

From: James Trimmer

Sent: Thursday, November 23, 2023 4:08 PM

To: Timbrell, Julie

Subject: Invite to Southwark's Environment & Community Engagement Scrutiny Commission
- 27 Nov re River Freight

Julie

As I unfortunately cannot attend the session on Monday, I can share a few thoughts on the issues under consideration and the PLA's perspective.

Firstly, I welcome this investigation and believe that the Borough's location, infrastructure and population density makes it particularly suitable to benefit from using the river to deliver freight. In this context, 'freight' is defined as parcels and packages delivered to piers for either last mile delivery or for local click and collect.

The Borough is home to the first destination on the one existing light freight service operating on the river currently, which is undertaken by DHL and serviced by Thames Clippers on a dedicated, branded vessel. This is a daily service of packages from Heathrow airport to Wandsworth Riverside Quarter (by EV), then by vessel to Bankside Pier, where packages (which have been pre-sorted) undergo a further micro-consolidation stage at the pier into final delivery runs, which are then sent out for delivery by cargo-bike and, if necessary, by EV. There is a further stop for the vessel at Wapping Pier in Tower Hamlets. This service is unusual in a couple of ways; firstly, it operates from west to east, when the other customers we're talking to would be running the other way, from large warehouses in the Thames Gateway to the final customer in inner east, central and west London. Secondly, the documents carried are of a value and required at a speed that means the normally logistic industry's principles of economies of scale are not as important.

The benefit of using the river are the decreased carbon emissions per tonne/kilometre (roughly half of the comparable trip on the road) and, importantly, the reliability and certainty. When the vessel leaves after picking up cargo (which is usually in the form of roll cages or palletised), the destination time can be certain, which in view of the mode and timing interdependencies now common in logistics, is a major benefit which can't be equalled by the road. The river can therefore offer a more certain, sustainable connection with final mile services to riparian boroughs throughout the capital. Thames Clippers have secured government funding to construct and trial an electric vessel to deliver light freight, so fully decarbonising this element of the logistics chain.

We've undertaken a number of successful light freight trials (most recently earlier this year, which had Bankside Pier as a destination and used the EV parking bays adjacent to the pier) and know that it can be carried very successfully on the river, having tested multiple pick-ups and drop-offs and return loads. However, now that the fundamentals have proven to work, what is needed now is a move to scale the operation, which will make using the river more comparable in cost terms to the roads and is essential for long-term service

viability. However, this will mean changes are needed at piers where the services (and these will consist of vessel running multiple times from origin loading point downstream into London) operate from and will most probably include pier extensions to handle the vessels and cargo. Additionally, how e-cargo bikes (all the potential customers I'm dealing with are looking at purely sustainable final mile deliveries from piers) are separated from passenger flows may need to be adopted; these issues were considered more fully in the report commissioned by the PLA and Cross River Partnership earlier this year on the principles of best practice in the use of e-cargo bikes at piers.

I know that Bankside Pier is of particular interest to customers and this increase in scale (and the implications arising from that, with the resultant modal shift benefits at a Borough wide level) will need to be discussed with the Council and will be something I may well be coming to discuss in due course. There are a number of exciting developments we're discussing and I'd be really pleased if we could like work together to gain the benefits of moving deliveries from the highway network to the Thames. I really think, if these developments come, that it will be a great opportunity for Southwark to demonstrate to the rest of London how the river can re-establish its role as a principal highway into the capital and the resultant benefit from getting vehicles off local roads. Hopefully I'll be back soon with more details and I'm happy to help if there are further questions from the summary I've outlined above.

Cheers

Jim

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