic on 13 August because there was a risk it would suddenly collapse into the river. The estimated cost of the bridge stabilisation works, simply to make the bridge safe and avoid a potential catastrophic failure, is £46M.

No local authority has that kind of money available. We therefore write to ask that the government funds this work as a matter of urgency.

If the bridge is stabilised in this way, it can then be permanently reopened to pedestrians, cyclists and river traffic. Despite the best efforts of world-leading engineers, the 133-year-old structure continues to deteriorate without these works.

Meanwhile, all river traffic has had to be halted which cuts off the Chiswick RNLI station from sending any lifesaving mission east of Hammersmith Bridge.

Minimising disruption

The closure of Hammersmith Bridge is causing disruption across South West London and north Surrey. Many people have contacted us to tell of the huge difficulties they will now face. Those range from nurses, doctors and other key workers working long hours during the pandemic, to new problems for people being treated in hospitals on the opposite sides of the river. When school term starts, hundreds of children and their parents face significant disruption. There are many more examples of people being seriously hindered from going about their day-to-day business.

Boats have been stranded on either side of the bridge since its closure and ferry companies are unable to carry out their legitimate business. The Port of London Authority can provide government with a full brief on these matters.

While we are urgently reviewing all possible measures that might mitigate some of these problems (such as running a ferry to transport people across the river) it is possible that without government funding, these problems will persist for a long time.

Protecting British national heritage

In 2015 the Comprehensive Structural Integrity Review began to discover decades of dangerous unchecked corrosion riddled throughout Hammersmith Bridge which had seized up critical parts of the suspension structure. The micro-fractures in the cast iron pedestals that hold the suspension chains in place are a consequence of that. Cast iron can shatter. If the microfractures increase in size to a critical point we are advised that could cause the sudden collapse of the bridge - which until 10th April 2019 carried 22,000 vehicles a day.

Last week the new state-of-the-art sensors now in place alerted us to a sudden increase in the size of pedestal microfractures. As you know, we immediately closed the bridge.

However, despite all these failings, this beautiful 19th century bridge is a unique part of Britain's pioneer engineering heritage. What a terrible metaphor it would be if we allowed this achievement from a high point in British history to simply crumble away in the middle of the Thames, at the heart of our capital city. We can restore Hammersmith Bridge to its rightful grandeur and strengthen our country's economy while doing that. But only with support from you.

Financial support

As you know, the "shovel ready" plan to fully restore Hammersmith Bridge and make it safe for motor vehicles will cost £141M based on the latest independent industry estimates.

If the government does not see that as a priority, at the very least, we ask for support to make the bridge safe for pedestrians, cyclists and river traffic by funding the £46M bridge stabilisation works.

During the general election, the Rt Hon Grant Shapps MP, Baroness Vere, George Freeman MP, Nus Ghani MP and Helen Whately MP, all visited Hammersmith Bridge pledging to provide the necessary government funds. We ask that you ensure the government now delivers on those promises.

We stand by to share all information with your officials. We look forward to constructively working with the government to get these problems sorted and put the needs of all the people affected above any other concerns.

With kind regards

Yours sincerely

Cllr Stephen Cowan

The London Borough of Hammersmith & Fulham

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