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Editorial

As usual we have a mix of topical news and analysis on London's transport network. The latest example of incompetence by Transport for London (TfL) was the introduction of a tighter width restriction at the Rotherhithe Tunnel with little advance consultation – see the first story below for coverage. This is of course not the first move by TfL that has generated congestion in Southwark. The imposition of a 24-hour bus lane on Jamaica Road created congestion when there was none before a few years back.



Above is a new photo of your editor – yes I am getting younger every day as a result of expert photography.

Don't forget to send in your comments on the contents of this newsletter for subsequent publication, or otherwise.

Roger Lawson, Editor

Chaos at Rotherhithe Tunnel



On the 19th March, Transport for London (TfL) introduced a new narrower width restriction at the entrances to the Rotherhithe Tunnel (photos above and below shows Southwark entrance at noon on the 20th).

The result was absolute chaos with long queues on Jamaica Road even at midday and gridlock over a wide area during rush hours. Photo below shows the queue back down Jamaica Road.



The justification given by TfL was to improve safety in the tunnel by stopping large vehicles from entering, particularly vans with large fuel tanks. But in reality it did not stop many of them as one can see below. LGVs continued to squeeze through. However, they took up to minute to do so, thus severely impacting the volume of traffic (normally 30,000 vehicles use this crossing every day).



Vans still squeezing through

It's not as if TfL had not been told that it would create difficulties as the author of this article contacted TfL on the 7th March asking for more information when he saw some warning signs. But my complaints about the lack of consultation and the likely problems that would result were ignored.

In reality there was some statutory consultation in early 2012 sent to a few organisations, particularly local ones in Southwark and Tower Hamlets, but not to the ABD even though we are on other TfL consultation lists. There was no wider publicity on the matter.

The Rotherhithe Tunnel is used by people from a very wide area of South-East and North-East London, particularly when the Blackwall Tunnel and London Bridge are closed or congested, as often happens. Those are the only practical alternatives.

TfL claimed that only 103 vehicles per day would be affected by the new width restriction (which was imposed by kerb build-outs and new posts when it was previously about 7 feet wide) but the experience at other 6'6" width restrictions (such as at Bickley Station, or in Greenwich) is that many people in ordinary cars cannot get through, or if they do they scrape the sides or knock off their wing mirrors. To get through a 6'6" width restriction requires great care even in smaller cars and hence the delays generated.

Note that the Rotherhithe Tunnel was built 105 years ago, has narrow road lanes and two sharp bends in it where vehicles tend to collide.

But the previous 7'0" width restriction stopped most larger vehicles and a 20 mph speed limit enforced by average speed cameras was introduced only recently.

TfL Admit Their Mistake

It seems that TfL realised their error because 48 hours later (on Wednesday night) they removed the metal posts although the concrete kerb build-outs remain. This has allegedly improved matters somewhat.

However the ABD has asked for a meeting with TfL to discuss this matter and a better long-term solution to any safety problems.

Anyone who has been affected by this change and wishes to be put on a contact list for further news should send an email to roger.lawson@abd.org.uk

Cycling Revolution in London?



Boris Johnson has committed to spend nearly £1 billion on an ambitious plan to encourage cycling in the capital. Above is the vision of what the Embankment (a major east-west thoroughfare in London) might soon look like. The artist's impression originally showed the dedicated cycle lanes on the left in Barclays blue until Westminster Council reminded TfL that this had already been rejected in a previous planning application as it is a "heritage" site.

The above is part of a scheme to create a cycle "superhighway" to run east to west through London - a "bike Crossrail" in effect.

It would include taking one lane from the A40 Westway (the elevated section) and turning it into cycle lanes, redeveloping the Embankment and improving other roads. There would also be “Quietways” to encourage cycling on quieter minor roads but it is not at all clear what these will look like or how the space will be obtained.

The Mayor claims major health and air pollution benefits will result. More details can be obtained from the Mayor’s press release here: www.london.gov.uk/media/mayor-press-releases

Comments

What is the financial return on this investment? In saved journey times, reduced casualties, or whatever? In reality road casualties will go up because cycling is notoriously hazardous and encouraging cycling just creates more road accident victims as we have seen in recent statistics.

The claim that “If just 14 per cent of journeys in central London were cycled, emissions there of the greatest vehicle pollutant, NOx, would fall by almost a third and over the years literally thousands of lives could be saved.” is simply nonsense. The only way that a 14% reduction in journeys could lead to a third less NOx would be if HGV drivers and bus drivers stopped driving their vehicles and got on their bikes because most of the NOx comes from them. Reducing the number of private cars would have minimal impact on NOx so the claim is simply ridiculous. Is the Mayor saying he is to cut the number of buses by encouraging people to cycle? And converting people to cycling will increase deaths, not save lives.

These proposals seem to be an enormous waste of financial resources on a scheme that favours cyclists over other road users. Some of the more recent Cycle Superhighways have removed substantial road space and dedicated it to cyclists. Why should they get preference rather than have to share road space with other road users?

The A40 Westway proposal may be a good idea because one lane is certainly underutilised at present. The Embankment scheme would be an absolute nightmare for traffic as you can see that eastbound, two lanes are reduced to one. There is already heavy congestion at present at certain times when both existing lanes are fully used.

The ABD is not opposed to cycle lanes as such, indeed we support the idea of segregated cycle lanes where they can be built without reducing road space for other users. However, if they require significant expenditure then perhaps cyclists should pay for them as it is they who are gaining the benefits!

Note though that the intention is to improve “people’s perception of cyclists” by improving enforcement action against illegal and intimidating cyclist behaviour. *Editor: good to hear it, although they need to start with the Mayor from his past behaviour caught on camera of ignoring red lights.*

Traffic Speeds Will Fall

An article in LTT spelled out the likely impact of the above scheme on traffic speeds in London. It reported that modelling by TfL of the proposals for Cycle Superhighway 2 (Bow to Stratford) suggests that it will increase journey times for buses, freight vehicles and all other traffic. It indicated that there is an overall negative cost/benefit ratio even after taking into account the benefits for cyclists.

UKIP Anti-Tolls Campaign



UKIP have a clear policy of scrapping all road tolls which will no doubt win them a lot of votes. They recently organised a number of demonstrations across the country at toll sites including in London at Tower Bridge and at the Dartford Crossing.

Above is a photograph of UKIP leader Nigel Farage taken at the Dartford Crossing demonstration, with unusually sparse traffic for the rush hour in the background.

Traffic News & Web Cams Site



A good web site where you can view the congestion at the Rotherhithe Tunnel, at the Blackwall Tunnels or other London locations is this one: www.londontraffic.org. Click on the "London Traffic" tab to go direct to web camera views of main routes (you need to scroll down to the bottom of the pages to see them). To go direct to a view of the Rotherhithe Tunnel approaches go to:

www.londontraffic.org/rotherhithe

Above is a screen shot of what one can see - still queuing vehicles when this newsletter was being written,

Boris Johnson's "Game Changer"



"Boris Johnson Kowtows to Environmentalists and Anti-car Fanatics". That was the headline we put on a press release issued by the ABD on the 14th February. The announcement by Boris Johnson of a "game changer for air quality in the capital" is surely nothing less than an ill informed attack on private car owners.

He is proposing to ban all but low emission vehicles from the city centre by introducing an "ultra low emission zone" by 2020.

Although we welcome the acknowledgement by the Mayor that one of the biggest contributors to air pollution in London is the city's bus fleet, and hence his changes to Phase 5 of the Low Emission Zone (LEZ) regulations, he still apparently thinks it necessary to attack private car users.

In reality private car users provide a very small proportion of the overall emissions that are potentially harmful to public health in London and banning all but certain zero or low-emission vehicles will have negligible impact on the figures.

This is surely political "tokenism" of the worst possible kind. In reality it will impact tens of thousands of people on a daily basis who need to drive in central London for business or other purposes. It is simply not practical to use public transport by all people and for all journeys.

In addition the health hazards caused by air pollution in London have in our view been grossly exaggerated and the allegations simply do not stand up to scientific scrutiny.

The Alliance of British Drivers (ABD) will be vigorously opposing any such proposals and we invite all individuals likely to be affected by this measure to join us in a campaign to oppose it. Mr Johnson, or his Conservative Party successor, may find his re-election a lot more difficult than he did last time if he continues to propose such measures.

More Information

The Press Release issued by Boris Johnson, Mayor of London is present here:

www.london.gov.uk/media/mayor-press-releases

These are some of the facts:

There are recognized air pollution problems in London, particularly in certain "hot spots" caused by traffic congestion or building and industrial activity. Particulates (PM10s and PM25s) and Nitrogen Dioxide (NO₂) are specific problems.

In the case of particulates, about 50% of those measured in central London actually blow in from outside London. In addition, particulates don't just come from vehicle emissions (particularly diesel vehicles), but are also generated by tyre and brake wear. Indeed for modern cars, the latter sources now exceed the former, so changing to zero emission vehicles in central London will affect less than half those emissions. Plus cars in central London generate only 23% of PM10 emissions, with the rest coming from taxis, LGVs, buses, HGVs, etc.

Also it seems that "local residents" might be exempt from this ban on ordinary cars and yet they form the vast majority of those who drive in central London assuming that "local residents" means anyone living within the LEZ area (which is basically the whole of London).

Vehicles and heating systems are the main sources of NO2 in London (the breakdown is difficult to determine). But it is well known that large diesel engines as used in buses are the major source of both NO2 and particulates. Buses and HGVs are therefore the main problems that need to be tackled followed by LGVs. But the Mayor is not proposing to ban these of course. So the attack on the use of private cars is tokenism of the worst kind, attacking those who are the least contributors to pollution (and falling rapidly as new vehicles spread), and in reality it will not make a significant impact on pollution.

The above information was primarily taken from TfL sources. For more background information see this page of the ABD London web site: www.freedomfordrivers.org/Environment.htm

Complaint about Rail Fares

The Financial Times published a letter from a Dennis Tan complaining about the cost of rail fares for commuters. This was the response from your editor which they also printed:

Ignoring commercial common sense on rail fares

I think your correspondent, who has spent £20,000 in the last 5 years commuting from Oxford to London by train, complains too much.

The cost may be high, but he is still being subsidised to a massive extent by those taxpayers like me who chose to live closer to their work. He simply does not pay the real cost of his transport which is why the Government has been increasing fares.

He has a number of options of course, including:

- 1) Get a job nearer to where he lives; or
- 2) move to live nearer to where he works.

Indeed there are many areas of London (or nearby) within cheaper commuting distance where housing may be less costly than in Oxford.

In addition he wants train operators to ignore the law of supply and demand by stopping train operators from reducing fares on lesser used routes at the same time as raising fares on those more heavily used.

Well we would all like to live in a fairytale economy where we don't have to pay the real cost of travel, and service operators set prices as we prefer rather than having them set rationally, but we don't.

The artificially low rail fares created by political decisions rather than commercial common sense is of course the reason why we have so many long-distance commuters when in a rational world all the wasted resources (and the commuters wasted time) that results would not be supported.

Speed Awareness Courses and Speed Summit

Your editor attended a conference entitled Speed Summit recently. Here are some facts reported by the speakers:

Jessica Matthews of the DfT said that one million people a year are now doing speed awareness courses. She also said they are "popular" according to customer surveys. This just shows what a money spinning exercise, used to finance speed camera operations, this has now become. This is based on the corruption of justice, condoned by ACPO, by one avoiding prosecution by paying a fee which is then diverted to the police (see previous editions for more details).

Note: it was reported elsewhere that Norfolk Police made more than £400,000 in seven months from drivers taking speed awareness courses.

Paul Watters of the AA said that only 28% supported speed humps according to their surveys.

Zahur Khan, traffic engineer from the borough of Islington, said they had reduced accidents 66% in 7 years. In a recent year there was an 8% decrease in traffic and a 6% reduction in KSIs. The latter statistic alone tells you his claims for achievement are defective and the last time your editor looked at road accident stats across the whole of London, Islington was not in the lead in terms of reduction.

Ben Johnson of TfL mention a study by Rosen & Sander of pedestrian casualties and vehicle speeds, which produced figures much lower than other claims - see <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/19393804> . For example, at 20mph they say there is a fatality risk of 2%, and at 30mph it is 7%. But that relates to the speed of the vehicle on impact and as Ben said, vehicles tend to slow down before they hit a pedestrian.

This is what your editor had to say in the panel discussion in response to questions:

1. What major concerns do you have about speed policy and how it relates to road safety policy in general?

What's wrong with speed policy, and road safety policy in general? Namely that they are being driven by emotion rather than science. Whether it is speed cameras, speed humps, or the general impact of speed on casualty figures, I suggest that there is a persistent failure to confront the evidence in a soundly based scientific and statistical manner. There are no unbiased trials of proposed new innovations – so speed cameras were introduced, and rolled out, with minimal real evidence of their benefit. No proper controls, no double-blind trials, and basic misunderstandings about statistics. Likewise I have personally studied the evidence on speed humps, and it is likely that all the claimed benefits arise from traffic diversion.

It is questionable whether either of these enormously expensive interventions generated above trend improvements

The recent promotion of 20-mph speed limits is done in the name of saving lives when there is no evidence there is any benefit. False claims about the data from Portsmouth are commonplace while the negative data from other areas such as Bristol, Oxford and Warrington is ignored.

What we need is proper independent scientific investigation of road accidents as in the airline world, and not blame allocation. Road safety improvements should be evaluated on a proper cost/benefit basis so that we spend money where most lives would be saved.

2. What are your views on the Department for Transport's recent Circular on Setting Local Speed Limits?

In essence it makes it clear that there is no longer any pretence about setting speed limits on a rational basis. They will be politically driven by local busybodies with no knowledge of the subject. The 85th percentile of free flowing traffic was and is the best way to set limits to make them most cost effective, but is being abandoned. The knowledge and expertise of all the traffic engineers in this audience could be ignored in future. And there seems to be a view that you and politicians could dictate driver behaviour by setting limits that are nowhere near what driver's perceive as safe limits – something that they will not respond to in reality. As the saying goes, this audience needs to wake up and smell the roses.

News Snapshots

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

+ The ABD has responded to two consultations recently on “controlled” and “managed” motorway systems for the M25 junctions 16 to 23 and 23 to 27. These are effectively variable speed limits enforced by cameras in gantries, and hard shoulder running in addition on the latter. We opposed these schemes as often imposing inappropriate speed limits and believe hard shoulder running is unsafe. See www.freedomfordrivers.org/Consultations.htm for details of our responses.

+ Muslim clerics in Indonesia are asking for speed bumps to be declared “haram”, i.e. “forbidden”. To quote *“The Prophet Mohammad once said if someone saw a rock on the street that could harm another road user, it is their obligation to get rid of the rock...”*. This no doubt demonstrates the hatred of speed humps worldwide.

+ Orpington High Street was the location of a major traffic calming and road safety scheme at the cost of over £2m a couple of years ago. Speed tables, 20 mph speed limit and other measures. For the 12 months to 10/2010 there were 2 accidents. In the following two years there were 9 and 11. There have also been complaints from a resident about the noise generated by traffic passing over the new cobbled road surface.

+ The London Congestion Charge is now ten years old having been launched on the 17th February 2003. Any person who has seen a substantial reduction in traffic congestion within the zone should contact the Editor, because you will be one of the few. According to TfL, traffic speeds have not improved but Transport Commissioner Peter Hendy is still claiming it is a success in his comments on the new cycling scheme.

About the Alliance of British Drivers (ABD)

The Alliance of British Drivers was formed from a merger of the Association of British Drivers and the Drivers Alliance. 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 Alliance 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

Contact person	Borough	Email
Les Alden	Southwark	LHA@looksouth.net
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Roger Lawson	Bromley, Barking & Dagenham, Barnet, Bexley, Brent, Greenwich, Hackney, Haringey, Havering, Islington, Lewisham, City of London, Newham, Redbridge, Tower Hamlets, Waltham Forest	roger.lawson@abd.org.uk
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Contact Information

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