

Coronavirus (COVID-19) Update from Cllr Gareth Roberts 3 June 2020

Hello, you may be aware that the Government has recently entered into an emergency funding package with TfL, to help TfL weather the financial storm which has hit it as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. And while this emergency funding is welcome, it comes with a couple of conditions about which the Council is not very happy. The first, is about the older persons Freedom Pass. The proposal at the moment is that from the 15 June, you will no longer be able to use your Freedom Pass before nine o'clock in the morning on buses. Now, this is a problem because many of our supermarkets have come with the idea of so-called 'Silver Hours' whereby older residents can go and do their shopping usually before nine o'clock and therefore avoid any of the crowds and queues that are a feature of shopping later in the day. Of course, if they can't use their Freedom Pass to go to the shops, they will either have to drive and that will lead to more cars on the road during peak time or they will have to pay the fare which of course will effectively be a tax on their shopping. The second change is that from September, the free travel for under 18s will stop. The proposal is that this responsibility for providing free travel to and from schools will fall to local councils. One London council is estimating that they will be on the sharp end of a bill of £500,000 for this change. And the cumulative bill is going to be looking at £16 million across London as a whole. At a time when councils are so stretched for cash, this is going to be a particularly difficult burden on our resources. And of course, it will be a resource burden for local families who may find that they will have to start paying for fares for children to go to sporting events, to cultural events, even just to go and visit friends. So, I've written to Grant Shapps MP asking him if he will reconsider these two conditions which will affect both our oldest and our youngest people disproportionately. As soon as I receive a letter back from Mr Shapps, I will let you know what he's got to say. Thank you.