

4 August 2020

To Ed Miliband MP

Dear Ed Miliband,

Thank you for your article “Our biggest enemy is no longer climate denial but climate delay” (Guardian Opinion, Friday 30 July). I agree with you that the window to avoid catastrophe is closing with every passing day; that we are in the decisive decade; and, most of all, that the supposed supporters of change, who refuse to act at the pace the science demands, are more dangerous than climate science deniers.

You are right to point out that “nothing is more dangerous than the mirage of action shrouding the truth of inaction”. The example you give is the government’s climate policy, which is indeed quite a spectacular mirage of that kind.

I draw your attention to another example: the Greater London Authority’s decision to press ahead doggedly with the Silvertown Tunnel project, despite the advice of 60-odd researchers in a range of relevant fields that it is incompatible with the actions needed by the UK to make its fair contribution to limiting global heating to 1.5 degrees.<sup>1</sup>

The argument against the climate effect of the tunnel project is grounded in simple principles of transport sector carbon budgets and transport policy: that more roads produce more traffic; that large cities in high-income countries need to make substantial cuts in the volume of traffic; that expansion of infrastructure projects for fossil-fuelled sectors, including road transport, is impermissible in the climate emergency. (For detail, see the Stop Digging report published by the Transport Action Network.<sup>2</sup>)

The tunnel is the GLA’s biggest spending decision for many years, and central to a transport policy dramatically at odds with 1.5-degree-related carbon budgets. The yawning gap between GLA policy and what is required has been made public by the Stop the Silvertown Tunnel coalition in a simple, but frightful, graph.<sup>3</sup>

The Labour Party can not duck the Silvertown Tunnel problem. With the parliamentary party in opposition, the Mayor of London is arguably Labour’s most powerful elected official. It is in his gift to stop the tunnel project now, before construction starts and before more political damage is done.

The London regional conference of the Labour party last week called for cancellation of the project, by an overwhelming majority. Matthew Pennycook and other local Labour MPs, the Labour-controlled Hackney, Southwark, Lewisham and Newham borough councils *ipso* have urged the GLA to pause and review, or cancel, as have local teachers, doctors, transport workers and others through their unions, and large swathes of local opinion.

If Labour fails to stop the tunnel project, its very justified criticisms of government climate inaction will sound hypocritical. Please raise your voice and take action to stop the tunnel project now.

With best wishes,



Simon Pirani,

Author of the Stop Digging report; Senior Research Fellow, Oxford Institute for Energy Studies

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<sup>1</sup> <https://transportactionnetwork.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/open-letter-silvertown-tunnel.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> <https://transportactionnetwork.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/Stop-Digging-Report.pdf>

<sup>3</sup> <https://xrgreenwichcom.files.wordpress.com/2020/07/silvertownclimate.pdf>