



HOUSE OF COMMONS

LONDON SW1A 0AA

Mayor of London
City Hall
Kamal Chunchie Way
London
E16 1ZE

14 August 2024

Dear Mayor Khan,

I write to outline my strong concern about Transport for London's plan to withdraw the 347 bus route in my constituency, which I am told will be rubber stamped at a meeting this week. This decision will severely reduce access to bus services for my constituents within the Cathedral Estate in Upminster while totally removing access to TfL bus services for those residents between Winchester Avenue and Fen Lane.

My office was alerted to this issue following a call with our dedicated TfL Government Relations Officer, who advised that a TfL Board would be taking a decision this week, following its review of the 347 bus route. We were advised that the outcome of this decision was likely that the route would be withdrawn and we were asked to provide any relevant local feedback.

You will recall that we previously discussed the future of this bus route - first, when TfL first proposed removing the service in a consultation which closed in April 2023, and again in March of this year when I noted that the decision to keep the route, while 'under review', was nothing more than a stay of execution before its quiet removal when there is less attention. Regrettably, last week's conversation suggests that this is indeed the case.

Before setting out some of the further recent feedback I have received from constituents, it is worth acknowledging the wider context in which this proposal has been made. When you chose to impose ULEZ on outer London boroughs like Havering, you advised that this would be accompanied by one million additional kilometres to outer London's bus network, encouraging more people to use public transport ahead of the expansion taking place.

It has therefore been an immense source of local frustration that subsequent proposals for bus services in Havering have always included this cut in services, which would leave residents more isolated from the bus network and exposed to the £12.50 daily tax you imposed via the ULEZ expansion. Additionally, Havering was left out of the initial Superloop with it not yet clear when the proposed Leytonstone-South Hornchurch line, dubbed Superloop 2, will be introduced.

Since Friday, several constituents have written to me directly to outline their objections to this proposal (I was given very little notice to obtain feedback, so I am grateful to those residents who responded so rapidly and vociferously to my call for evidence) and I have enclosed with this letter a copy of their comments on an anonymised basis – case references have been retained such that originals can be provided if necessary. Also included are Facebook comments to the posts I made on this topic.

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As you can see, many correspondents have touched on themes raised when the removal of the 347 was first proposed:

- that it would severely disadvantage Cathedral Estate residents who would have to walk further, in some cases via an unlit alleyway, to bus stops without a seat or shelter
- that many users of this service are elderly, making the above particularly challenging for them
- that it would totally remove services for those between Winchester Avenue and Fen Lane

While these points remain as valid today as they did in April of last year, constituents have also referenced new issues worth considering which may further increase usage of the 347 route in future. These include proposals to construct Europe's largest data centre in land north of Fen Lane and proposals for 100 new homes and a new hockey pavilion and pitch on land north of St. Mary's Lane. The latter of which would only be served by the 347 route.

Other residents have acknowledged that, while the 347 might not be the most used bus, this is largely due to the infrequent scheduling of services. I would also add at this point, that had my suggested amendments to the 347 and 497 routes been implemented, this would have increased usage of the 347 while still delivering the Upminster-Harold Hill direct bus connection TfL had sought to deliver. I would draw your attention to submissions under references JL22924 and JL29120 where residents have gone to great effort to outline how they feel bus services in the area could be improved. I would welcome a detailed response to all resident comments.

Further to the above issues, I have serious concerns regarding the lack of transparency regarding how this decision is being taken. Appendix A of TfL's consultation report lists TfL's responses to issues raised in the original consultation on proposals to the 346, 347 and 497 routes, many of which related to the withdrawal of the 347. TfL provided scant response to those issues, instead relying upon the default statement 'A decision has yet to be reached on the future of route 347. The route will continue to operate until further notice while it remains under review.' I am very concerned that a further decision is about to be taken on the 347 while the public have received no formal response to the issues highlighted within the earlier consultation, much less an update on how the review of the 347 route has been undertaken alongside its findings.

Furthermore, the consultation report commits TfL to have further discussions with the London Borough of Havering on potential mitigations to improve pavements, streetlighting and the public realm where this would facilitate access to the bus network. My office has spoken to officers in Havering who confirmed that no such discussions have taken place, suggesting that TfL plan to withdraw the service before knowing whether suitable mitigations can be applied.

In light of the above, I implore you to retain this much needed service for the community in Cranham and Upminster.

With best wishes,

Member of Parliament for Hornchurch & Upminster

CC:

Cllr. Keith Prince AM – London Assembly Member for Havering & Redbridge
Government Relations, Transport for London