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Revealed: how average speed of London traffic has plummeted to just 7.8mph

ROSS LYDALL | Friday 9 December 2016 12:18 | 67 comments



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Construction work and dwindling road space are causing the traffic in London to grind to a halt *Jeremy Selwyn*

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The full scale of the gridlock blighting central London's roads was laid bare today as **average traffic speeds** fell to just 7.8mph.

The extraordinary figure - one of the lowest recorded in the last decade - emerged as motorists were today warned of four years of delays when work begins on the £4.2 billion super sewer under the River Thames.

Transport for London has quietly published figures showing that average daytime speeds on main roads in central London dropped to 7.8mph between July and September, down from 8.1mph a year earlier.

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There were an unprecedented 8,146 roadworks on main roads in Greater London in the same period - almost 900 more than last year. This reduced the average speed across the city to 17.4mph.

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Critics said traffic was now moving "as slow as a horse and cart" - with average speeds in the run-up to Christmas expected to follow seasonal trends and fall even further.

Bus passenger numbers are down five per cent. TfL predicts 45 million fewer journeys this year after travellers became fed up at getting stuck in jams.

TfL commissioner Mike Brown, in a stark warning to colleagues, said: "People using London's roads are facing congestion and reliability problems on a daily basis and, unless we address the underlying causes, it will only get worse."

TfL says construction work in response to economic growth and dramatic increases in the capital's population were primarily to blame.

Val Shawcross, Sadiq Khan's deputy mayor for transport, yesterday promised a crackdown on congestion, which she also blamed on online shopping deliveries and a dramatic increase in minicabs.

Caroline Pidgeon, Lib-Dem chair of the London Assembly transport committee, told the Standard: “It is a depressing fact that traffic speeds in large parts of central London are now very similar to traffic speeds that London saw over 100 years ago when horse and carts were the main form of transport.

“Bold action is now needed, especially to curb the unsustainable growth of private hire vehicles and to ensure delivery vans serve our economy in a smarter way.

“The congestion charge also needs to be updated, with variable charges matching the levels of congestion on our roads.”

RAC roads policy spokesman Nick Lyes said: “These latest figures will come as no surprise to those who use London’s roads.

“Average speeds in the capital have been declining for at least the last eight years, partly driven by roadworks and dwindling road space - but worryingly this is at a time when traffic volumes on London’s major roads is actually declining.”

TfL today revealed details of how the super sewer will impact on drivers and cyclists when digging begins on Victoria Embankment in the New Year.

Drivers wanting to turn left from Blackfriars bridge onto the Embankment will be sent on a two-mile detour via Waterloo bridge until 2021.

The work will also involve re-routing part of the £59 million flagship East-West cycle superhighway just eight months after it opened. Cyclists riding to and from the North-South superhighway on Blackfriars bridge will be diverted via a slip road currently used by vehicles.

Diversions will be introduced from January 2 - just three days after Tower Bridge is reopened to traffic after a three-month closure.

A TfL map predicts that roads including Strand, Aldwych, Fleet Street and Ludgate Hill - each where traffic is often at a near standstill - will be “busier than usual” throughout the day.

TfL and Thames Tideway, the firm building the 25km super sewer, said they considered all options but believed the closure of the west-bound slip road onto the Embankment was the safest and least damaging option.

The super sewer work is vital to clean up the Thames, into which raw sewage is discharged every week due to the extent of the pressure on the 150-year-old waste infrastructure. The sewer is due to open in 2024.


TfL modelling suggests that no more than 200 drivers an hour turn west from Blackfriars bridge, though the diversion will add to queues elsewhere.

Garrett Emmerson, TfL's chief operating officer for surface transport, said: 'We think we have minimised as far as possible the transport impacts, the cycle impacts and the construction impacts, but it's a very big project.' ■

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