

Councillor Stephen Cowan

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



1 February 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

I was rather surprised to have received your letter of 25 January because, at the 14 January Taskforce meeting, I assured you then that LBHF officials were updating the outline financial plan and would be sending it to the Secretary of State as soon as that work is completed. It will be sent to him this week.

I have reviewed the concerns you've raised, in particular your "*disappointment at how the working relationship appears to have stalled*" and your comment that, "*my officials have reached out to try and establish how we best work through this together but have so far failed to receive any real engagement from your team*". I do not think that is an accurate reflection of events. Indeed, LBHF's officials advise me they have contacted Department for Transport officials on a number of occasions seeking assistance without receiving it.

Rather than get into the detail of that, I can reassure you that LBHF is committed to working with DfT officials to do all the necessary work together - just as they have been doing with TfL. It may be useful for us to have a catch-up to hammer out any problems.

LBHF officials have engaged legal counsel to understand and factor into their workings the complicated legislative process for a toll - in part because they could not get such assistance from the DfT.

I am happy for Taskforce Project Director Dana Skelley to attend the Hammersmith Bridge Project Board. I have every confidence in Dana's technical skills and experience. As the Project Board was set up under a Section 8 agreement between two Highway Authorities, LBHF and TfL will arrange for Dana to attend as an observer. I hope this will be helpful.

As you know, LBHF is leading on the top three issues on the Dashboard:

1. the Ritblat/Foster/COWI proposal which offers the prospect of a quicker time frame at reduced cost for the bridge opening
2. the development of the toll so it delivers a value-for-money funding solution for local and UK taxpayers and
3. the presentation of actual engineering reports based on detailed site analysis.

I understand the specialist bridge engineers and officials on the Hammersmith Bridge Project Board were dismayed by the government's press release of the AECOM and Fleck desktop reviews which not only was devoid of much of the detailed specialist engineering work they are doing to actually examine and repair the bridge but that it misadvised the public that the bridge could have unnecessarily been closed and could even soon be re-opened. They viewed that episode as an ill-advised political PR stunt. They are understandably reticent to allow such activities to distract them from their work in the future.

It is clear that funding for the unprecedented amounts required is the single issue that has held up progress. We would have made much better headway if funding had been allowed to be discussed from the beginning at the Government Taskforce meetings.

I hope we are therefore able to move things on at pace as we go forward.

With best wishes.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Stephen Cowan', with a large circular flourish at the end.

Cllr Stephen Cowan

Leader of the London Borough of Hammersmith & Fulham