

Councillor Stephen Cowan

Leader of the London Borough of Hammersmith & Fulham
Hammersmith Town Hall, London W6 9JU



13 May 2021

Baroness Vere of Norbiton Parliamentary
Under Secretary of State
The Department for Transport
Great Minster House
33 Horseferry Road
London
SW1P 4DR

Dear Charlotte

Thank you for writing on 18 March to confirm your receipt of the 108-page Outline Financial Plan (OFP) sent on 19 February 2021. I was pleased to read your reassertion of the commitment given by the Secretary of State, when we met on 25 November last year, to work with LBHF to hammer out the details of this plan.

While there have been some exploratory discussions with Department for Transport officials on the potential for a toll or a road charging scheme, there has not unfortunately been or any of the close collaborative work needed to move the financing options forward - nor has our team been given any substantive feedback.

The most significant indication of the government's view about the proposal that a toll represents the best value to national and local taxpayers, remains the 6 January letter from the Secretary of State, when he said *"An Act of Parliament would be the most robust and flexible way to introduce a toll road. Depending on the repair options you take forward with TfL and contractors, this could increase the timeline for the project significantly; my officials, legal colleagues and your officials should continue to work closely to develop this option, bearing in mind the users who are currently struggling to cross the river."*

I agree with the Secretary of State that these proposals can only be progressed at speed if LBHF's team is able to work closely and collaboratively with DfT officials and legal team to deliver them. I hope we can urgently begin to do that.

As you know, Hammersmith Bridge is one of the world's oldest mechanical suspension bridges made using technology and materials unsuitable for the modern age which is why it is also one of Britain's most expensive bridges to repair. The 19th century Hammersmith Bridge is a Grade II* Listed national historic landmark just five years younger than Brooklyn Bridge in New York - which is also a suspension structure. Like

Brooklyn Bridge, Hammersmith Bridge will always require high levels of maintenance funding if it is to be properly preserved as a working public utility into the 22nd century and beyond.

These exceptional factors require an exceptional solution. A toll or a road charging scheme given to a new delivery model solely responsible for its repair and on-going maintenance offers that exceptional solution.

The OFP provides a blueprint of a way forward where only up-front costs need to be provided by Government and whole programme can be funded by motor vehicle users through a toll rather than by taxpayers.

I'd be grateful for a response to the proposals detailed in the OFT. As you know, we need to make urgent progress in raising the necessary finance if we are to avoid further delay.

With best wishes

Yours sincerely



Cllr Stephen Cowan

Leader of the London Borough of Hammersmith & Fulham