



BBRAG NEWS

Bromley Borough Roads Action Group - No. 39 (April 2006)

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Editorial

Our major story in this edition is the Cray Avenue Bus Lane camera which has resulted in over 1,000 fines of £100 being issued in some recent months (will BBRAG members please note that the article has been updated with the latest council decisions).

It seems to be an example of petty officialdom enforcing laws to no purpose when there is no evidence that buses have been impeded and almost all the people "contravening" the regulations have simply been turning left and therefore moving into the left hand lane earlier than they should.

Members should make sure they communicate their feelings on this matter to the council and to their local councillors.

Roger Lawson, Editor

The Cray Avenue Bus Lane Camera



According to the latest "budget review" by Bromley Council, the bus lane camera on Cray Avenue, Orpington was identifying three times the number of offences previously expected. Local paper the News Shopper is running a campaign alleging that the bus lane design and camera placing is specifically designed to catch people unawares, and should be changed. Many disgruntled drivers are writing in to complain and it seems that the council expects to collect more than £250,000 in six months.

This and the new Widmore Road camera is helping to offset the shortfall in other parking revenue, but as reported in our last newsletter, the council still expects to make a surplus of £3.6 million on car parking and penalty charges.

A photograph of the Cray Avenue camera site is shown above (camera marked by an arrow). Note how there is no break in the red asphalt of the bus lane for vehicles who need to turn left into Station Approach. This makes it very confusing for drivers, although the white line becomes "broken" shortly before the turn. There is an arrow on the road but it is not at all clear where one can legally turn, if at all, when in fact crossing the unbroken line at any point is an offence.

If you are sitting on the right hand side of a vehicle, you can't see exactly where it stops to your left as the vehicle you are in and the one ahead obscure it. No doubt this is the source of the problems.

A meeting of the council's Environment Policy Development and Scrutiny (PDS) Committee on the 30th March discussed this matter. It commenced with a statement from Brian Cooke of LondonTravelWatch (what used to be the London Transport Users Committee who represent public transport users). He effectively said that everyone who got a fine for being in the bus lane deserved it. He was clearly breaching the rules for members of the public as you are only supposed to ask short questions, not make speeches. But the Chairperson, Samaris Huntingdon-Thresher said nothing until your editor intervened.

Thereafter Gareth Davies, the council officer who looks after traffic matters made a presentation. This said that there was basically nothing wrong with the design of the scheme and that he would not recommend significant changes.

Local ward councillors did support changing the "dotted lines" to extend them further back by a few metres however, and the committee finally settled on that as a recommendation to Councillor George Taylor .

It was also agreed that congestion on Cray Avenue seemed to have worsened and that the kerb "build-out" on Cray Avenue after Station Approach which effectively reduces the whole road to one lane, should be reconsidered. Also the timing of the traffic lights at the junction with Leasons Hill, and the yellow "box junctions" should be examined. *(Editors Comments: These are certainly good things to come out of the meeting).*

Before then Councillor Julian Grainger had made a number of good points, and raised questions which were not adequately answered. For example, he asked how many of the people fined for being in the bus lane near Station Approach actually ended up turning left? He clearly suspects it is most of them.

Councillor Taylor's Meeting

At Councillor Taylors Environment Portfolio Meeting on the 5th April, he considered this matter, and heard more representations from Councillor Grainger and from BBAG Chairman Roger Lawson. But he accepted the recommendation of the Environment PDS committee and therefore the only immediate change will be the extension of the broken lines by 5 metres.

(Editors Comments: This is either a gross error in design or a deliberate attempt to ensure that unsuspecting motorists incur fines. It should be changed to remove the red surface treatment and allow vehicles to enter the left lane up to 100 yards before the Station Approach junction (nobody wanting to go straight head will do so because they would have to get back into the main lane soon after which would be very difficult to do as there is a continuous queue of traffic there at all times of the day. The termination of the red surface treatment, and appropriate accompanying signage, would make it clear where the bus lane ends for traffic turning left into Station Approach. Ideally the road should be marked in that lane with "left turn only" to make it clear and the camera operators instructed not to penalise anyone who turns left.

Of course what really annoys motorists about this camera, and many others, is that perfectly reasonable behaviour, such as turning off to the left by using the bus lane when there is no queue there, and no bus in sight, generates an instant fine of £100. In addition, there is no system of appeal to an independent judiciary. The only appeal mechanism is to a tribunal which will only examine the facts in a very narrow way, and not consider the general merit of the case or whether the fine is appropriate – and even to appear at the tribunal risks doubling your fine.

I don't think this is justice in the normal sense and is a totally inappropriate approach to what is in essence a very minor infringement of the road traffic regulations even when it is not done accidentally.

In summary I am opposed to:

A – The system of enforcement of traffic law by "deregulated" offences where there is no real justice or a fair system of appeal.

B – Excessive penalties for trivial offences.

C – The placing of cameras to maximise revenue when there is no clear evidence that there was a major problem anyway, or a problem that could not have been tackled easily by other means.

In addition, I feel that the bus lane on Cray Avenue has been poorly designed, particularly near Station Approach, and in reality has worsened traffic congestion on this road significantly. But I do not think the whole bus lane should be removed. After all Cray Avenue was widened to accommodate the bus lane so that is not the sole cause of the problem).

More Bus Lane Cameras Planned

The council report on this subject also revealed that another two cameras are planned to cover the Cray Avenue Bus Lane, even though there is no evidence of deliberate infringement, or buses being delayed.

Note that if you have any views on this matter, make sure you write to the council and let them know – it seems they have had very few “representations” on the subject.

Biased Presentations from Council Staff

Apart from a video of activity on Cray Avenue which was shown at the Environment PDS committee meeting (and from which the public were excluded on grounds that were not at all clear and which is yet another example of council secrecy if they can find any excuse at all), there was a presentation from Gareth Davies. One of his slides shows the general attitude from council staff and included the statements that “More people want to do by bus” and “Less people want to go by car”. On what does he base this statement? Has he done a survey of Bromley residents and asked them that question? Your editor has never seen any such evidence and does not believe those statements to be true.

The Londoner Gets it Wrong

The mouthpiece of Ken Livingstone is called “The Londoner”. This free “newspaper” is distributed to all London residents and contains lots of positive statements about the Mayor’s achievements – needless to say his political opponents have complained about the use of

taxpayers money on what could be seen as a party political promotion.

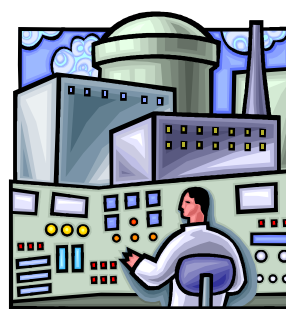
The latest edition contains a number of peculiar articles, if not downright mistakes.

Deaths from Pollution

One “letter” to the editor points out that 80% of London’s carbon emissions come from homes, so why the emphasis on restricting car transport? The reply from Ken is that “*Scientists estimate that more than 1,000 Londoners die a year because of the poisonous fumes coming from exhausts...*”. Unfortunately this statement is grossly misleading and a travesty of the facts. It is true that air pollution can exacerbate some medical conditions, possibly contributing to earlier deaths in those severely ill, but to suggest that air pollution is the direct and imminent cause of over 1,000 deaths is a gross exaggeration. In reality it may have “contributed” to a handful of premature deaths.

Even estimating the number of people affected in this way is exceedingly difficult as the evidence is limited and the causes of death often complex. This subject was covered in some depth in our edition number 29, and Mr Livingstone should be a lot more careful about what he says. Perhaps he would care to name the 1,000 people who died last year from this cause to substantiate his claim?

Nuclear Power



Another revealing article on the prejudices of the Mayor is given in an article headlined “Nuclear Power too dangerous”. What this subject has to do with London or

Londoners is not exactly clear, as there is certainly no proposal to build any nuclear power stations in London. But disregarding that point, the article consists mainly of three letters criticising proposals for new nuclear power stations.

One of the letters is from a "D. Johnson", presumably Darren Johnson of the Green party, proposing that windmills are built instead - to be constructed on the "same design of old windmills" so they look pretty. Unfortunately the writer is mistaken if he believes that windmills can supply the needed power in total. The only real alternative to more nuclear power stations, at least to replace the ones being decommissioned, is more coal fired power stations. As the son of a former coal miner (yes you may not believe it but it is true), your editor can tell you bluntly that a lot more people die each year mining coal than have ever been killed in nuclear accidents. For example, 6,000 coal miners die every year in China alone from accidents (yes that is six thousand and it's not a misprint). And coal fired stations produce a lot more pollution as well.

It would take too long and be out of place in this publication to cover the full arguments for and against the use of nuclear power, but one thing your editor is sure of. Mr Livingstone should not promote his political views in this way.

If you want to give the government your views on this matter, they are currently conducting an "Energy Review Consultation" – go to www.dti.gov.uk/energy/review for details.

Mayors Suspension



It will be interesting to see how future editions of the Londoner cover the subject of the Mayor's recent suspension from office for suggesting a Jewish newspaper reporter was no better than a concentration camp guard. But I am sure we

are all glad that he has ended up with a legal bill of £80,000 apparently (and rising no doubt with his recent appeal), which he could almost certainly have avoided by a simple apology.

Mayor Puts His Foot in it Again

Another example of the Mayor's insensitivity was given by his comments recently on the refusal by the US Embassy to pay the London

Congestion Tax. The embassy, and quite rightly, claim this "charge" is in fact a tax, and they are exempt from all taxes under the international convention that applies to foreign embassies.

He said in a TV interview that *"It would actually be quite nice if the American ambassador in Britain could pay the charge that everybody else is paying and not actually try and skive out of it like a chiselling little crook"*.

A US Embassy spokesperson said *"The Mayor has a tendency to hyperbole"*. (*Editors Comments: A polite understatement if ever there was one.*)

Congestion Charging for Bromley and Other TfL Proposals



Another interesting article in "The Londoner" was a piece on new Transport for London (TfL) chief, Peter Hendy. Mr Hendy is clearly a bus aficionado as was

obvious from a picture of his early career as a bus conductor in the article. But one interesting quotation from him is:

"Transport for London has some particularly testing challenges coming up, not least in lowering car use levels in outer London...."

And how might this be achieved? Well an article in The Times on the 22nd February explained that there are already plans to charge car users in outer London by using a series of road-side beacons with in-car tags. An experiment in Southwark has already been undertaken using this technology and the article says *"TfL hopes to introduce it across Central London in 2009"*. But in addition it says that TfL has also identified "key centres" in outer London that would "benefit" from congestion charging by 2010. These are Harrow, Hounslow, Kingston, Sutton, Croydon, Bromley, Ilford, Romford and Wood Green.

Note also that Bromley Council's Policy Development and Scrutiny Committee also resolved at a recent meeting that *"a report be submitted to a future meeting of the Committee setting out the background and effect on Bromley of any possible introduction of congestions charges"*, so this is clearly now no longer a rumour.

(Editors Comments: Of course Ken Livingstone only recently denied the suggestion that congestion charging was being contemplated for the London suburbs, so either he is being disingenuous or he does not know what his own staff are considering. Perhaps he has been too busy defending himself against the proposed suspension. But if this proposal goes forward then your editor will be one of the first people to stand up and fight against it. The central London congestion charge is a financial disaster as well as a gross personal inconvenience and if it was imposed in Bromley then it will be one of the worst possible decisions for the vitality of the area).

Hendy's Priorities

Peter Hendy also recently spoke on his priorities for TfL to the Greater London Assembly. He promised to visit all the London boroughs and provide greater transparency at TfL. He wishes to "engage" more with stakeholders, including local authorities, user groups and the wider public. But members of the Assembly accused TfL of being a "desperately unresponsive bureaucracy".

(Editors Comments: Exactly my experience of TfL, but Peter Hendy is welcome to come and talk to me anytime).

Apparently he was asked what his experience was of driving in London. He replied that he didn't drive in London often, and said that "*the chairman of Kellogg's doesn't need to eat cornflakes all day*".

Enforcement of 20 Mph Speed Limits



TfL is seeking Home Office approval for enforcement of 20 mph zones by a new type of "time-distance" camera. These would be similar to the "SPECS" system you see on road works and in some other areas (like the Nottingham ring road and currently on Lower Thames Street in the City of London). They are also asking for speeding fines to be decriminalised although why the two are linked is not obvious – probably because they expect so many fines to be generated that the court system might be overwhelmed.

(Editors Comments: A possible benefit is that speed humps would be considered unnecessary, but it's yet another system of generating money with no proper legal process for those persons accused of a crime).

Ken's Impact on Your Council Taxes

Bromley Council recently approved a budget which will see your council tax rise by 6.2%. But this will still mean that Bromley residents will be paying the lowest rate for an outer London borough.

Why did it rise so much, and yet again at a rate higher than inflation? Well one simple reason is because the Greater London Authority precept, as determined by Ken Livingstone, rose by 13.3%.

In fact although the GLA "precept" is a small part of your council tax bill, the rise in the former was almost as much as the rise from other causes. In other words, yet again Ken Livingstone's budget has been one of the main causes of rising council taxes in London.

Also it's worth pointing out that of the 13.3% increase, some 7.8% of it represented the cost of the 2012 Olympic Games. So Bromley residents have to fund this minority interest for many years to come, and the associated improvements to transport services in Ken Livingstone's favoured electoral heartland.

A further reason for the increase in council taxes is the failure by central Government to increase the grants they make in line with increased costs, and of course, the increased obligations laid down by new legislation invented by central Government. However prudent the local Conservative administration is in Bromley, they are overwhelmed by the GLA and central Government policies.

London's Low Emission Zone



Earlier this year, we briefly covered the proposals for a "Low Emission Zone" in

London. This will attempt to improve air quality by deterring older, more polluting vehicles, from entering any part of the GLA area.

Only HGVs, LGVs, and buses will be affected, not private cars. In practice, any older vehicles that do not meet the latest "Euro III" standard by 2008, and the "Euro IV" standard by 2010 will have to pay a hefty fee to enter any of the London Boroughs.

This matter has now gone to public consultation and you can read the full report and submit comments by going to the following web site: www.tfl.gov.uk/tfl/low-emission-zone/

The basic intention of the proposals is to cut the level of PM10 (particulates) and NO2 in the atmosphere. A high proportion of these in the atmosphere come from road transport, particularly diesel engines in the former case. They are also claimed to have negative impacts on health. The report claims that the cost benefits in terms of health would be in the range of £130 to £180 million over the years 2008 to 2015 but does not substantiate that with any figures (*Editors Comments: I am exceedingly sceptical that this is the case.*)

The scheme would be enforced by a network of cameras, as with the congestion charging scheme, and it will cost approximately £130 million to implement and operate it until 2016. This will of course have to be paid for mainly by Londoners as it is expected to generate less than £50 million in fees and penalties from the vehicle operators.

In addition, the cost for goods vehicle operators to comply with the scheme, partly to modify their vehicles to cut emissions, will be up to £180 million, which of course they will pass on to their customers.

Only 5 Years Benefit

One remarkable comment in the TfL report is this: *"Work undertaken by TfL estimates that the introduction of a London LEZ would bring forward by some 4 – 5 years reductions in PM10 emissions in 2010 than would otherwise be achieved under the natural vehicle replacement cycle".*

In other words, this enormously expensive project will only expedite improved air quality by about 5 years, because it would improve anyway as older vehicles are replaced. New vehicles must conform to much tighter emission standards so the problem will be much reduced in a few years time.

Why Such a Complex and Expensive System?

The report also points out that there are alternative ways of achieving the same results. For example in Sweden they introduced such a system in some of the major cities by simply banning older vehicles from town centres.

(Editor: Of course once you have this amazingly expensive infrastructure in place, will it ever get dismantled? Probably not because it will provide TfL with a great opportunity to regulate even more of our lives.

The following is what I said last time on this subject, and a reading of the report hasn't changed my views: As with most of Ken Livingstone's plans, financial probity seems to have been ignored, and this proposal is a sledgehammer to crack a nut. It is certainly a good idea to introduce a low emission zone in those parts of London that are badly affected by pollution from such vehicles, but such areas are relatively small. For example, Bromley has minimal problems in that regard. But to introduce the proposed scheme over the whole of London will be enormously expensive for vehicle operators.

Of course there could be another reason why Ken and TfL are so keen on this scheme. Once the cameras have been installed over the whole of London, introducing a London wide "congestion charging" scheme would be trivial.)

Don't forget to send in your comments on this scheme to TfL.

BBC News Coverage on Speed Humps



BBC News in Scotland recently covered Judith McCrorie's petition to the Scottish Parliament on the issue of speed humps (previously

covered in our Newsletters). As she has said "*A lot of people with disabilities are having to avoid certain roads and areas just because of the pain experience*".

Bob McLellan from her local council responded with "*If vehicles are travelling at appropriate speeds within the 20 mph area then no discernable discomfort should be afforded to the vehicle user or passengers*". (Editor: *but as we all know, this is simply not true*).

A large number of people wrote in to the BBC web site with some comments. Among the most revealing ones were the following:

"My uncle spent most of the festive period in bed and in extreme discomfort after pulling muscles and trapping a nerve going over a speed cushion. He was definitely going well under 20 mph...."... Lally, Aberdeen.

"My wife has a chronic pelvic condition resulting in constant pain which is exacerbated by the likes of speed bumps, pot holes and uneven surfaces at ANY speed. Would he suggest that she gives up work and just sits on a comfy chair at home".... Donald Marshall, Glasgow.

"Both my wife and I suffer from back pain and have to take a particular route home to avoid speed bumps on our estate – they were installed without any public consultation several years ago..."... Colin Wilson, Liverpool.

"Whilst I was pregnant last year I found I suffered a lot of discomfort every time we went over speed humps, as a result we often took a different longer route as I couldn't bear it..." Debbie Bissell, Lichfield.

Oh and in case anyone was wondering, the answer to the question as to whether speed humps have ever been tested using pregnant women as the car drivers, or tested on people with disabling medical conditions, the answer is no.

Telegraph Reports

The Daily Telegraph is also running a campaign against speed humps and the following reports were published in a recent edition.

A speed hump was installed in Swindon outside a fire station in the early 1970s. Within a few days a woman cyclist rode out of the station, turned left and struck the hump at an angle. She fell off and was killed by a passing motor vehicle.

A speed hump was installed at Guys Hospital in the 1980s. Soon after an accident victim with spinal injuries was being brought to the hospital via ambulance. When it crossed the hump, the result was a complete spinal cord injury and the patient was left as a permanent paraplegic.

In both cases the humps were removed soon afterwards.

Old Hill Decisions



Old Hill - Can You See the Humps?

At the meeting held by Councillor George Taylor on the 2nd March, he considered the report on the latest consultation with residents on the Old Hill, Chislehurst traffic calming scheme. The main points in the report produced by council staff were:

1. The majority of residents felt that traffic calming was necessary on Old Hill but a large majority also felt that the "right type" had not been installed. In other words there was clear dissatisfaction with the two single cushions on the lower part of the hill and with some other aspects of the scheme with a number of people complaining of severe discomfort as a result. Note that the response rate to the survey was 24% which is a good one for this type of consultation exercise.

2. There was unfortunately no unified view as to what should be done about the scheme and a number of impractical suggestions were made. The main support seemed to be for changing the single speed cushions into full width tables or humps, or scrapping them altogether, but council staff would not support the latter suggestion.

3. Note that thirty questionnaires were received from outside the local consultation area which the council ignored when compiling the report. At the meeting, your editor asked a question on this point and the answer given by Gareth Davies was that they were ignored because he was not convinced they were genuine road users. But in a subsequent conversation he backtracked on that and simply said they were not from the local area. *(Editors Note: some of these 30 questionnaires were no doubt from BBRAG members so if you care to complain that your comments were ignored I suggest you send your remarks to the Chief Executive at Bromley Council).*

4. The report also did not mention the severe accident involving Anja Szkodowski that was covered in our previous newsletters. When your editor asked why not, when council staff were clearly aware of the matter, it was stated that this was because it hadn't been reported via the police STATS19 system which seems a pretty lame excuse (as also pointed out previously, the police had specifically rebuffed Anja twice when she tried to report it).

5. The report shows that traffic volumes fell considerably after the traffic calming measures were installed. But it also shows for the first time that the 85th percentile speed on the road before installation was just over 30 mph – this is remarkably low in comparison with most roads in Bromley and not only shows that the vast

majority of people kept within the speed limit but also that the traffic calming measures were probably unnecessary.

6. The accident record is also supportive of the above argument with only a few slight accidents before and after construction – that's apart from the severe accident to Anja Szkodowski of course, which was a direct result of the defective design of the scheme.

7. The report recommended:

a – Remarketing the humps.

b – Some changes to parking restrictions.

c – That Mr Taylor considers whether it was worthwhile to spend £5,000 replacing the two single speed cushions with flat top tables (note the lack of specific recommendation on the latter).

The full report is available from the council web site if you want to read it.

BBRAG's Position

Note that BBRAG supported the proposal to change the single cushions to speed tables with the following provisos:

a – That the local residents affected by traffic noise (i.e. "thumps") from the humps be consulted about the new table design and placing.

b – That the humps be designed to minimise noise by using a gentle leading slope, and be more clearly marked. These features would also avoid a recurrence of the severe accident mentioned above.

What Were The Decisions?



Mr Taylor (picture left) decided that the speed tables should be installed, to replace the single cushions, and the other recommendations also followed. However no more than £5,000 will be spent on the tables.

Also it seems that local residents will again be consulted on this matter, so it is hoped that they will get what they want,

although the limit of £5,000 may make it difficult to achieve a high quality result.

Let us pray though that the end result is an improvement because this saga has been going on for far too long. It has certainly consumed an awful lot of council staff time and money. But of course this has resulted primarily from the inability of council staff to listen to the comments of BBRAG and of residents at an early stage, and to take heed of subsequent complaints.

(Editors Comments: BBRAG committee member and Old Hill resident Des Andrews got his picture in the Kentish Times alongside an article on this subject. Your editor also got his picture in the same edition attached to an article on congestion charging in Bromley).

Pedestrian Refuges in Beckenham



Another decision taken by George Taylor at his meeting on the 2nd March was on the question of some proposed “pedestrian refuges” on Bromley Road, Beckenham (picture of a typical refuge is shown above, although they are usually now built wider and higher in Bromley). This would not normally be a contentious issue, but a whole gaggle of residents turned up to raise various points about the position of these refuges.

Bearing in mind that the 85th percentile speed figures on the road were over 38 mph (in a 30 mph zone of course), these refuges or “islands” seemed a sensible proposition even though there have been historically few accidents to pedestrians on the road. Compare those speeds with those on Old Hill given above for example!

Councillor Michael Tickner raised the issue that one of the islands was adjacent to a bus-stop and thus buses would be likely to hold up traffic

unnecessarily. He argued that cars were not allowed to hold up buses – bus lanes were provided for just this reason – and therefore buses should not be allowed to hold up cars. He jokingly referred to the need for “car lanes” in such circumstances.

Gareth Davies for the council argued that there were many other such arrangements in Bromley that did not cause a problem, and that in his view such a design was a “good traffic calming measure”.

But common sense prevailed, and Mr Taylor approved the scheme “in principle” but subject to the detail design for the problematic island being placed so that it did not hold up traffic.

Green Lane, Chislehurst and Petts Wood Kerb Build-Outs

Another proposal that might cause additional traffic congestion is to “build-out” the bus stop outside Belmont Parade, Chislehurst. This is a typical suggestion that comes out of the “London Bus Priority Network” project which consumes a lot of the transport budget.



Of course much of the existing traffic congestion at that point, which makes it difficult for buses to exit from the bus stop, is actually caused by inconsiderate (and dangerous) parking on the stretch of road between Mead Lane and Belmont Parade. See the pictures above and below for examples of this (in the second photograph, the driver had actually parked on the “zig-zag” markings after the zebra crossing which is of course illegal, but she had put her hazard warning lights on so that’s OK isn’t it!).



This parking problem has been an annoying feature of the road network in Chislehurst for many years and is long overdue for resolution. Thankfully part of the proposals includes more parking restrictions to fix that problem so we must congratulate the planning consultants for that.

However, with parked cars continually occupying the opposite side of the road to the bus stop, a "build-out" would narrow the road too much.

If you feel the same way about this proposal, please send your comments to Simon Fryer, Colin Buchanan, FREEPOST PAM 5181, 45 Notting Hill Gate, London, W11 3BR by the 7th April (tel. 020-7939-7000 for a copy of the proposals which also cover Albany Road).

Build-outs in Petts Wood

Proposals for the 208 bus route also involve a number of kerb build-outs in such roads as Southborough Lane, Crofton Lane and Queensway. Some of these will certainly block traffic when buses are parked on the bus stops. BBRAG has sent in objections to these but it is unfortunately symptomatic of the attitudes covered above that buses should have priority regardless of the necessity or any reasonable justification for such measures. And the fact that such proposals will actually worsen traffic congestion seems to be barely considered when drawing up these plans.

Double Decker Trains

Transport Secretary Alistair Darling recently announced measures to cope with increased congestion on the railways. Yes double-decker trains could be coming to a station near you – at least sometime, maybe, as there was no very definite commitment.

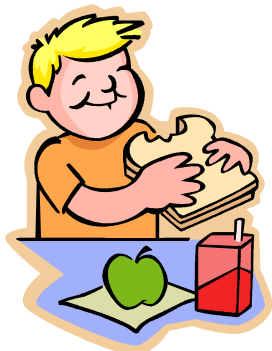
Overcrowding on London suburban rail lines is getting worse, although South Eastern trains are better than many other lines according to statistics published for 2004. Passenger rail travel has grown by 40% in the last 10 years and there is little spare capacity on commuter routes into London to run more trains.

There are only two solutions: either run longer trains, which means extending all station platforms, or run double-decker trains. The former though is not always practical and is also costly.

Double-decker trains are perhaps more feasible and were in fact used on the Dartford line in the 1950s. You can see a photograph and more details of those on the following web site: www.yellins.com/transporthistory/rail/ddtrain.html . But they proved to be cramped and also it took longer for passengers to get on and off the train, thus delaying them. However they are used on some lines overseas. *(Editor: I have actually used such trains in Sydney, Australia and in continental Europe and they work well, but I think these services have a wider track gauge and a taller "height" gauge also.)*

Note though that raising the height of tunnels and bridges to cope with taller trains would also be an enormous expense, so don't expect a lot of fast action on this idea.

More Free Lunches Even for the Editor



Yes there are to be more handouts to the needy of London (and even for your editor). From April 2nd all under 11s will be able to use the underground and DLR free of charge. At least so long as they are accompanied by an adult.

That's in addition to the free travel for under 16s on London buses and trams since last September.

Ken Livingstone seems keen to persist with bribing the electorate of London with their own money. Unfortunately this generosity is yet another factor in the above inflation increases in your council taxes. Because Bromley and other local London councils pay for the travel used by borough residents, every price rise that Ken introduces to bridge the yawning gap in his transport budget, also results in proportionate increases in the subsidy. And of course, a large part of the "precept" for the Greater London Authority that you pay, which again rose much faster than local borough charges, also goes to fund public transport deficits.

But the worm is turning for your editor. Having reached the age of 60 he now qualifies for a "Freedom Pass" giving free public transport on trains, buses, underground, etc, at most times of the day. Will he give up his car as a result? Unlikely, as he has just treated himself to a new one. Will he decline to take advantage of this "free lunch" to attend business meetings in central London on the basis that he can afford to pay? No because he has of course been subsidising other people in the same position who didn't need this hand-out in the last few years.

Note that your editor's council tax bill has now multiplied by 2.1 times in the last 10 years, based on the latest demand (no he has not moved house in that time). And no doubt one of the reasons is this preference for subsidies to public transport in London when it would make more sense to let people retain more in their own pockets so they could spend it on what they prefer. As it is they are forced to "donate" it to pay for free transport for many people who could afford to pay for it themselves.

If any readers have any comments on the bizarre economic policies of Ken Livingstone, please send them in for publication.

News Snapshots

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

+ Road deaths in EU countries fell by 39% between 1994 and 2004, but Britain was actually 13th (ie. next to bottom in terms of improving road safety). In the last four years we are actually last. Is this because the UK traditionally had a very good record, so other countries are simply "catching up"? Not according to Paul Smith of Safespeed who blames our poor performance solely on the recent policies followed in the UK – namely an overemphasis on speed as the cause of accidents, the reduction in traffic police that is associated with an over-reliance on technology and a reluctance to spend any money on road improvements. (*Editors Comments: It could be both factors have contributed, but it's certainly an issue worth considering*).

+ A newish web site that promotes the benefits of electric trolley buses is www.tbus.org.uk. This is definitely worth visiting if you are one of the people who are keen on trams. As your editor has said several times in the past, if you want an environmentally friendly, safe, quiet and fast public transport service, then trolley buses beat trams without question. They are also less obstructive to other road users so should find favour with car users also.

Another site specifically campaigning for trolley buses on the Uxbridge Road (West London) instead of trams is www.tfwl.org.uk . They also have a link to a "webring" of trolley bus sites which is <http://f.webring.com/hub?ring=trolleybus>

+ Transport for London (TfL) have revised the targets for road traffic accident reduction in London by 2010 (from the 1994-98 baseline). These are now 50% for most accident categories, against the previous 40% for "KSI" accidents (killed and seriously injured). Child KSIs are reduced to 60% but powered 2 wheelers stay at 40%, mainly because the previous target is far away from being achieved. Bromley council suggested the targets should be even lower bearing in mind the good progress being made to achieve the previous ones.

+ Autocar magazine has reported that 66 new digital speed cameras are to be installed in the London area at a total cost of £3.3 million, plus another £1 million is being spent on a supporting advertising campaign.

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.

Contact Information

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B.B.R.A.G. Chairman and Newsletter Editor: Roger Lawson (Tel: 020-8467-2686, fax: 020-8295-0378, Email: roger.lawson@btclick.com). Contact the above for information on the aims and objectives of B.B.R.A.G. or for membership information (membership costs £9.50 per annum for individuals, or £7.50 if you opt to receive our Newsletter via email, or £50 for corporate membership). B.B.R.A.G. would be happy to advise or assist anyone who is concerned about any traffic, transport or road safety issues in the borough.

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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