

The Mayor is under pressure to support investigations into six high-profile London Development Agency projects after a London Assembly scrutiny committee raised serious concerns about their management.

Dee Doocey, assembly member and chair of the Economic Development, Culture, Sport and Tourism committee, called for a full audit into the projects at Mayor's question time today, following the finalisation on Monday of a report by Deloitte that highlighted a lack of evidence of control, accountability, and proper clearance of budget amendments. It also found a lack of information about the expected benefits of the projects, which will cost taxpayers £18 million.

The Mayor suggested that the calls had an 'electoral timetable', rather than being the result of any genuine concerns:

"The Deloitte report found nothing to criticise - this seems to be part of an undermining campaign by the assembly. My only concern was about the Rich Mix project. I have made the decision that if the LDA fund a project, it will have LDA project management, which should avoid another Rich Mix experience."

Mr Livingstone was backed by Labour member John Biggs, who accused the committee of "an ambush wrapped in senior consultancy."

Doocey defended the audit proposal, saying "This is not an election ploy – we had no choice but to investigate, and we were advised that it had to be done before purda."

Pre-election transport promises were also high on the agenda as Livingstone pledged to push for former Waterloo international platforms to be reopened for suburban services as soon as possible, and outlined projected rail capacity increases of 30 per cent on Thameslink and 50 per cent on Silverlink services by 2012.

He highlighted cuts to bus fares and the freezing of tube fares in his 2008 fares package, claiming that this has been made possible by record passenger numbers over the past year. He denied being motivated by the election timetable and emphasised his record on fares:

"Over eight years, we've seen a reduction in bus and virtual freeze in tube fares. I should have the Nobel prize for cutting and freezing travel prices," he said.

The cuts will not affect the prices of travelcards – the most popular ticket type among Londoners - which have to be agreed with train companies.

The Mayor also repeated his opposition to Heathrow's planned third runway, pledging to lend his weight to local authorities' challenges to the scheme.

"I will go all the way to Europe on the questions of noise and atmospheric pollution," he said.

He suggested that the pressures on the airport could be relieved by withdrawing Heathrow's short-haul flights - to which the new high-speed international rail services provide an alternative - and applauded similar moves in France.

"The fact that Heathrow is operating at 98 per cent capacity compared with 70 per cent in other airports is not down to business travel, but short haul flights. They are a luxury the world can no longer afford," he said.

/ ends