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Editorial

This edition is somewhat shorter than normal. This is for a variety of reasons – a limited amount of news, holidays restricting my time, commitment to other business matters and for some other reasons.

It is of course a considerable effort to collect the material and write the articles for the newsletter. If anyone wishes to contribute articles or help in other ways, please let me know.

Having recently passed the age of 65, I can no longer write it as quickly as I used to do. Like a lot of retired people, I have also taken on just as many commitments as I have ever had.

It's worth possibly reflecting that this newsletter (and its predecessor the BBRAG newsletter) has now been produced for 12 years. At least we survived the Livingstone years but his financial legacy is still with us in terms of massive and unnecessary bus subsidies, and a ridiculously ineffective and expensive Congestion Charge tax (see page 2). There are still no sensible plans to improve the London road network while billions of pounds get invested in rail and underground schemes (such as Crossrail and HS2) with very poor cost/benefit justifications. But hopefully this newsletter has highlighted some of the worse insanities over the years.

Roger Lawson, Editor

Barnet CPZ Legal Action



The issue of sharply increased permit parking charges in the London Borough of Barnet was mentioned in our last newsletter.

Many London residents are facing increases in permit parking charges, and it would appear from our analysis of parking charges (see “Profiting from Parking” on this web page: www.freedomfordrivers.org/Parking.htm) that some London councils are already probably breaching the law. Permit parking charges should in essence only be used to cover administrative and enforcement costs, not be a “general revenue” raising measure.

Barnet residents are outraged by Barnet Council's huge increase in the cost of Residents Parking Permits and Visitor's Vouchers. They are so angry that they have decided to take legal action. David Attfield, a Barnet resident and a solicitor himself, has volunteered to go to the High Court for a Judicial Review on behalf of the group that has been formed to fight a campaign on this issue. The action seeks to set aside the proposed price rises.

In the case of Barnet, the proposed charges are an increase of 250% in some cases, making them much more expensive than other London boroughs.

What is the basis of the claim? Namely that the council is raising permit parking charges to enable it to cover other costs. For example, the Council Leader's response to public questions on this subject at a Cabinet meeting on the 14th February were to say repeatedly that “the increased charges are necessary to ensure sufficient investment in the council's road network”.

It is clear that the increased charges are being used to fund general street maintenance, not for operation of the permit parking scheme. This is not consistent with a previous legal judgement in the Camden LBC/Cran case.



More information on the campaign is present on this blog page: <http://barnetcpz.blogspot.com/>. They need to raise a considerable amount of money to cover their prospective legal costs so donations would be welcomed. *(Editor's Comments: I would encourage you to support this campaign so that London Councils realise that they should not be abusing the law, and setting permit parking levels that are too high and unaffordable for many. Please donate urgently as they need more funds to fight this issue).*

ABD Members Meeting



For those recipients of this newsletter who are Members of the ABD, I remind you that the Annual General Meeting takes place on Saturday the 16th July in Gaydon.

Apart from the formal business of the meeting, which will probably only take a short time, there are presentations from Steve Baker, M.P. (photo above), from Warren Djanogly on the fight against Westminster's parking policies, from Matt Sinclair of the Taxpayers Alliance on HS2 and Martin Kicks on fuel/energy policy. It should be a very exciting event because there are some really important issues being covered, and this is the first time an ABD meeting has been addressed by a Member of Parliament.

So please do attend. Attendance is free of course. Note also that attendance gives you free entrance to the exhibition area if you wish to bring your family with you.

For those who are not ABD members, you can of course join the ABD for as little as £20 – see www.abd.org.uk/about/join_individual.htm

No Net Revenue from Congestion Tax



According to the latest Transport for London Business Plan (for 2011 to 2015), the income over the next four years from Congestion Charging, the LEZ and “Enforcement” of those is almost the same as the Operating Expenditure of those items. Indeed in 2014/2015 they match exactly at £301 million. In that year there is also £7m of capital expenditure so the net overall figure will be a cash deficit.

In other words, enormous sums of money are being raised, all of which goes to operating these systems (and of course to the profits of the third party contractor, now IBM, who runs them). But that is £300m per annum that comes out of the pockets of Londoners that could have been spent on other things.

So the next time you hear people say that the Congestion Tax subsidises public transport, just point them at Table 10 on page 71 of the Business Plan (see www.tfl.gov.uk/corporate/about-tfl/investorrelations/1462.aspx)

Cycle Hire Scheme



A very interesting article on the “Barclays” cycle hire scheme recently appeared in the Financial Times. A reporter followed a few users around one day with rather amusing results. The first person went over a zebra crossing when a woman was crossing it, so she said “It’s a pedestrian crossing you idiot”. His response was that “Well I don’t want to stop when I’ve got some momentum” and he suggested that pedestrians were the biggest danger to cyclists.

Another person asked the reporter “Do you break the law” when asked whether he could be followed, and then added “because I do – red lights, one way streets, that sort of thing”.

It seems from other information in the article that few of the cycles have been stolen, but there is a major logistic exercise to move cycles around by van. This is necessary because the usage of cycles is mainly one way in the morning (from train stations) and the other way in the evening, so they tend to accumulate at certain locations during the morning and need to be shuttled around to meet demand.

There have also been numerous problems with payment and other aspects of operating the system which Serco, the operator, is being pressured to fix.

TfL have yet to publish any information on the financial results of the scheme so far as your editor is aware.

Harassed by Schoolchildren?



A member of the public contacted the ABD recently about the fact that he had been stopped in Bromley by the Police, allegedly for speeding in Park Avenue.

He thought the stoppage was inappropriate as he was alleged to be doing all of 35mph. But what really shocked him was that he was then invited to talk to a group of young schoolchildren who were standing nearby. He refused on the grounds that this seemed to be an attempt to humiliate him.

(Editor: you might like to think about what your response will be if this happens to you. I know what mine will be. I consider the use of ignorant children to promote any agenda is simply wrong, and by what logic their teachers are supporting this kind of thing, I do not know).

Blackfriars Bridge



Proposals for changes to the junction at the north end of Blackfriars Bridge were covered in a previous edition. Some changes have been made in response to complaints from cyclists, although their demand for a 20mph speed limit on the bridge have been ignored.

After some weeks of trying, your editor is unable to get a straight answer to a question on details of the new scheme, and whether the ABD's comments have been taken into account.

Rotherhithe Tunnel 20Mph Cameras



The Rotherhithe Tunnel is one of the few crossings across the Thames to the east of Tower Bridge – indeed essential if the Blackwall Tunnel is closed as sometimes happens. But it was built in 1908 and was originally designed for horse-drawn traffic. As a result it has very narrow carriageways and two sharp bends in the middle (although a width restriction at each end stops larger vehicles from entering). See http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rotherhithe_Tunnel for more background information if you are not familiar with it.

Needless to say, it is somewhat tricky to negotiate in a larger car or van, and minor accidents were no doubt quite common. This may be why a 20mph speed limit was imposed some years ago, and a speed camera set up at one entrance (on a perfectly straight stretch where there was no hazard in doing 30 mph).

New 20 mph average speed cameras were installed recently. No consultation was done on these and it is questionable whether they were necessary or required (average speeds are probably not much above that). But TfL want to expand the 20 mph zone so that they are “effective”. The ABD has sent in an objection.

Letters

One response to the note we sent out on the Barnet permit parking charges was as follows:

“Dear Roger,

Thank you for your message. As an active member of the Hampstead Garden Suburb Residents Association (Roads & Traffic Committee) I am very much conscious of Barnet's extortionate proposals to raise parking costs in the borough.

For many years our organisation has opposed the creation of controlled parking zones in Hampstead Garden Suburb, warning against the risks to commerce and the disruption caused to local people who live outside the zones but who need access to stations, shopping facilities etc. Among the warnings we have given over the years was one which forecast that as soon as the CPZ scheme was mature in the borough and there was no need to keep permit prices low to persuade new roads to join, Barnet would hike costs in precisely the manner now proposed. We therefore have great sympathy for those residents who were outvoted when their roads were canvassed to join the CPZ programme or who were forced into the schemes by traffic displaced from CPZs nearby. However we rather take the view that where residents voted to become part of the CPZ arrangement against our advice and for mostly selfish reasons, they have less cause for complaint about permit price rises.

For this Association therefore the scandal of the parking proposals consists of three principal matters; 1) The enormous increases in Pay & Display charges, partly (and cynically) disguised by the manipulation of price bands; 2) The loss of free parking bays inside station CPZs. These could be used by local station users throughout the day and their removal will deny convenient and inexpensive access to the railway stations; 3) The continued use by local councillors of a free universal parking permit which allows them to park for as long as they wish in any of the borough's CPZs or P&D places without the need to obtain a ticket or permit and without charge.

On this latter point we have challenged the councillors hard and continue to do so to which end the attached letter has been published widely in the local press. In response Cllr Daniel Seal of Garden Suburb ward is quoted, apparently without irony, as saying ‘I need to be able to go to a meeting and not be worried or distracted about moving my car or paying to top up my parking.’

We do not believe that the very councillors who determine the parking regulations should be able to exempt themselves from those regulations and we will continue to fight them over this. If that story is of any interest to you please contact me should you require further details.

Regds,
Gary Shaw”

News Snapshots

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

+ The PIPS Speedspike cameras as currently under trial for 20 mph speed zone enforcement (see www.no20cameras.org) have received Home Office Type Approval.

+ Isabel Dedring has taken over the Transport brief in TfL from Kulveer Ranger (who is “promoted” to look after the Environment brief – in effect a swap of jobs between them). She has the new title of “Deputy Mayor for Transport”.

+ A £1m fund to research and develop new technology to reduce the disruption caused by road works was announced recently by Philip Hammond, Transport Secretary and Boris Johnson. (*Editor's Comment: this was a theme of one of our past responses on this subject – perhaps someone has been listening*). Meanwhile TfL are still pushing for legislation to support “lane rental” although many people have asked for more details on how it might work, and specifically the question of whether utilities will simply be able to pass on the charges.

+ The Greenwich town centre pedestrianisation project (which meant major changes to the road network in Greenwich) has been abandoned following lots of representations on the subject. There may be a “wider ranging” consultation later in the year, which might include a new river crossing – another ferry seems to be the latest idea.

+ Business is booming in west London following the removal of the Congestion Charge zone extension according to a report from TfL. Local traders were said to be “very pleased”. Traffic has gone up by a small percentage but TfL were unable to report any discernable effect on pollution levels. *(Editor: as predicted by the ABD, and by TfL of course).*

+ A Camden resident complained that she had been sent a parking ticket when she definitely was not in the road concerned at the time of the alleged offence. Indeed the photo sent to her as evidence showed no car! Allegedly she had driven off before the photo was taken, but they did agree to cancel it.

+ A shuttle bus service to move commuters from the west end of London to the City has commenced operation (to support those wealthy bankers who live in Fulham and Chelsea no doubt). The interesting aspect of it is that it uses all-electric vehicles – nine seater mini-buses with a range of about 70 miles. They even have a re-charging point for them outside John Lewis on Oxford Street. City firms are asked to subsidise the cost with £10 per trip so the end-users pay only £4. More expensive than other alternatives of course, but no doubt more pleasant than other bus or tube options which are overcrowded.

Registering to Receive This Newsletter

This newsletter is free of charge and is sent approximately bi-monthly to anyone who cares to request a copy. It is sent via email (as a link to a web page from which you can download it). To register for a free copy simply go to this web page www.freedomfordrivers.org/Newsletters.htm and fill out the box to be added to our mailing list.

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 other 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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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.

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