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20 December 2022

Maggie Ferncombe,
Chair, London Labour.
london@labour.org.uk

Ed Miliband MP,
House of Commons.
ed.miliband.mp@parliament.uk

Dear Maggie Ferncombe and Ed Miliband,

I write to ask you to take action within the Labour Party over the circulation of false information about the climate emergency by the Greater London Authority, and the Authority's failure to deal with complaints about this false information, in breach of its own rules.

The false information was circulated in 2021 by Heidi Alexander, former deputy mayor of London, in response to people who protested to the Mayor of London about the Silvertown Tunnel project. In particular, Ms Alexander claimed:

- (a) that the GLA has adopted plans to reach "zero carbon goals";
- (b) that the modelling of carbon emissions on which the GLA carbon reduction trajectory is based takes into account planned developments such as the Silvertown Tunnel; and
- (c) that Arup has conducted an "independent assessment" of London's 1.5 degree carbon reduction trajectory.

The attached note explains the importance of the issues complained of for climate policy.

Recipients of this false information contacted the Stop the Silvertown Tunnel coalition, for which I had conducted research about the tunnel project. The coalition continued to press the Mayor to review the project and its compatibility with his climate policies, but he declined.

In September 2021, I brought a complaint on the grounds that Ms Alexander's statements breached the Nolan Principles, and thereby the GLA Code of Ethics and Standards for staff. I asked the GLA to contact those who had been written to with this untrue and misleading information, and provide them with correct information. In July this year, the complaint was elevated to Stage 2 of the GLA complaints procedure, to be dealt with by Mary Harpley, GLA Chief Officer. After some delay, I was assured in writing that the complaint would be dealt with by 23 September, and then by early November. Now, four and a half months after going to Ms Harpley's office, it has not been dealt with.

I am contacting you because the complaint concerns climate policy, which, according to the GLA, the Labour Party and many other public bodies, is an emergency issue. As we all well understand, any project that expands the road network, be it the Silvertown Tunnel or the government's road building programme, will generate extra traffic and therefore extra / pto

greenhouse gas emissions; there will be an opportunity cost in terms of public transport and alternative modes projects foregone; and the project will push us another step towards failure to meet climate targets. As we also all understand, politicians will be tempted to obscure these realities with greenwash. This was the reason that I complained about the untruthful and misleading statements in Ms Alexander's letter, and why it still matters.

The Greater London Authority is the most significant public body controlled by Labour. If greenwash is tolerated there, and complaints trashed in breach of the GLA's own rules, what does that say about Labour's climate policy? What hope does it give us that a future Labour government will mean what it says about climate issues?

The Mayor and other senior Labour politicians have recently responded to direct action protests over climate by saying that people should use lawful channels – but the experience of the Stop the Silvertown Tunnel coalition is that our attempts to use lawful channels, in dealing not with the Tory government but with a Labour Mayor, have been treated with high-handed contempt.

Please let me know if you are prepared to raise this issue in the Labour Party. As well as the attached note, I have a file of correspondence with the GLA that includes much more detail, if you need it.

In the knowledge that the majority of Labour Party members in London have never supported the tunnel project, I will also be circulating this letter to others.

With best wishes,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Simon Pirani', with a long horizontal stroke underneath.

Simon Pirani,
Honorary Professor, University of Durham,
Supporter of the Stop the Silvertown Tunnel coalition.

See attachment: Note on why the three issues complained of matter.

Note on why the three issues complained of matter.

a. By informing protesters that the GLA has “zero carbon goals”, Ms Alexander was seeking to reassure them that policies had been adopted commensurate with the seriousness of the climate crisis. But actually none of the GLA’s goals were “zero carbon”. The scenarios published in association with the Zero Carbon London plan assumed 3.4-6.9 million tonnes per year of carbon emissions in 2050 from the GLA area; the Zero Carbon Pathways tool on the GLA web site showed that the London Environment Strategy aimed for 4.7 million tonnes per year in 2050. It was not only climate scientists, and the Stop the Silvertown Tunnel coalition, who thought these targets were inadequate. So did the Mayor himself, and for this reason he announced new targets in January 2022. (Note that a report associated with these targets includes scenarios under which vehicle kilometres driven by cars in London, per year, will fall by 12%, 27% or 40%. The tunnel project pushes the city towards failure to achieve such reductions.) The purpose of Ms Alexander’s false claim that the GLA’s targets were “zero carbon” was to mislead protesters into believing they were adequate, when clearly they were not.

b. By informing protesters that the modelling of carbon emissions, on which the GLA carbon reduction trajectory is based, takes into account planned developments such as the Silvertown Tunnel, Ms Alexander was seeking to reassure them that the construction of the tunnel would not obstruct progress towards those targets. But it was untrue. The Zero Carbon Model was not compiled on the basis of estimates of the effect of particular projects; neither was the analysis of transport sector emissions conducted by Jacobs for the GLA. There was a good reason for Ms Alexander to make this untrue claim: the Stop the Silvertown Tunnel coalition had repeatedly questioned the modelling of the tunnel project by Transport for London, which had been based on the false premise that its construction would not result in any additional trips across the Thames. By starting out from this false premise, TfL denied a basic principle of traffic research, that more roads produce more traffic.

c. Ms Alexander’s statement to protesters that the GLA’s carbon reduction trajectory had been independently assessed by C40 was simply false. The C40 assessment, compiled by Arup, says that the trajectories worked out by the GLA (on whose carbon action plan Arup was working), align with the trajectories published by C40, which were compiled by Arup. There was nothing “independent” about this assessment. The purpose of this falsehood was to give the impression that the GLA’s carbon targets not only took the tunnel project into account, but had been independently verified. This was all untrue.

In all three cases, untrue statements were made to protesters with the aim of reassuring them that the Silvertown tunnel could be built, without obstructing progress towards climate targets. This is itself untrue. This is the same sort of greenwash as used by the government to defend decisions to approve a new coal mine, issue new oil and gas production licences, and proceed with its road-building programme.

(end)