

## LONDON BOROUGH OF HAMMERSMITH & FULHAM

**Report to:** Cabinet

**Date:** 05/06/2023

**Subject:** Consideration of petition: "Letter of support for a feasibility study into the use of lightweight, electric autonomous shuttles to help people cross the river"

**Report of:** Councillor Sharon Holder - Cabinet Member for Public Realm

**Report author:** Anvar Alizadeh – Service Manager Highway Assets & Structures

**Responsible Director:** Bram Kainth, Strategic Director of Environment

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### SUMMARY

On 11 May 2023, Possible (the Climate Charity) launched a petition seeking the Council to provide a letter of support for a fully funded feasibility study into the use of lightweight, electric autonomous shuttles to help people cross the river (particularly those who previously relied on the bus to travel between Barnes and Hammersmith Town Centre). By the petition end date of 11 May 2023, 269 signatures had been collected, which warrants a consideration by the Cabinet as the number of signatories exceeds the 250 threshold.

However, the Council has already commissioned such a feasibility study (in July 2022), for an e-mobility pod to be utilised when the bridge stabilisation work completes in Autumn 2023. As such, a letter from the Council in support of this grant funding application is unnecessary. It should also be noted that because of its unique design, any proposal for Hammersmith bridge needs to be integrated with the existing refurbishment scheme and assessed by specialist bridge engineers.

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### RECOMMENDATIONS

1. To note the petition included at Appendix A.
2. To note that in July 2022 the Council commissioned a feasibility study for the use of an e-mobility pod following completion of the bridge stabilisation work.
3. To not provide a letter in support of the grant competition application, given the feasibility study is already underway.

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**Wards Affected:** All

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### Financial Impact

There are no financial implications for the Council in considering this petition. The Council has already commissioned a feasibility study looking at options for different modes of people carrying transport across the bridge following completion of the stabilisation works in Autumn 2023. As such, this is included in the existing programme of works for Hammersmith Bridge.

*Implications completed by Kellie Gooch – Head of Finance (Environment), 22 May 2023.*

### Legal Implications

The Council is the highway authority for Hammersmith Bridge and is responsible for its maintenance under the Highways Act 1980. Currently works of stabilisation are taking place which will make the bridge safe for pedestrians and cyclists to cross the bridge. It is anticipated that these works will be completed in Autumn 2023. Further works will be required for the restoration/strengthening of the bridge to make it safe for vehicular traffic. The study commissioned by the Council in September 2022 will consider the feasibility of electric mobility transport. If the study is positive, e-mobility transport could be in place when the stabilisation works are completed. The implementation of this is within the Council's powers as the highway authority.

*Implications completed by: John Sharland, Senior solicitor (Contracts and Procurement) [john.sharland@lbhf.gov.uk](mailto:john.sharland@lbhf.gov.uk)  
Dated 22 May 2023*

### DETAILED ANALYSIS

1. In 2019, a number of defects were found on Hammersmith Bridge that categorised the bridge as a sub-standard structure and necessitated the bridge to be closed to vehicles. The most critical defects were found as cracks in the bridge chain supporting members (cast iron pedestals) and seized bearings that required installation of sensors, gauges and temperature control system to prevent further deterioration of the bridge. In February 2022, works commenced to strengthen the chain support members (cast Iron pedestals and replace the bearings).
2. Once the bridge is stabilised, pedestrians will use the footways and cyclists will use the carriageway. However, use of any other mobility pods on the bridge requires structural assessment of the other remaining defects to assess the capacity of the deteriorated members.
3. On 11 May 2023 a climate charity called "Possible" initiated a petition with the Council. The petition requests a letter of support from the council to enable them to apply for grant funding (from The Centre for Connected and Autonomous Vehicles) for a feasibility study for a bus replacement shuttle service over the bridge. The Council is advised that the grant funding application window is expected to open at the end of May/start of June 2023, and close in July 2023. Pending a successful grant application (decision expected in Autumn 2023), the

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feasibility study will be undertaken during 2024 (although the carriageway is expected to be reopened sooner than this, in Autumn 2023).

4. However, in September 2022, the Council commissioned specialist consultants with significant invested knowledge about the bridge to undertake such a feasibility study. This study investigates the use of different modes of people carrying transport across the bridge (including an e-mobility pod measure), within the remits of the defective structural elements that will remain after the stabilisation works have completed in Autumn 2023. This study is currently in progress, on program and coordinated with the existing bridge stabilisation works. As such, a letter from the Council in support of a duplicate feasibility study is considered to be unnecessary.

### Reasons for decision

5. Under the Council's Petitions Scheme, a petition which attracts 250 valid signatures (of people who live, work or study in the borough) triggers consideration of the petition by Cabinet. This petition meets this criterion.
6. The requested letter of support is unnecessary as the Council has already commissioned a feasibility study for different modes of people carrying transport across the bridge when the stabilisation works complete.

### Equality Implications

7. The closure Hammersmith bridge has inconvenienced elderly, those with restricted mobility and some Disabled people commuting between the south and north side of Hammersmith Bridge. TfL have provided buses for the public to travel along the diversions route but this does take longer for them to travel
8. The provision of an e-mobility pod, if it can be accommodated over the bridge, will be useful and save time in commuting between the North and South side of the bridge. So the feasibility study on possibility of providing e-mobility transport that is currently in progress could be a potential positive impact on some groups that share protected characteristics should the output of the feasibility study be positive.

*Implications verified/completed by: Yvonne Okiyo, Strategic Lead Equity, Diversity and Inclusion, [Yvonne.Okiyo@lbhf.gov.uk](mailto:Yvonne.Okiyo@lbhf.gov.uk),*

### Risk Management

9. The report notes recommending the results of a petition which has met the threshold for consideration by the Council. The report also notes that the Council commissioned a feasibility study in September 2022 which is in progress and is considering the potential use of lightweight, electric autonomous shuttles when the bridge stabilisation works are completed. The feasibility study will take into account a range of risks before recommending a preferred approach.

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*Implications verified by: David Hughes, Director of Audit, Fraud, Risk and Insurance, 19 May 2023*

### **Climate and Ecological Emergency Implications**

10. Currently, Hammersmith Bridge is open for walking and cycling only with no fossil-fuel powered vehicles able to enter the bridge or the vicinity of the bridge. The proposal is to use autonomous mobility pods powered by pedal or electricity and therefore the climate and ecology impact will be limited.

*Implications verified by: Hinesh Mehta, Head of Climate and Ecology, May 2023*

### **Consultation:**

11. As part of the feasibility work that the Council is undertaking, consultation with TfL, Cyclists group and residents either side of the bridge is in progress.

### **LIST OF APPENDICES:**

Appendix A – Petition Details

Petition Details

# Hammersmith Bridge - Letter of support for a feasibility study into the use of lightweight, electric autonomous shuttles to help people cross the river

- [View paper petition responses](#)
- [Browse all current ePetitions](#)

**We the undersigned petition the Council to please provide a letter of support for a fully funded feasibility study into the use of lightweight, electric autonomous shuttles to help people who used to rely on the bus to cross the river here to travel between Barnes and Hammersmith Town Centre.**

The climate charity Possible, where Leo Murray (the petitioner) is director of innovation, has worked with local communities and expert stakeholders to develop an alternative proposal for the future of Hammersmith Bridge which could work within the existing engineering constraints on the bridge after the stabilisation works are completed. As there is still no funding agreement in sight for the full restoration works, we believe it is incumbent on the council to consider contingency options for meeting the mobility needs of local people.

Although LBHF has stated it has been legally instructed to reopen the bridge by the secretary of state for transport, the Department for Transport themselves have denied this in a categorical statement provided to Possible under the Environmental Information Regulations 2004. Furthermore, advice procured from Possible's own legal counsel concludes that any threats of legal repercussions made verbally in private meetings with LBHF representatives have no substance, and the legal avenues of recourse cited do not genuinely represent a material risk to the council.

Meanwhile the problems which the bridge's closure has caused for people in Barnes and Roehampton who lack access to private cars or the ability to walk or cycle across the bridge unassisted continue to blight lives south of the river. We believe the plan we have developed to meet the mobility needs of those who used to depend on the bus to cross the river here is realistic, affordable, desirable for local people, consistent with urgent efforts to tackle the climate crisis (including H&F's net zero commitments, and the London Mayor's Transport Strategy and net zero targets), and will protect the unique heritage of this iconic West London landmark.

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We have identified the promising opportunity of obtaining a grant for a fully funded feasibility study to produce a business case for this 'plan B', namely a shuttle service to replace some of the lost bus connectivity over the bridge with autonomous vehicles, specifically aimed at supporting mobility for those who are unable to walk or cycle over the bridge. This would be alongside high quality protected cycle lanes and pedestrian footways.

The Centre for Connected and Autonomous Vehicles (C-CAV) has outlined the feasibility study funding opportunity to Possible as follows: a funding competition to support feasibility studies into the integration of autonomous vehicles into public mass transit systems is expected to open to applications at the end of May / start of June, and close in July, with winners announced in the autumn and feasibility studies taking place during 2024.

Possible have assembled an industrial consortium of highways engineers, transport consultants and autonomous vehicle providers who are ready to build on the detailed pre-feasibility work we have already completed on the proposed shuttle solution. The consortium includes Red Bull Advanced Technologies, who are UK partners of the shuttle provider we have selected, Ohmio, as well as a number of other reputable UK based firms with specialist expertise and track records of success on similar projects. C-CAV have reviewed the work Possible have done to date, as well as the strength of the consortium we have convened to progress this work, and they have indicated that we have a very strong case for support under the upcoming competition, with just one caveat: successful bids must have the blessing, in the form of a letter of support, of the relevant highways authority. In this case of course, this is LBHF.

Agreeing to provide a letter of support for our feasibility study will not commit LBHF to anything beyond the study itself, and nor will it cost the council anything at all. If LBHF highways' dept wishes to be a delivery partner in the study consortium, we would welcome this; public bodies are eligible for 100% funding under C-CAV rules. Alternatively, we would like to invite a senior LBHF officer to sit on the steering group for the study, alongside representatives from LBRuT and TfL, as well as a suitable heritage body and Disabled People's Organisation. However, there is no requirement for the council to have any active role in delivering the study at all if you prefer not to. All that is needed in order for us to proceed with applying for funding is your in principle agreement, in writing, to a full feasibility study into our proposed scheme.

Please provide a letter of support for a fully funded feasibility study into the use of lightweight, electric autonomous shuttles to help people who used to rely on the bus to cross the river here to travel between Barnes and Hammersmith Town Centre.

On reaching 250 signatures a Cabinet debate will be held.

This Paper petition ran from 11/05/2023 to 15/05/2023 and has now finished.

269 people signed this Paper petition.