

TfL finances in disarray

One of the consequences of 'austerity' was the withdrawal of central government funding to TfL, previously £700m per annum, making London the only major city in the world without subsidy and also the most expensive urban transport system.

Although bus use continued to decline and buses continued to require subsidy, TfL was on course to break-even until Covid-19. It held reserves of £2bn prior to lockdown.

Maintaining most bus services and all but of a handful of tube stations quickly whittled this away, and TfL was forced to accept some punitive restrictions in return for a £3.5 bn bailout from government, some of which came in the form of a loan. This secured the provision of public transport in the capital only until October.

72 per cent of TfL income comes from fares, so it does not need Einstein to work out that if two-thirds of passengers have not returned to the network, there is a shortfall of around a half of the anticipated income. It also renders largely irrelevant arguments about the fare freeze and a possible increase of RPI + 1% next year, as stipulated by government. The Department of Transport is itself seriously considering a fare freeze in a bid to restore confidence in public transport.

An independent review of the finances should consider all the obvious Mayoral decisions that brought us to where we are. Lost income from the abandoned Western extension of the congestion zone, the additional cost of the New Routemaster over more conventional hybrid buses, money expended on a project to build a private bridge over the Thames at taxpayers' expense should be easy to identify. The cost of the under-18 pass, introduced by Ken Livingstone, the over-60 pass introduced by Boris Johnson and the fare freeze introduced by Sadiq Khan in line with a clear manifesto

commitment in each case require more detailed consideration because the financial benefits have never been properly analysed. These arise from embedding the public transport habit in the young; greater economic activity from the old with associated health benefits; and arresting a decline in public transport use in favour of less sustainable modes or reduced economic activity.

Further delays to Crossrail have added to the financial headache, both in terms of additional construction cost and delayed receipt of fare income, but fortunately the scheme is sufficiently advanced for abandonment to be a false economy.

Although public transport use is down 66.8 per cent (figure from the last week in August, most recent as we go to press), car use is down only 6 per cent although by nearly a fifth in central London. There are calls for politicians to encourage people back to traditional places of work and to reassure us that public transport is safe.



Empty train: how long can this go on?

The requirement to wear face coverings however sends a clear signal that public transport is NOT safe. Faced with the choice of travelling in discomfort on the tube, those who can are choosing to drive where there is no requirement for face covering and the opportunity to open a window and breathe fresh air – impossible on the tube, and limited at best

on buses. There is anecdotal evidence of higher use of the Overground, where doors open regularly to admit fresh air and where the alternative journey by road is often circuitous.

Moreover, while there is scientific evidence for and against face coverings, there is no doubt that they are no substitute for social distancing, which is particularly difficult on trains where seats face one another (rather than airline seats). Confidence will return when there is better treatment of Coronavirus, more rapid and effective tracing as in 'test and trace', or a vaccine.

It is though folly to suppose there will be a full return to the old pattern of working. People have enjoyed the two hours a day, ten hours a week saved by not commuting. They are willing to give some of this time to their employer as there is plenty left to see more of their family or indulge in more locally based leisure activities. They miss the camaraderie of the office and the pubs, restaurants and theatres in the evenings. Re-opening these facilities is a bit of chicken and egg.

Working from home is here to stay and will encourage people to live further from the office in return for a larger property and a garden. Commuting from Taunton or Solihull looks more attractive if it only has to be done one way each week. Those with recently retired parents in the home counties might stay a night with them, so as to have two days in the office and three working at home. Others might return to the hospitality sector for one evening and night.

All this has serious implications for the provision of urban public transport. The provision of infrastructure and vehicles in London is currently geared to traffic levels at peak periods leaving much of it little used for the rest of the day. Lower peak demand will reduce the need for much of this provision, saving a lot of expense, and call into question the need for many proposed developments. Office developments in suburban centres will trigger the need for better orbital bus and train services. There may be more long distance, if occasional, commuting.

Andrew Bosi

Future Transport London is the successor to the London group of the Campaign for Better Transport.

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£12.50 a year.

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Please look at and comment on our new website at <https://www.futuretransport-london.org>

<https://bettertransportlondon.org.uk/>
Recent issues of the newsletter can be found there.
Previous issues can still be found at <https://bettertransportlondon.org.uk/>

Engines off

Idling Action Project is a London wide campaign, jointly led by the City of London Corporation and the London Borough of Camden. It has been running since 2016. On 3rd August it launched an 'engines off' campaign to tackle air pollution caused by idling engines. The project has been awarded funding from the Mayor's Air Quality Fund and is supported by 31 London boroughs. The campaign asks firms to pledge that their fleet drivers will not leave their engines running whilst parked. As part of the campaign Idling Action is offering drivers free training and is providing anti-idling workshops for schools and local authorities. Construction company MACE and Veolia are amongst major firms which have signed up to the initiative.



Rail changes at East Croydon

To improve the performance of a much busier Brighton Main Line, Network Rail is currently consulting on a plan to remove a significant bottleneck around East Croydon.

Several flat junctions in the Selhurst area would be replaced with flyovers/dive-unders and the six old platforms at East Croydon station would be replaced with eight new ones. Network Rail hopes that funding for this major scheme will become available in a reasonable timescale. Whether and when post-Covid 19 demand levels would justify it is another matter.

Since an earlier public consultation, it has been determined that there is insufficient width for two additional platforms between the tall buildings west

and east of the existing platforms at East Croydon. So the current plan is to construct eight new platforms in phases 100 metres further north (where there is space) and to keep the station open during the work: there are several similarities with the recent, phased rebuilding of all the national rail platforms at London Bridge and the construction of the Bermondsey dive-under.

At East Croydon, the problematic ramps, which lead down from the cramped concourse to the existing platforms, would be replaced with lifts, escalators and retail units. The new footbridge, which serves the six old platforms, would be retained to serve the eight new ones. The footbridge was intended to (but does not yet) reduce the 'severance' caused by the railway between locations east and west of

the tracks. The proposed scheme should remedy this. Windmill Bridge, north of the station, would be reconstructed. There would also be changes at Norwood Junction station, including the installation of lifts.

In response to written questions from FTL, Network Rail have stated that the new layout and signalling will provide the capability for slow line trains (whether Southern or London Overground) from the north to terminate and reverse in East Croydon platforms. It is envisaged that this flexibility would only be used during perturbations and engineering work and that services would normally be scheduled to terminate further south (except, possibly, for those to/from Milton Keynes).

Similarly, trains from the south will be able to reverse at Norwood Junction during perturbations and engineering works.

The current proposals are intended to enable the existing infrastructure down to South Croydon and the junction with the Oxted line to be used more efficiently. For cost reasons, the current scheme does not actively provide 'passive provision' for future widening of that section nor for grade separation of that junction.

'New entrances and public routes are proposed to significantly improve access into and out of the station from all directions...The project team have

collaborated with TfL buses, trams and taxis, and London Borough of Croydon, in relation to potential changes to these modes in response to the potential station redevelopment. There are no firm plans currently and it is anticipated these will be developed further during the next design stage.'

That there are not yet any firm plans for this very important intermodal interchange (while there are such plans for retail units) is disappointing in the circumstances. If the tram, bus and taxi stands remain in their existing locations, tens of thousands of passengers every day will have 100 metres longer walk from George Street to the new national rail platforms at East Croydon station and vice versa.

Until there is a firm new plan in place for East Croydon station, it is not possible to assess what proportion of the nearly 25 million annual entry and exit passengers (2018-19 figures) could benefit from improved access and what proportion could be disadvantaged by that 100 metres longer walk. Perhaps some elements of the full scheme (such as the provision of lifts) would be justified on their own and implemented in advance of the full scheme.

Information about the scheme can be seen at <https://carsconsultation.com/>.

Neil Roth



Streetspace for London

The lockdown following the coronavirus outbreak resulted in a reduction in car traffic on London streets by a fifth and a rise in the number of cyclists, including children and whole families.

The resulting freedom and the improvement in air quality was much appreciated by people on the streets and many were keen to ensure that traffic build up when the lockdown was eased was not allowed to revert to its former volume.

The Mayor responded quickly to this challenge by proposing radical changes to road layouts restricting car traffic and promoting walking and cycling with his Streetspace plan. As he said: 'If people switch only a fraction of ... journeys to cars, London risks grinding to a halt, air quality will worsen, and road danger will increase,' so they worked to promote 'Clean, green and sustainable travel ... at the heart of London's recovery'. The initial concern was to install temporary bike routes and more space for walking to reduce pressure on tube and buses and foster a 'ten-fold increase in cycling and five-fold increase in walking when lockdown restrictions are eased'.

The focus was on three main areas. The first was the rapid construction of a strategic cycling network, using temporary materials, including new routes aimed at reducing crowding on Underground and train lines, and on busy bus corridors. The first temporary cycle routes were in Euston Road and Park Lane, both now benefiting from a new 20mph limit. A ten-fold increase in cycling during the lockdown was envisaged leaving a five-fold legacy increase when lockdown restrictions are eased. At the end of August 50km of new or upgraded cycling infrastructure have been built or are under construction.

The second focus was a complete transformation of local town centres to enable local journeys to be safely walked and cycled where possible. Wider footways on high streets, such as in Camden and Stoke Newington, will facilitate

a local economic recovery, with people having space to queue for shops as well as enough space for others to safely walk past while socially distancing.

The third focus is on reducing traffic in residential streets, creating low-traffic neighbourhoods right across London to enable more people to walk and cycle as part of their daily routine, as has happened during lockdown. A number of routes are to be restricted to walking, cycling and public transport including London Bridge to Shoreditch, Euston to Waterloo and Old Street to Holborn. Waterloo Bridge and London Bridge are also restricted. Some roads, such as Broadway Market in Hackney, have been temporarily closed to all motor vehicles.

The congestion charge and the low emission zone charge were suspended for a time but have been reinstated with the Central London congestion charge being increased to £15, operating seven days a week, and extended in time to 22.00.



This will hopefully deal with the dramatic spike in car numbers in central London immediately after the former closing time of 18.00.

The danger is that these changes will not have a long term effect. A Centre for London survey in June found that 49 per cent of people intend to restrict their use of the tube and, whilst a third say they will cycle more, a third also said they would use their car more.

As traffic began to revert to its

previous density it was observed that, although, by mid July, HGV traffic was at 95 per cent of usual levels, vans at 90 per cent and cars at 75 per cent, nitrogen dioxide levels, which are largely driven by diesel engines, were still 30 per cent below pre-lockdown level. It was thought that this was due to the easing of congestion brought about even by this relatively small reduction in traffic.

Chris Barker

HEALTHY STREETS SCORECARD



The seven campaigning organisations (including Future Transport London) which produced a scorecard last year showing how each London borough is performing against a number of criteria have now updated it to track progress by the boroughs. They say there is a huge amount boroughs could do to deliver substantial and rapid change even within restricted budgets in this crisis, but it isn't being done. Not only is London failing to enable enough people to shift away from car ownership and use, compared to the Mayor's own Transport Strategy targets, but the pace of change is far too slow to tackle the coming climate crisis, to enable a 'green recovery' from the Covid-19 pandemic, to tackle inactivity levels that are crippling NHS budgets and to achieve the Mayor's 'Vision Zero' on road danger.

The report highlights bold leadership from boroughs such as Richmond, Kensington & Chelsea and Westminster which have announced action on 20mph speed limits; Enfield and Barking & Dagenham which have put in more controlled parking; Croydon and Islington which have introduced many school streets; Waltham Forest which has installed cycle track on main roads; and Lambeth, Hackney and Tower Hamlets which are due to install Low Traffic Neighbourhoods soon.

On the other hand fewer than five percent of streets are covered by 20mph limits in Bromley and Barnet. Most boroughs have done almost nothing in the way of installing modal filters to block through-traffic from residential areas. Only nine per cent of roads in Bromley and Sutton have controlled parking and one inner London borough, Lewisham, has a very low rate at just 24 per cent. 13 boroughs have yet to install traffic-free 'school streets'.

There remains a dramatic difference between boroughs in reliance on cars with 127 cars registered for every 100 households in Hillingdon compared to just 35 in Islington. 70% of households have no car in Islington, Westminster, Hackney, Tower Hamlets and Camden but just 23% of households in Bromley, Havering and Sutton operate without a car.

The scorecard can be downloaded at www.healthystreetscorecard.london/



E-scooters

E-scooters are currently illegal on British roads. However, Transport Minister Grant Shapps has authorised controlled trials to take place. Only hired scooters will be allowed and riders will have to have a full or provisional driving licence.

The DfT says that scooters should have a maximum speed of 15.5mph and weigh less than 55 kg. Like cycles, the scooters will be permitted on roads and cycle tracks but not on pavements.

There has been varied reactions to the news. The Parliamentary Advisory Council for Transport Safety (PACTS) is critical. They think the small wheels and narrow handlebars make e-scooters difficult to control and vulnerable to the ruts, potholes and uneven surfaces of many urban streets. It is very difficult, they say, for e-scooters riders to see vehicles approaching from behind or to give signals. They are also worried that they lack the health benefits of cycling as they require no physical effort. Although the trial is limited to rental scooters PACTS is worried that it will be seen as a green light for use of privately owned scooters and that regulations will be ignored. In fact in the past year police have seized 109 e-scooters ridden illegally in the UK. There is hope that use of e-scooters will reduce car use. However, in Paris, it is reported that only 8 to 10 percent of scooters users have transferred from cars or taxis.

The National Federation of the Blind in the UK (NFBUK) say the DfT have underestimated the negative impact e-scooters will

have on vulnerable road users. 'E-scooters', they say 'create dangerous, frightening and intimidating environments for blind, disabled, elderly people and vulnerable people'. They are appealing to local authorities not to take part in the trials.

The London Cycling Campaign is more welcoming. They think that increased use of cycle tracks by e-scooter users could increase the pressure on transport authorities to provide appropriate protected space for micromobility.

Future Transport London is worried about a number of aspects. Although e-scooters will not be allowed on pavements there is the fear that many riders will defy the rule because they would be vulnerable on busy roads. The issue of enforcement then comes to the fore.

At the time of writing Teesside and Milton Keynes are taking part in the scheme and Northampton, Norwich and Cambridge are due to follow.

Brent Cross West

A Barnet Council 'Brent Cross West' station has been approved by Barnet planning committee, providing four 12-car Thameslink platforms on the Midland Main Line between Cricklewood and Hendon Thameslink stations. Although completely missing from the planning application, the officer's report describes two additional 8-car platforms for the Dudding Hill freight line which runs via HS2/Crossrail Old Oak Common and may reopen with TfL 'West London Orbital' trains.

The station was originally meant to support a larger car-based Brent Cross shopping centre, but that scheme is dead now. For the last 15 years Barnet's strategic policy has anticipated over 29,000 extra cars per day in the area, but that should change at last with a new 'Barnet Plan' in the next few months.

Bus lanes

TfL are initiating a consultation on a proposal to make extend bus lane hours. Future Transport London has responded wholeheartedly supporting the proposal. We said that in our view there is no reason why the default timing should not be 24

hours, seven days a week. If the road is busy then the bus lane is needed for buses. If it is not there is no reason why other vehicles should need to use it. It would save the anxiety and danger which currently arises when drivers have to consult their watch as well as the sign to see if the bus lane applies. It is difficult to think of a scenario where 24 hours is not applicable. Parking (including by blue badge holders) and loading could be dealt with by permitting it in the bus lane in defined areas at defined times.

We add that the monitoring measures which it is proposed to use to test the effectiveness of the pilot should be published.

Traffic in the Royal Parks

We have long been campaigning for the closure of Regent's Park to through traffic so we eagerly looked forward to Royal Park's 'Movement Strategy Implementation Plan 2020-2021'. We were disappointed therefore to see that the plan makes no mention of Regent's Park. It does, however, make some proposals affecting Greenwich Park, Hyde Park, St. James's Park, Green Park, Bushey Park and Richmond Park which, as far as they go, are welcome, closing some roads permanently and some at weekends. Apart from Regent's Park, two glaring omissions are proposals to close Hyde Park's West Carriage Drive and routes through Richmond Park.

Silvertown Tunnel – Stop Digging

A report, led by Transport Action Network, has reopened the onslaught on the GLA's plan to build the new road tunnel to supplement Blackwall Tunnel. The report recommends that the project be scrapped. Two recent developments have added urgency to this demand. First is the government's declaration of a climate emergency which, opponents say, obliges the GLA to reassess the effect on London's greenhouse gas emissions. Secondly is the shake-up of transport practices and policy during the Covid-19 crisis. The GLA claims that the new user charging scheme being introduced will ensure that the Silvertown tunnel does not result in increased operational carbon

emissions as the total number of vehicles crossing the Thames is not forecast to increase. The report points out that in this case there should be no need for the new tunnel. It also fails to take into account the carbon embedded in the construction of the tunnel. In point of fact new road construction invariably results in an increase in traffic as drivers are induced to make use of the new facilities.

More for London Overground

TfL's steadily advancing takeover of London's suburban rail network looks set to make another leap by 2022. DfT have confirmed they are working on a plan to transfer the Great Northern Electrics – trains from Moorgate to Welwyn Garden City and Stevenage via Hertford – to TfL. This move will bring the underground line between Finsbury Park and Moorgate back into London's hands, having been part of the Underground system between 1913 and 1975.

Reversing at the end of tube lines – a postscript

Neil Roth writes Reversing via sidings is hard to avoid at intermediate reversing locations but it is very wasteful at the end of a line, compared to reversing in the platform. Consider the methods of reversing at the eastern and western ends, respectively, of the Waterloo & City line. At Bank, trains reverse efficiently in either platform and can depart westbound one minute after arriving eastbound, even during peak hours. At Waterloo, after discharging passengers in one platform, trains run empty to a siding 200 metres further west, wait briefly there, then run back into another platform for passengers to board. This lengthy process means they can't depart eastbound until five minutes after arriving westbound and require one more train to be in service during peak hours, more drivers, more train- and track maintenance and unnecessary waste of energy.

In the circumstances, it is difficult to understand why reversing via sidings was incorporated into the DLR extension to Bank or into the Piccadilly Line extension to Heathrow Terminal 5.