

MPWRA Response to Consultation on Tramlink Extension

I am writing to you on behalf of the Merton Park Ward Residents' Association (MPWRA). We have some 450 member households in the ward, representing more than 1000 adult residents. Morden Road forms part of the ward's eastern border and the ward also includes the greater part of Morden Town Centre. The current Tramlink line enters the ward at Morden Road Tram Stop, passes to the rear of houses in Dorset Road and then over Kingston Road close to Merton Park Tram Stop.

1. We have several comments to make about the proposals. Inevitably, given the early stage of the process, and the short timescale for the consultation, these include questions which we feel should be answered before a proper assessment can be made.

MPWRA is keen to be involved in future discussions

2. As an association, we have always taken a close interest in Tramlink since its inception. We welcomed a speaker from Tramlink to our June 2013 meeting to hear of future plans for the network. In answer to our questions we were told about thinking at that time for an extension through Morden.

3. We welcome schemes that improve personal mobility, reduce dependence on private cars, promote public transport in an environmentally friendly way and create linkages between population centres. Tramlink schemes form an important part of public transport networks in south west London.

The consultation timetable has been unacceptable

4. We recognise that the proposals are at a very early stage and we welcome the fact that the public are being consulted. But we feel the timing of the consultation has been poor, reflecting badly on both Merton and Sutton and TfL itself. As a result we seriously **doubt whether it has received the public consideration it deserves.**

5. Given that the prospect of an extension to Sutton has been under consideration for so long, and construction, if it were to happen, is so far into the future, a consultation timetable which extends for just one month from mid-July to mid-August is hard to justify. We have received numerous anxious complaints from residents about this aspect of the process. It sends all the wrong signals about the importance placed on public engagement and indeed about TfL and the boroughs' commitment to the scheme.

6. **We question the extent and depth of public involvement.** As a reflection, we noted that the hastily announced Stakeholder drop-in session held on the afternoon of 29 July attracted only two people apart from the eight members of our committee.

7. There is a case for **further efforts to publicise the scheme**, especially as we are told that we are still at the stage of informing the public and identifying issues and concerns. If the public are not made sufficiently aware of the details we can have little confidence in the degree of support they show, or that all potential issues have been identified.

Specific issues

8. There is widespread opposition to the use of **Nursery Road Playing Fields** to take the line to South Wimbledon. The playing fields are owned by the Rutlish Foundation and only leased to Merton. We understand that they are controlled by covenant to be used only for "educational purposes".

9. It is not clear to us how the alternative, "option 2", would approach **South Wimbledon** or where the South Wimbledon Tram Stop would be accommodated. Without that detail it is hard to comment on its local impact or acceptability.

10. In discussion with TfL experts at the Stakeholder drop-in session it became apparent that Wimbledon Station would not be able to accommodate all the trams that would come from Croydon and Sutton. It seems to us that **options 1 and 2** to approach South Wimbledon are in fact **not options** because as the plans stand, either option 1 or option 2 **has to be adopted**: in order for Sutton and Croydon lines to operate effectively, some proportion of the trams would have to be diverted away from Wimbledon to South Wimbledon. This point was accepted by the TfL representatives present at the Stakeholder event. It is a **critical issue and one we would like to see clarified**.

11. As a related point, the **level crossing at Kingston Road** is another junction where capacity is constrained, because of the volume of vehicle traffic intersecting with the trams. We understand TfL believe that, with some adaptations to road markings at the junction of Kingston Road and Hartfield Road, the frequency of trams could be increased. However, from the discussions we had at the drop-in session it does not seem credible that such an adaptation could facilitate a significant number of extra tram movements each hour. From this we conclude:

11.1 This is further evidence that some South Wimbledon option would be critical to the overall scheme

11.2 Some other way of taking trams across Kingston Road would become necessary, given that the disruption to road traffic is already quite severe.

11.3 Potentially the Sutton line would necessitate alterations to the Kingston Road/Hartfield Road junction which need to be made explicit in the scheme's description as soon as possible so their impact can be appreciated.

12. We understand that along **Morden Road** there would be a double-track, passing Morden and going to Sutton along St Helier Avenue. On Morden Road itself, other traffic would be restricted to one lane in each direction. Buses would share their lane with northbound traffic. This appears likely to restrict other traffic flows. We

appreciate that the extent of the problem needs to be modelled but it raises several issues which we would like to see clarified:

12.1 **Buses** which currently have a dedicated lane would need to share their space with other traffic. This appears to downgrade bus routes along the line. These are bus routes which extend well beyond the length of the Sutton spur.

12.2 As well as buses, the existing road-width accommodates **heavy commercial traffic to trading estates** in the area between South Wimbledon and Morden Hall Park (both sides of the road). Commercial road usage would need to remain adequately accommodated.

12.3 The scheme is likely to encourage more vehicle drivers to travel through the **side-roads of Merton Park** to avoid congestion along Morden Road. This is already a problem for many of our residents. We would like to have a better idea of the full extent of the problem that would arise. Once that is understood we would want to see what measures could be introduced to mitigate the impact and whether these, in turn, represented an improvement or were by their nature a loss of amenity.

13. We would like to understand better the success that Croydon Tramlink has achieved in reducing **congestion**, in order to understand better the potential impact in Merton Park. The Croydon Tram Impact Study refers to “up to a 19%” reduction in the number of car journeys along the route. We would like to understand, rather, what reduction would be experienced in the area around the line. What constitutes a car journey along the route? Many car journeys in the vicinity of the Tramlink line would not be so classified so what would be the reduction in traffic in the area through which Tramlink passes?

14. As you can see, we want to understand whether the general reduction in congestion will be counterbalanced by an increase in congestion within our ward.

15. Along **Morden Road**, traffic may have to run much closer to the **houses** facing the road. The road already experiences significant pollution as a result of the heavy traffic flow. What additional noise and particulate pollution would these households experience?

16. The new tram junction that would be constructed at Morden Road Tram Stop would need to annex some of nearby **Morden Hall Park**. How much would be required?

17. Early discussions on a Sutton Tramlink included the possibility of the tram coming into **Morden Town Centre**.

17.1 This could make for a much better interchange than the envisaged stop 300 metres from **Morden Station**.

17.2 Also, given the problems we listed above about South Wimbledon, a better link with Morden could reduce the need for a **South Wimbledon** spur as it would connect more effectively with the Northern Line.

18. We would support the loop to **St Helier Hospital**. Plans should take account of the special needs of the elderly and less able when being costed.

Strategic Issues

19. Although we are concerned that issues directly affecting residents in Merton Park ward are taken into consideration, as Londoners we also have some comments and questions about the wider strategic aspects of the scheme.

20. Sutton Tramlink will bring more passengers onto the **Northern Line**.

20.1 Will the Northern Line overall be able to cope with the additional traffic?

20.2 Will there be carriage space for passengers joining the Line a few stops further north to be able to use the service in rush hours?

20.3 With the plan for Crossrail 2 to link with Tooting Broadway would all this increased access overwhelm the Northern Line?

21. We would like to see more information, when it is available, on the benefits of the scheme to set alongside the costs.

22. At present there does not appear to be any indication of what **alternative developments** might be considered in the event the scheme did not proceed. What are the alternative options to improve connectivity in south west London?

It would be useful for plans to factor in (1) the implications for cycling along the length of the line and (2) the likely emissions standards of buses to compare with the tram alternative by the time the scheme would be introduced.

23. From the limited materials we have seen it appears the scheme has undoubted benefits for Sutton through better connections with Central London and other hubs. The benefits for Merton appear to be more limited. The route of Tramlink is already served by buses although it seems that people are more likely to use trams than buses. However, buses would in future have to share their lanes with other traffic more than at present, downgrading their service.

25. We recognise that the consultation is intended to consider the scheme before us. However, if the major prize is to enhance the **connectivity of Sutton with other places** in a cost-effective way we believe that other options to achieve this goal

should be considered as well. These might include enhancements to Thameslink services or conversion of other rail links to tram or light rail.

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