
Chaos at Rotherhithe Tunnel



On the 19th March 2013, Transport for London (TfL) introduced a new narrower width restriction at the entrances to the Rotherhithe Tunnel (photos above and below shows Southwark entrance at noon on the 20th).

The result was absolute chaos with long queues on Jamaica Road even at midday and gridlock over a wide area during rush hours. Photo below shows the queue back down Jamaica Road.



The justification given by TfL was to improve safety in the tunnel by stopping large vehicles from entering, particularly vans with large fuel tanks. But in reality it did not stop many of them as one can see below. LGVs continued to squeeze through. However, they took up to minute to do so, thus severely impacting the volume of traffic (normally 30,000 vehicles use this crossing every day).



Vans still squeezing through

It's not as if TfL had not been told that it would create difficulties as the author of this article contacted TfL on the 7th March asking for more information when he saw some warning signs. But my complaints about the lack of consultation and the likely problems that would result were ignored.

In reality there was some statutory consultation in early 2012 sent to a few organisations, particularly local ones in Southwark and Tower Hamlets, but not to the ABD even though we are on other TfL consultation lists. There was no wider publicity on the matter.

The Rotherhithe Tunnel is used by people from a very wide area of South-East and North-East London, particularly when the Blackwall Tunnel and London Bridge are closed or congested, as often happens. Those are the only practical alternatives.

TfL claimed that only 103 vehicles per day would be affected by the new width restriction (which was imposed by kerb build-outs and new posts when it was previously about 7 feet wide) but the experience at other 6'6" width restrictions (such as at Bickley Station, or in Greenwich) is that many people in ordinary cars cannot get through, or if they do they scrape the sides or knock off their wing mirrors. To get through a 6'6" width restriction requires great care even in smaller cars and hence the delays generated.

Note that the Rotherhithe Tunnel was built 105 years ago, has narrow road lanes and two sharp bends in it where vehicles tend to collide.

But the previous 7'0" width restriction stopped most larger vehicles and a 20 mph speed limit enforced by average speed cameras was introduced only recently.

TfL Admit Their Mistake

It seems that TfL realised their error because 48 hours later (on Wednesday night) they removed the metal posts although the concrete kerb build-outs remain. This has allegedly improved matters somewhat.

However the ABD has asked for a meeting with TfL to discuss this matter and a better long-term solution to any safety problems.

Anyone who has been affected by this change and wishes to be put on a contact list for further news should send an email to roger.lawson@abd.org.uk

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