

Report – Planning and Transportation Committee

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

To be presented on Thursday 7th December 2023

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

SUMMARY

The All Change at Bank project is currently in construction and due to be completed in Spring 2024. Following a Court of Common Council Motion in April 2022, the planned review of traffic and timing restrictions at Bank has been brought forward.

Early data collection from this review shows daytime taxi volumes in 2022 were 35% lower in the Bank area and 27% lower for the City than in 2017. This is in line with the reduction in taxi volumes in the West End and the congestion charge area as a whole.

The latest position was considered in detail by your Planning and Transportation Committee at its meeting on 21 November 2023, and [the full report is available online](#).

Following this consideration, your Committee took the view that it would endorse the officer recommendation to immediately restart the modelling of the traffic impacts, running this work in parallel with the data collection and analysis to identify and evidence the need for change. This has the potential to compress the timetable to implementation by up to four months (spring 2025). There is, however, a risk of abortive work and costs of approximately £110,000 to £170,000, (depending on additional data required to progress the traffic modelling work) with this approach.

Any change to the traffic mix and timings of the restrictions at Bank requires a decision by TfL via a Traffic Management Application (TMAN), supported by evidence, including traffic modelling. Members must also be satisfied that the evidence for making a change is robust.

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 (by June 2024), 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.

RECOMMENDATION

It is **recommended** that this Honourable Court approves the restarting of the modelling of the traffic impacts at Bank junction, running this work in parallel with the data collection and analysis.

MAIN REPORT

Background

1. The All Change at Bank project, currently in construction following approval in December 2021, 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. Threadneedle Street and Queen Victoria Street on the approaches to the junction have been closed to motor vehicles, providing a safer and more pleasant environment for people walking and cycling and opportunities for seating and greening. The operation of Princes Street is also modified retaining two-way working for buses and cycles only and providing a route for vehicles requiring access to Cornhill. Construction is due to be completed in spring 2024.
2. The 7am – 7pm, buses and cycles only restriction remains in place for vehicles crossing the junction (except for access to Cornhill from Princes Street). When it was decided to proceed with the All Change at Bank design, it was acknowledged that there was still a need to review the traffic mix and timing of the altered junction. The Streets & Walkways Sub Committee and the Projects Sub Committee agreed in September 2021 that the review would begin 12 months after the completion of construction, i.e., spring 2025.
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. Any changes to the traffic mix and timings of the restrictions at Bank, whether in the form of a standard traffic order or an experimental one, will require a Traffic Management Application (TMAN) to TfL. This is because Poultry and Cornhill form part of the Strategic Road Network and because changes are likely to have implications for other streets and junctions in the surrounding area, particularly regarding traffic signal timings, including streets that form part of the Transport for London Road Network (TLRN) for which TfL is the Highway Authority.
5. The TMAN process requires traffic modelling to establish the likely journey time impacts across the area so that these can be assessed holistically. In order for TfL to agree to any proposed changes they would need to be satisfied that the evidence submitted in the application, including evidence of the need for change, is robust and meets their traffic management duty under the Road Traffic Regulation Act 1984.
6. Members must also be satisfied that the evidence for making a change is robust. 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.

7. In February 2023, it was agreed that no further work on the option to reintroduce general traffic into Bank would be undertaken. This was based on the likely impacts to bus journey times. The review is now focused on assessing the need for changes to the restrictions to allow access for taxis and/or powered two wheelers.
8. Traffic reviews of this type are usually informed by an identification of an issue or issues that needs addressing, for example traffic collisions and casualties, volumes of people travelling, equality concerns and/or air quality, the development of mitigating measures to address the issue(s) and an assessment of the benefits and disbenefits of making a change.
9. To date, analysis of various data sets has found that the most likely potential reason for a change to the mix of traffic at Bank is equality impacts around accessibility for people who rely on taxis. The potential benefits of this change, if required, will need to be balanced against potential disbenefits for protected characteristic groups of any changes. Further work is needed before a conclusion can be drawn.
10. In July 2023, the Court of Common Council agreed to pause further work on the traffic modelling exercise and focus on identifying and evidencing the need for change and how this can be best addressed. Further work is also needed to understand how many taxis are likely to travel through the junction, if allowed. This is needed to inform the next stage of traffic modelling work and this approach will need to be agreed with TfL. The report also set out the timetable for delivering change on that basis, which would likely be summer 2025.

Current Position

11. One of the key pieces of analysis to inform the decision on whether to make any changes to the traffic restrictions at Bank will be the Equalities Impact Assessment (EqIA). This will consider the benefits and disbenefits for different protected characteristic groups of the potential changes to allow taxis and/or powered two wheelers through the junction during restricted hours.
12. Data collection and analysis of taxi availability and journey lengths and costs for people who rely on taxis for door-to-door transport is ongoing. This is expected to be completed in early December 2023. This analysis will help inform the assessment of the equalities benefits and disbenefits.
13. The following studies, surveys and analyses have been commissioned:
 - a) On-street taxi availability (light on vs light off) surveys on the approaches to and in the vicinity of Bank and at control locations elsewhere in the City, including comparison with surveys undertaken in 2006 and 2016.
 - b) Taxi availability via ride hailing apps (e.g. Gett, Free Now and Addison Lee) on the approaches to and in the vicinity of Bank and at control locations elsewhere in the City.

- c) Comparison of pre- (2017) and post- (2022) pandemic taxi volumes in the City of London against data for Oxford Street and Regent Street, central London trends and the numbers of licensed taxis and taxi drivers.
 - d) City-wide taxi rank occupancy and availability survey.
 - e) Journey time surveys.
14. The interim report summarising the methodology and headline results from the data collected and analysed so far is provided in Appendix 1. Data for on-street availability, journey times and taxi rank occupancy is still being analysed and is not included at this time. Findings to date include:
- a) The average wait times for a taxi hailed via a ride hailing app are between three and five minutes with little variation between approaches to Bank junction and elsewhere in the City. Average wait times for private hire vehicles (e.g. Uber) are longer, between four and 14 minutes, with more variation through the day.
 - b) In 2022, peak hour (8-10, 12-14, 17-19) average taxi volumes on Oxford Street and Regent Street were 26% and 46% below 2017 volumes. By comparison, for the same times average volumes were 35% lower in the Bank area and 27% lower for the rest of the City.
 - c) The volume of taxis entering the congestion charge zone during charging hours was 43% lower in the first quarter of 2022 compared with quarter one of 2017.
 - d) Between 2017/18 – 2021/22 time period, the number of taxi drivers holding an All London licence has fallen by 16% and licensed taxi vehicles by 30%. On 22 October 2023 the number of taxi drivers holding an All London licence was 23% below 2017/18 numbers.
15. Taxi Card and Oyster Card data from TfL and London Councils have been requested to help inform the EqIA. This includes looking at the type of Oyster card used on bus services that pass through Bank and at local London underground stations to help inform the use of public transport by particular groups, e.g. Freedom Pass Holders, Disabled Oyster users or Young Persons Oyster users.
16. Other ongoing workstreams to inform the review include:
- a) Meetings with TfL and the traffic modelling consultant to agree an approach to the future modelling requirements of any proposed change to the restrictions. This includes discussion to agree a methodology for the likely increase in taxi numbers that would travel through the junction if permitted.
 - b) Engagement with the taxi trade. Officers have met with the London Taxi Drivers Association (LTDA) and are arranging meetings with the Worshipful Company of Hackney Carriage Drivers and TfL Taxi and Private Hire.
 - c) Offering a briefing for the City branch of the London Chamber of Commerce (City branch) to discuss Bank and any business concerns related to this. At the time of writing, we are awaiting dates from the Chamber of Commerce.

17. All Change at Bank is significantly changing the layout of the junction. There have also recently been significant changes to streets in the wider Bank area, particularly the 7am – 7pm restrictions on through motor traffic using Bishopsgate. These may, in combination with the Bank restrictions, lead to further increases in journey times that exacerbate the negative impacts of the Bank restrictions on people who rely on a taxi, car or private hire vehicles for their transport. This balance of benefits and disbenefits is due to be assessed through the EqlA which forms part of the ongoing review.

Proposal

18. 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.
19. There will be a focus on identifying and evidencing the need for change and how this can best be addressed. If this is undertaken alongside work to inform the modelling by identifying the likely number of taxis that would use the junction is permitted, this will be completed in time to report to the Planning and Transportation Committee in May 2024 and then your Court in June 2024.
20. Your Committee has considered various options as to the optimal route forward. Under Option A, if a decision was made to pursue a change to the restrictions, traffic modelling to assess the traffic impacts would resume at that time. Option B was to immediately restart the modelling of the traffic impacts, running this work in parallel with the data collection and analysis. Option C was to stop the review and leave the 7am-7pm, bus and cycle only restriction in place. This option would allow unspent funds to be returned to the On Street Parking Reserve. The current data collection exercise would be completed under this option with the results being used to inform other transport planning initiatives and projects.
21. Ultimately, your Committee endorsed the office recommendation (Option B) to immediately restart the modelling of the traffic impacts, running this work in parallel with the data collection and analysis as this would have the potential to reduce the overall programme for the review by up to four months. This will be dependent on TfL being able to resource the modelling audit at this stage and on agreeing taxi numbers that will travel through the junction if permitted. There is also a risk of abortive work and costs (approximately £110,000 to £170,000 depending on additional data required to progress the traffic modelling work) if the decision at the next report is to not make any changes to the current restrictions.

Improving access to taxis

22. At the July 2023 Court of Common Council, a Member asked Officers to identify short-term measures to improve access to taxis.

23. Engagement with the taxi trade is ongoing but the following short-term measures to improve access have been identified:
- a) Working with BIDs, venues and businesses to raise awareness of taxi hailing apps as an alternative to hailing a taxi on-street. As noted above and in Appendix 1 average wait times for taxis hailed via an app are between three and five minutes.
 - b) Providing event venues in the City with details of social media accounts, etc that inform drivers of events that are likely to have a high demand for taxis. This will allow them to alert drivers when there will be higher demand for taxis as events finish.
 - c) Sharing details of recent traffic management changes with drivers.
 - d) Continuing to share details of temporary traffic management, with drivers for example for restrictions associated with street works or construction.
 - e) Continuing to review taxi rank provision and explore the potential for new ranks in areas that may have a higher demand for taxis, particularly at night.
 - f) Exploring the potential for rank marshalling to improve late night availability and safety at taxi ranks. The City of London Crime Prevention Association are currently piloting taxi marshalling at the Liverpool Street rank with Proceeds of Crime Act (POCA) funding. Through the Safer City Partnership, Officers will monitor the results and assess the resources required for ongoing provision of a marshalling service.
24. In addition to the above, recent changes in the Bank area are expected to increase access to taxis. The Cheapside bus gate opened to taxis (on an experimental basis) on 6 November and a new taxi rank to serve the Ned hotel has been installed.

Conclusion and Next Steps

25. Data collection and analysis for the review of the traffic mix and timing of restrictions at Bank junction is ongoing. This is focussed on taxi availability and journey lengths and costs for people who rely on taxis for door-to-door transport is ongoing. This analysis will help inform the assessment of the equalities benefits and disbenefits.
26. Work is also underway on determining the likely increase in taxi numbers that would travel through the junction if permitted. This is necessary to inform the traffic modelling and any assumptions will need to be agreed with TfL as part the modelling process.
27. It is recommended to immediately restart the modelling of the traffic impacts, running this work in parallel with the data collection and analysis to identify and evidence the need for change and how this can be best addressed. This has the potential to compress the timetable to implementation by up to four months (spring 2025). A decision on whether to pursue a change would still be required in May/June 2024.

Appendices

- Appendix 1 – Bank Junction taxi availability analysis – Interim Report
- Appendix 2 – Implications Report

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

DATED this 21st day of November 2023.

SIGNED on behalf of the Committee.

Deputy Shравan Joshi MBE
Chairman, Planning and Transportation Committee