BusinessLDN response to the London Assembly Transport Committee Investigation: Road Space, Driving and Congestion

Dear Chair of the Transport Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to contribute to the Committee's inquiry into road space, driving, and congestion.

BusinessLDN is a membership organisation with the mission to make London the best city in the world in which to do business, working with and for the whole UK. We represent 170 large businesses across London, spanning a wide range of sectors.

How London's streets are managed is critical not only to the efficient movement of people and goods, but also to the capital's economic competitiveness, environmental sustainability, and quality of life. A well-functioning road network – one that supports public transport, freight, servicing, walking, and cycling alongside essential vehicle journeys – underpins access to jobs, customers, and services, and is vital to London's continued growth as a global city.

Congestion remains one of the most significant constraints on London's economy and quality of life. While welcome progress has been made in encouraging more sustainable travel, congestion continues to impose substantial costs on businesses, freight operators, and Londoners, and undermines the performance of public transport. The total economic cost of traffic congestion in London in 2024 was approximately £3.85 billion, averaging about £942 per driver, with London drivers losing 101 hours in delays.[1]

This response draws on BusinessLDN's engagement with members, our previous consultation responses, the Mayor's Transport Strategy (MTS), and wider evidence.

In response to the Committee's investigation, our views based on the questions included in your letter are:

Use of London's roads

Why are people choosing to drive over other modes of transport?

1. There are several consistent reasons why driving remains a common choice over other modes of transport:
    - **Journey reliability and flexibility**, particularly for multi-stop, time-sensitive, or non-standard working hours.
    - **Outer London and orbital journeys**, where public transport provision is often limited. The MTS recognises that traffic growth pressures are strongest in Outer London due to weaker public transport coverage.[2]
    - **Work-related and freight journeys**, including servicing and deliveries, which are not easily substituted by public transport.
    - **Accessibility and caring responsibilities**, where driving provides independence and flexibility.

[1] INRIX, 2024 INRIX Global Traffic Scorecard, January 2025
[2] Mayor of London, Mayor's Transport Strategy, March 2018

2. We support the Mayor's ambition to reduce unnecessary car use, but within the context that many vehicle journeys are **economically and socially essential** and must be recognised as such in policy design.

Where is congestion increasing and decreasing in London?

3. Congestion in London is uneven and increasingly dispersed. While Central London remains highly congested, particularly outside traditional peak hours, evidence suggests that **growth in congestion is now most pronounced in Outer London**. Population and employment growth, combined with more limited public transport options for orbital and cross-borough journeys, mean car dependency remains high, and delays are rising in many outer boroughs – a trend recognised in the MTS.[3]

4. Across the capital, congestion is also **less peak-focused than in the past**, with flexible working patterns and increased freight and servicing activity spreading traffic throughout the day, reducing predictability for business travel.

5. By contrast, there are **localised improvements** on corridors with targeted priority and junction management, demonstrating the value of evidence-based interventions.

What impact is congestion having on Londoners and London's public transport network?

6. Congestion continues to have significant economic, social, and environmental impacts across London. For Londoners, longer and less predictable journeys reduce time available for work, family, and leisure, contributing to stress and poorer quality of life. Congestion also disproportionately affects those who rely on buses, often lower-income and transit-dependent communities, limiting access to jobs, education, healthcare, and essential services.

7. For London's public transport network, congestion directly undermines bus reliability and efficiency. Buses carry **over 1.8 billion passenger journeys annually**, yet average network speeds remain low, at around **9 mph**, with Inner London routes often falling **below 7 mph** during peak periods.[4] This not only extends journey times but also increases operational costs for Transport for London (TfL), requiring more vehicles and staff to maintain service levels. Slower, less reliable buses contribute to declining ridership, reducing fare revenue and limiting the scope for reinvestment in the network.

8. The combined effect is a **negative feedback loop**: congestion slows buses, reducing public transport attractiveness, which in turn increases car use and further congestion. It also impacts freight and servicing, creating knock-on effects for businesses and local economies.

9. Solutions to mitigate these impacts include: targeted bus priority measures and signal optimisation to improve journey times on key corridors; smarter road space management to balance the needs of buses, freight and essential car journeys; and effective congestion charging and demand management, aligned with the EV transition.

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[3] Mayor of London, Mayor's Transport Strategy, March 2018
[4] Transport for London, Travel in London 2025: Annual Overview, December 2025

10. We also note that **current road charging mechanisms**, including the Congestion Charge, Ultra Low Emission Zone (ULEZ), and tolls, are not fully aligned with congestion patterns. The Mayor should consult with the public and businesses to explore the potential for an integrated and dynamic road pricing system. Such a scheme could encourage more non-essential trips to shift away from peak travel times and highly congested corridors.

11. Addressing congestion is critical to ensure London's streets are efficient, reliable, and equitable for all users, supporting economic growth and sustainable mobility.

Allocation of road space

How does TfL assess the impact of road layout on different users and on congestion before implementing changes?

12. TfL uses a combination of modelling, monitoring, and consultation to assess the impact of road layout changes. This includes traffic simulations, pedestrian and cycling surveys, bus journey time analysis, and freight movement studies. Schemes are tested against **bus reliability, general traffic flow, road safety, and air quality outcomes.** Public and stakeholder consultation is also conducted, particularly with boroughs, businesses, and transport user groups.

13. While TfL has strong data tools, **network-wide impacts are not always fully captured**, especially for freight and servicing movements. There is scope to better integrate **economic impacts and business access needs** into pre-implementation assessments. Evidence-led pilot schemes with real-time monitoring and post-implementation review should become standard to ensure road layouts achieve the intended benefits without unintended negative effects.

Is any transport user group being disproportionately impacted by current congestion or road layouts?

14. Congestion affects all road users, but its impacts are **unequally distributed**. **Lower-income and transit-dependent** Londoners are disproportionately affected because they rely on buses, which are slowed by congested roads. This reduces reliability, increases journey times, and limits access to employment and essential services.

15. **Freight operators and small businesses** also experience disproportionate impacts. Delays increase operating costs, disrupt deliveries, and reduce workforce mobility. Car users face slower journeys but often have greater flexibility to adjust timing. Congestion reduction policies must **consider these unequal impacts** and prioritise interventions that improve public transport, freight efficiency, and access for essential trips.

Is road space in central, inner, and outer London being allocated and used in a way that enables essential journeys to be made?

16. Road space allocation varies significantly across London. In **Central London**, schemes such as **bus lanes and signal priority** support essential journeys for public transport and freight.

17. These interventions – alongside the introduction of the Congestion Charge – have helped to reduce vehicle volumes in the area since the early 2000s. TfL data suggests Central London traffic has remained **below historic levels**, with overall central area traffic volumes declining relative to the mid-2010s.[5] However, average traffic speeds in central areas remain around **9 mph**, highlighting the ongoing impact of congestion on essential trip reliability.[6]

18. In **Inner London**, competing demands – including freight, servicing, cycling infrastructure, and parking – can restrict access for essential trips, slowing buses and increasing operating costs.

19. In **Outer London**, lower public transport coverage and population growth have increased reliance on cars for essential journeys, while narrow streets and limited off-street loading constrain freight and servicing.

20. Place-based, evidence-led road space reallocation is required. This should strike the right balance between prioritising bus reliability, freight efficiency, active travel, and access for essential car journeys. Post-implementation adjustments are also vital once there is evidence of the impact of road space reallocation.

What impact do roadworks have on congestion in London?

21. Roadworks are a major contributor to congestion across London, especially where alternative routes are limited. Temporary lane closures, traffic signal adjustments, and works-related parking restrictions reduce network capacity, often creating **bottlenecks at key junctions**.

22. Delays caused by roadworks affect buses, freight, and private hire vehicles alike, with knock-on economic effects for businesses and services. TfL guidance on “co-ordinated works” aims to reduce disruption, but BusinessLDN members report **significant unpredictability**, particularly for freight and servicing.

23. Mitigation measures should include real-time traffic management, deploying night-time or off-peak works where possible, and clear communication to businesses and the public. Enhanced planning and co-ordination between TfL, the boroughs, and utilities can help to significantly reduce delays and network disruption while maintaining necessary maintenance and infrastructure upgrades.

[5] Transport for London, Travel in London 2024: Annual Overview, December 2024 – central London traffic trends
[6] Transport for London, Travel in London 2024: Annual Overview, December 2024 – central London traffic trends

Freight in London

What role can other modes of transport have to move freight around London? (e.g. waterways, rail, cargo bikes)

24. Freight movement in London is increasingly multimodal. We support the **greater use of waterways, rail and cargo bikes** to complement road haulage and reduce pressure on the highway network.

25. The **River Thames and London's canal network** offer underused capacity for bulk goods, particularly construction materials and retail stock. For example, Uber Boat by Thames Clippers' **Zero Emission Fast Freight (ZEFF)** project aims to deliver up to 54,000 parcels per day by freight vessel between Dartford and Tower Bridge Quay. This shows the potential for the Thames to move goods efficiently while bypassing congested roads. Greater use of the river for freight should be actively encouraged and a clear aim of policy.

26. **Rail freight** can serve strategic distribution hubs, reducing the number of heavy vehicle trips into Inner London.

27. **Cargo bikes**, supported by micro-consolidation hubs, enable efficient last-mile deliveries in central areas with fewer vans, lowering congestion and emissions.

28. **Diversifying freight modes** is particularly important given the growth in e-commerce and light freight deliveries. This should be supported through targeted investment in intermodal freight hubs, stronger co-ordination with developers and boroughs, and incentives for operators to shift suitable deliveries away from traditional road-based freight, supporting a more sustainable and efficient urban freight system.

What impact does freight have on congestion levels in London? How could this congestion be managed while ensuring essential journeys?

29. Freight traffic is critical to London's economy, delivering goods to businesses, shops, and residents. Road freight dominates short-distance deliveries, with **light commercial vehicles accounting for 16% and heavy goods vehicles 3%** of total vehicle miles in London.[7] Peak-time deliveries often coincide with commuter traffic, amplifying congestion and slowing the flow of essential journeys.

30. Delays from congestion cost London billions annually and reduce business efficiency. For companies reliant on timely deliveries, unpredictability in journey times increases **operating costs and undermines service reliability**. Ensuring freight efficiency is therefore integral to maintaining London's economic competitiveness.

31. We support solutions that prioritise essential deliveries while reducing non-essential road traffic such as off-peak delivery incentives, consolidation via micro-hubs, and expanding river and rail freight where feasible.

[7] Transport for London, Freight and servicing action plan, March 2019

What has been the impact of the increase in light freight and deliveries?

32. The growth in **light freight and last-mile deliveries** has been a significant factor in London's congestion and air quality challenges. Light commercial vehicles now account for around 16% of total vehicle miles in the capital, and the rise in e-commerce has concentrated deliveries during peak periods, increasing pressure on already busy streets.

33. This surge affects not only **traffic flow** but also **road safety and emissions**, with stop-start driving and multiple deliveries amplifying the negative environmental impacts. Businesses face increased operational costs due to unpredictable journey times, while essential journeys – including public transport and emergency services – are indirectly slowed.

How efficient is the freight network in London and what improvements could be made to enhance its efficiency and reduce the impact of freight on congestion?

34. London's freight network is **functional but constrained**. Road freight dominates short-distance deliveries, yet congestion, limited loading bays, and fragmented delivery patterns reduce reliability and increase costs.

35. These inefficiencies lead to unpredictable journey times, higher operating costs for businesses, and indirect effects on public transport and essential services. Stop-start driving also contributes to higher emissions and road safety risks.

36. As outlined above, we support measures such as off-peak delivery incentives, freight consolidation via micro-hubs, and expanded use of river and rail transport. Digital co-ordination between suppliers, couriers, and authorities can reduce empty running and optimise routing.

37. Embedding these improvements in a **co-ordinated freight strategy** aligned with wider transport and economic planning can maintain business-critical deliveries while reducing congestion, emissions, and pressure on road space. We look forward to supporting the Greater London Authority (GLA) and TfL on the development of the *London Logistics Plan* in 2026.

Conclusion

Congestion remains a persistent challenge, with uneven impacts across London. It disproportionately affects lower-income Londoners, disabled people, children, and older residents, who are less likely to drive but more exposed to poor air quality, road danger and unreliable bus services. Nevertheless, it also affects commuters, businesses, and freight operators alike, imposing economic costs, reducing reliability, and limiting access to jobs and essential services.

Addressing congestion and managing road space effectively requires a co-ordinated, evidence-led approach that balances the needs of buses, active travel, freight, and essential car journeys. Key measures include smarter road space allocation, targeted bus priority, investment in public transport alternatives, co-ordinated freight strategies, and better planning and communication around roadworks.

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