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London's Air Quality Problem



There is universal agreement that bad air is bad for health. There is, however, little sign that the authorities charged with protecting our public health have any serious intention of taking sufficiently substantial steps to remedy the problem of air pollution in London.

This is not to say that nothing has been done. London saw the introduction of its Low Emission Zone in 2008 with tighter restrictions added this year. The scheme lays down limits for emissions of particulate matter by most commercial vehicles which must pay significant charges if they do not comply with zone limits.

However the scheme covers neither private cars nor taxi cabs. Taxi cabs were to be dealt with by a ban on cabs more than ten years old from January this year but this has been relaxed to 15 years backed up by a hope to reduce emis-

sions to zero by 2020 and a requirement for newly licensed private hire vehicles to be no more than five years old from April this year. Private cars, apart from exemption from congestion zone charges for low emission models, seem to defy any attempt to regulate their emissions. The abolition of the Western Congestion Zone in 2010 and the Mayor's 'traffic smoothing' initiatives hardly display an intention to take emissions by private cars seriously.

Other initiatives that have been tried have included the specification of small numbers of hybrid or hydrogen buses for certain tendered bus routes and the promotion of cycling with the Barclays hire bikes and the introduction of the controversial cycling 'super highways'. There have even been faint hints of extensions to the Tramlink system and the undoubtedly success of attracting travellers to the Overground network, some

of whom will possibly have previously travelled by car. From the Government we have heard undertakings to meet nitrous dioxide limits by 2025 and finance for 'trials of dust suppressants to 'glue' pollution to the street' (*Guardian Environment Network* 5/4/11).

Despite all the above it is indisputable that London is seriously in breach of the European Union air quality levels. The Government considers these levels might be met by 2020 outside London and 2025 in London. Meanwhile the Olympics experienced hazardous levels of ozone, characterised by the Department for Food and Rural Affairs variously as 'low' or 'moderate' but considered by Clean Air in London to be 'high'. The *Daily Telegraph* had already rebuked 'the authorities' in March for failing to warn the public about 'record levels of dangerous air pollution' and pointed out that the Government does not issue warnings about levels of particulates but only for high ozone levels.

If, with all the initiatives that have been undertaken, pollution remains a serious hazard we should expect more to be done and to be done soon. 2025 is too late. Stephen Garrett

Our Newsletter is sent out to our London members and other contacts.

The group exists to campaign for sustainable transport solutions in London and to support the work of the Campaign nationally. If you have not already done so we would be pleased if you would also join our group and take part in our London based activities.

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Regular meetings of the group are held in central London.

The Newsletter is edited by Chris Barker. Contributors are welcomed. Opinions expressed are those of the authors and not necessarily those of the Campaign for Better Transport.

Points from readers

Disabled and elderly people

Shivakuru Selvathurai makes the point that steps are needed to implement basic travel rights for disabled and elderly people. Amongst the points he makes are:

- ◆ Enforcing the rule reserving certain seats for their use
- ◆ Empowering the driver to refuse to move the bus until disabled and elderly people are seated
- ◆ Ensuring that buses stop next to the kerb
- ◆ Ensuring that drivers do not move off until disabled or elderly people are seated
- ◆ Ensuring that drivers allow adequate time for elderly and disabled people to board.

Tail pipe emissions

Tony Hart draws attention to the curse of drivers leaving their engines running whilst stationary. Particular offenders are cash in transit vehicles. It is made worse, he says, by the position of tail pipes on most vehicles which is exactly in line with children sitting in buggies.

Services What services?

Keen observers of the Department for Transport website may have been surprised recently to come across a mysterious consultation.

It was held in accordance with section 24(4)(b) of the Railways Act 2005 and concerned the proposed withdrawal of 'railway passenger services' between Ealing Broadway and Wandsworth Road.

Neither scrutiny of the London & South East rail map, nor interrogation of either the National Rail Enquiries website or the Transport for London journey planner, would have revealed the existence of any such services.

The history of this strange administrative charade goes back to 2008, when the withdrawal of the last handful of Cross Country trains which previously ran daily between Reading and Brighton via Kensington (Olympia) left three short 'chords' near Acton, Willesden and Clapham unserved by any regular passenger trains. Under the 2005 Act, the Secretary of State is required to conduct a consultation exercise before consent can be given to the permanent withdrawal of services from any line or station.

Although London TravelWatch repeatedly reminded DfT officials of the need to comply with the requirements of this Act, nothing was done until a few weeks before the train service ceased, when it was announced that it would be replaced by a 'temporary' replacement bus service operating once a week in each direction between Ealing Broadway and Wandsworth Road, calling at Kensington (Olympia) en route. Neither of its termini had been stops served by the trains, but they were the first stations at either end of the series of three short links over which no service was now scheduled.

There is no statutory definition of how long a temporary bus service of this kind can run – the former Croxley Green branch was replaced by one (actually, a taxi) for several

years. In this case, it has operated for over three and a half years, at a cost to the taxpayer of several hundred pounds a week, and has carried virtually no one except a few rail hobbyists and, on one occasion, some TV journalists researching a story on this nonsensical situation. The only evidence of its existence, other than the vehicle itself, is posters at two of the three stations in question. No tickets are issued on board, and its purpose is apparent only from a sticker behind the windscreen.

The (then) government's unwillingness to initiate the closure procedure – which would give rail users an opportunity to put forward their views – apparently stemmed from a lingering hope that a train company would come forward with a proposal to restart regular services over the links concerned. But assent to a formal 'closure' would not have prevented this, because the tracks concerned remain in use for freight and diverted passenger trains, and could be legally 'reinstated' at any time.

The Office of Rail Regulation has a statutory duty to certify that the closure process has been properly conducted, but it refused to intervene in this case on the grounds that this duty arises only when such proceedings take place, and that it is powerless to act if none have been started.

In 2010 it was announced that Southern had agreed to provide a train service (once daily in each direction) between Wandsworth Road and Kensington (Olympia), which uses one of the links affected. This was done by the simple expedient of converting an existing empty stock movement to passenger service. These trains are in the public timetable, though not on the map.

The other two links, which are between Kensington (Olympia) and Ealing Broadway, are not electrified, but Southern agreed to test the possibility of providing

an off-peak service over this section using one of the diesel units normally operated from London to Uckfield. This ran without reported difficulty for several months in 2010, for driver route familiarisation purposes, but was never brought into public service because Network Rail refused to give it permanent track access rights on the grounds that it constituted a potential performance risk to other trains. Southern did not appeal against this decision, so once again ORR claimed to have no power to intervene.

In 2011 the (present) government reversed its predecessor's ban on closures, and decided finally to initiate the closure procedure in order to avoid the cost of continuing to fund the bus. The proposal includes the link used by the Southern (electric) train, even though there is virtually no additional cost involved in providing this because it will continue to run for stock positioning purposes. The consultation period closed in August, and the Secretary of State's decision is awaited.

The newly popularised term omnishambles could have been invented specifically to describe this sorry saga. Not only has it demonstrated the ineffectuality of the ORR's role and the scope for obstructiveness by Network Rail, but it has highlighted the tokenism of the protection provided to rail users by the current closure arrangements. Any real hardship suffered by passengers in this instance occurred when the Cross Country trains were withdrawn four years ago, as the by-product of a much larger package of changes to that franchise.

If several intercity trains a day can be replaced indefinitely by one barely-advertised bus journey a week, between stations at which the trains did not even stop, without the closure procedure being invoked, then going through the motions of seeking the public's views when it finally becomes politically expedient to bring the curtain down on this pantomime is merely adding insult to injury. A tragicomedy indeed.

John Cartledge



Increased danger for cyclists and pedestrians

The number of cyclists killed and seriously injured on London's roads has risen by 22 per cent since 2006, more than double the nine per cent year-on-year increase in cycling on main roads. Nine of the 16 cyclists who lost their lives last year were victims of turning lorries.

There was also a 33 per cent increase in pedestrian deaths last year. It is worrying to note that, according to DfT figures, road danger is being skewed towards pedestrians. There has been a steady increase in the proportion of pedestrians amongst those killed on the roads from 20.8 per cent in 2004 to 23.8 per cent in 2011.

An intrepid group of cyclists have kept the issue of cycling safety alive for some years by their 'critical mass' ride on the last Friday of every month. On 27th July, after allegedly straying into the Olympic Route Network large numbers were kettled by the police and more than 130 were arrested, held overnight at police stations and had their bicycles confiscated. Most were eventually released without being charged but with conditions such as 'not being on a bicycle' or going within 100 metres of a games venue. These conditions are to be challenged in court.

New bus for London



Jumping on and off the open platform

A fourth new bus for London entered service in the last week of May between Hackney Central and Victoria on the 38 route.

This was 50% of the eight vehicles promised by the end of May. The fifth arrived at the end of June and a sixth early in July. A whistle-blower reports that the absence of the prototype was because the body work is so robust it has caused one of the window panes to crack, and the bus has gone back to Wright's for remedial work.

The windows that are not cracked attracted some adverse comment as people felt passengers were old enough to be trusted to

open or close windows. On the other hand, if the heating/air conditioning is so wonderful open windows are not needed.

The big issue is the bus conductor, who has been permanently stationed by the open door to prevent anyone jumping off into on-coming traffic. Bus conductors are very popular, especially with people of limited mobility. However, their popularity stemmed from chatting to passengers in less busy periods, going upstairs to collect fares and monitoring the availability of seats on the upper deck, not to mention helping people aboard, which was more significant when there was a step.

The cost of a conductor with so limited a remit inevitably attracts criticism, and it does not achieve the popularity craved by the Mayor. (S)he does not even ring the bell although there is an alarm to operate when people are boarding or alighting at the open platform. Some in the industry are rather lukewarm about the whole project, and seem to want to operate the vehicles as close to conventional one person operation as possible.

The cost of the whole project is an issue in times of austerity, although so little attention has been paid to developing bus design from a passenger's point of view that some spending in this

area is long overdue. One wonders what the trials will prove, given the high density of driver only buses on the 38. Conventional wisdom has always been that crew operation is most cost effective when applied to all operations on a route. However, it has shown that people have lost the habit of boarding at the back – in any case, since there is only a one in fifty chance of the new bus arriving the head of the queue must be at the front – which means that the middle and rear points of entry are underused. There is though a big time advantage in alighting at the back compared with waiting for doors to be opened. As expected, there is considerable scope for fare dodging.

The seats are harder than those on Arriva's other hybrids, but the ride is smooth and quiet, and the fuel consumption is minimised. Alighting is a lot easier than on conventional buses when crowded. The high backed seats are particularly welcome, just as the last ones are being phased out from the Underground. It beggared belief that Boris could claim in the course of the election campaign they would cost no more to purchase than conventional hybrid buses. The whole idea was to have a higher quality product – you might reduce fuel costs as a result, but you would have to pay more at the outset.

The use of curved panels and curved glass is bound to increase the cost, even on a large production run. Pretending otherwise clouds the debate about the importance of the appearance of the bus. Many architects were strong supporters of the route-master because it was such a permanent feature of the London landscape. They considered its appearance as important as that of heritage buildings. There is of course no protection of buses remotely comparable to that afforded St. Paul's Cathedral.

Andrew Bosi
Adapted from the newsletter of Friends of Capital Transport issue no. 38. The newsletter is sent out free by email to subscribers. Contact andrewbosi@aol.co.uk.

NEWS ROUNDUP

Go Dutch for cyclists

We are pleased to report that, after we went to press and at the last minute, Boris Johnson did endorse the London Cycling Campaign's 'Go Dutch' demands.

He has now gone further and announced that fifty junctions will be made safer for cycling and walking by 2013. They include the junctions at Blackfriars, King's Cross and the Bow roundabout. TfL says improvements at these junctions will include "adopting best practice from other European countries" and will include features such as more segregated cycle lanes, 20mph speed limits and 'early-start' traffic signals to allow cyclists to move through the junction ahead of other traffic.

Cable car across the Thames

The £60m new cable car system linking the O2 arena and the Excel Centre is now in operation. It's an eerie feeling being suspended 100 metres above the Thames but worth the trip if you're not afraid of heights. It is designed to carry 2,500 people an hour in each direction. Better than another road tunnel.

TfL Rail

Following the runaway success of TfL's Overground system, the Mayor is now bidding for the right to run other London suburban rail services. First in his sights are the south-eastern services to Sevenoaks and Dartford and West Anglia services to Enfield, Chingford and Hertford. London TravelWatch has endorsed these proposals and goes further by advocating that TfL should take over other suburban train service elements of franchises such as South West Trains and Thameslink. They also suggest that TfL fares should apply to all services within the Greater London area.

Mayor Boris Johnson said: "London's rail passengers deserve far better service than the current franchises deliver and the economic benefits of properly investing in our rail infrastructure are huge. This plan gives us the opportunity to create a truly joined up suburban railway system that would vastly improve service and deliver better stations."

A more coherent London-wide structure would bring more frequent trains, safer stations and sanity to a mind bogglingly complex fares system."

GLA says no to Heathrow third runway

The London Assembly has voted unanimously against the revival of plans to construct a third runway at Heathrow and to support councils and community groups who campaign against them. At the same time the assembly appears to accept the need for more airport capacity in the south east calling upon the Mayor and the Government to work together to find alternative solutions to address airport capacity issues.

Oxford Street

Congestion in Oxford Street caused largely by too many buses has been aired before in our newsletter (see issues number 3 and 6). One of our proposals, supported by Ken Livingstone when he was Mayor, was to replace buses with an ultra-light rail tram. The idea was not taken up.

But now Sir Howard Bernstein, chair of the West End Commission, has resurrected the notion. The coming of Crossrail, he said, will reduce the need for arterial bus routes and give the opportunity to create opportunities for new forms of transport in the West End. 'We should be looking at light rail and all of those things', he said.

Lying statistics

Injuries on 20 mph roads increase by 24 per cent. Ergo: these roads are more dangerous than those with higher limits. This simplistic conclusion was widely reached by the press on release of this news. What it did not take into account was the widespread increase in the length of 20 mph roads. Unfortunately figures for this are not available but it is reasonable to guess that, with recent encouragement by the Government, the length of roads subject to the limit has shot up by more than 24 percent.

We also discovered that deaths increased by 17 percent but, since this was an increase in deaths

from six to seven it is impossible to draw any conclusions from it.

The same difficulty about interpreting figures can be seen in international comparisons about road deaths. Compared with the number of vehicles on the road UK figures are the worst in Europe, but compared with the size of the population we come out very well with only Sweden better. For motorways the death rate is below the European average but, per mile of motorway, it is above.

The lesson for all cynics seems to be: write your conclusion and then choose the research that proves it.

Olympic success

Dire warnings of overwhelmed transport facilities during the Olympic Games seem to have been headed by passengers not wanting to access games venues. Stations such as London Bridge which, it was envisaged, would have to close when crowds grew too great, seemed to have had fewer crowds than usual during peak periods. It was not because passenger numbers fell. London Underground recorded its greatest ever number of passengers on 7th August although buses seemed lightly used.

There were few rail delays. One Javelin failed to run resulting in queues down Midland Road but this was soon overcome. There was also a brief interruption on the Central Line. Overall a great success for TfL.

The same could be said about

crowd control. There often seemed to be more helpers than punters around Olympic venues and vast hoards of people were successfully kept moving.

There was less joy about the much criticised 'Zil' lanes which unnecessarily delayed traffic so that athletes and officials could get around unimpeded. In the event they were not heavily used and many were suspended for much of the time. Drivers employed to drive the cars bought especially for the occasion reported that they were not used as much as might be expected. One user was heard to remark that he wondered what it was all about. He could as well have used the tube.

End of 'Pay before you board'

Machines to let you pay before you board buses, in use in central London and on route W7 from Muswell Hill to Finsbury Park, are being phased out and those few passengers who still wish to pay for single journeys will be able once again to pay the driver. The decline in use of the machines is due to the increasing popularity of Oyster and is good news for passengers not in the know who are obliged to get off the bus and fiddle with change before they make their journey.

Oyster is still, however, a mystery to many visitors to London and more needs to be done to publicise it. One way to do this would be to sell Oyster cards on planes and ferries.

