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Editorial

This edition has been somewhat delayed because your editor had to spend a month in hospital. But we have some detailed analysis of the Mayor's Transport Strategy document which otherwise got little media coverage when released a few weeks ago. This is a very important document as it sets the framework for London's transport system over the next few years. So don't forget to respond to the public consultation (see later) which you need to do by January 12th. If you manage to read the whole document, we would be glad to publish any letters on the subject.

The ABD's official response to the consultation will be put on our web site as soon as possible, but the more individual responses the better. In summary I would call it yet another missed opportunity to tackle London transport problems, but see what you think.

Best wishes for the New Year, and I hope you had an enjoyable Xmas.

*Roger Lawson
Editor*

Mayor's Transport Strategy



As heralded in our last edition, Boris Johnson has now published his London Transport Strategy document.

See <http://mts.tfl.gov.uk/default.aspx> if you want to read the full 300 pages, or there is a "Quick Summary" document if you don't have the time, although that is more of a PR exercise than a clear summary. The following attempts to explain the key aspects of what is a complex and muddled plan which appears to try to be all things to all people, i.e. anyone of any political persuasion may find some good things in it, and the bad things tend to be glossed over.

Infrastructure and New Road Building

There is clearly major expenditure planned on public transport projects such as Crossrail, extensions to the DLR and underground improvements. There is a commitment to new East London river crossings (but don't hold your breath waiting for them). Thankfully the Mayor's predecessor's plans for trams seem to be dead and buried.

There is clear statement of support for new road building where it can be justified on economic grounds and does not have adverse environmental impact – this is a step forward from the past regime where all new road building was pretty well ruled out.

For example, for Bromley residents there is a suggestion that the A21 will be widened so as to improve the link from the M25 to the town centre. So it shows that the Mayor seems to at least have some commitment to more local democratic input into transport budgets.

Road Pricing

When first published, some commentators such as the London Evening Standard suggested that the plan was a charter for road charging schemes. But it is not as clear cut as that. The Mayor's Transport Advisor, Kulveer Ranger immediately responded saying there was "absolutely no scheme" to introduce London-wide congestion charging. But he did say that road user charging would be considered if other measures failed to have the expected effect and note that his wording does not rule out local schemes.

There are two problems that the Mayor faces. Firstly the environmental problem that London is in breach of EU air quality standards and faces large fines if it does not improve. Secondly road congestion is forecast to get worse due to increased population (although your editor thinks this is a mirage as traffic congestion tends to be self regulating). The Mayor is proposing a number of measures such as electric vehicles to reduce air pollution, promoting cycling to get people out of vehicles, and traffic management measures to reduce congestion, but they may not have as much impact as hoped – indeed it is difficult to see how air pollution will fall as fast as required unless there are much tougher policies on taxis, buses, HGVs and LGVs.

The Mayor seems to be living more on hope than depending on a practical plan. But if you oppose all forms of road pricing and congestion charging, then make sure you respond to the specific question on the response form (where it is now called euphemistically "demand management") – see later for how to respond.

Parking

The Mayor supports emission based parking policies as epitomised by the Permit parking scheme in Richmond which generated such fierce opposition. Parking provision for new office developments in outer London are relaxed slightly but residential development provision is still totally inadequate (for example, 1 to 1.5 spaces for a 3 bedroom property).

Heathrow

The Mayor has reiterated his opposition to expansion of Heathrow Airport. He continues to promote the idea of a new airport in the Thames Estuary.

Cycling

One of the big ideas promoted in the document is the encouragement of cycling with a range of measures including "cycle superhighways" (more on these in a later article). In total he plans to increase cycle use four-fold which would be a major achievement.

Environmental

Apart from the poor quality air problem (which surely most Londoner's would like to see improved), the Mayor also has the problem of meeting the "Climate Change" policies imposed by the Government. This involves very substantial reductions in CO2 emissions. Even with all the measures proposed, such as substantial numbers of electric vehicles, generally improved vehicle efficiency and more cycling, it seems very unlikely that the Mayor can meet his target for reducing transport CO2 emissions. (Editor: as a "climate change" sceptic, wasting enormous resources on trying to meet pointless CO2 targets would not have my support anyway).

Budgets

One of the most astonishing things about this plan is that there are no costs attached to any of these proposals. Transport for London (TfL) is a major business when looked at in commercial terms, with a massive budget. They also massively subsidise London Buses and control London Underground (the problems of the PFI maintenance contracts where one company went bust and had to be taken over by TfL, and the other has been subject to a massive contract dispute which is going to cost TfL much more than expected, is a story by itself). What business organisation would ever put forward a plan with no budgets attached to it? Neither is there any information on what costs these proposals might impose on individuals or businesses who reside in London.

Bus Services and Fare Rises

Mr Johnson has a massive hole in his budget due to the planned infrastructure commitments, his election promises to expand the “Freedom Pass” for residents (whose costs have been escalating anyway as the population ages), the financial recklessness of his predecessor, and his commitment to other plans. How is he going to pay for it?

One way apparently is to reduce the bus subsidy by reducing bus services – in total by 16 million miles of bus journeys per year.

In addition bus fares will rise by 12.7%. As Boris Johnson himself said “*We have to be realistic and for the taxpayers’ subsidy of the capital’s bus services to leap from £24m in 2000 to £602m this year is simply not sustainable in these tough economic times.*”. Well said Mr Johnson is all your editor wishes to comment on this, but it is not totally clear how much will be saved by these changes. Tube fares will also rise.

Western Extension of the Congestion Charge

The Mayor continues to support removal of the Western Extension of the London Congestion Charge. Perhaps you thought you had already responded to a consultation on this subject (which showed strong public support for doing so)? No doubt you did, but there is yet another consultation on this issue in the response to the Mayor Transport Strategy. You should make sure you respond to the relevant question appropriately to ensure that this is not in doubt.

How to Respond

Responses to the consultation on the London Transport Strategy must be in by the 12th January so do not delay.

An online response form, which only takes a few minutes to complete is available in a link from <http://mts.tfl.gov.uk/default.aspx> . Or you can send an email to mts@london.gov.uk . Alternatively simply write to Mayor of London Transport Strategy, PO Box 65064, London SE1P 5GE

Brian Mooney’s Comments



Here are some comments on the Mayor’s Transport Strategy from ABD activist Brian Mooney, who takes a definite stance of opposition to many of its aspects:

Boris Johnson’s draft ‘Mayor’s Transport Strategy’ (MTS) isn’t just important for London – remember that London is the test-bed for anti-motorist measures that our masters wish to roll out elsewhere.

Transport for London (TFL) is putting out a biased consultation leaflet. Those who get past the glossy pictures have a three page form to fill in, and a key question asks the reader if they’ll support ‘fair’ demand management?

‘Demand management’ is of course bureaucrat-speak for taxing drivers off the road. And there’s nothing ‘fair’ about adding to the fuel duty, VAT and VED we pay!

We’ve seen a couple of posters in central London tube stations, but the consultation seems to be very low key. Perhaps the hope is that drivers won’t notice it, and the relatively small number of PC and anti-motorist groups who respond will have a walkover? Sorry, Boris – but ABD has got other ideas.

There is also a proposal to develop ‘cycle superhighways’. At first somebody joked if this meant ‘pavements’, but checking with TFL, we found that they will span existing cycle lanes, bus lanes and reallocated road space. Two out of a planned twelve will be trialled.

ABD has nothing against cyclists (at least those who respect other road users) and was pleased when Boris seemed to end Red Ken’s ‘hierarchy’ where some road users were seen more equal than others (and drivers lowest of the low).

But it’s pushing credibility to think that a large proportion of drivers will simply swap four wheels for two and congestion will vanish? Local Transport Today felt that Boris would face a driver backlash for slowing down the roads.

TFL is reported as intending to spend £140m on 'promoting cycling' – the latest cover for driver-bashing. Their hyped 'Cycle Fridays' were judged an expensive flop, after they only tempted 436 people to try cycling into the City.

Boris is also tempting a backlash as he unwisely promotes CO2-based parking charges. 92% of Richmond residents opposed their council's scheme, according to a local Tory Councillor, Pamela Fleming. Shopkeepers collected a petition with over 3,000 signatures, only to be ignored.



YOUR MONEY OR YOUR WAY OF LIFE?

Amongst Boris's other proposals are:

- restricting car access in residential areas to slow traffic and give undue cyclist priority.
- road pricing to meet the CO2 emission reduction targets.
- unspecified charges to provide new facilities like bridges and river crossings.
- encouraging companies to take up speed limiters (ISA, 'Intelligent Speed Adapters').
- Our write-up of the worst proposals is on www.fairdealabd.org.uk/londonmts.htm



"SCRAP THE EXTORTION ZONE"
 - slogan from the successful 2008 campaign by ABD London

Fulham councillor Nick Botterill criticised delays in removing the unwanted Western Extension Zone of the C-Charge. Boris's transport adviser Kulveer Ranger confirmed that if the consultation backs it, the WEZ will be removed.

However, residents suspect that TFL doesn't want to lose the cash - so we will need to fight for TFL to respect last year's overwhelming call for the WEZ to be scrapped.

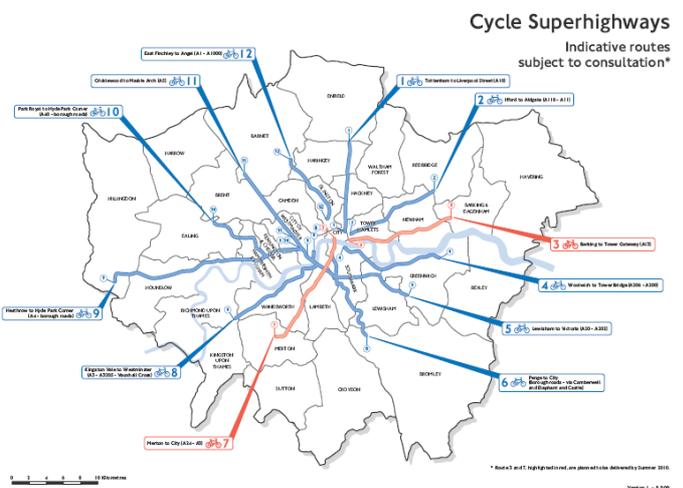
MAKING IT EASY TO RESPOND

You can respond as an individual before 12th January 2010 – we have made it easy for those who have less time by featuring a number of standard letters that can readily be adapted.

See www.fairdealabd.org.uk/campaign.htm - and please do ask us for any help you may need.

You don't have to write much, but the important thing is to write.....it's numbers that count.

Cycle Superhighways & Hire Scheme



What are "cycle superhighways?" you may well ask. They are a proposed network of arterial routes that will enable cyclists to get into central London quickly (see map above). They will be clearly delineated by blue road surfaces and will be either segregated off-carriageway routes, share bus lanes or share roads without much traffic. Continuity will be improved on these routes to reduce "stop/start" conditions and hence encourage commuting by cycle.

Will they involve taking road space from other road users, or from pedestrians? It is not exactly clear but that certainly is not ruled out.

The first two trial routes will open in summer 2010. These will be the South Wimbledon to City route and the Barking to Tower Hill route. More information is present at: www.tfl.gov.uk/roadusers/cycling/11901.aspx

Cycle Hire Scheme

Another encouragement to cycling will be a public cycle hire scheme also planned to come in during 2010. You should be able to pick up a cycle from a number of hire points and drop it off when you no longer need it. Details are sketchy as yet, but see www.tfl.gov.uk/roadusers/cycling/12444.aspx for more information. Regrettably it seems unlikely to be of much relevance to outer London boroughs.

This scheme would no doubt be similar to the Velib scheme that operates in Paris. Unfortunately this scheme had to be bailed out by local taxpayers after 8,000 of the sturdy, grey cycles were stolen and 18,000 damaged beyond repair.

The cost of running the London scheme for 6 years is expected to be about £170 million and the start-up costs about £70 million. Plans are already well advanced it seems with contracts having been signed. Again it seems that Londoners are being expected to make decisions on proposals without full financial information as to the likely costs (and the liabilities that might fall on the taxpayer if it is unsuccessful).

Congestion Tax Changes



The Mayor has announced an overhaul of the London Congestion Charge (or tax as it should be called). There will be an automated "account" system so you will be able to avoid paying accidental fines because you forgot to pay if you have set up an account in advance. Fines currently generate a major proportion of revenue from this system, and therefore this will have major benefits to users.

However the daily charge will rise to £9 per day for payments via the account system, and to £10 for others, to take account of the revenue that will be lost from this change.

(Editor: it would have been better to scrap it altogether. The justification given for keeping it is the reduction in congestion, but congestion is back to where it was before and there is no evidence that it has made any difference whatsoever to congestion. It's an enormously expensive system that generates almost no contributions to public revenue and should be abolished. Regrettably the previous Mayor stuck Mr Johnson with this system under a long term contract and he would have difficulty getting out of it even if he had the political will to do so).

Roadworks Permit Scheme



We all recognise that road works cause major traffic congestion. In central London, roads get repeatedly dug up, and no sooner has one contractor finished than another turns up to repeat the exercise. Projects such as Crossrail will not make this any better in the next few years, and outer London boroughs have been suffering from major renewals of gas and water mains of late.

New legislation now enables boroughs to operate a permit scheme that enables them to regulate the activities of people who wish to dig up roads.

Eighteen London boroughs have opted to try out such schemes including Bromley and Lewisham, but there are significant costs involved. For example in Bromley it will cost £400,000 a year to operate, but those costs will be more than recovered by charging for permits. Contractors will be encouraged to co-ordinate work and the Boroughs can impose conditions on the work.

For more information see www.tfl.gov.uk/corporate/media/newscentre/13757.aspx

Speed Cameras



Speed cameras of the digital type (Monitron) shown on the left have been popping up all over London in the last two years. They are easy to miss as they are placed at the top of a tall pole and must have caught many people unawares, rather than their visible presence deterring speeders.

Speed cameras in London are operated by The London Safety Camera Partnership (LSCP) which is dominated by the bureaucrats of TfL, has no constitution and holds meetings in secret. They claim to be a road safety initiative designed to reduce speeding and the number of vehicles running red lights in the capital, but they don't produce any evidence as to how effective they are.

The LSCP is a curious entity. It has no written constitution. Why not? It is possible that the LSCP is now in financial crisis and there is certainly a question mark over its future. Does it really serve any useful purpose?

There are now 38 SCPs, covering most police force areas. Until April 2007, local SCPs received a proportion of the income from fines generated by traffic-enforcement cameras, but the well-founded suspicion that the cameras were being used primarily for revenue-raising purposes led the government to abandon this method of funding. Nowadays all local authorities with a responsibility for road safety receive an annual road safety grant not related to the number of penalty notices issued.

The enforcement of traffic laws is primarily the responsibility of the police. So why the need for a "partnership"? Ostensibly the creation of SCPs (a decade ago) was seen as the rectification of a democratic deficit. But one of the "partners" is usually the local magistrates court which rather undermines the requirement for the judiciary to be independent of law enforcement. Traffic enforcement cameras are not popular with motorists, the vast majority of whom see themselves as, and are in fact, law-abiding citizens.

The root cause of motorists' dislike of speed cameras is that they resent the interference with their judgment that the cameras impose. And they suspect that the primary purpose of the camera is to raise revenue.

The creation of the SCPs was seen at the time as a way of deflecting criticism of this type by formalising links between the police and local authorities in respect of the location and operation of safety cameras. The history of the London partnership suggests that this has not been a success.

The LSCP is a secretive body. Take a look at its minutes (available at its website). Many of the most important items are deleted, hidden from public view - for example financial performance monitoring (September 2007), poor quality of camera data (November 2007) and strategic planning (March 2008). LSCP meetings are not open to the public - though no official seems to be able to quote any legislative or regulatory backing for this ban, which is not surprising since the LSCP has never had a constitution. During 2008 there was a concerted effort by local councillors in London to obtain representation on the LSCP, but this was comprehensively thwarted. One elected councillor attends LSCP meetings but has had to sign the Official Secrets Act as a condition of attendance.

In practice, the work of the LSCP is dominated not by the police but by unelected officials from Transport for London. These bureaucrats are no doubt passionate about their work but they (inevitably) bring prejudices to it - mainly a conviction that motorists are predisposed to break the law and are the sole authors of their own misfortunes.

But are they? To talk to TfL you would think that traffic-enforcement cameras are infallible, and that their technology is perfect. Well, they're not and it isn't. No technology is perfect. There are a number of well-publicised instances of cameras giving false readings. What would you do if you received a Notice of Intended Prosecution alleging that you had been snapped by a camera driving over the legal speed limit? The first thing you should do is to demand sight of the relevant calibration certificate.

To their credit, a number of SCPs actually post these on their websites. But not the LSCP. Privately TfL admits that traffic-enforcement cameras can malfunction, but it is adamant that it is not going to advertise the fact, and points instead to the new generation of average-speed cameras whose readings they insist are irrefutable. Well, they aren't. For instance, a minute misalignment of the gantry on which banks of average-speed cameras are mounted can result in the transmission of compromised data.

The LSCP is presently in a state of financial crisis. TfL has had to cut its annual budget from £5.8m to £3m for 2009-10. So there will have to be a much more focused prioritisation in its work. Earlier this year Swindon became the first English local authority to scrap all its fixed speed cameras – it will divert the money saved thereby to road safety awareness schemes and friendly, vehicle-activated signs, while Wiltshire police will continue to operate mobile units.

Is it too much to expect TfL to do the sensible thing and follow suit?

Postscript: over 300,000 NIPS were issued in London in 2008/2009 but this may fall to around 80,000 notices as TfL have cut funding by about £2.8 million and 45 staff have been removed. Presumably it will be pure luck whether you get a ticket or not as the number of cameras shows no sign of being reduced.

News Snapshots

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

+ The delays at the Dartford Crossing caused by the toll booths have been the subject of numerous complaints. The Department for Transport have argued that they caused no delays but it was simply the volume of traffic. Recently this was clearly disproved when a power failure in the area caused the tolls to be suspended. Traffic flowed much more freely than normal. As most intelligent people have said, these tolls are about collecting money from motorists, who were promised a free crossing

when the bridge had been paid for (which it has been). The Government has also announced it is planning to sell off the Dartford Crossing to raise funds to fill the yawning hole in Government budgets which would of course ensure the charges stay in perpetuity because no private sector owner would give them up without enormous compensation. But you'll no doubt soon be getting an opportunity to show your views on politicians and their promises at the forthcoming general election.

+ The organisation that supplies guide dogs to disabled people (see www.guidedogs.org.uk) have come out strongly against "shared space" schemes. They are threatening legal action and even went to the expense of a full page advert calling on people to "Say No to Shared Streets" in Private Eye.

+ The Oxford Circus diagonal pedestrian crossing and associate pavement changes opened recently. Cost was about £5 million, but no comments received to date. Let us know if you have any.

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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