



BBRAG NEWS

Bromley Borough Roads Action Group - No. 23 (August 2003)

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Editorial

This edition contains much good news, such as the removal of speed humps in one London borough and proposals for a new Thames bridge.

However it also contains a report of another death in Perry Street which might have been avoided if expenditure on road engineering works had been more effectively spent.

Our Chairman is pictured promoting the merits of cycling in a good cause on page 6 and there is a review of urban transport design in the USA, commencing on page 9.

Don't forget to let us have your own comments for publication in the "Letters" section.

Roger Lawson, Editor

Barnet Removes All Speed Humps

The London Borough of Barnet has decided to remove all speed humps in their part of north London. Councillor Brian Coleman (picture left) said "Motorists have for years faced an anti-car agenda from anti-car fanatics. We are taking a different approach. We have declared war on the road hump. Barnet will be a hump-free zone. Our policy is to make traffic flow more freely on main roads, and therefore remove the incentive for motorists to divert on to rat-run residential streets where people then demand humps. We are breaking the vicious circle."



Barnet councillors claim that humps simply do not work in reducing accidents and have many other disadvantages. The humps will be removed over the next 5 years when the roads are resurfaced so there will be no extra cost to the council. A start has already been made by removing about 20 humps. Other "traffic calming" devices such as chicanes may also be tackled as the council returns to more traditional congestion busting techniques.

(Editor's Comments: This is a policy that must be applauded and should preferably be considered for Bromley. Removing painful speed humps when roads are resurfaced is surely a good idea).

Proposed Thames Gateway Bridge

A new bridge to cross the river near Thamesmead has been proposed by Transport for London (TfL) and has gone out to public consultation. It may actually be built by 2010 at a cost of £425 million, which would be funded by tolls.

An artist's impression of one possible design is shown below.



The new bridge would connect to the North Circular and A13 to the north, and with the A2016 to the south, with new approach roads being built (but no direct link to the A2 or M25 to discourage long distance traffic).

Toll charges would also be set to discourage long distance vehicles, although it is not clear exactly how this will be done. Possibly by making the charges so high that long distance traffic will go a long way out of their way to avoid it?

The bridge may also be funded out of tolls on the Dartford Bridge now that has been paid for (readers will recall that the Government reneged on it's promise to drop tolls once that had been achieved).

The bridge will have two lanes for cars and commercial vehicles in each direction, plus one lane for public transport (buses and trams sharing possibly). Another lane would also be present for pedestrians and cyclists.

TfL and the Mayor of London see this bridge as a way to help regeneration in East London and support the latter's development plans. Business groups have already welcomed the plans, but Friends of the Earth have opposed it, on the usual luddite grounds.

For more information or to fill out a consultation form go to the TfL web site at <http://www.londontransport.co.uk> or telephone 0800-321-080.

(Editor's Comments: This bridge has been planned for at least 30 years as it was widely advertised as a "coming attraction" when I lived at Thamesmead in the early days of the construction of that development. It is widely acknowledged that routes across the river east of London are inadequate, and it will certainly benefit Bromley residents).

Congestion Charging Review



The London Congestion Charge has now been in operation for several months. Although it originally seemed a good idea, our members generally appeared to oppose many practical aspects of the scheme once the details were announced. It seems an opportune time to review how it has worked in reality.

There is no doubt that traffic congestion in the central charging zone has been reduced considerably. Transport for London, TfL, who run the scheme claim it is down by 20% which your editor can well believe. As expected the main reduction is in cars (down 38%), with other vehicles affected to a lesser extent.

On the periphery of the zone, initially traffic seemed also to be reduced, presumably as people abandoned cars and used public transport. However, as time passed, this effect wore off and congestion around the zone returned to normal, and in some cases even worsened. Trafficmaster reports congestion is particularly bad on the south west and western approach roads into London.

It seems that a short experience of public transport encouraged some drivers to simply find a longer route around the zone or pay the charge.

One consequence of the success in the central zone, which was better than expected, has been a shortfall in the expected revenue. When first mooted, the scheme was expected to raise over £200 million (net) for public transport. This estimate was reduced to £130 million before the scheme was implemented. The expected revenue is now likely to be of the order of £65 million according to TfL.

This is a drop in the ocean in terms of funding for TfL - for example bus subsidies have grown from zero when before Ken Livingstone took power to £500 million per annum now and will soon be £1 billion per annum (source K. Livingstone on Carlton TV 8/7/2003).

The expense of running the congestion scheme is more than £1.2 billion over ten years, ie. at least £120 million per year so it is now costing about twice as much to collect the revenue as the revenue itself. *(Editor's Comments: This must be the most inefficient revenue raising method ever devised. To look at it another way, two thirds of the charges you pay go to running the system with only one third being used to support public transport).*

The scheme is operated by Capita Plc using staff based in offices in Coventry and Glasgow (this can lead to long winded conversations for example about how one spells "Chislehurst" when paying). Payment is remarkably easy and your editor has had no great difficulty paying by telephone. You can also pay at machines located in London car parks, via the internet or via phone text message. The latter requires you to register first though. To pay via telephone is tedious though unless you are willing to register your credit card details and other information and allow them to hold and reuse that information. *(Editor's Comments: That's not something on which I am very keen, having experienced fraudulent use of a credit card number in the past).*

They also seemed to have been experiencing some difficulties with erroneous transactions as they now ask you to tell them of the make of car, but you can refuse to supply this information if you prefer not to do so. Apparently 33% of payments are now via the internet, and 25% by mobile text message.

Does the technology work and are drivers who don't pay picked up? Well it seems that 100,000 penalty tickets were issued in the first four weeks, but 22,000 of those were torn up by TfL after representations were made, so clearly a lot have been issued in error. It seems about a third of the fines were in fact disputed and many will go to the Appeal Adjudicator which operates like the Parking Appeals System. About 15,000 penalty notices are being issued per week at present (the fine is £40 if you pay immediately), which compares with 500,000 paying per week.

Apart from simple errors, many cars seem to have "cloned" plates and this in fact is one easy way to avoid paying. Just pick the number of a vehicle like your own and replicate onto your car. The fine will be sent to the wrong person

who will vehemently deny it to no avail. In fact the police estimate that up to 10% of drivers are simply not licensed anyway, ie. not registered with the DVLA and cannot be traced.

But how good is the technology at picking you up? Well your editor decided to see what happens if you don't pay. It took 6 attempts to actually get sent a penalty notice, and that's not taking any special steps to avoid the cameras. It included accidentally driving past two of the mobile vans used within the congestion charging zone which were clearly in operation. But the technology did seem to get more effective later. Is this because they are only sending tickets to repeated non-payers or because the technology has been adjusted? One does not know.

Has there been any impact on air pollution in the zone? Ken Livingstone recently said that he "pushed ahead with the congestion charge because of air quality problems." If that is the case then clearly he didn't read his own report which said that air pollution would not be significantly improved. No information has yet been published on this - the London Air Quality Network have apparently collected some data but are not allowed to give out the contents of their reports to TfL because of a confidentiality agreement.

Many individuals and businesses have been badly affected by the scheme. For instance traders in Chinatown are reporting a 30-50 per cent slump in trade. Mr Livingstone blames retailers problems on other business issues like a fall in tourists and closure of the Central Line, but shopkeepers seem unconvinced.

Stephen Norris, Conservative candidate for the mayor of London next year, has said he would dismantle the scheme. But the bill for doing this would apparently be £81 million payable to Capita for contract termination.



Meanwhile Ken thinks it's working so well that he plans to extend it to the west so as to cover Westminster and Chelsea (see map above) . This would be part of his election platform.

Jenny Jones, Deputy Mayor, even said on a recent television programme that she would like to see the charging zone extended on a zonal basis to all of London within the M25. (*Editor's Comments: This is probably the same effect as happens with permit parking schemes. Once you have these bureaucratic systems in place, it's better to live within the zone rather than outside).*

How do you avoid paying the charge? Here are some answers:

1. Don't go into London. This seems to be the approach of many people, and it is expected that retailers and businesses may move out.

2. Maybe you have a holiday home in France or Spain? Register your car there (TfL says they will still chase you down but that seems unlikely).

3. As only the registered owner of the car is liable for the charge (not the driver), "sell" your car to an illegal immigrant who is untraceable on condition he lends it back to you in perpetuity. (*Editor's Comments: A similar scam was perpetrated on your editor recently when he was involved in an accident where the driver did not stop. When traced the owner of the vehicle claimed the driver was an American citizen who was only visiting temporarily and was now "travelling in South America". The police simply gave up at that point).*

4. Purchase a low emission vehicle or convert to LPG as they are exempt (but check the rules carefully as they are not simple).

5. Register your vehicle as a licensed mini-cab, which are exempt.

6. Enter or leave London before or after the charging times. In fact if you park all day in London you can even save money because NCP and other car park operators have reduced their charges so as to stimulate more business.

Many of the above have snags of course, and if you only drive in occasionally they are not worth the hassle. But for a higher rate taxpayer the congestion charge costs over £2000 per year for daily visits, so no doubt people are exercising their ingenuity on this problem.

(Editor's Conclusions: This is a wonderful scheme for keeping country dwellers and other provincials off

the roads of London and reserving them for the wealthy citizens of Bromley. But it is totally undemocratic and suffers from many technical defects. It is also inconvenient and a major invasion of people's personal privacy and liberty. The sooner it is scrapped totally, or replaced by a better scheme, and the workers used to run it redeployed to more productive occupations, the better for the residents of London. If the scheme was run more economically, raised more revenue, and that revenue was used to build a decent road transport network in London, then only then would I be in favour of it).

Development of Aquila Site Approved



A revised proposal for building of houses on the ex-MOD site at Aquila in Bickley was approved at the council Development Control Committee on the 3rd June.

The new proposal is for 212 dwellings, as opposed to the previous 280.

There were numerous objections to both the original scheme and the latest one by BBRAG and local residents on the grounds of poor site access, worsening of existing traffic problems, over dense housing in comparison with the surrounding area, lack of essential nearby facilities, and other grounds. There were also a number of specific complaints about breaches of planning and transport policies.

However, it would appear that these objections were ignored on the basis that retaining it as an industrial site would be even worse, that traffic concerns were relatively minor, and because the development would be at the minimum density now permissible under government regulations - so it was not possible to get anything better. Yes there must be at least 30 dwellings per hectare under PPG 3, irrespective of whether it destroys the traditional appearance and amenities in Bromley!

A number of conditions were attached to the approval however, including:

- A proportion must be "affordable housing".

- A "Green" Travel Plan must be developed.

- Provision of public transport facilities (including preferably a bus service down Blackbrook Lane, even though the recently installed speed tables will make that exceedingly slow and uncomfortable).

- Measures to deter traffic from exiting the area via Coates Hill Road, which is an unmade road (although this is also possible via Gosshill Road which isn't mentioned).

- A possible "Toucan" crossing on Blackbrook Lane near the Barfield Road junction.

- Speed reduction measures in Hawthorne and Oldfield Roads which it is thought traffic might use as a short cut to avoid the Bickley Park Road junction. This is likely to include build-outs and chicanes (ie. "horizontal deflections" which have been such a disaster elsewhere in the borough).

- Possible traffic lights and widening of the road at the Bickley Park Road, Blackbrook Lane junction to cope with the additional traffic flows.

These plans could still be vetoed by Ken Livingstone or the Secretary of State (such as on the grounds of too low a density of housing, or development of green belt land).

(Editor's Comments: It is not clear whether the increased traffic volumes will be a major problem, and whether the measures mentioned above will assist, but it still seems likely that there will be worse congestion on Blackbrook Lane where all traffic from the site must exit via Barfield Road. The proposed measures on Hawthorne and Oldfield Roads also seem pointless - what's the point of having road capacity if you deter people from using it? It is a pity that other measures to improve site access have not been considered).

Democracy Comes to Bromley

The proposal for a second cycle downhill lane in Green Lane, Chislehurst has been abandoned as the consultation exercise undertaken by the council "showed more residents were against it than for it". BBRAG also opposed it of course on safety grounds.

Incidentally it seems that the report to the council on the original, uphill cycle lane in 2000

clearly stated that there was not room for a second lane, so why this idea was ever proposed is somewhat baffling. *(Editors Comment: clearly when you have a good policy, you shouldn't let local knowledge or practicality get in the way until the last possible moment).*



Just to show how far democracy has come, residents have been complaining about parking in Mayfield Avenue, Orpington for the last two years (picture above). Parking on both sides of the street reduces the road to one lane, and has been a danger spot since the restricted parking area around Orpington station was extended. Putting a simple single yellow line down one side of the street at a cost of £1000 would have solved this problem and could have been done in a few weeks. However Councillor George Taylor made an executive decision to put this matter out to public consultation (ie. leaflet to be printed and circulated to residents). What's the cost of doing this? Exactly £1000. There is also no certainty that the problem will be resolved in the near future.

However Councillor Taylor did make it clear at his last Executive Environment meeting that he would not necessarily be bound by consultation results, so one wonders whether he may be about to make some "courageous" decisions.

20 Mph Zones for Magpie Hall Lane and Marlow Road?



Outline proposals for 20 mph zones in the Magpie Hall Lane area near Bromley Common, and Marlow Road in Penge have been published for consultation.

These roads and the surrounding residential roads have a number of minor accidents, with some serious ones on the main routes which are Magpie Hall Lane, Turpington Road and Marlow Road (the first two are used as short cuts to the A21 from Petts Wood and Bickley by some drivers).

The narrowness of these roads, the numerous junctions and residents parking which obscures pedestrians, do not help.

However, 20 mph zones are actually very difficult to enforce, and it can be argued that they are only practical if imposed with speed humps. The details of the proposed measures have yet to be seen. However, let us hope that what happened in the London Borough of Camden is not repeated in Bromley. In that case, where residents voted for a 20 mph zone, they didn't realise it implied they would get speed humps without further consultation - the resulting dismay and annoyance when this became apparent caused the formation of a local pressure group opposing the measures which subsequently forced the council to reconsider.

Note that Transport for London (TfL) would finance these schemes and are actively encouraging them in all London boroughs. Of course this means that Bromley residents are financing hump schemes in other parts of London and vice versa, as TfL funding comes partly from your council tax.

Another Death In Perry Street



A second fatal accident has occurred in Perry Street, Chislehurst (the A222) within the space of a year. An 18 year old motorcyclist was killed when he collided with the central refuge near the junction with

Beaverwood Road. The cause is not yet clear, but this is similar to the previous accident when a motorcyclist collided with a lamppost two hundred yards further north.

Note that the pedestrian refuge is sited next to a bus lay-by which has been recently partly filled in so that buses stick further out into the main carriageway when parked, in fact partly blocking it, which hardly seems to contribute to road safety. But this appears unlikely to relate to the cause of this accident on this case as it was in the other direction.

(Editors Comment: Both these accidents have occurred since the speed limit on this road was reduced from 40 to 30 mph, which shows that futile gestures do not make roads safe. This heavily used road which is a primary artery into Bromley, needs to have proper road engineering measures introduced so as to reduce the risks to motorcyclists. It is unfortunate that the proliferation of street "furniture" has actually made such roads more dangerous for motorcyclists. According to a recent letter to The Times newspaper, over 500 people a year are killed in the UK from hitting roadside hazards such as signs, lampposts and trees, due to the sub-standard nature of our non-motorway road network. Most of these accidents are preventable.)

Chairman Raises £200 for Charity



Our Chairman, Peter Appleby, recently raised £200 for the British Heart Foundation by completing the London to Brighton cycle ride.

Peter is a keen cyclist and now handles consultation on cycle lanes and other related matters for BBRAG. He also regularly uses a motorbike. *(Editors Comment: Well done Peter. Some people get the impression that our members are made up solely of car fanatics but that is far from the truth).*

News Snapshots

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

+ The campaign to halt night flights into Heathrow (see Newsletter No. 17) was lost in the European Court of Justice on appeal. The judges effectively said that any residents whose sleep was disrupted could always move house!

(Editors Comment: A sad event as I am fed up with being woken up at 5.30 am by planes heading for that airport).

+ The Biggin Hill Hangar court case was also lost by Bromley Council. They tried to overturn the decision of the Secretary of State that building this in the green belt was justified. *(Editors Comment: Having read the note justifying the decision by the Secretary of State, in my view this drives a coach and horses through the green belt legislation).*

+ Both the above cases show how the courts are failing to protect the public and uphold the laws when faced with pressures from commercial groups. Incidentally one BAA shareholder (the operator of the main UK airports) has complained that the free airport parking they provide to all MPs and other politicians is an undeclared political donation and could be seen as an undue influence on their policies. These freebies are currently valued at more than £1 million per year.

+ Subsequent to the Orbit report on the M25 (see Newsletter No. 17), the Government has decided to spend £7 billion on widening the M25 to four lanes in all sections, and other trunk road improvements. It could take up to 10 years to complete. As the report recommended however, they will also study in more detail a wide area congestion charging scheme as the above is not likely to reduce congestion significantly. *(Editors Comment: Do you think this is a lot of money? Well compare it with the up to £15bn that the London Crossrail Link will cost which has just received government approval - see <http://www.crossrail.co.uk>).*

+ The Conservative Party has promised to remove “unnecessary” road humps, speed cameras, road tolls and the M4 bus lane if voted into power at the next general election. They would also raise the motorway speed limit to 80 mph. The AA commented “On speed humps, quite a lot of councils are removing them already after residents who campaigned for them discovered that the cure was worse than the disease”. *(Editors Comment: More vote winning, popular policies from the Conservatives. No wonder that one recent opinion poll showed they had actually overtaken Labour for the first time in many years).*

+ Croydon Tramlink is now proving so popular (despite the cost - see last two Newsletters), that plans are afoot to extend it to Crystal Palace (by 2012 if we are lucky). Other possible extensions are to Streatham, Purley and Sutton. Councillor George Taylor is also a fan and would like to see it extended to Lewisham and Bromley Town Centres - but these routes are difficult in terms of identifying suitable rights of way.

+ Transport for London (TfL) have warned that there is likely to be a substantial shortfall in available funding in the next two financial years due to their inability to reconcile the proposed expenditure budgets with likely income and low expectations from the Government Spending Review. This will make it even more difficult to get approval and funding from TfL (which is the main source) for road safety and traffic management schemes in Bromley. *(Editors Comment: This is a consequence of gross over subsidy of bus services which will soon be £1 billion per year and unrealistic estimates of expected net revenue from the London congestion charging scheme. As usual when Ken Livingstone is in charge, financial probity is never at the forefront of policies).*

+ London Mayor Ken Livingstone recently officially opened the redeveloped Trafalgar Square. *(Editors Comment: He was wearing a new suit of “imperial purple” which instantly took me back to the 1960s, but let us hope it is not a further symptom of his “folie de grandeur”).* London taxi drivers had previously staged a large demonstration against this and other London transport policies. Trafalgar Square has always been a major road hub in the centre of London with 6 roads leading into and out of the Square. These six roads now converge on a much smaller roundabout, leading to increased congestion on the Strand and on the southerly approach roads of Northumberland Avenue and Whitehall, both of which now have much longer queues of standing traffic than previously.

+ Cray Avenue (the A224 route through St Mary Cray that links up Court Road and Sevenoaks Way) is being widened so as to accommodate a bus lane. *(Editors Comment: This must be one of the few road widening schemes in Bromley in the last few years, and clearly Cray Avenue and Sevenoaks Way were designed to be widened to two lanes when first built).*

+ Plans are afoot to improve Bromley Town Centre to make it more attractive to residents and visitors. It is also hoped to tackle the problem of few people walking or cycling into the town centre, even though they live within easy walking distance - they drive instead. A recent consultation day with interested groups, including BBRAG, was held. Preference seemed to be to try and improve or redevelop the area around Bromley South Station and north towards the Market Square which has become run down since the Glades was developed, and is dominated by a wide road which no longer goes anywhere. These plans may take some time to develop and funding may also be a problem (see above for reasons).

+ Orpington town centre is also likely to be improved so as to make it more attractive to pedestrians. However the previous attempts to make the High Street a pedestrian only area, or to allow only buses, will not be repeated. Details of the proposals are not yet clear.

+ Residents and some councillors are apparently unhappy with the decision not to build speed humps in Maple Road, Penge after the recent consultation. There were higher numbers in favour in that road than in the other roads considered at the same time (Elmstead Lane, Poverest Road and Queensway), but as BBRAG did not circulate information in the Maple Road area on the grounds of cost, it is possible they were simply less informed.

+ Transport for London, TfL, is to try again to tackle the problem of utilities repeatedly digging up London's roads and causing traffic congestion. A voluntary scheme, backed by the threat of compulsory legislation, is to be introduced. It will involve a permit system enabling TfL to co-ordinate and schedule work. However, as Transco and Thames Water need to replace 22 miles of cast iron gas and water mains in London this year, the scheme is unlikely to be a panacea.

+ BBRAG has suggested that physical speed humps be replaced by "non-vertical speed humps". These are simply painted on the road and by a "trompe l'oeil" effect fool drivers into slowing down. *(Editors Comment: Your editor recently came across these in Cadbury Road, Sunbury and they are certainly very effective, if not downright disconcerting, if you are not familiar with*

the road. Unfortunately it is alleged the effect wears off over time as people become familiar with them).

+ The latest road safety measure to be introduced by the Government is the compulsory fitting of bells to all pedal cycles. The Pedestrians Association, recently renamed Living Streets, welcomed the move. In 1997, three pedestrians were killed and 86 seriously injured by collisions with cyclists. *(Editors Comment: BBRAG is likewise thinking of renaming itself, so if you have any snappy, emotive new names in mind like the above then please advise).*

+ In a recent reshuffle of councillor responsibilities, Michael Tickner has been replaced by Russell Mellor as overall Leader. The former has moved to take over responsibility for the Education portfolio. Councillor George Taylor remains in charge of the Environment portfolio. The reason for this change, and whether it will have any impact on council policies, is unclear.

+ The 18 year old driver of the vehicle that crashed into a tree at Shortlands (see Newsletter No. 17) has been convicted of causing death by dangerous driving and sentenced to 200 hours of community service and disqualified for four years.

+ Recent NHS ratings that were published show ambulance response times are getting worse. The London Ambulance Service failed to meet its response time target to "life threatening" calls and was dropped from two stars to one star. *(Editors Comment: The spread of speed humps and other "traffic calming" measures is likely to be a big factor in this decline).*

+ The Orpington multi-storey car park in Station Road and adjoining land has been sold to Tesco by Bromley Council, as expected (see previous Newsletters for full story). A planning application for the new development has yet to be submitted however.

Useful Web Sites



Bromley town centre management have recently sponsored development of a new web site promoting facilities in Bromley at: <http://www.bromley.towntalk.co.uk>

This a standard template site and in fact there are other similar sites for Orpington, Chislehurst, Biggin Hill and many other UK towns - these can be accessed from the home page. As yet though, there doesn't seem to be much original information that could not be obtained elsewhere, but it may be worth a visit in future.

Letters

From W.Olsen, Bickley:

“Someone who has had polio for 50 years and is now bed-ridden said to me recently that humps caused her to nearly to go off the front of her seat in ambulances like Dial-a-Ride”.

From P. Appleby, Chislehurst:

“Regarding the article in the last Newsletter on accident rates experienced by different transport modes, I have to point out that there should be a factor included to take account of the number of journeys you undertake. I am not a statistician but the benchmarks assumed that all methods of transport cover the same amount of mileage, which just isn't so. The greater number of journeys, the higher is likely to be the accident rate as it is the risk per time period which is of concern to many.”

Shocked by the news in this edition, or outraged by the Editor's comments? Put your views in writing while the iron is still hot, by sending an email to roger.lawson@btclick.com or by post to The Editor, BBRAg, PO Box 62, Chislehurst, BR7 5YB.

Book Review - The Vanishing Automobile (and Other Urban Myths)

This book by Randal O'Toole and published by the Thoreau Institute (see <http://www.ti.org>) is subtitled “How Smart Growth Will Harm American Cities”. It is a response to all those people, particularly urban planners, who believe that the solution to traffic congestion is to increase the density of urban development and encourage the use of mass transit systems.

Bearing in mind that these are exactly the same policies advocated by the Commission for Integrated Transport in the UK, and Transport for London, it is well worth reading. Oddly

enough, the “success” of such policies in Europe is often given as an example in America of what can be achieved. (*Editors Comment: clearly they haven't been to London lately, or looked at the costs of such systems in other parts of Europe*).



Tram in Portland, Oregon (Picture and those below courtesy of TransportationPlanet.com)

The author lives in Portland, Oregon and this 540 page tome gives you all the data you will ever need to know on transport in the USA. Much of it is directly relevant to the debate on how to improve transport in the UK. Below are just a few issues covered in this book.

- ◆ The economics of high density cities are much worse than low density ones. (*Editor: Ken Livingstone - please bear in mind*). People spend a much higher proportion of their income on housing and infrastructure maintenance than in low density cities.
- ◆ It is a myth that low density suburbs devote more space proportionally to road surface than high density cities. Australian transport researcher Ray Brindle has shown that “urban areas designed for car use in fact devoted less land to roads and streets than areas designed before the car”.
- ◆ The automobile transformed American society for the better. Unlike mass transit, the automobile allows people to go where they want to go, when they want to get there. It gives them access to a much broader range of services, jobs, retail outlets, friends and cultural facilities than before. Here are the comparable figures for 1900 and 1996 for the distances Americans travel (annual miles per capita):

Mode	1900	1996
Cars and light trucks	10	14,000
Air	0	1,700
Heavy Trucks	0	700
Intercity bus	-	530
Urban transit	400	160
Motorcycles	0	40
Intercity rail	200	20
Walking/cycling	1,000	350
Totals	1,610	17,500

♦ It is a myth that light rail systems relieve traffic congestion. Portland's light rail system had virtually no effect on congestion.



Portland Light Rail System (Max)

♦ The “auto-dependency” myth is that poorly designed neighbourhoods force people to be dependent on expensive, polluting automobiles. Reality: modern suburbs reflect people’s preference for the increased mobility provided by the automobile.

♦ It is a myth that automobiles are a costly burden forced on Americans by poor urban design and sprawl. The reality is that over most urban distances, the automobile is the most efficient and convenient transport mode ever devised. (Editor: Bromley planners please note).

♦ It is a myth that increasing land use density will reduce congestion. In reality, the denser the city, the more congestion tends to rise, even if transit systems are provided. (Editor: Mr Livingstone might like to bear this in mind with his plans to expand the population of London). Note that blaming the decline of American cities on suburbanisation is wrong. The message is that density and congestion are costly and people avoid them.

♦ It is a myth that you need to preserve downtown areas. The idea of downtowns as the single centre of urban areas is obsolete, as seen in newer cities such as Los Angeles. (Editor: the parallel here in London is that it may make more sense to expand urban sub-centres such as Bromley, Croydon, Lewisham and Greenwich, rather than concentrate commercial and retail development in central London. At present the strategic London plan is very centrally orientated.)

♦ Polls show that most people who support light rail systems never plan to ride them. They only support them because they hope it will reduce congestion on the roads on which they drive.

♦ There is an interesting chapter on European city data, which shows that, as in London, mass transit’s share of travel is falling, miles driven per capita are rising and population densities often falling (Editor: although Mr Livingstone has plans to “fix” all those numbers in London). The only exceptions to these trends have been in cities where planning laws were so draconian that they forced people to live a lifestyle that they did not prefer (as in the former East Germany, or Sweden). (Editor: in fact we are now getting this situation in London where developers cannot build houses at densities that people prefer to buy, but have to meet higher densities dictated by Ken Livingstone and the UK Government, with a certain proportion of even lower quality houses to meet the “more affordable housing” criteria).

♦ Rail lines are typically more costly to construct and have lower capacity than freeways. Consider the following table of actual figures on US routes.

	Light Rail	Commuter Rail	Heavy Rail	Freeway
Average passengers per route mile	4,300	2,222	12,890	23,769

(Heavy rail is equivalent to a London commuter rail line, commuter rail is equivalent to an intermediate system like the London underground, light rail is equivalent to the Docklands Light Railway or tram lines, freeway is equivalent to one lane of motorway).

♦ It is a myth that low density housing is unaffordable because it consumes so much valuable land. The fact is that high densities are strongly correlated with significant increases in land and housing costs. Development at higher densities, and providing and maintaining the necessary infrastructure is a lot more costly than developing at low densities.

♦ It is a myth that increasing urban densities reduces pollution because people will be able to walk, cycle or ride transit to work or play. Reality: air quality problems are strongly associated with high urban densities.

♦ As a rule of thumb, \$1 spent on buses or new highway capacity has as much effect on reducing congestion as \$6 to \$50 spent on rail transit. As in the UK, transit fares are massively subsidised in comparison with highway provision, and rail transit even more subsidised than bus transit. Despite huge increases in transit funding and subsidies over the past two decades, usage is stagnant in the USA.

♦ It is a myth that rail transit is fast. In reality the average heavy rail line goes 30 mph and the average light rail line goes only 20 mph. If you add the time that passengers take to get from and from the rail stations, then rail is generally far slower than automobiles for almost all trips.

♦ It is a myth that rail transit can attract many more riders than buses. In reality, ridership on almost every rail line built in the USA in the last twenty-five years has been far lower than expected, and in most cases is little more than previously rode the buses.

♦ It is a myth that transit saves energy. In fact bus transit consumes more energy per passenger mile than cars, and rail transit consumes about the same amount as cars, based on figures published by the US Department of Energy. And rail transit is only cleaner in pollution terms than other forms of transportation if it significantly alters travel habits, which it does not.

♦ It is a myth that air pollution is getting worse. In fact air pollution controls in the USA have significantly cleaned up urban air, while attempts to discourage auto driving have had little or no effect. (Editor: Bromley council staff please note).

♦ Jitneys (a “just in time” minibus type vehicle that is called on demand and can have flexible routes and schedules), may be a much better solution to most people’s needs. For example in South Africa 40 per cent of black commuters ride some 105,000 unsubsidised minibuses to work. Unfortunately they are rarely proposed for new public transit initiatives because they are not high profile systems, and there is no major business opportunity for large corporations to get involved.



Portland Bus (note bike carrier on front)

♦ Bus only or high occupancy vehicle lanes often increase congestion rather than reduce it because they dedicate a large share of roadway surface to vehicles that carry relatively few passenger miles. Also giving priority to buses to pull out into traffic imposes far more delays on automobile passengers than the time it saves for transit riders. An implicit judgement behind such transit preferences is that transit is somehow more morally sound than autos and hence deserves some advantages. This is questionable.

♦ It is a myth that automobile driving is far more dangerous than transit. The following are the figures for the USA from 1990 to 1996 in fatalities and injuries per billion passenger mile (source US National Transportation Statistics):

Mode	Fatalities	Injuries
Car	9	990
Urban Transit	7	1364
Trucks	7	4002
Intercity bus	0	161
Motorcycle	228	5948
Air (public carrier)	1	0
General Aviation	67	36

Light rail is in fact the most dangerous form of urban transit, causing 80 per cent more fatalities than autos. This is because light rail vehicles are very heavy and are unable to stop quickly. (Editor: you can see this from the fatality figures on the Croydon Tramlink for example). Commuter rail also has high rates for the same reasons, while heavy rail is safer because it is usually completely separate from pedestrians and other vehicles.

♦ He has a lot of interesting things to say about the way urban planners manipulate the democratic process and redefine the English language. For example, he says “obstructing roads and creating congestion is called *traffic calming*”, “auto hostile design is called *pedestrian friendly design*”, “the mobility provided by automobiles is called *auto dependency*” (Editor: it certainly is in Bromley council speak), “policies that increase congestion, making housing unaffordable, and raising taxes, are called “*smart growth*” (Editor: known as an “*integrated transport strategy*” in the UK).

♦ Note however that the author is quite keen on road tolling, on a pay as you go basis, ie. to use road tolls based on usage by location and time of day to fund road development. (Editor: But he probably would not be in favour of the London congestion charge scheme which is a flat rate system, more designed to subsidise public transit at the expense of road users).

♦ To summarise, there is much in this book worth reading. Clearly some of it needs to be adapted to the UK situation, but the same processes are happening here. It’s certainly highly recommended reading for anyone with an interest in transport matters, as it debunks a lot of the myths surrounding transport issues (unlike in this article, where only the main points have been covered, the author provides all the detail evidence to back up his statements). If anyone would like to obtain a copy of this book but has difficulty in doing so, please contact the editor.

Incidentally if you think the above article is rather long, try reading the book. If the writer has any defect it is that he has a somewhat repetitive style and clearly lacked a good editor to cut the size down.



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Our internet web address is: <http://www.bromleytransport.org.uk>. This contains much useful information including articles extracted from our newsletters. It also contains a “News” page which is updated regularly with items of topical interest.

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BBRAG Background Information

The Bromley Borough Roads Action Group (B.B.R.A.G.) stands for a more democratic and more rational approach to the traffic management problems of the London Borough of Bromley. Our initial formation some years ago was based on opposition to the kind of traffic calming scheme that was being introduced in the borough that simply caused more traffic congestion, and general inconvenience to road users, without any significant benefit in terms of road accident reductions. In fact, the money wasted on such schemes could have been much better spent on actual improvements to road safety in other areas. We now take a more general interest in all transport and associated environmental issues in the borough of Bromley and the greater London area. This includes traffic management schemes, public transport, road safety, parking policies, air pollution, other transport environmental issues such as noise, and associated local and central government policies. Our prime objective is to promote improvements in the transport infrastructure while stopping wasted expenditure on unpopular, ineffective or inappropriate policies.