

Oxford Street a programme for change

When private cars were banned from Oxford Street a few years ago, we were told that this was going to reduce traffic jams and congestion.

Do you remember the mock-ups showing happy pedestrians strolling around a tranquil sunlit Oxford Street, with just one or two taxis and a single bus right at the bottom of the picture?

Well it hasn't worked out that way. We now have traffic jams of buses and taxis stretching almost from one end of Oxford Street to the other. The solid line of red and black metal provides a poor and unwelcoming environment for the massive volumes of pedestrians who visit the street each day, with crowded pavements, difficult crossings, and too many accidents. Air quality is among the worst in London.

And many of the buses running through Oxford Street are nearly empty. Last week I found a solid line of 20 east-bound buses between Selfridges and Bond Street station, carrying a grand total of 31 passengers. This is not only inefficient, it is counter-productive - the whole convoy was moving so slowly that it would have been quicker to walk!

Its time for an urgent and sustained programme of action to upgrade Oxford Street. We need to create a pleasant pedestrian-friendly environment, which actively welcome the millions of people on foot who use the street each

year, and includes an efficient surface-based public transport system. Five main steps are required:

First, we need to reduce significantly the number of buses using Oxford Street. The Oxford Street retailers are asking for 33% fewer buses, and TfL has already agreed to a 10% reduction this year. The process of steady year-on-year reductions should continue until we reach an acceptable level.

Second, TfL should look carefully at ways of stopping buses bunching together. Individual buses, running slowly but regularly along Oxford Street, are quite compatible with a good environment for people on foot, and would significantly reduce journey times. It is the long unbroken convoys of buses which intimidate pedestrians and make it difficult to cross the road. Other cities manage to deal with this problem: why not London?

Third, we need to re-direct taxis out of Oxford Street and on to the side-roads which cross it from north and south, with pick-up points and taxi-bays located at the important junctions. There are some 38 side-streets entering Oxford Street, so people should never have to walk too far to find a taxi. It would be pointless to successfully reduce bus volumes, only to fill the gap with taxis!

Fourth, we need to upgrade the streets to make life easier for people on foot - wider

pavements free of obstacles and obstructions, pavements which have priority over side-roads and delivery lanes, regular resting places with seating, more and better crossings including the proposed diagonal crossings over Oxford Circus.

Finally, we should build on the success of the last two years' VIP days, when the whole street was closed to traffic for a few hours during the run-up to Christmas. These traffic-free days were hugely popular with the general public, and retail organizations reported a significant increase in trade. What about one traffic-free Sunday each month, or traffic-free weekends in summer?

With good-will and political support from the Mayor, all this could amount to a coherent and practical programme to transform Oxford Street within just a few years. But it won't be painless. More passengers will need to change buses at Tottenham Court Road or Marble Arch, and will complain if the interchange is difficult. The taxi-drivers may not be happy. TfL may be reluctant to reduce bus numbers or alter traditional bus routes.

But consider the alternative. At present the environment is noisy, congested, and insecure. There is already some evidence that elderly visitors are becoming reluctant to visit Oxford Street. A new modern shopping centre has opened just a few steps down the Central Line, and sooner or later shoppers will start to vote with their feet.

Oxford Street has become a bit of an embarrassment. It's time to bring the famous old street up to modern twenty-first century urban standards.

David Martin

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.



Air Quality and Public Transport

Why does nobody seem to care about air quality in the UK and least of all in London?

The Campaign for Clean Air revealed in March 2009 that the UK now tops the EU's list as the country with the highest toxic traffic fumes in Europe, whilst London is now apparently the most polluted capital city in Europe. The UK has already breached the legal standards for dangerous diesel-generated, airborne particles (PM10) and is well on the way to facing legal action also for breaching the health based air quality laws for Nitrogen Dioxide (NO2) (a toxic traffic gas) in London in 2010.

Despite this the mayor has just announced that he is cutting down his environmental department. Predictably this has provoked cries of shock-horror from Nicky Gavron and other relics of Ken's regime, who were rather better at monitoring pollution than taking action to combat it.

One of the most astonishing achievements of the previous mayor was his success in projecting a green image whilst doing little to provide London with a modern non-polluting surface transport system. Besides the disastrous effects of this policy on public health, London is now worryingly vulnerable to any disruptions in supplies of diesel, which could bring the economy of the capital to its knees in a matter of days. By contrast, Stockholm, Lille, Graz and many other cities in Europe are by now virtually independent of fossil fuels for public transport – but they mostly started planning their programmes some 15 years ago. We have not begun.

Toxic traffic fumes and public transport are subjects which both TfL and the Department for Transport seem to want to sweep under the carpet. There is much trumpeting about road safety but little reference to the fact that toxic traffic fumes are estimated to

claim some 24,000 lives a year in the UK, as compared with 2,900 deaths from traffic accidents. This figure is almost certainly an understatement since the European Environment Agency reports that 'across the EU, PM10 is estimated to have caused approximately 373,000 deaths in 2005'. The cost of pollution to human health in the EU has been estimated at Euros 80 billion.

The new mayor has accepted his predecessor's policy of total reliance on diesel fuelled buses. 'Business as usual' is free to live on, to the satisfaction of the big bus companies, who can continue to make good profits out of the huge subsidies they enjoy. The docile Londoners will have to go on suffering the serious health effects of an ever-growing fleet of diesel buses, whilst we all continue to subscribe to the ever-increasing bus subsidies – now exceeding £2.5 billion a year (£750 million

in London alone), including a substantial sum for the direct subsidy of diesel fuel. If a fraction of this vast sum were to be diverted to introducing new, clean, efficient vehicles, London's transport could be revolutionised and pollution largely banished, as has been done in so many foreign towns and cities.

Climate change, toxic fumes and energy security all call for urgent action (not more reports) to phase out our dependence on fossil fuels. The required technology is all readily available. But efforts to break the diesel bus monopoly have been met by TfL with a determined refusal even to discuss alternative forms of clean, efficient public transport.

Three years ago the London Thames Gateway Development Corporation put forward an ultra light rail scheme proposal for the Barking to Dagenham section of the East London Transit, prepared by a transport consortium which included AMEC Rail, Interfleet and my own company Sustraco.

It showed that a light tram scheme need cost no more than TfL's busway proposal and could eliminate carbon and toxic emissions whilst increasing modal shift. TfL refused even to discuss the proposal. Nothing has been done since then to look for affordable clean alternatives to the diesel bus on this or any other route. It seems that Londoners will just have to continue to swallow their daily dose of NO2 and particles.

James Skinner

Parking charges not a cash cow for boroughs

'They only do it to raise money'. A common complaint from people who cannot see any reason why they should pay to park their car. Leaving aside the issue of whether this is not a legitimate way to ease the burden of the Council tax, a recent report from consultants Colin Buchanan showed that it doesn't raise the vast amount of money which people imagine.

Five central London boroughs – Kensington and Chelsea, Hammersmith, Wandsworth, Camden and Westminster – raised £110 million surplus, but the rest raised only £50 million between them, the bottom ten making only £1.15 for each pound spent.

Richmond extends tax on gas guzzlers

Richmond was the first borough to charge residents higher parking charges for cars emitting high rates of CO2. They have now gone one stage further and introduced differential charges for visitors at parking meters.

The more polluting vehicles will be charged a 25% premium and the least will get a 25% discount. This can only be a good thing if it helps motorists to decide to buy more environmentally friendly cars.



Orbital Bus Routes



Road centre reservation for an orbital bus in Paris

Boris Johnson's jibe against Ken Livingstone is that he was a 'zone 1' mayor.

He was concerned about central London and neglected the suburbs. This had elements of truth in it and his decision to spend more time on issues affecting outer London is welcome.

A report from Transport 2000 in 2007 pinpointed some of the issues as far as transport is concerned. Whilst traffic volumes in central London fell after the introduction of the congestion charge, in outer London they continue to rise. Here, only 13 per cent of trips are made by public transport, compared with 62 per cent of trips between inner and outer London.

Travelling in outer London is particularly difficult if the journey is orbital. Radial routes are well defined. Main roads chiefly serve to speed traffic into and out of London, helped by their designation as red routes to restrict parking along them. Most rail and underground lines also serve primarily to take passengers into and out of central London. It is particularly these orbital journeys which are most likely to be made by car.

A remedy proposed by the mayor is a system of orbital express bus routes. Although it would be better from many points of view if the proposal was for a light rail system, this idea is worth pursuing. But the problem to overcome is the absence of suitable roads. Only the North Circular Road is ready made for fast orbital journeys and, as there is no restriction on its use, it does nothing to encourage car owners to use public transport.

The basic need, therefore, is to re-engineer roads to enable buses to travel fast and unrestricted,

largely segregated from other traffic. Good examples of what might be done can be found in Paris. Paris is introducing a network of orbital light rail routes which will eventually completely encircle the city. These routes are partly on converted heavy rail lines, partly on ready-to-use wide boulevards, but partly on heavily engineered local streets from which other traffic is largely

excluded. This kind of work is expensive and local residents often find it disruptive. It is not, however, impossible to envisage in this country. One has to travel no further than Croydon to find examples.

There is also an example of a bus-based line in the southern suburbs of Paris which could form the model for London. It is called Trans Val de Marne (TVM) and runs along a recently completed orbital dual carriageway rather like a superior North Circular Road. Buses are protected from other traffic partly by conventional bus lanes and partly by running along a tram-like central reservation.

What, then, are the possibilities for such routes in London? The North Circular Road is the obvious start. The South Circular Road would then need to be included although much more work would need to be done on it. An outer north London route might be traced from Heathrow, through Harrow, Edgware, Barnet and

Enfield. In east London, one could look at a route from Redbridge, along the A102 and the Blackwall Tunnel onto the South Circular. In the south, a revival of orbital Green Line route 725 from Dartford through Bromley and Croydon might be introduced. From Croydon to Heathrow, it has already been resurrected as X26.

The essential features of these routes would be that they are fast and fully protected from other traffic. There would be relatively few stops but, at each one, passengers would find excellent waiting and information facilities and excellent connections with other routes. One might call these interchange points hubs. One such hub could be Redbridge underground station where the North Circular Road route and the East London route would intersect. Other bus routes also serve the station and there is scope for diverting or extending other existing routes there.

Is this expensive plan what Boris Johnson has in mind? There would not be much point if he wants anything less.

Chris Barker

West London Line in the news

The West London Line Group has been campaigning since 2004 for improvements in the line between Willesden Junction and Clapham Junction.

On 19th February, the Group was delighted to host Lord Adonis, the Minister for Rail, to brief him on the many issues faced by its users. Mark Balaam, Chair of the Group, said, 'We understand that this may be the first time that a Rail Minister has accepted such an invitation from a voluntary passenger support group'.

This line is the west arm of the orbital rail route around London which is now within sight of completion with the East London Line now being built and the final stage, taking the line round to

Clapham Junction, having gained approval.

After many years with a very sparse service between Kensington Olympia and Clapham Junction there is now a local train every half hour calling not only at Kensington but also at two new stations: West Brompton with connections to the District Line and Shepherds Bush. The West London Line Group, however, says that this is not enough. They are campaigning to strengthen this service and to restore the direct link with Gatwick Airport and Brighton. They are also concerned that the next new station to open, Imperial Wharf, will provide an hospitable environment for passengers and dovetail with improvements needed in new tracks and trains to accommodate the expected massive increase in demand when the station opens.



Without a car? You are in the majority

In London, the majority of people (57.5%) have not got a car or a van.

In the City of Westminster, this figure is 70%, in Brent it is 61.5% and in Barnet 48.7%. These results

may surprise, as too often it is assumed that 'everyone has a car', 'we all get into our cars'.

The National Statistics* show the number of *households* without

a car or a van, with one, two, three or more cars. In London as a whole 37.5% of households have no car, in Brent, it is 37.3% and in Barnet, 26.7%, but in Westminster the majority of households, 56.4%, have no car. Some but not all vans can be used as a car.

A household with one car can consist of one person able and willing to drive wherever they want whenever they want. But this is not always the case. Some people with a car may not be willing to drive after dark, in central London, on long journeys, over unfamiliar roads. For many purposes, they depend on public transport, underground, overground, buses, taxis, tram if there is one.

Further, a household may have one car or even two, but consist of several people who need to travel in different directions at more or less the same time. Consider, for example, a household of two adults and two children of secondary school age. The children are not necessarily at the same school, the adults are likely to have jobs which

are not necessarily in the same place or direction. The school day ends earlier than most employment. The children will need to be able to travel independently. Until they are 17, they will not be allowed to have a car – and how many seventeen-year-olds have a car?

At least two or three persons will not be able to use the one or even two cars they have and will be dependent on public transport. Unless public transport is good, one adult may well find her/himself occupied as an unpaid taxi-driver and that person's opportunity to get employment or other work will be severely restricted or made impossible. The number of people without cars and therefore dependent on public transport is far greater than is assumed.

Margherita Rendel

*Derived from ONS 2001 Census. Total population minus those aged 0-10 (those aged 0-10 unlikely to travel unaccompanied by an older person) equals the number able to travel on their own from which the number of cars and vans is deducted to arrive at the percentages.



Getting creative at watford

In the current economic environment, finding the money for an Underground extension in outer-London might seem tricky enough.

Doing so without calling on the financial power of TfL, however, would seem to be asking the impossible. At Watford, however, it increasingly appears that Herts County Council have managed exactly that.

At the end of February, the East of England Regional Assembly (EERA) presented the Department for Transport (DfT) with its recommendations as to how the Department should spend the £1.2bn it has set aside for transport projects in the region.

In many ways, the funding priorities suggested differed little from those that would normally be expected, with road-based projects such as bypasses and busways forming the bulk. Thanks largely to the efforts of Herts County Council, however, this year there was one major difference – £120m for the "Croxley Rail Link" – the extension of the Metropolitan Line into Watford proper.

On the surface Watford, with both Metropolitan Line and Overground Stations and extensive bus services, seems well served for

transport links. Dig deeper, however, and the cracks soon show. Watford's connections are radial not orbital – a journey to the heart of the city may be relatively easy, but travelling to and from the area's own extensive shopping and leisure facilities via public transport isn't. This is something that the "Croxley Rail Link" is intended to correct.

The project's goal is simple – the Metropolitan will no longer terminate at its Watford Station, but instead divert to Watford Junction, via stations at Ascot Road, Watford West and Watford High Street. Indeed although major construction work will be required, it's not a new idea and the foundations for the extension are already in place – the remains of the old Croxley Green Line which closed to passengers in 1996.

With the EERA recommendation under their belts, Herts Council and their project partners (crucially including London Underground) can now take the project forward. The recommendation isn't binding, but combined with the £25m the Council have already secured for the project it makes their case a strong one. Herts certainly seem confident of success and now indicate they are cautiously optimistic of a 2015 completion. The Council are currently finalizing the process for achieving Project Entry status with the DfT, and the Department will likely reach their final decision on funding early this summer.

A Transport and Works Act (which would grant the powers necessary to build the scheme) is also being prepared for a spring 2010 submission

Whether this scheme ultimately comes to pass or not, the approach taken by Herts and their partners on this project demonstrates that creative thinking in transport funding by local governments should

be encouraged. TfL are not the only potential source of funding in the capital, and their lack of financial support for a project does not automatically mean it must be abandoned.

As Croxley highlights, the money for improvements may well be out there – just not in the places that local government normally finds it. John Bull

Boris's latest sins

- ◆ Pedestrian times could be cut by several seconds to allow more time for motor traffic at traffic signals (according to the Times of 11 March). TfL now wants to install 'pedestrian countdown' signs to encourage faster crossing of the road
- ◆ The mayor has reported that abolishing the Western Extension to the Congestion Charging Zone will increase traffic entering the area by 30,000 vehicles (10-15%) a day
- ◆ David Martin the CEO of Arriva, the capital's biggest bus operator, said he expected TfL would have to pay 24% more to bus operators to cover the cost of replacing bendy buses with more frequent double-deckers
- ◆ Phase three of the Low Emission Zone has been abandoned as an 'unnecessary' burden on small businesses
- ◆ Another public transport project, the Greenwich Waterfront Transit, a planned bus route between North Greenwich and Abbey Wood via Thamesmead, has been scrapped because of budget constraints
- ◆ Staff numbers in the GLA environment team are being roughly halved and the Climate Change and Energy Team will be reduced from ten staff to three
- ◆ Livingstone's 100 Spaces Project which Johnson abolished last summer, is now to be replaced with a Great Spaces project with a budget of £200,000 for all 33 London Boroughs, £6000 each.