

Open Letter to Sadiq Khan, Mayor of London

From the Stop the Silvertown Tunnel Coalition

London, 1 November 2021

Dear Mayor,

Tomorrow in Glasgow, with other mayors from the world's largest cities, you will tell the world that "our future depends on action taken today in the world's cities". The C40 Cities alliance, of which you will take over as Chair, says that this is "Our Last, Big Chance".

But the action you are taking in London – pressing ahead with the climate-trashing Silvertown Tunnel, your largest spending decision and the city's largest infrastructure project – is guaranteed to miss this chance.

The tunnel project would commit our great city to a transport future centred on cars and lorries, when the climate emergency requires a rapid reduction in motor traffic in the next decade.

The tunnel project would commit human and financial resources, for decades, to subsidise better-off car drivers and haulage companies, diverting those resources away from transport policies to support lower-income families in London.

The tunnel project would exacerbate the air pollution problem, especially in Newham, London's most-polluted borough, which has a high proportion of communities of colour and lower-income families.

Most seriously, given the global climate emergency, the tunnel project would – like all road building projects – facilitate more traffic, and so add to London's, and the world's, greenhouse gas emissions. It will add to unsustainable expansion of infrastructure, including a lorry park, planned to be one of Europe's biggest. This is impermissible: to prevent global heating, rich-country cities must be in the forefront of cutting emissions rapidly.

A report commissioned by C40 Cities in 2016 said as much, when it cautioned against "locking in [carbon-]inefficient pathways" of exactly this kind. More than 70 researchers of climate science, transport policy, energy policy and urban development warned you, earlier this year, that the tunnel project is incompatible with London's climate targets.¹ As Greta Thunberg reminds us, we must listen to the science.

The tunnel project has no social licence. In east and south-east London, Members of Parliament, borough councillors, doctors' and teachers' organisations, transport workers' trade unions and most of public opinion oppose the tunnel. Last month, the regional conference of your own party, the Labour Party, voted to oppose the project by a three-to-one margin.

Dear Sadiq, please have the courage of your convictions. Don't say the words about climate change, without taking the bold actions that you urge others to take. Take your last big chance. Cancel the Silvertown Tunnel, and divert the resources to rapid decarbonisation of transport in London.

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¹ For these documents, and other details, see our recent briefing. <https://transportactionnetwork.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/Silvertown-Tunnel-Briefing-Oct21.pdf>