LIVE LINK

But the opportunity of any attempt to revive the South Bank will depend largely on the cleverness with which it can be linked to the existing West End. The links must seem inevitable and intriguing. For example, Hungerford bridge, the present foot route to the Festival Hall, is today as dismal and uninviting as it could be—a bleak outlook on the side of a railway bridge, to assure that two people can scarcely pass. But this bridge is in an important strategic position, for it points straight to the heart of the West End, at Leicester Square and Piccadilly Circus. The present structure, an anachronism anyway, should be replaced in such a way as to offer a direct pedestrian link between the Strand, South Bank riverside, and Waterloo station. Broad and level with shops, cafes and pubs, it should be a street crossing the river, and, with a restaurant in the middle giving splendid views up and down river, it could be planned against the weather and its form would depend on the transport needs (A or B show) to dispose two routes, with and without the railway). Charing Cross station will be moved to South Bank, then a traverse bridge would be incorporated in the bridge for rapid crossing, with wide footpaths for easy leisurely walking. Such a broad high-level connection, together with the terraces of the proposed Opera House, will help to break the emotionally impassible barrier created by the Shell complex. But the bridge structure must not be so bulky as to dwarf the important river views in Parliament and St. Paul's.

SOUTH BANK RIVERSIDE

Here is the chance to give London a real waterfront, something missing for the last 500 years. However, south of Westminster Bridge the rebuilding of St. Thomas's Hospital needs careful thinking. The existing buildings have a fine elevation and present a quiet and dignified frontage of repetitive form and mass to the river. They are also good cross-river neighbours to the Houses of Parliament. But the design for the new hospital suggests an inhuman, colourless box too thick on both floors and in consequence the sheer bulk of building right on the riverside is likely to overpower the Palace of Westminster opposite. North of Westminster Bridge, the stretch which most concerns us here, the danger is that having rightly kept the roads away from the river, caller on the Victoria Embankment opposite, and so made a traffic-free riverside walk possible, the GLC will end up by making it all too polite; just chunks of building standing well back from an over-wide promenade. This has happened already between Westminster and Waterloo bridges and it looks as though the same treatment may be intended right up to Blackfriars. This must not happen. Today, when you come down from Westminster Bridge, the heart-stirring domes of the proximities of Oxford Street is like a supermarket annealed—on top anywhere. But no matter if that comes later as it did in 1935 when the great space stood bare, vacant ever since, was filled with people and gay with lights. Today it is just a respectable oversize promenade. This is the site of the National Theatre and Opera House and Denys Lasdun's design for them suggests a brilliant solution to a difficult problem. Faced with buildings directly in front of Shell, what do you do? Winter, instead of trying to compete with the great wall-like office cliffs and tower, has used them as foil to his multi-terraced composition, which has a strong and lively façade to the river (see page 76). The Opera House has been shelved but is an essential part of the design, for as Kronenbourg the theatre will not work without its mirror stage. But the river front itself needs more interest than the present functional wall and this might be provided by a large entertainment pier and boat station running through beneath Hungerford Bridge and along in front of the Festival Hall. Placed directly opposite Charing Cross, the stage needs to be as tall as the 20-storey building. Under Hungerford Bridge you come out in front of the Royal Festival Hall and the new National Hall and Art Gallery which are new buildings. They are impressive buildings well built by a term on massive columns and the ramps and steps are bold and imaginative. But still the promenade runs, wide as a race track, in front of them and by now you

South Bank view: seen from the Victoria Embankment in front of Somerset House.