



HOUSE OF COMMONS

LONDON SW1A 0AA

Lilian Greenwood MP
Minister for Future of Roads
Department for Transport
Great Minster House
33 Horseferry Road
London
SW1P 4DR

Our Ref: RF36786

18 August 2025

Dear Lilian

Re: Unacceptable and Dangerous Delays on A421 on July 5th 2025.

I am writing on behalf of many constituents who have contacted me regarding the avoidable disruption on the A421 caused by scheduled roadworks on Saturday July 5th 2025.

The substantial redevelopment of the road network from the Black Cat Roundabout on the A1/A421 junction to Caxton Gibbet on the A428 has generally been very well managed with the necessary road closures and diversions causing levels of disruption within the bounds of acceptability.

Unfortunately, this all changed during planned road closures over the weekend of July 5th and 6th. Closure of the A1 northbound from Black Cat Roundabout resulted in tailbacks on the A421 of approximately 7 hours and these were not restricted to a short period of the day; I had reports from constituents suffering these sort of delays at 10am and still at 3pm and later. I don't need to explain to you the distress caused to road users from such delays and particularly those with elderly or vulnerable passengers or young children. I had numerous reports of extreme, desperate and extremely dangerous acts undertaken such as passing young children to friends and relatives on the other side of the dual carriageway to remove them from the congestion.

Having spoken at length with the team responsible from National Highways it seems that several key failings have been identified:

1. The phasing of the traffic lights at the A421/Black Cat junction had been used successfully for a previous closure of the northbound A1 but crucially, that closure had been overnight only whereas the weekend in question included daytime as well. It took too long to identify that this phasing was incorrect to allow sufficient traffic off the A421 compared to the overnight requirements. It then took too long to locate and mobilise an engineer who could change the phasing as it seems this is a far more complicated procedure than one would imagine.
2. Signage along the A421 was woefully inadequate to alert road users of the extent of the delays facing them so many opportunities for people to leave the A421 were missed and so the tailbacks grew longer and longer with no ability to turn around or exit the carriageway. The situation was exacerbated by poor local network coverage meaning that updates to online map services were still showing delays of only around

30 minutes, even when disruption was at its peak.

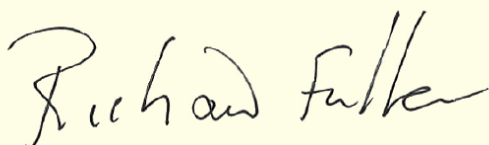
3. The project team responsible for the development (Skanska) had Traffic Safety Control Officers (TCSOs) on duty however it seems they took a very passive role during the disruption and there seems to be limited scope for what they can practically do when faced with situations such as this. For example, common sense would suggest that a proactive approach such as removing a section of the central reservation to allow access to the opposite carriageway, or manually over-riding the traffic lights with hand signals to improve traffic flow would have had a material impact on improving the situation. The TCSOs either don't have the powers or the seniority of on the ground to take such decisions and so no such actions were taken.
4. The police were present and many constituents have reported police cars travelling repeatedly along the free-flowing side of the A421 but seemingly doing nothing to intervene. The police do have the authority to make operational interventions to relieve traffic congestion but again, it seems a passive and watching brief was adopted rather than significant and effective intervention.

The failures that weekend were extremely serious and could have had far greater consequences had for example, the weather been as hot as it had been the previous weekend, or had a an attempted transfer of a child onto a carriageway with a 70 mph speed limit gone tragically wrong. I am not calling for heads to roll as I reiterate that previously this had been a well-managed project and the team at National Highways are genuinely devastated that all that previous good work has been destroyed by one weekend of mayhem. Nevertheless, I do want lessons to be learnt, and I believe there is a need for clear guidelines to be set for all future major road closures across the country.

1. The police, national highways traffic officers and any TSCOs from development companies must liaise in advance of the closure and have a very clear understanding of what operational powers each body has and what measures should be taken in the event of a failure like we saw on July 5th. This should include measures such as barrier removal, traffic light override and also the supply of emergency provisions, especially water supplies.
2. Greater coordination is needed on the signage that will be used and where it will be positioned in the event of unexpected traffic jams. This should include the strategic placement of mobile signage that can be activated immediately if severe build-ups are identified to direct road users away from the congestion.
3. Pre-planning spent assessing the ability of the local network to support real-time communications of the scale of the disruption through radio and online traffic alerts and commonly used apps such as Google Maps.

I would be interested in your thoughts and feedback on what steps your department can take in setting out a code of practice to minimise the risk of similar events occurring in the future.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading 'Richard Fuller'. The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with a large 'R' and 'F'.

Richard Fuller MP