
Discussion Summary

How is the Thames Tideway Tunnel project developing?

Top Lines

- **The Thames Tideway Tunnel project is currently on time and to budget.** The project is costing £4.2bn and due to be completed in 2023. The project is being financed by a levy on Thames Water bills of £14 per person per year.
- **To make the project sustainable, Tideway has used sustainable procurement of materials where possible, and targets for reducing the carbon footprint.** The steel and timber used for construction are from sustainable UK sources. Tideway has moved most of construction materials and site spoil by river, to reduce traffic disruption and danger to road users. Efforts have also been made to reduce plastics and disposable coffee cups on site.
- **Tideway have promoted community activities** such as cleaning up of the river Thames foreshore, in an effort to remove plastics and litter from the environment and reconnect communities with the river. This has an environmental and public relations benefit.

Speakers

- **Sarah Linney** – Public Affairs Officer, Thames Tideway Tunnel
- **Darren White** – Head of Sustainability, Thames Tideway Tunnel
- **Kelly Bradley** - Legacy and Community Investment Manager, Thames Tideway Tunnel

Overview

In the past, the River Thames was very polluted. In Victorian times, the smell from the pollution was so bad it disrupted the sitting of Parliament in 1858, and Queen Victoria and Alfred had to cancel a boat trip.

This prompted the government to commission the great Victorian engineer Joseph Bazalgette to significantly improve and upgrade the sewer system under London, including culverting over side rivers to prevent them being used as rubbish dumps. The capacity of Bazalgette's network was to cater for a 4 million population city, twice the size of London at that time. The city however now has a population of 9 million, over twice the capacity that the sewer system is designed for.

As the Victorian sewers are a combined sewage and rainwater system, when there is heavy rain raw sewage can get washed straight into the river, causing pollution and damaging the health of the river and

those who use it. The Government was also threatened with significant fines for not meeting commitments under the EU Water Framework Directive. The planning for the Tideway project started in the early 2000s, with tunnelling beginning in the last year.

The project is due to complete in 2023/24 and due to cost £4.2bn, which is paid for by a levy of £14 per year on the water bills of Thames Water customers. They have also financed the Tideway project by issuing green bonds and have investors from insurance and pension funds. This is pitched as a sustainable, resilient and ethical investment. At the moment the project is due to be completed on time and to budget.

The Thames Tideway Tunnel project has an extensive Health & Safety training program for staff, which has proved to very worthwhile with no fatalities on site and no cyclist deaths from lorries and trucks. The Grenfell Tower disaster showed the importance of having a clear procedure for when workers think something is not right, but they fear for their job if they speak up. The TTT have a procedure where people can report potential problems to those outside their team. Men working in the construction industry are three times more likely to commit suicide, and so the TTT work with a charity to provide support for staff who are struggling.

The TTT have tried to reduce traffic disruption and risk to cyclists by moving most of the spoil and construction materials by barge along the river. Whilst there is some concern about air pollution caused by the older tug boats, Tideway have tried to use the newer boats where they could. TTT have used sustainable procurement for the steel and timber used on site, which is all from UK sources. Whilst Tideway have targets for reducing their carbon footprint, the tunnel is designed to last 120 years, so therefore the concrete used needs to be of a durable mix.

Tideway is committed to improving diversity on site, something that the construction industry is not famed for in the past. They have supported Pride for the last few years to show support for LGBT workers. Efforts have been made to get more women into the sectors, and visit schools to promote the industry to young people. The construction industry is vulnerable to using modern slave labour, so Tideway has used the BRE's ethical labour standards for all their extended contractors.

The legacy project has 54 commitments. One is to get staff to undertake volunteering opportunities with the third sector that Tideway work with – staff get 5 days volunteering leave per year. Tideway have looked to engage local communities, hiring local staff where possible, and reconnect them with the river by using citizen science and monitoring what is collected from litter clear ups. Tideway has noticed a marked reduction in the number of plastic bottles that is washing up on the foreshore, since the public became more aware on the environmental impact of disposable plastics. Efforts have also been made by Tideway to reduce plastics and disposable coffee cups on site. Local schools are also being encouraged to get into rowing, which has been seen as an elitist sport in the past.

About the organisers

The Westminster Sustainable Business Forum (WSBF) is a high-level coalition of key UK businesses, Parliamentarians, Civil Servants and other organisations. Providing a politically neutral environment for knowledge sharing and discussion on sustainability policy, we help to inform the wider sustainability agenda in government and are a trusted source of independent information and advice for policymakers. We publish authoritative research reports; impact on government policy through our in-depth round

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For more information on our activities, please visit: www.policyconnect.org.uk/wsbf or alternatively please contact Jim Clark at jim.clark@policyconnect.org.uk

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