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Dear Consultation Team

## **CONSULTATION ON BUS SERVICE CHANGES – RESPONSE FROM THE LONDON BOROUGH OF HACKNEY**

Thank you for consulting the Council on these changes. The proposals follow on from frequency cuts to over half of Hackney's bus routes over the past few years – many of these before the impact of Covid.

The Council is aware of the acute financial position that TfL finds itself in, and of declining demand for buses in central and some parts of inner London. We have been supporting the case for stable funding, investment in London's public transport, and a deal with the Government that protects our network. Notwithstanding, the Council is concerned at the impact of further cuts to Hackney's bus routes - both in frequency and to key areas of the borough. These cuts are being proposed at a time when we are seeing an increase in the number of bus trips across London. Indeed in Hackney bus trips were up from 68% (of pre-Covid levels) to 72% in May and the bus throughout Covid-19 and the recovery has proved a more resilient transport mode for Londoners.

If the Mayor of London is to achieve his target of 80% of journeys in London being made by walking, cycling or public transport by 2041, bus use will need to increase by 40% from pre-Covid levels. Large scale cuts and reductions in bus mileage will make it harder to achieve this target and also impact on the positive aims of using the bus as envisaged in TfL's recent Bus Action Plan.

Recent research by LondonTravelwatch has highlighted that bus passengers tend to be those on lower incomes, and are more likely to be people of colour, women or younger people. Whilst any cuts or reduction in service will affect passengers across London, it is those on lower incomes who will be most affected and hit hardest, because other modes of public transport



are too expensive for many bus passengers to use as an alternative. This is certainly the case in Hackney. Similarly, although the Hopper fare allows (limited) change of buses at no extra cost, such interchanges need to be convenient with easy short changes between stops with clean well maintained shelters and countdown signs at stops. The area around Old Street, for example, is challenging with no improvements proposed with the current works at the roundabout. This is of particular concern to patients of Moorfields Eye Hospital and the elderly and infirm generally, as well as people with disabilities.

Turning to the proposals themselves we are generally concerned at how routes with reduced frequencies would cope with rising demand. On the specific routes we comment as follows:

#### Changes to Route 56

This route currently terminates at Bart's Hospital and provides a useful connection for hospital workers and patients there. Bart's provides specialist diagnostic cancer services. Although the proposed extension to Blackfriars (if Route 4 is withdrawn) will provide a new connection to the station's northern entrance (for Thameslink services) the route will no longer serve the bus stop directly outside the hospital. The EQIA suggests that the nearest stop will be at the Museum of London necessitating a 600m walk (or 320m to the northern entrance) This is likely to cause hardship to a number of patients who may have limited mobility. On balance the additional walk time required to access this important health care facility negates the benefits from the proposed extension to Blackfriars so the extension is not supported and an alternative should be found that maintains this vital link.

#### Changes to Route 26

Route 26 is proposed to be withdrawn between Aldwych and Waterloo and re-routed to terminate at Victoria. This will result in the withdrawal of a direct link from Ash Grove and Hackney Wick but a new destination. Convenient interchange will be possible along the route. On balance no objection is raised although we are concerned at the impact of congestion around Aldwych and Strand which will need to be factored in to achieve a reliable service.

#### Changes to Route 205

This route serves the city fringe area of Hackney. It provides a good link to the main line termini and is a useful alternative to the Circle line for those who may be carrying luggage, are less able bodied or looking for a cheaper travel alternative. It serves several key hospitals and town centres and as such it should be retained in its current form and branded as an orbital bus route to increase patronage. The Council therefore objects to the proposals.

#### Changes to Route 236

Curtailing this route at Homerton Hospital will effectively leave Route 276 as the only connecting service between the area and Hackney Wick. This area is one of Hackney's (and indeed the country's) most deprived areas with an elderly population, a low wage local economy, poor health, and reduced mobility. Reducing bus services here will impact severely on the local community where there are surgeries and a senior citizens welfare centre whose visitors are reliant on public transport, in an area with comparatively poor connectivity. Homerton Hospital is an important destination for many people here and improving public transport access to health facilities (not reducing them) is something that TfL should be aiming to achieve. There is already a great deal of bus on bus congestion (as well as poor air quality)

around Homerton Hospital and the Council is looking at ways to improve this. Terminating an extra service there will not be helpful and reduce wider options in an area that around Kingsmead Estate would be underserved. We therefore strongly object to this proposal.

#### Withdrawal of Route 242

Route 242 is to be withdrawn completely and replaced by an extension of route 135 from Shoreditch with the withdrawal of the section to Old Street. Frequency is also to be reduced from every 10 mins in the peaks to every 12 mins all day. Prior to these proposals the Council was actively engaged with TfL on proposals to extend Route 135 to Hoxton. It is regrettable that these proposals will now no longer be possible to achieve and that our previous success in maintaining the frequency of the 242 is now being undone.

Turning to the current proposals, Route 135 will effectively replace the 242 between Shoreditch and Homerton via Commercial Street. This route was subject to a review in 2018 when it no longer served Bishopsgate and St Paul's. The Council objected at the time and as a concession the link was retained for night buses only (N242.)

Although the Council recognises that this is a direct replacement, we still have objections to this proposal and it is subject to a request that the link to Bishopsgate and Liverpool Street (the current 135 routeing) is retained. This will reinstate the link from Homerton to Bishopsgate and provide direct interchange with the Elizabeth line there. It would also provide a consistent routing with the night service which is being retained. We would also want certainty that there is no reduction in frequency or reliability as early termination of services before they reach Clapton Park Estate and the Homerton is already an issue and could become more common as the 135 serves a longer route. We would want to ideally retain the current numbering of the 242, which is iconic locally and have active monitoring of any changes to a route that serves some of the poorest and most isolated parts of Hackney and the Homerton Hospital.

Commercial Street could be served by an extension of either Route 115 or 343 to Shoreditch to stand at either Curtain Road or Calvert Avenue.

#### Changes to Route 254

Routes 253 and 254 provide parallel orbital links across the borough. With the withdrawal of the 254 between Holloway and Finsbury Park interchange will be possible with the 253 at a number of stops, but these are often congested. In addition London Overground provides a fast and frequent service between Camden Road and Hackney Central.

#### Withdrawal of Route 349

Whilst we can see the rationale for this (and have recently introduced additional parking restrictions to assist buses accessing the bus stand at Stamford Hill) we are concerned that there will be a reduction along the Seven Sisters-Manor House corridor where major estate redevelopment is currently taking place. Although a frequency increase on the 259 is proposed, terminating the route at Holloway will force an interchange for convenient destinations such as King's Cross. Could the service not be retained to serve this area which provides good bus and rail connections?

### Changes to Route 388

During the consultation on the central London bus changes in 2018 we lobbied successfully to get this route extended to London Bridge to maintain links across the river and to Guy's Hospital. Whilst we welcome the additional journey opportunities and links that this will provide we are concerned at the additional length and congestion along the extension and the impact on reliability. Hopefully this will be addressed and again this is a bus that serves communities that could be impacted by other changes to the 26 and 236 if those changes go ahead.

### Changes to Route 476

This route parallels 73 between King's Cross and Stoke Newington. Although we can see the rationale for some changes on this corridor, curtailing it at Newington Green would not serve any useful objective and could ultimately lead to its withdrawal. As an alternative we suggest that it should be diverted at Newington Green and extended to Moorgate (Finsbury Square) via Southgate Road and Old Street to replace links lost with the 21 and 214. This would return some of the capacity we have recently lost on this vital corridor and an area with significant new housing growth and facilities such as the new Britannia Leisure Centre.

We hope that you will agree that Hackney has adopted a robust and balanced view on these proposals. Our suggestions to create new links will hopefully encourage people to switch to the bus as a cheap and convenient way to travel.

As a Council we believe in the vital role the bus plays in Hackney and London, and are always willing to facilitate the movement of buses and frequently provide comments and suggestions on bus services. We will continue to do so.

Yours sincerely



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**Mayor of Hackney**



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