

Report – Planning and Transportation Committee

Bank Junction Improvements (All Change at Bank): Traffic mix and timing review update

To be presented on Thursday 20th July 2023

To the Right Honourable The Lord Mayor, Aldermen and Commons of the City of London in Common Council assembled.

SUMMARY

In April 2022, the Court of Common Council requested that the Planning & Transportation Committee bring forward the review of the traffic and timing mix of the restrictions at Bank. This was to provide for a full assessment of traffic options at the Junction, from retaining cycle and bus use only, to permitting taxi, powered two wheelers or full vehicular access.

Much work has been undertaken since and your Planning & Transportation Committee, together with its Streets & Walkways Sub-Committee, have considered a number of reports. The latest position was considered in detail by your Planning & Transportation Committee at its meeting on 21 June 2023 (full report available [here](#)), where a number of challenges in progressing the review were noted, together with some significant risks regarding the agreed methodology in order to reach the point that a change to the traffic or timing of the restrictions could be achieved. In particular, there is a requirement to obtain Transport for London (TfL) approval and it was noted that various matters still need to be addressed before TfL would be likely to consent to any revised proposals: it was considered that proceeding precipitately, before these issues are resolved, would risk their refusal.

Following this consideration, your Committee took the view that it would be prudent to pause further work on the traffic modelling exercise (a key constituent part of the overall review), to allow for a focus on identifying and evidencing the need for change and how this can be best addressed. In addition, undertaking further work with TfL to understand the potential latent demand of the network if a route through Bank were available. It is unclear how attractive a route through Bank may be, and therefore how many vehicles are likely to use that route which makes forecasting the impact of the change very difficult. This work would then form the basis of a future decision to resume modelling in due course, in advance of public consultation. Subsequently a final decision whether to make a permanent or experimental change to allow taxis, or other vehicles, to use the junction would be taken. This is considered to be the course of action which will enable the strongest, most robust case to be put forward to TfL, which would in turn maximise the opportunity for a successful outcome. This approach limits expenditure while efforts to demonstrate a need for change can be developed, prior to any decision to continue the traffic modelling. The traffic modelling exercise is where the substantive cost of the review will sit, so pausing activity whilst determining the case for change will mitigate against the risk of abortive costs now and additional costs later.

The Court is not being requested this day to make any determination as to whether to allow additional motor vehicles through Bank Junction; this decision would be for

Members to make at a later date, once further evidence is collated and relevant modelling has been undertaken. Instead, the Court is asked today to endorse proposals in relation to the process of getting to the point of decision-making, so as to ensure the best opportunity of success in making a change, should the conclusions of the final review recommend this. Given that the Court previously requested the outcomes of a review to be reported back as soon as practicable, the Court's explicit approval to countenance this element of delay, in the interests of improving the chances of identifying and presenting any case for change, is sought.

RECOMMENDATION

That this Honorable Court **approves** the pause of further work on the traffic modelling exercise at Bank Junction for the time being, to provide instead for a focus on identifying and evidencing the need for change and how this can be best addressed, and on undertaking further work to understand the potential latent demand.

MAIN REPORT

Background

1. Bank junction has been restricted to buses and cycles only, Monday to Friday between 7am and 7pm, since May 2017 following the introduction of the Bank on Safety scheme. The All Change at Bank project follows this change and is currently in construction following approval in December 2021, and is intended to reduce casualties and pedestrian crowding, whilst improving air quality and public perception of the space. The junction's layout is being altered, narrowing the carriageway and increasing the space available for people walking through the junction and/or accessing the station or surrounding buildings. Parts of neighbouring streets will also be closed to motor vehicles, or their operation altered.
2. At the time of making the decisions to proceed, it was acknowledged that there was still a need to review the traffic mix and timing of the altered junction. This could not be undertaken confidently at that stage due to the impact of temporary Covid-19 recovery schemes in operation and uncertainty as to what the return to workplace might look like. It was initially agreed that the review would take place 12 months after the completion of the construction, once there was greater clarity.
3. A motion was subsequently approved at the Court of Common Council in April 2022 which included the following requirement in relation to Bank junction: *"That the Planning & Transportation Committee be requested immediately to begin a review of the nature and timing of current motor traffic timing restrictions at Bank Junction, to include all options. This review will include full engagement with Transport for London and other relevant stakeholders, data collection, analysis and traffic modelling. The Planning & Transportation Committee should then present its recommendation to this Honourable Court as soon as practicable."*
4. Delays in collecting the required traffic data were experienced due to a number of closures and diversions on the network. Once obtained, initial feasibility traffic modelling was undertaken to assess the likely impacts/benefits of making changes to the types of vehicle moving through Bank during the existing 7am to 7pm, Monday to Friday traffic restrictions. This work demonstrated that the reintroduction of general traffic was not feasible, indicating significant journey time delays for buses and general traffic in the wider area that would be difficult to mitigate. In March 2023, it was agreed that no further work on the option to reintroduce general traffic into Bank would be undertaken.

5. Since that March 2023 report, further work has been undertaken exploring the various options to mitigate the traffic impacts identified in the initial feasibility work. This included signal timing redistributions and extended signal cycle times as well as investigating different routing options as a form of mitigation and to understand the probable constraints of the network better.
6. Analysis has also been undertaken of the use of the junction by people walking and cycling compared to pre-pandemic volumes and reviewed latest casualty data and air quality monitoring. An interim equalities analysis has also been commissioned and completed. These are detailed in the [full report to your Committee](#).

Current Position

7. Traffic reviews of this type are usually informed by recent performance of particular aspects, such as traffic collisions and casualties, volumes of people travelling, equality concerns and/or air quality, causing issues that need mitigating and then assessing the impacts and benefits of making a change. However, because of the pandemic and associated changes in working patterns and travel habits, data from previous years may not be representative and it is difficult to draw definitive views or conclusions. This makes it very challenging to undertake the review at this time.
8. The full report presented to your Planning & Transportation Committee summarised the key data that is informing the current context of the review, refers to previous data that was collected pre-pandemic in support of the current approved All Change at Bank scheme, and highlights where there are fluctuations. The report also set out some of the difficulties regarding the level of confidence officers have in forecasting future performance of traffic with allowing more vehicles through Bank, based on the current flows and demand patterns. In summary, the key findings are that, to date, analysis of the use of the junction by people walking and cycling, casualty data, air quality monitoring and interim equalities analysis has not identified a clear need for change to the restrictions at Bank on transport grounds.
9. The statutory regime puts the consideration of any traffic implications (which would result from a change to any traffic orders) at the forefront of decision making when discharging the City Corporation's duty set out in Section 122 of the Road Traffic Regulation Act 1984. To date, there is no clear transport need for a change over and above the scheme that is currently being constructed.
10. The evidence of the feasibility traffic modelling at this stage indicates that a change to the mix of traffic would not be significantly detrimental to journey times, but this needs to be strongly caveated against the uncertainty around the number of vehicles that would use the junction if the restrictions were changed and how this impacts journey times. This is linked to the difficulty in forecasting what the latent demand in the network would be if Bank were reopened to other vehicles and how attractive this route would be.
11. The City Corporation has duties under section 149 of the Equalities Act 2010 which it must take into account, and the most likely potential driver for change is whether changing the mix of traffic addresses an equality concern around accessibility for people who rely on taxis.
12. However, it is not yet clear whether the potential benefits of allowing taxis would outweigh the potential disbenefits for people walking, cycling or using public

transport in the area. This is an issue that needs to be more fully explored to understand the balance of benefits and disbenefits, and, if a change to the traffic/timing mix at Bank is the best way to address this. This work would enable the City Corporation to discharge the equalities duty and give the best chance of successfully delivering improvements.

Proposal

13. As can be seen above, there are many aspects that need to be considered as part of this review to make an informed decision as to whether to progress with a change to the permanent traffic orders at Bank. Further data collection, together with stakeholder engagement, is needed before a conclusion could be drawn in respect of any equalities implications. Crucially, there is an imperative to justify either a transport or equalities need, in order to inform a case for change to the traffic orders.
14. Your Committee has considered various options as to the optimal route forward. However, the current level of uncertainty regarding the model outputs not accurately forecasting impacts of any future relaxation of the restrictions is of concern. The unknown latent demand does not necessarily need to be a large influx of additional vehicles before the journey times are detrimentally impacted from that shown in the early feasibility work. TfL will require robust forecasts in order to validate and audit the model outputs, prior to any consideration to approve a proposed change. There is a high risk that any traffic model exercise undertaken now would not get TfL approval and, if it did, that the subsequent increase in volume of vehicles would create unanticipated journey time delays and queuing at Bank and in the surrounding area. Queuing traffic would also increase the risk of a collision. The costs of proceeding regardless would amount to a six-figure sum, with a low likelihood of success.
15. Ultimately, your Committee determined that pausing the technical modelling and undertaking further work to identify the latent demand would reduce the associated risk of spending money trying to promote a scheme with a high risk of not being approved by TfL. It also reduces the risk of promoting a scheme that may disproportionately impact people with protected characteristics that do not use taxis, whilst affording the opportunity to expand on the positive impacts that taxis may bring. Spending some additional time to engage and research these issues thoroughly will minimise the risk to the rest of the programme. It also reduces the risk around the uncertainty of other schemes in the local area and the intention for their progression.
16. Having a stronger well evidenced argument for change which is then backed up by the traffic modelling makes for a better scheme proposal which could be delivered by either a permanent or experimental route depending on what was most appropriate. The outline process and decision making points for either a permanent or experimental route are shown in appendix 1. Such an approach would be in line with our usual approach to developing proposals for change.
17. Pausing the modelling also provides the opportunity to gain clarity on the TfL schemes proposed for Bishopsgate/London Bridge and consider if these were to be made permanent what, if any, further mitigation might be offered and how this interlinks with the opportunity for improvements at Monument junction.

Conclusion and Next Steps

18. The Court previously requested that a review of all options regarding the nature and timing of motor traffic at Bank Junction be undertaken and reported back as soon as is possible.
19. It is apparent that there is, as yet insufficient data to put forward to TfL a case for either an experimental or permanent change to the Junction, and that further work is necessary to understand the equalities implications of various options and make any case for change.
20. In order to mitigate against the risk of proposals being rejected by TfL and to avoid wasted expenditure, it is recommended that work on the traffic modelling exercise element of the review be paused at this time, so as to allow for further work on demonstrating the need for change to be undertaken.
21. It is anticipated that this additional activity will be completed by June 2024, with sufficient information obtained to establish what the evidence for change is, and allow this Court to come to a judgement as to whether or not it wishes to proceed and on what basis.

Appendices

- Appendix 1 – Process Maps indicating next steps and decision-making points

The full report and various public appendices considered by the Planning and Transportation Committee, together with the draft minute of the discussion, can be found [here](#).

All of which we submit to the judgement of this Honourable Court.

DATED this 21st day of June 2023.

SIGNED on behalf of the Committee.

Deputy Shравan Joshi MBE
Chairman, Planning and Transportation Committee