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Editorial

You will notice that we have adopted a new delivery mechanism for this newsletter for this edition. Instead of sending you a pdf document via email, we simply send you a link to the relevant page on our web site from which you can download or print it. At least that applies to everyone except those still receiving paper copies via post – please advise us of an email address if possible in that case. We are also using an email delivery service called Constant Contact which will ensure more reliable delivery and make it easier to subscribe, or un-subscribe – just in case you get fed up with receiving these newsletters. Please let us know if you have any difficulties with this new system.

All past newsletters can be obtained from our web site at www.freedomfordrivers.org/Newsletters.htm in case you happen to miss any (or have not told us of changes to your email address in which case the notification of new ones will disappear into the ether).

Roger Lawson, Editor

Mayor's Transport Strategy



Our last few editions covered the Mayor of London's proposed Transport Strategy, and the ABD's response to the associated public consultation.

Bromley Council did an extended response to the consultation which is well worth reading – it can be seen in full at:

<http://sharepoint.bromley.gov.uk/Public%20Docs/ENV%20PH%20050110%20item%204%20Appendix%20-%20revised.doc> . A brief summary of some of the points it makes are as follows:

- They question the impact of the forecast growth of London, and hence in transport usage. They suggest that the expectation that there will be the same or fewer car trips in 2031 is somewhat optimistic because it implies more “modal shift” than we have seen in the past (but see the later article in this newsletter).
- They welcome the increased emphasis on outer London transport links and regional centres, but question whether there is sufficient provision in the plan for orbital public transport.
- They note the emphasis on the fuel efficiency of cars but question how this can be achieved in outer London (Boris's emphasis on electric cars might not prove economic or practical to the average outer London resident). It says “we would strongly oppose any suggestion that might result in a blanket Low Emission Zone type of restriction on private cars in Outer London”.
- They question the proposal to restrict car access to local residential neighbourhoods and suggest this is “several steps too far”.
- They highlight the issue of increased “rail-heading” (commuter parking near or at stations), and the intrusive and indeed obstructive parking that can result.

This is an increasing problem in Bromley in recent years where people who live in remoter parts of Kent drive into outer London to complete their journey via rail instead of commuting the whole way by train. The fact that rail fares have gone up faster than car running costs has exacerbated this problem. Their solution is more “park & rides” and possible “double-decking” of station car parks (for example at Orpington).

- They support the Mayor’s enthusiasm for cycling and walking but question whether the proposed cycle hire scheme will work in outer London and wish to see the results of experiments with cycling in the contra-direction down one-way streets before supporting that.

- They don’t like the idea of “environmentally based” parking charges being imposed on all boroughs and suggest this should be left to local boroughs to decide. Indeed more local decision making instead of a prescript from the centre is a theme that runs through many of the responses.

- They are opposed to managing the demand for travel by the use of parking restrictions where there is adequate space and no impact on highway capacity. Likewise they oppose parking standards for new developments that are over restrictive. Specifically they object to the current PTAL (Public Transport Accessibility Levels). They say “PTALS fail to recognise that the destinations of those living in outer London are many, varied and frequently lack the credible public transport options taken for granted in more central Locations”. They are also opposed to maximum parking standards for housing, and believe that minimum parking standards should be used.

- They are clearly opposed to road user charging and “implore the Mayor to discard such overt anti-car measures from his evolving MTS”.

(Editor: in general, this submission is to be applauded in its clarity and content, even if some of the details may not please everyone. But we will have to wait and see whether these and other submissions to the consultation are taken into account).

Another Response

The Borough of Kensington & Chelsea has questioned the value of bus lanes in central London according to an article in LTT. In it’s response to the Mayor’s Transport Strategy it said “We are sceptical about whether bus lanes make best use of the road space in the narrow carriageway conditions prevalent in Central London”. They are also opposed to the use of CCTV to enforce bus lanes. There are only two bus lanes on the borough’s roads although they have no current plans to remove them. They also questioned whether the proposed “cycle super-highways” were of value in improving the attractiveness of cycling more widely.

Climate Change Strategy and FOI



The Mayor of London has also launched a web site to collect ideas on how to adapt to climate change. Don’t forget to submit your own ideas such as “wear clothes you can take off, or put on, so you maintain an equable temperature”. See www.london.gov.uk/climatechange .

(Editor: Most of the suggestions are pretty lunatic and you can actually see the number of votes for and against if you vote on them – many of them have negative votes overall.. Of course the site assumes there is such a thing as “climate change”, or at least that it is an abnormal phenomenon in the modern era. After one of the coldest winters in living memory, it seems odd that people should still think that there is any consistent change in our climate. Even the concept that there is more “variability” in the climate is statistically unproven – the longer one lives, the more extreme events one is likely to encounter. Yes your editor has to admit to being one of those “climate change sceptics”).

FOI Requests

Perhaps somebody should submit a Freedom of Information Request to find out how much this site cost to develop and maintain. A useful site for such requests is www.whatdotheyknow.com which enables you to easily submit such requests, and review others that people have submitted.

Budget Cuts

According to a report in the newsletter of the London Forum, Boris Johnson wants to save £5bn in the Transport for London (TFL) budget to enable him to freeze the GLA Precept (the amount contributed by the local boroughs). Planned cuts include:

- Saving £570m by cutting 1,000 jobs at London Underground.
- Saving £400m by switching to more efficient computer systems.
- Cutting £185m by renegotiating the Oyster contract and £240m from contracts related to congestion charging and the low emission zone.
- Reducing £200m from the marketing and press budgets.
- Saving £130m by moving central London based staff to cheaper locations, and £220m on consultants fees.

(Editors comment: some of these numbers are quite astonishing in size, and just shows how profligate was the previous Mayor in spending our money).

West End Parking



Westminster City Council is planning to start charging for parking on its streets in the evenings. Parking on single yellow lines would be banned and people would be forced to pay at parking meters until midnight.

The main motivation behind this appears to be to raise revenue for the council. It is alleged that they have a £22 million hole in their budget which they plan to fill mainly by raising parking charges.

It is of course illegal (as supported by a previous legal precedent set by a case involving Camden council) to use parking charges as a general revenue raising measure. Westminster seems to have overlooked this problem. Is there any need for these changes to regulate parking? Well your editor just happened to drive in for a dinner on one recent Saturday night and parked just off Bond Street. There was no obvious problem with doing so, and indeed it seemed a lot less of a problem in terms of finding a parking space that it used to be some years ago.

Numerous local businesses such as restaurants have already objected to these ideas it seems. Lord Bradford, chairman of the Restaurant Association was reported by the London Evening Standard as saying “*The madmen have taken over the asylum at Westminster Council. This would be ruinous to many businesses in the area.*”

If you wish to make a representation on this matter, we suggest you write to Councillor Colin Barrow, Leader, Westminster City Council, 64 Victoria St, London, SW1E 6QP, as the ABD has done.

One peculiarity about parking in Westminster is that since the introduction of the Congestion Charge and “Pay by Phone” parking, many parking bays are empty. Increased charges in recent years have probably contributed to the lack of demand. For example, your editor recently noticed that spaces in Waterloo Place, just off Pall Mall, were all empty when a few years ago they would have been fully occupied. Pay by phone parking has discouraged many visitors from using them as they are so difficult to use, particularly for the first time. There seems to be something seriously wrong with the parking policies of Westminster Council which is no doubt resulting in a drop in revenue.

Motorcycle Parking

Westminster Council are also under pressure from motorcyclists after scrapping free parking for motorbikes. There is a very active campaign still running on this, with a recently well attended public demonstration. Many new parking signs erected by the council have been defaced. See www.notobikeparkingtax.com for more information and photographs.

Oxford Circus Pedestrian Crossing



Your editor had the first opportunity to use the new diagonal crossing at Oxford Circus several times recently (as a pedestrian). My

only complaints were that one has to wait a long time for the lights to change and then the crossing often gets blocked by buses or other traffic which you have to walk around. There was no obvious impact on traffic flows from the new arrangement (not that your editor would normally try driving through this junction anyway as Regent Street is one to avoid), and it certainly gives more space for pedestrians generally.

Indeed it seems the number of buses on Oxford Street continues to be an issue (see a typical “bus jam” on Oxford Street above) which TfL are now examining. Although bus trips have been reduced in London already under Boris Johnson’s regime to save money, it seems not to have affected the heavily used routes on Oxford Street much, and unfortunately this is the main east/west route for buses in that part of London.

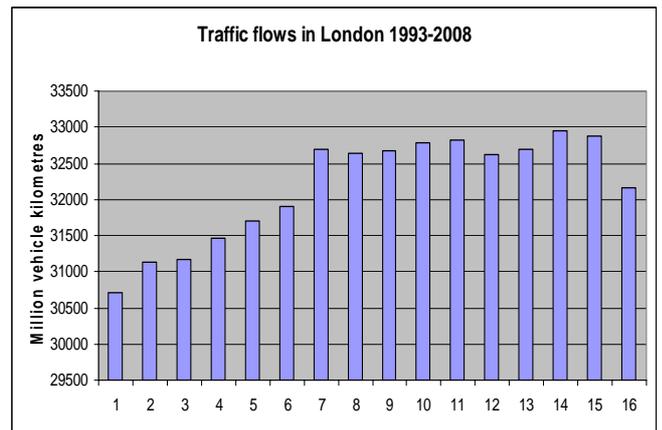
There are also a large number of accidents involving buses on Oxford Street – the narrowed road widths and removal of pedestrian barriers seems to have worsened these statistics. Pedestrians often step off the pavement into the path of buses with serious consequences.

Useful Data and Traffic Flows

A useful new web site is the following: <http://data.london.gov.uk> . It is intended to contain a repository of data about London – in other words lots of useful statistics. For example if you look under “Traffic” you can see some data on traffic flows in all the London boroughs, and compare them with the national figures.

The chart below was generated from the figures for London as a whole for the last 15 years. It shows an increasing trend in the early 1990s, but a plateau in recent years.

Indeed a significant fall in 2008, whereas traffic volumes in the country as a whole were still increasing. The explanations: perhaps simple saturation of many roads, and policies to encourage “modal shift”? Whatever the case, whenever you hear someone saying that traffic volumes will rise in London in the next few years, leading to ultimate gridlock, just give them this data.



Electric Cabs



The traditional London black cab as pictured left is facing major competition for the first time. The

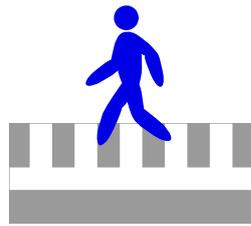
Mercedes Vito taxi was launched in 2008 and has already captured 30% of new sales according to one press report. Eco City Vehicles now plan to launch an electric, zero-emission version (picture below). Trials are commencing although they may not be released for wider use until 2011.



The Vito has a 25-ft turning circle, rear-wheel steering and the new electric version will do 120 miles before a recharge is needed.

(Editor: This is surely a positive development because the diesel emissions, particularly from the traditional older model black cabs, are a major source of pollution. Some people love black cabs, but to my mind they are an archaic design).

Greenwich Town Centre



Greenwich Council has put forward proposals to pedestrianise the town centre. There were a number of options published and comments invited. All of the options

involved closing off the circulatory route around the town centre and introducing two-way traffic on Nelson Road. However some of the options meant lengthy detours for some vehicles and probably problems in positioning of bus stops. It's worth saying though that a couple of the options might actually improve traffic flows, in what are notoriously congested roads. The ABD submitted a response accordingly, but pointed out some of the problems. Our response seemed to be similar to that of the Greenwich Society, the local amenity body.

Unfortunately the council seems to have removed the details of these proposals from their web site. It is likely that they will develop the proposals further and do more consultation before there is any decision on the matter.

20-Mph Zones



The DfT has reversed its previous policy on 20 mph zones, in that they no longer insist that they should have “self-enforcing” traffic calming engineering measures (typically speed humps that most people hate). They suggest signed-only 20-mph limits may be appropriate across wider areas, when they previously indicated that these were not a good idea because they might not be complied with.

Portsmouth has claimed some success for its 20 mph scheme, even though average speeds were only reduced by 1 mph (but a higher reduction was seen on roads that were faster than average beforehand). There are no statistics for any casualty reductions as yet in Portsmouth.

(Editors comments: any figures from Portsmouth, after only a year, are likely to be very questionable because it is conventional traffic engineering wisdom that a three year period is the minimum for comparable statistics. Any changes to a road have a temporary impact on driver perception that wears off over time).

In Abingdon (near Oxford) however, police opposed a proposal to put a 20 mph limit on 24 local roads. They said it was unnecessary and would only reduce average speeds by 2 mph. A spokesman said “*simply putting a different number at the end of a road and relying on enforcement alone to achieve compliance is not the answer*”. He complained about the lack of engineering measures in the proposed scheme.

Labour's Transport Policies

I was reminded recently of the “10-year” Transport Plan launched by the current Government some ten years ago. This was aimed to redirect transport policies in a major way and solve the already perceived inadequacies in the UK transport system. For example, encouraging public transport while limiting new road construction was one of its major themes. Your editor wrote several critical articles on the subject some years ago. As we are coming up to a general election, it is worth looking at how successful this plan turned out to be.

The reminder came in the form of this article published by the Drivers' Alliance, which is reprinted with their permission:

New Realism is the name given to a movement of academic transport theorists who, led by Professor Phil Goodwin, advocate a different direction in transport policy. Their core belief was that congestion could not be relieved by road building but instead demand for road space should be managed through adding cost or difficulty.

The successful 'Predict and provide; policy was out and the new buzz word in Government was 'sustainability'.

Goodwin chaired a panel of advisors that helped John Prescott write the 1998 white paper on transport. This White paper eventually became the Governments £180bn 10 year transport plan which aimed for a;

- 50% increase in public transport use, measured by passenger kilometres
- Congestion reduced below 2000 levels, particularly in large urban areas
- Up to 25 new rapid transit lines in major cities and conurbations, more than doubling high rail use
- Eight of our largest towns and cities to introduce congestion charging schemes and a further 12 to bring in workplace parking levies

On a recent BBC programme a fellow New Realist, Professor David Begg, was forthcoming about what New Realism and the 10 year plan would mean for road users;

"You really have to make it more difficult and expensive to drive. There was a series of measures to incentivize buses priority and take space from cars. The whole thrust of the policy was to make it more attractive to use public transport, walk and cycle and more difficult to drive"

2010 will see the conclusion of the 10 year plan yet you would be hard pressed to find any reference to it in Government circles. Put simply, the plan has missed every one of its targets from increased public transport usage to congestion reduction. Despite this Prescott is bullish about his transport legacy claiming it has succeeded. As David Begg relates, New Realism and the 10 year plan was undone almost from its inception by the fuel duty protests of 2000.

"The fuel duty protest is burned on the memory of people like Gordon Brown... you cannot have a dispassionate conversation with the prime minister on road pricing without memories of that 2000 protest. That's where the backlash came."

Although Prescott and the New Realists ultimately underestimated the strength of opposition to their 10 year plan, they fully understood the contentious nature of their scheme. In a recent Radio 4 programme 'Derailing Transport 2010', Prescott admits that in hindsight his failed Regional Assemblies scheme would have enabled congestion charging to be implemented

"without local councillors having to worry about three year election cycles".

Subsequent events such as the Downing Street road pricing petition and referenda in Edinburgh then Manchester against congestion charges have delivered an unambiguous public rejection of most aspects of the 10 year plan. Despite this, the New Realists are still pushing for the introduction of pay-per-mile road pricing and presumably accept that by necessity, its implementation would have to be forced upon the public through a very undemocratic process.

Given that the chief beneficiaries of the 10 year plan were the public transport companies it is unsurprising that we can find close links between them and the New Realists. In 2005 Professor Begg was made a director of First Group and amongst the most radical of New Realist advocates, the Campaign for Better Transport has acquired charitable status and have received funding by both the Government and public transport operators.

There is however a more fundamental issue. As Begg alluded to, public transport has been given every possible advantage over the last decade with dedicated bus lanes, traffic light priority and government subsidies including cheap subsidised fuel. To that we can add support from government 'spin doctors' demonising the car with negative and unjustified environmental claims while glossing over the environmental failings of public transport. As driving lobby groups were marginalised and all but ignored, public transport funded lobby groups such as the Campaign for Better Transport acquired charitable status and were lavished with public funding.

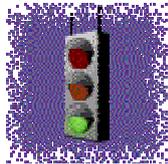
Yet given all these advantages, public transport companies have still failed to provide an attractive alternative to the car.

Surely it is time for the New Realists to accept that the reality of the situation is that public transport never provides an alternative to the car as it is rarely convenient, often uncomfortable and doesn't go where you want.

Not only has Labour's transport plans failed but it has left our road infrastructure underinvested and crumbling, has created congestion through reallocation of road space and has left Britain even further behind our European competitors.

News Snapshots

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



+ According to a report in the London Evening Standard, the Olympics organisers have got the support of Boris Johnson to turn-off some traffic lights during the games so as to speed traffic. They may even be left turned off afterwards. But dedicated games traffic lanes would be kept to a minimum according to an IOC spokesman. Temporary pedestrian bridges over roads may also be used near venues such as Greenwich Park (the location of much on-going opposition to the use of the park for equestrian events incidentally). One peculiar comment by IOC officials was their objective to keep the average speed of cars used to transport athletes and officials to 45 mph – rather odd bearing in mind that most of the proposed roads currently have a 30 mph speed limit.



+ The Liberal Democrats suggest that the US Embassy now owes £40million in Congestion Tax charges. Yes the USA claim it is a tax rather than a charge and hence they should not be paying it. Other embassies have also refused to pay and run up large bills which they show no intention to pay. Boris Johnson is asking the US to pay up, but is also blaming the national Government for failure to pursue it at the highest level. Unfortunately, although he may desperately need the money, his arguments have been somewhat undermined by his previous public comments that it was a tax.

(Editor: I hope the US Embassy holds out against paying. It always was a tax, and an inefficient one at that, imposed on Londoners by the previous car-hating mayor).

+ Brian Mooney has pointed out that there has been no Annual Impacts Monitoring Report from TfL on the Congestion Charge (a.k.a. Tax). The Sixth Annual Report was published in September 2008, but we have seen no Seventh report as yet.

+ According to an article in the Financial Times, written by the "Undercover Economist", cars emit 127g of CO₂ per passenger per kilometre and buses 106g, based on average occupancy. London buses average a mere 13 passengers. Of course the individual figures for particular vehicles vary quite a lot from those numbers so it might be best to use a low emissions car. But the article argued one should look at the marginal cost perhaps, or use the argument that the "buses are taking the journey anyway". The author settled on cycling at the end of the day.

+ The most common cause of fatal cycle accidents in London are left turning vehicles, according to a report from Transport for London (TfL). TfL want the exemption from the fitting of side guards for construction vehicles to be removed, and that additional safety mirrors are fitted. The report also suggested that helmet wearing by cyclists might have prevented some of the fatalities.

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

Contact Information

This Newsletter is published by the London Region of the Association of British Drivers (A.B.D.), PO Box 62, Chislehurst, Kent, BR7 5YB and is distributed free of charge to ABD Members in the London area and to those Members of BBKAG who formerly received the Bromley Borough Roads Action Group newsletter. All material contained herein is Copyright of the A.B.D. or of the authors and may only be reproduced with permission. Any opinions expressed herein are solely those of the author of the article or that of the Editor which do not necessarily represent the official policies of the A.B.D.

A.B.D. London Region Co-ordinator and Editor: Roger Lawson (Tel: 020-8467-2686, fax: 020-8295-0378, Email: roger.lawson@btclick.com). Contact the above for information on the aims and objectives of the A.B.D. or for membership information (membership costs £25.00 per annum if paid by cheque, debit or credit card; or £20.00 if paid by standing order (however there is an additional charge of £5 if you wish to receive the ABD national newsletter on paper rather than electronically). The A.B.D. would be happy to advise or assist anyone who is concerned about any traffic, transport or road safety issues in London. Complimentary subscriptions to this newsletter are available on request to elected politicians or those with a professional interest in transport matters.

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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 keep an eye on local news and advise on local transport issues then please let me know. Roger Lawson

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