Open Letter: the Silvertown Tunnel project

30 April 2021

We, the undersigned, urge Grant Shapps, Secretary of State for Transport, and Sadiq Khan, Mayor of London, to take emergency action to put in place a review of the Silvertown Tunnel project. This could take the form of a cancellation of the Development Consent Order, or a decision to freeze work on the project while an inquiry is conducted.

Since the DCO was issued, the UK parliament and the Greater London Authority are among the many bodies internationally to have declared that we are in a climate emergency. As a result of the Covid 19 pandemic, long-term transport projections have changed. In these circumstances, it would be foolhardy to press ahead with an infrastructure project that can only contribute to the UK’s excessive greenhouse gas emissions – as well as skewing London’s transport system further towards roads, and exacerbating local air pollution problems.

With the COP 26 talks coming up in Glasgow in November, the government has decided to review the licencing of a new deep coal mine in Cumbria. This was a correct decision in view of the climate emergency, which requires both that total emissions be reduced swiftly in this decade, and that infrastructure projects that could underpin higher emissions in future be avoided.

The Climate Change Committee has warned the government that it is on course to miss its own emissions targets for the fourth and fifth carbon budgets – targets that some researchers believe are anyway too generous to reflect adequately the UK’s fair share of the emissions cuts required to limit global warming to 1.5 degrees above pre-industrial levels.

Transport emissions are a major part of the problem: they are rising while emissions from other sectors are falling. This can not be addressed mainly by electrification. Transport strategy in London, and the UK as a whole, needs to prioritise modal shift and public transport, not further expansion of the unsustainable road network.

Under these circumstances, the DCO issued in 2017 is not an adequate basis on which to press ahead with the Silvertown project. It risks, like the Cumbrian coal mine, undermining the UK’s efforts to address climate change.

Yours faithfully,

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Dr Lucy Baker, Senior Research Fellow, University of Sussex
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Gareth Dale, Senior Lecturer in politics, Brunel University
Dick Daniel, transport campaigner and committee member of Bath & Bristol Area Trams Association (BBATA)
Dr Adrian Davis, Professor of Transport and Health and Fellow of the Faculty of Public Health, Edinburgh Napier University
Dr Robert Davis, Chair of Road Danger Reduction Forum
Patrick Devine, Honorary Research Fellow (Social Science), University of Manchester
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Professor Graeme Macdonald, University of Warwick; Researcher, Climaimaries project and Low Carbon Scotland

Dr Martin Mahony, School of Environmental Sciences, University of East Anglia

James Marriott, artist and activist at Platform; associate researcher, University of Durham; co-author of The Oil Road (Verso Books, 2012) and Crude Britannia (Pluto Press, 2021)

Bill McGuire, Professor Emeritus of Geophysical & Climate Hazards, University College London

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Simon Pirani, Senior Research Fellow, Oxford Institute for Energy Studies; Honorary Professor, University of Durham
We invite researchers of climate, energy, transport, air pollution, urban planning and associated areas to sign this letter. Please fill out the google form at:

https://docs.google.com/forms/d/1pPZPtLYrDEZroUA5MfQszFU3urEL-JVjPxzg0jNmW1-8/edit

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