

JULIA LOPEZ MP
Hornchurch & Upminster



HOUSE OF COMMONS

LONDON SW1A 0AA

Sadiq Khan
Mayor of London
City Hall
Kamal Chunchie Way
London, E16 1ZE

26 September 2024

Dear Mayor Khan,

As you will know from our exchanges over the years, I am concerned that outer London boroughs like Havering do not receive a fair share of the capital's resources, be it police officers or public transport connections.

My concern has been underlined by recent TfL decisions including Havering's omission from the Superloop and the withdrawal of the 347 bus route, ironically first proposed within the 'biggest ever expansion of the bus network in outer-London.'

I have already had numerous exchanges with the Deputy Mayor for Transport, Seb Dance, on the withdrawal of the 347. However, I am writing to you today in relation to the capacity of the 499 bus service that operates in Harold Hill.

At the start of the school year, I was contacted by a constituent who reported that her granddaughter was frequently unable to board 499 services on her way to and from school as busses were full by the time they reached her. Sometimes several full services would pass before my constituent's granddaughter would be able to board, causing her to arrive late to both school and home as well as causing crowds of students to form at bus stops at the roadside.

I brought this to the attention of the Members' Correspondence Team at Transport for London, asking when the route was last surveyed and, if it was not within the last year, if a new survey could be undertaken. I am very pleased to say that Libby within the team very promptly responded and advised that the Public Service Transport Planning Team had committed to undertaking a new survey of the route. I am grateful for their timely assistance and look forward to receiving the response of the survey in due course.

I posted a short update on the issue on my Facebook page, inviting any resident also affected by the issue to let me know so that I could pass on additional user experiences to TfL. I have a record of the comments I received from constituents on my social media post and in direct email correspondence.

I was inundated by constituents informing me about how regularly this issue occurs, with children being passed by as many as three services, and detailing the many adjustments that they, or their children, have had to make to their daily lives to deal with this issue.

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Some parents are having to drive their children to school while other pupils are allowing an hour to complete a journey that should be under thirty minutes. This is clearly having a direct impact upon children's ability to arrive at school on time, with the knock-on impact on their education, and on my constituents' chances of successfully juggling family life with work commitments.

This route is mostly served by single-decker busses while there are some double-decker services around school times. As the responses make clear, this simply does not match the capacity that the route requires with many commenting that many more services, if not all, should be double-decker. I note that one respondent, who is a bus driver that sometimes operates the route (comment 16), states that the morning double-decker services is wrongly timed and that an afternoon double-decker service may improve capacity issues.

While this issue does appear to be most acute around school times, given the five Havering schools served by the route, I do note that it is not just school children who are impacted by the over-capacity route. One disabled resident has advised that they have given up attempting to use the service before 9am and another notes that his family member has encountered significant delays on a Sunday. A suggestion has also been made that capacity should be increased on days when the Romford Market is trading.

Alongside these concerns relating to the 499, commenters have also raised concerns relating to the frequency and capacity of the 193, 174 and 496 routes that also serve a number of local schools. I would be grateful if surveys could also be undertaken on these routes.

You will recall that, during our many exchanges prior to the ULEZ expansion, one of my principal objections to the expansion was that the bus services in Havering is simply not good enough for many residents to rely upon it. Their experience of the 499 route shows that, regrettably, my assessment was correct.

Alongside the survey that TfL will be conducting on the 499, I implore you to take a deeper look at the TfL network in Havering to ensure its bus network is reliable and that it sees a true expansion of the sort you promised in November 2022 before levying a daily tax upon many of my constituents.

With best wishes,

Member of Parliament for Hornchurch & Upminster