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Editorial

If you think you have missed an issue of this newsletter, the answer is you have not. No edition was produced in February due to pressure of other work.

Even this edition is smaller than normal simply due to lack of news. No big pronouncements coming out of City Hall about new transport initiatives so it seems the initial impetus for change after Boris Johnson took over as Mayor is being ground down, or perhaps taking time to mature into actual plans. Let us hope it is the latter.

But this edition does cover some interesting articles on “shared space” and the Aldgate traffic management scheme.

Roger Lawson
Editor

Contentious “Shared Space”



“Shared Space” schemes are now “a la mode” in traffic engineering circles. The term applies to road engineering schemes where there is little or no demarcation between different types of road users so pedestrians and cyclists are mixed up with car users and other motorised vehicles. Barriers are removed, kerbs may disappear altogether and it’s basically a “free for all”.

It is claimed that such schemes reduce road accidents because drivers perceive the road differently and take more care. Generally it seems to introduce a more “relaxed” atmosphere and less contention between different users of the road.

It is worth stating that your editor is not opposed to these schemes in principle and indeed thinks that it might be a good idea to look at developing one in his local neighbourhood for Chislehurst High Street. But they are possibly being misused and placed in inappropriate locations.

A good example of their misuse is the scheme in Sloane Square, Kensington. Here the kerbs have been removed and zebra crossings taken out. The end result is that people can now walk out of the dark underground station into bright light and into the roadway without even realising that they are in a road with vehicles on it at all.

The pavement and road surface have been flattened so the only hint of a roadway is a slight change in the surface texture. Blind people find this positively dangerous and it is obvious when observing people who are unfamiliar with the area that they simply do not realise they are walking into a roadway and mixing with vehicular traffic.

A demonstration was held recently by local residents, supported by the ABD and other groups. And some photographs of this and the scene are given above and below.



This is surely simply a badly designed scheme which is positively dangerous? But the same borough is also introducing another such scheme onto Exhibition Road at the unbelievable cost of over £13 million (that's not a misprint – yes thirteen million which is being provided mainly by TfL). In this case it will be imposed on a main “A” road where traffic volumes are enormously high.

It could well result in the worst possible scenario where through traffic is frustrated by the delays imposed on them, and pedestrians do not realise the dangers imposed by the speed and volume of traffic.

Memorial Flowers



Dead flowers recording the position of a fatal accident are a common feature on our roads, and seem to be particularly prevalent in my local London Borough of Bromley. They don't just stay

there for a few weeks but sometimes for years (as the ones above on Bromley Road in Chislehurst have done). Indeed some local councils do specifically remove them after 6 weeks.

These “withering” tributes or roadside shrines are surely an eyesore and at best are a distraction for road users. Would it not make sense to encourage some other form of remembrance? Why not introduce a scheme where the council would plant a shrub or perhaps bulbs that would mark the spot without ostentation. This would be a reminder of life, not death, and surely be more acceptable to the general public.

Specs 3 Cameras

A new generation of average speed cameras named Specs3 is about to receive Home Office approval. These cameras can be used to enforce 20 mph zones because they can work out the average speed from any entry to any exit point on a local network, including taking account of changes in lane.

A “Scrutiny Panel” of the London Borough of Ealing has already called for their use to enforce 20 mph zones on a trial basis. The argument is that they may be an alternative to the use of “self enforcing” road engineering measures, such as speed humps, which everyone hates.

(Editor: I may hate speed humps but I also hate this invasion of one's privacy even more and the erosion of the assumption that drivers should drive at appropriate speeds for the road conditions. Have you ever tried to consistently drive at under 20 mph even in 20 mph zones? It's simply impractical to do so particularly with current speedometer accuracy.. The end result of using this system would be yet more millions of speeding fines issued to unsuspecting and essentially innocent motorists – at least innocent of any moral crime).

There are also proposals afoot to introduce a general 50 mph speed limit on single carriageway roads, instead of the current default of 60mph, again enforced by these same cameras.

Letters

Here's a letter from Harvey Manchester on a topical issue. Your editor has noticed the appalling results of the Aldgate traffic scheme where long traffic queues are now a regular occurrence on all the approach roads, and traffic almost stationary, whereas before the junction worked well. It was certainly an area that needed some improvement but removal of the gyratory system has created a traffic nightmare.

"No doubt as London coordinator for the ABD, you are somewhat overwhelmed with issues to deal with. However, I hope to bring a couple of things to your attention, plus share some very concerning issues I found online:

Redevelopment of Aldgate - the Aldgate gyratory is being redeveloped to make all traffic that previously flowed around an effective roundabout system squeeze through a new system with approximately half the space of the previous scheme, causing significant congestion. This is as a result of Ken Livingstone's 'public spaces' initiative which had the good natured intention of claiming additional public spaces (one half of the former roundabout has now been closed off to traffic). Tower Hamlets council have posted various background documents on the scheme, none of which seem to show any consideration for road traffic volumes in its objectives, despite this being a very important North / South / East / West traffic interchange.

So whilst the intention was to improve the quality of life for locals (which could have been achieved in a number of ways without necessarily undertaking the current plan), the result has actually been to significantly worsen road transport links with the actual effect of significantly increasing congestion and further cutting off other areas of East London (supposedly a development area) and reducing access for public services vehicles and taxis (it can be bad enough trying to get a taxi East as it is!).

The redevelopment of the public space does not actually seem to be that much of a priority to those behind the scheme - the work on this is yet to commence (despite the road works having been under way for over 8 months now)! I assume that it is too late to do much about this, but if any publicity can be raised regarding the issues caused by this scheme and the general approach of the powers that be, I would not complain at all. I emailed TFL to point out the issues caused and received an email back saying that the additional congestion was caused by surrounding works! This is plainly ridiculous.

In reading around this subject, I came across some very concerning online statements which are relevant to this development, but also of general interest to anyone interested in the objectives of those responsible for management of roads in London:

Statement by Chris Connor, TfL's Director, Road Network Management speaking at Streets and Surface Transport Sub-committee Tuesday 26 September 2006:

http://www.londontravelwatch.org.uk/get_document.php?id=2632

"How worried was TfL, about increased congestion on the TLRN? Across the country, there was concern at increasing congestion. In London, however, TfL was not so concerned because people were beginning to realise that driving in London was not sustainable, and that there was a physical restraint on the capacity of the TLRN."

This seems a rather interesting statement given various purported 'attempts' to reduce congestion by the former Mayor and TFL with

schemes such as the Congestion Charge - so is this really just a means of raising revenue if they are not concerned by congestion?

A statement in relation to the Aldgate works is as follows - not sure how many actual powered road users they have spoken to - I assume none!:

<http://www.tfl.gov.uk/corporate/media/newscentre/archive/8195.aspx>

"Dana Skelley, TfL's Interim Director of Road Network Management, said: 'The changes we are making to the Aldgate gyratory system have been welcomed by all of the road users we've spoken to, particularly cyclists.'"

News Snapshots

Sundry news in the last few weeks that is worth a mention is as follows:

+ Income from the London Congestion Charge is expected to be £37m lower this year than originally forecast. Traffic volumes are noticeably lower due to the recession and people are taking more care to avoid accidentally paying penalty fines. The Mayor has yet to announce details of proposed changes to the system which might make it more "user friendly" but also reduce income even further.

+ One of our readers reported having her car towed away after parking on a single yellow line in Hackney. Even more surprising is the fact that this took place at about 7.00 pm when most single yellow lines in London cease at 6.30 pm. It seems Hackney thinks they should continue until midnight and the severity of the offence is so extreme that you should be towed. Yet another example of unreasonable and inconsistent parking enforcement policies operated by one individual local London borough. Readers should make sure they always check the signs that indicate the exact times of permitted parking when parking on a single yellow line.

+ Cyclists in the London Borough of Islington are becoming increasingly disrespectful of traffic laws according to evidence given by "Living Streets" (the old Pedestrians Association). They cycle on pavements, through red lights, ignore no entry signs and "verbal abuse" is the result if you remonstrate with them. Editor: we have

reported this in the past as well in other parts of London but the police take little action.

+ TfL expects to announce a possible short list of candidates for a new Thames crossing in East London by June. This would replace the now defunct "Thames Gateway Bridge" proposal.

+ Mayor Johnson has scrapped plans to extend the Low Emission Zone (LEZ) to Transit sized vans, ie. LGVs.

+ Ealing Council and TfL are apparently considering using "flashing amber" signals as a replacement for traffic lights, at least in off-peak hours. However they would need DfT approval. Such signals are used in other countries and indicate "proceed with caution" at junctions.

+ Both TfL and Boris Johnson got a lot of flak when it snowed heavily this winter, resulting in all London buses being withdrawn on the worst day – it seems they could not get safely out of their depots because nobody had gritted the relevant access roads. Boris ended up defending his own organisation rather surprisingly. (*Editor: it did not stop me getting to work in my new office in Chislehurst – I walked, but I think it might have been safer to drive as the roads were clear when the pavements were covered in snow and ice.*)

+ Boris Johnson got fined £60 for accidentally failing to pay the London Congestion Charge in January. He described the system as "wretched" and "crazy" as a result – he also said "I got done by my own system and forgot to pay and then bing! I got the £60 fine." No doubt many other people know exactly how he feels, and it may lead to reform of the system to introduce an "account-based" system. (*Editor: that will of course undermine the economics of this lunatic financial arrangement even more and hopefully lead to its rapid demise.*)

+ The London Borough of Richmond, not content with introducing a carbon emissions related permit parking scheme, is planning to introduce a similar arrangement for on-street meter parking and council car parks. It is not exactly clear how this will work, but it looks another sure way to make the Liberal Democrats unelectable at the next local elections in the borough.

Contact Information

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About The Association of British Drivers (ABD)

The ABD is the leading independent organisation which represents the interests of private motorists in the United Kingdom. We campaign to protect the rights of individual road users and believe that road transport is a beneficial and essential element in the UK transport infrastructure. We oppose excessive taxation of motorists and are against tolls and road usage charging. We also campaign for more enlightened road safety policies. The Association is a "not for profit" voluntary organisation which is financially supported primarily by its individual members. More information on the ABD is available from our web site at www.abd.org.uk

Note that the ABD maintains a list of members who are familiar with individual London boroughs and may be able to help with information on local issues in those boroughs. The current list is below. If any members would like to take responsibility for any boroughs and report back on local transport issues so we can monitor them then please let me know. Roger Lawson

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