

Appendix A – Briefing Note for the Approval of Urgent Interim Safety Measures December 2021

BRIEFING NOTE

DATE: 21st December 2021

To: Councillor James Spencer, Cabinet Member for City Management

**c.c. Kevin Goad - Director, City Highways
Phil Robson - Head of Operations**

From: Andy Foster, City Highways

Subject: Piccadilly (Hyde Park Corner) Road Underpass – Immediate interim control measures for the underpass

This Briefing Note is to inform you of the outcome of the results from the recent ‘Smoke Test’ carried out in the Piccadilly Road Underpass under Hyde Park Corner and the steps the City Council intends to take as soon as possible to improve alerts and evacuation of the tunnel in the event of a fire. These measures will be in place until such time as the new ventilation system and fire controls are designed and fully operational.

Introduction/background

The current ventilation fans inside the Piccadilly Underpass perform a pollution control function only. The fans were never designed to control the movement of smoke away from the source of the fire and more importantly away from any persons evacuating the tunnel.

A smoke test took place over the weekend of 13/14 November 2021 to mimic a fire incident in the tunnel in order to understand how the smoke would naturally vent out of the ends of the tunnel (or not) and what the impact would be if the fans are activated by the pollution control sensors forcing smoke to ventilate through the extraction duct in the centre of the tunnel.

The smoke test revealed that whilst there is good natural ventilation in the event of a fire, if the fans are activated, as they would be by the pollution control sensors, and depending on the fire location in the tunnel and prevailing wind conditions, it could have a significant detrimental impact on drivers and passengers trying to evacuate the tunnel on foot. It is possible that the fans could blow potentially toxic smoke over the evacuees and impede their escape.

Whilst the new ventilation fans will be designed to deal with smoke and pollution control, these will not be installed and fully operational until early 2023. In the meantime, it is recommended

that the City Council implement interim control measures - with immediate effect - to improve evacuation procedures in the tunnel in the event of a fire. These interim control measures include:

- Reducing the traffic in both tunnel bores from 2 lanes to a single lane in each direction. It should be noted that on the tunnel approaches and departures, traffic is already in single lanes, so the single lane arrangements will be maintained through the tunnel.
- Impose a 20mph speed limit in the tunnel.
- Ban dangerous goods from entering the tunnel.
- Introduce a linear heat detection system with automatic alerts to the council's Service Provider.
- Install CCTV to allow the Service Provider to remotely view the tunnel via the internet and view an incident in the tunnel.
- Install an automatic public address system warning drivers to evacuate the tunnel immediately

It is hoped that the lane and speed restriction measures can be in place either just before or just after Christmas 2021, the other measures will be introduced early in the new year (January 2022).

If you have any comments with respect to this Briefing Note, please do not hesitate to email me at afoster1@westminster.gov.uk

Andy Foster

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