

TRANSPORT FOR LONDON

SAFETY, HEALTH AND ENVIRONMENT ASSURANCE COMMITTEE

**SUBJECT: IMPROVING THE URBAN REALM ON THE TRANSPORT FOR LONDON ROAD NETWORK**

**DATE: 20 JULY 2010**

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**1 PURPOSE AND DECISION REQUIRED**

- 1.1 The purpose of this paper is to update the Committee on the actions being taken to deliver urban realm improvements on the Transport for London Road Network (TLRN) in response to the Mayor's ambitions to revitalise public spaces and improve Londoners' quality of life. This will be achieved through a combination of major new schemes, the planning and design of improvement schemes and the effective tidying and de-cluttering of the network under planned maintenance and renewal programmes. This new approach will be underpinned by a change in the skills, culture and management processes of TfL staff responsible for managing and improving the TLRN.
- 1.2 This paper was considered by the Surface Transport Panel at its meeting on 30 June 2010. The Committee is asked to note this paper.

**2 BACKGROUND**

- 2.1 In his manifesto 'London's Great Outdoors' and his new Transport Strategy, the Mayor sets out his ambition to revitalise London's public spaces to enhance quality of life, improve journey experiences, and enhance the built and natural environment for the benefit of all those living in, working in, and visiting London.
- 2.2 'London's Great Outdoors' was accompanied by two daughter documents. The pertinent one to this paper is Better Streets, a practical guide that both establishes the Mayor's vision for an improved public streetscape and sets out some simple steps for achieving this. It illustrates how better streets can be created through a series of increasingly progressive interventions, the underlying principle being to find a better working balance for the different users of London's streets and places. It aims to improve the appearance of London's streets as well as accessibility and ease of movement for all users. It places urban design at the heart of the GLA's delivery agenda.
- 2.3 Achieving the Mayor's ambition requires a fundamental change in the way TfL plans, commissions, delivers and maintains London's streets and public spaces. In the recent past, schemes designed to improve and maintain the TLRN have focussed on streets as routes rather than places. While this has ensured the safe movement of road users (including pedestrians) and the provision of a structurally sound network, this has, in certain cases, led to some unintended and undesirable consequences. These include the marginalisation of pedestrians, a lack of attention to the role of streets as places and a general deterioration in the quality of the urban realm due to an abundance of

unnecessary street furniture and signage.

### 3 A DIFFERENT APPROACH TO THE URBAN REALM

- 3.1 TfL undertakes a wide variety of planned highway schemes on the TLRN. These range from maintenance and renewal of footways and carriageways to major projects, such as the removal of gyratories or the enhancement of town centres (e.g. Brixton Central Square). These major improvement schemes can and do achieve significant urban realm improvements. While important, these tend to be in targeted areas and have a relatively small impact on the network as a whole. Much more can also be done to improve the overall quality and appearance of the TLRN, through the proper application of good urban design practices in the commissioning and design of smaller schemes as well as through tidying and de-cluttering streets as part of planned maintenance and renewal programmes.
- 3.2 The historic focus on streets as routes rather than places is often reflected in organisational structures, processes and the skills of those responsible for developing and maintaining the highway environment. A thorough review of TfL's existing planned schemes is needed, as well as a new approach to the development and delivery of schemes in the future. The challenge is to ensure that TfL officers have the appropriate knowledge and skills to deliver a high quality urban realm and that this is at the core of TfL's design philosophy and woven into all processes.

#### What Are Better Streets?

- 3.3 The guiding principles of 'Better Streets' will ensure that the function and character of the routes and places in London are well understood and reflected in proposals to deliver simple, well designed and high quality improvements. There are five different levels of intervention that can be applied in a staged approach to improve the street scene. These range from quick wins achieved by tidying and de-cluttering to introducing large scale change by completely re-thinking the street to better reflect its purpose and function. These interventions have been categorised as follows:

1 Tidy Up	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Get rid of unnecessary road markings and street furniture</li> <li>• Remove or repair damaged street furniture</li> <li>• Keep free of litter, graffiti, etc</li> </ul>
2 De-Clutter	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Rationalise and remove unnecessary signs, posts, bollards, guardrail, road markings etc</li> </ul>
3 Relocate/Merge Functions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Make the remaining street furniture and features work better together – attach multiple signs to a single pole; attach lighting to buildings or structures; ensure street furniture is not 'scattered'</li> </ul>
4 Re-think Traffic Management Options	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Consider how pedestrians, cars and cyclists use the area and rebalance priorities to improve the way the link/place functions</li> </ul>
5 Recreate the Street	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Larger scale schemes to totally remodel the space to create a very different place, for example to create a shared space environment</li> </ul>

## **4 ORGANISING RESOURCES**

- 4.1 Surface Transport's Better Routes and Places (BR&P) and Roads Directorates are jointly responsible for delivering urban realm improvements on the TLRN.
- 4.2 BR&P is a new Directorate which has brought together the 'modal' teams within TfL (walking, cycling, road safety, bus priority, smarter travel and freight) together with all the borough Local Implementation Plan (LIP) funded programmes. These modal teams had previously acted as separate clients for highway improvement schemes on the TLRN and managed the allocation of LIP funding to the boroughs. The Directorate has been reorganised to move away from a narrow focus on specific modal objectives to create a more integrated approach to scheme design and delivery to help improve delivery performance.
- 4.3 BR&P acts as the 'intelligent client' for improvement schemes on the TLRN and works with the boroughs on the development of their LIP programmes and schemes, including the Major Schemes allocations. Major Schemes allocations from the LIP budget typically fund three to five large urban realm improvement schemes per financial year; this year £7 million was awarded to City of Westminster to help them restore the boulevards of Piccadilly by making the traffic system in the area two-way again. This corresponds to managing delivery of levels four and five of the Better Streets interventions and working with the Roads Directorate on delivery of level three interventions.
- 4.4 The Roads Directorate is responsible for maintaining and improving the condition of the TLRN, including the structures, bridges, tunnels and public spaces on it. Through its planned maintenance and renewal programmes, the Directorate manages delivery of levels one, two and three of the interventions identified in Better Streets and is responsible for the physical delivery of interventions four and five.
- 4.5 TfL also has established processes for reviewing key aspects of the quality and character of highway schemes. This includes a Streetscape Review Group that examines schemes to ensure compliance with the guidance set out in TfL's Streetscape Guidance. These processes are being reviewed as part of the wider changes to the way TfL commissions and delivers highway projects.

## **5 IMPROVING THE URBAN REALM ON THE TLRN**

- 5.1 The 580 kilometres of the TLRN varies in scale from high speed, dual and three lane carriageways to single carriageway urban streets. The network passes through open countryside, dense residential areas, and centres of commercial, retail and civic activity. These roads combine roles as routes for the movement of people and goods as well as places, such as high streets and town centres. This combination of route and place roles, together with the character of the surrounding land uses, creates a distinctive character for each section of the TLRN. These variations in streetscape character are more complex than traditional road hierarchy classifications, and need to be recognised when designing and operating the network.
- 5.2 TfL is establishing processes to ensure that good urban design practices are embedded throughout the delivery process, such that it becomes a compulsory and fundamental requirement in a similar way to safety considerations. In order to help achieve a step change in the delivery of urban realm improvements on

the TLRN, the 580 kilometres of the network has been surveyed to establish the base case and then set an aspirational target for improving each stretch in terms of the Better Streets interventions outlined above. These should be applied to various locations and lengths of network and to take account of function and character.

- 5.3 In some cases, the aspirational target has already been met or exceeded. Where this is the case, the high quality urban realm will be maintained. In other locations, there is work to be done to meet the required Better Streets standard. All new scheme designs will be cognisant of the Better Streets standard appropriate for each particular length of road. As a minimum, all opportunities will be taken to achieve intervention Level One ('Tidy Up'), making sure that unnecessary street furniture is removed.

## 6 TIDYING, DECLUTTERING AND RELOCATING/MERGING FUNCTIONS

- 6.1 Using existing maintenance resources, TfL is targeting significant urban realm improvements over the next two years, including raising the proportion of the network in a 'tidy' condition and more than doubling the length considered to be de-cluttered by 2012. The table below summarises the current position and our proposed targets for improvement under Interventions one to three over the next two years:

Better Streets Status	Aspirational Target (length, kilometres)	Aspirational Target (Percentage of network)	Current Status (Percentage)	Anticipated cumulative Achievement 2010/11 (Percentage)	Anticipated cumulative Achievement 2011/12 (Percentage)
Tidy	580	100	46	63	81
De-cluttered	309	55	16	27	39
Relocated/ Merged Functions	127	22	5	9	15

- 6.2 To help support this, TfL is developing a system to allow its highway inspectors to record electronically a Better Streets condition status for each appropriate highway asset during their regular network inspections. A computerised reporting process, enabling detailed Better Streets analysis, is currently under development by our asset inventory team.
- 6.3 There are a number of initiatives that will help deliver tidy and de-cluttered streets, including the removal and rationalisation of street furniture, such as unnecessary pedestrian guardrail, signs, posts and bollards.
- 6.4 The Guardrail Risk Assessment Framework (GRAF) process was developed by TfL in 2007 and provides a practical and consistent way of assessing the redundancy of Pedestrian Guardrail (PGR). It was piloted during 2008/09 when eight kilometres of PGR was removed. Following the successful pilot study in 2008/09, a dedicated TfL project team was set up in April 2009 to manage the assessment and removal of guardrail across the entire TLRN.
- 6.5 Since April 2009, all 204 kilometres of PGR on the TLRN has been assessed using TfL's GRAF process. By the end of June 2010, and in addition to the eight

kilometres mentioned above, TfL will have removed a further 52 kilometres; successfully achieving its initial target to remove 60 kilometres (29 per cent) of PGR from the TLRN. Appendix 1 details the percentage of guardrail removed (or to be removed) by borough. While this is a good start, TfL will continue to look for every opportunity to remove unnecessary PGR from the network.

- 6.6 Following the application of the GRAF to the entire TLRN, there are sections of guardrail that have been identified to remain which appear counterintuitive from an engineering judgement perspective. TfL intends to review the GRAF assessments for these sections of PGR, undertake further analysis and determine with borough stakeholders whether they could be removed. The results of this further analysis will allow the GRAF process to be thoroughly reviewed to determine whether the scoring values that are applied need to be realigned. TfL will be looking to set a further PGR removal target for 2010/11.
- 6.7 There are areas where the ability to de-clutter the network is hampered by standards and guidance, for example red route signing requirements. There are over 5,500 'No Stopping at Any Time' (DR7) signs which accompany the double red lines on the TLRN. TfL believes that the vast majority of drivers in London understand the meaning of a double red line and the accompanying signage is unnecessary. However, the Department for Transport's (DfT) approval is required to dispense with these. TfL will continue to lobby the DfT for a relaxation in regulations.
- 6.8 In addition to the overall street condition indicator and the ongoing guardrail work outlined above, TfL is looking to set specific targets to reduce the overall number of posts, bollards and signs on the TLRN. In the financial year 2010/11, TfL will be looking to remove 2,000 unnecessary bollards on the TLRN and will be setting similar targets for the removal and rationalisation of signs and posts.
- 6.9 TfL will be reviewing all street furniture on the TLRN and seeking to remove items that no longer serve any useful purpose as part of planned maintenance and renewal programmes. Any remaining 'No Stopping at Any Time Except for Buses' signs will be relocated from separate posts onto existing bus flags. In addition, older style signage will be replaced with smaller signs, wherever appropriate by using smaller lettering. These signs are around 50 per cent smaller and far less intrusive.
- 6.10 TfL's Streetscape Guidance proposes a palette of materials and furniture for the TLRN to ensure a consistent approach to the quality of materials and design of street furniture. The Guidance acknowledges that there will be instances where variation is necessary to respect the local character of a particular area. The footway, carriageway and lighting schemes in TfL's capital renewal programme are planned and delivered to ensure these assets are maintained in a state of good repair. The materials used for each renewal scheme are carefully considered with stakeholders, to take account of the individual characteristics and function of the particular section of the network.
- 6.11 In addition, greater focus will be placed upon the reinstatement of utility company excavations to ensure that appropriate materials are employed and workmanship is sound. This will help to ensure that deterioration in the appearance of the street is minimised.

## **Removing Traffic Signals**

6.12 TfL has identified 145 traffic signals across London that may no longer be useful in traffic, pedestrian or safety terms. Of the 145 signals being investigated for removal, 24 are on the TLRN. While signal removal is being undertaken to help meet the Mayor's smoothing traffic flow objectives, it can also have a significant effect on removing street clutter and enhancing the pedestrian environment. TfL will be discussing the potential removal of these traffic signals with internal and external stakeholders and the relevant London boroughs, and developing a programme for removal.

## **Improving the Green Estate**

6.13 TfL planted around 1,062 trees on the TLRN last year and felled 564. Those planted this year include 80 under the Mayor's 10,000 tree planting initiative, following TfL's successful bid for two tree planting projects on the TLRN in Lewisham and Richmond.

6.14 TfL always aims to replace trees which are removed. However, this is not always achievable due to unsuitable underground conditions, the presence of services or where a self-sown tree has grown in an unsafe location. In addition to replacement tree planting, TfL endeavours to increase tree numbers on the TLRN, following the principle of 'Right Place, Right Tree' in accordance with the Mayor's London Tree and Woodland Framework.

## **7 RETHINKING TRAFFIC MANAGEMENT AND RE-DESIGNING THE STREET**

7.1 As mentioned, TfL's BR&P Directorate acts as 'intelligent client' for the highway schemes on the TLRN, where the aim is to achieve a significant transformation in character of the street environment for the benefit of those using the street as a route (e.g. as drivers or bus passengers) or as a place (e.g. as visitors to a town centre). BR&P is establishing new and improved processes to ensure that good urban design practices are embedded throughout the scheme design process such that it becomes a compulsory and fundamental requirement in a similar way to safety considerations.

7.2 All new schemes directly commissioned and managed by BR&P will be the subject of an internal design review by experienced individuals, independent of the team managing the project. This will be a comprehensive review covering urban realm, safety and environmental impacts, as well as other technical aspects, and will be undertaken at key design stages. This peer review will deliver a more consistent design quality and result in more balanced solutions.

7.3 In addition to internal peer review of new schemes, selected small schemes (i.e. of value less than £2 million) will be subjected to more comprehensive review processes. In the early stages, design schemes will be referred to the established monthly design surgeries run by Urban Design London (UDL)<sup>1</sup> to identify urban realm opportunities. These UDL surgeries comprise a panel of urban design experts from the public and private sectors with experience of highway urban realm improvements. It is proposed that schemes should be selected in terms of the importance of their locations as places and the degree of urban realm improvement proposed. At the later stage of the detailed design

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<sup>1</sup> UDL is a non-profit making organisation, chaired by Councillor Daniel Moylan.

process, selected schemes will be presented to the Streetscape Review Group to ensure that designs are compliant with Streetscape Guidance and that end user and operational needs are properly balanced.

- 7.4 For all major schemes (i.e. greater than £2 million) funded or directly managed by TfL, whether on borough roads or the TLRN, an internal design review will be undertaken by a new panel. The process will be sufficiently light touch to reflect the 'informal' approach set out in Better Streets. The membership of the panel will be sufficiently flexible to consider the particular needs of the relevant proposal, together with supporting agencies and promoters. These sessions will result in written comments being provided to the promoter that will be taken forward by TfL. In addition to the internal design review, some major schemes may get referred to the Mayor's Design Advisory Panel, who will consider the scheme on its merits and scrutinise the design advice provided by TfL.
- 7.5 In addition to the design review processes set out above, there will be facility to engage urban realm experts or 'mentors' to provide dedicated support and advice to project teams for selected schemes. The support would typically be for one or two days and would cover the following key elements: scoping and preparing the brief, reviewing tenders, assessing options, and general design support. These mentors could be selected from the panel of experts serving the Design Surgeries.
- 7.6 In addition to introducing the processes outlined above for new schemes, TfL has also embarked on a comprehensive review of all existing schemes in the current TLRN programme regardless of the stage in the design process. The aim of this review is to maximise opportunities for enhancing the urban realm relevant to the scheme in question, with due consideration to programme and funding requirements. Approximately 90 schemes have been identified for this review as they fall within sections of the network with a higher urban realm category (i.e. Better Streets levels three to five). Prioritised lists of schemes will be presented to UDL Design Surgeries and the Streetscape Review Group over the coming months and these are now underway. It is envisaged that this retrospective review of existing schemes will be completed by September and reports on scheme changes resulting from the review will be produced.
- 7.7 In addition, TfL will undertake a post-implementation audit (akin to a road safety audit). This will verify that the completed scheme has actually delivered what it set out to achieve. This audit will also provide valuable on-the-job learning for project teams, and peers in TfL and the boroughs about the effectiveness of different measures, which will inform future scheme development and implementation.
- 7.8 As mentioned above, the TLRN schemes in Better Streets categories four and five (i.e. 're-think traffic management options' and 'recreate the street') tend to affect more targeted areas than maintenance regimes applied to categories one to three. This means a linear measure of network condition (i.e. kilometres of TLRN meeting a certain standard) is less useful. The total number of schemes aimed at meeting levels four and five to be delivered in 2010/11 is set out below. While the total number of schemes is small, it is important to note that these schemes represent the top level of relatively costly urban realm interventions (typically in the range of £300,000 to £2 million+ depending on scope and location). Beneath this top level, there is a much larger number of schemes that will deliver more modest Better Streets improvements (level one

to three standards) distributed across the whole network.

Target level of service	No. of schemes
4 - Re-think traffic management options	5
4 - Recreate the street	1
Total	6

## **8 STAFF GUIDANCE, TRAINING AND DEVELOPMENT**

- 8.1 TfL officers involved in improving the highway environment need support in developing the requisite urban design skills and insight. TfL's Streetscape Guidance was updated in January 2009 and is a working tool for those within TfL with responsibility for managing and operating the TLRN. It acts as a guidance document for all design teams.
- 8.2 Urban Design London offers training and networking opportunities for transportation and highway professionals in London to help create better designed places. UDL is supported by the Mayor of London, TfL, London Councils, the Homes and Communities Agency, and the Commission for Architecture and the Built Environment. It has been running urban design related training for built environment practitioners in London since 2006.
- 8.3 TfL has initiated Urban Realm Skills programmes in collaboration with UDL. These programmes will build on UDL's successful Urban Design Training and are tailored to suit the design of street schemes and the needs of highway clients and designers. All staff involved in the commissioning and design of TLRN schemes and those responsible for driving improvements through TfL's routine maintenance and renewal programmes will complete a UDL Street Design Foundation Course.
- 8.4 Going forward, there will be at least one Urban Design Champion (UDC) in each of the delivery teams, who will have attended a full suite of UDL workshops and training, and will have demonstrable experience of streetscape design. The UDCs will promote and embed good urban design practice throughout the planning and design of schemes, and lead internal peer reviews of briefs and designs.
- 8.5 All highway engineers and operatives in the Roads Directorate are undergoing in-house awareness training to highlight the challenges and issues of delivering better streets and to enable them to consider Better Streets opportunities as part of business as usual activity. UDCs have also been appointed in each network area to provide guidance and support to highway staff, and embed new processes to deliver improvements.
- 8.6 The urban design skills programme will be driven forward as part of TfL's performance management framework, with personal performance objectives and training and development needs identified for all those involved in the design and delivery of schemes.

## **9 RECOMMENDATION**

9.1 The Committee is asked to NOTE the paper.

## **10 CONTACT**

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Map showing percentage of guardrail removed or to be removed by borough

