

Proposed BL1 express bus route between Waterloo and Lewisham – London TravelWatch’s response

London TravelWatch is London’s independent transport watchdog, using evidence to campaign to improve journeys, and advocate for all people travelling in London.

It is in this role that we are responding to TfL’s consultation about the proposed route BL1.

We make the following comments:

The benefits of limited stop, orbital bus routes

We support TfL’s proposal to introduce the BL1. London TravelWatch has been calling for more orbital and limited stop bus routes for many years because we know that people value being able to travel across boroughs for work, healthcare appointments, schools and shopping trips. We support too that the BL1 will connect with other bus routes, Tube, London Overground, DLR and National Rail services. By doing so, it will help connectivity and bring new, speedier connections in Lambeth, Lewisham and Southwark.

Making Superloop an enduring success

We are pleased that for passengers Superloop has quickly become a widely recognised and valued addition to London’s bus network. However, Superloop services operate in the wider bus network where average bus speeds in London continue to fall year on year, with an average network speed of just 9.2 mph across this financial year. And so, whilst London TravelWatch supports Superloop, we are concerned that for passengers a limited stop bus stuck in traffic is still just a bus stuck in traffic.

TfL must redouble their efforts to give the bus the priority it needs on the road, both on their own roads and in working productively with London’s boroughs on their roads. It is only through doing this that the Superloop network - as well as the rest of the bus network - will be an enduring success.

The BL1’s stops

We generally support the BL1’s proposed stops but suggest it should also serve the stops named Lewisham College / Ashmead School (eastbound) and Lewisham College (westbound). This would provide easy access to those educational sites, a connection to nearby St. John’s station and fill the large gap between the BL1’s stops in New Cross Gate and Lewisham.

We acknowledge that this suggestion would add an extra stop in each direction so, to maintain the express nature of the BL1, we suggest that TfL may wish to revise the stopping arrangements in Lewisham for westbound services. Here, we believe that the stops of Lewisham Centre, Lewisham Clock Tower and Lewisham Station are sufficient for the town centre and other public transport links. We therefore suggest that the Lewisham Loampit Vale stop is not served by the BL1 heading away from Lewisham (although buses heading towards Lewisham should still call there).

To enable passengers to make the easiest connections between the BL1 and the other bus services which run alongside the BL1, we hope that TfL will, wherever possible, ensure same stop interchange.

The impacts on other local bus routes

We are pleased that TfL are not proposing changes to other bus routes in the area as part of this consultation including any reduction to their frequency. The BL1 will free up capacity for the routes calling at bus stops not served by the BL1. Maintaining their existing service levels is important as it should lead to more comfortable journeys for current passengers and hopefully encourage more people to use those routes.

Advertising the consultation

Unlike with the earlier consultations for Superloop routes, we are pleased to see that the bus stop poster for the BL1 inviting passenger comments is much clearer about the locations of the proposed stops for the route. Similarly, the leaflet for the BL1, which contains a detailed proposed route map and advises how people can have their say, is also an improvement on the leaflets produced for previous Superloop consultations. We trust that this quality of information will continue when TfL consult for the remaining routes in the second phase of Superloop. We were also pleased to see that TfL are continuing to use the distinctive 'Toblerone' style wraps at bus stops to advertise this – and other - consultations.

The Bakerloo line

Although not in direct scope of this consultation, London TravelWatch strongly supports the proposed Bakerloo line extension, which would mirror the BL1 when complete. The extension would provide a significant increase in public transport capacity in southeast London. However, more immediately, we hope that TfL will prioritise capital funding in the next settlement from government to commission the building of new trains for the Bakerloo line, so that they can replace those currently operating, the oldest trains in regular passenger service in the UK.