



# BBRAG NEWS

Bromley Borough Roads Action Group - No. 42 (Sept 2006)

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## *Editorial*

*As there is so much news in recent weeks, this is a bumper edition and also it has been brought forward a month so members will get an extra edition for your subscription money. Important stories in this edition are the false claims by Transport for London regarding air pollution in London, and an adjudication that demonstrates that Bromley Council was wrong in its enforcement of a bus lane.*

*Roger Lawson, Editor*

## **Congestion Tax Not Cutting Pollution**



Our previous edition included an article that covered the latest report from Transport for London (TfL) on the Congestion Tax. It pointed out that even based on their own report, the impact of the congestion charge on air pollution has been negligible. However, that has not stopped TfL from making a public claim that it has – see the advertisement hoarding above which was put up in Cable Street, London E1.

In case you can't read the small print it says "Less road traffic emissions – The Charge is helping it happen", which is clearly nonsense.

Your editor has submitted a complaint to the Advertising Standards Authority accordingly. The full argument and supporting data which shows that pollution in central London has probably risen rather than fallen in the last three years can be seen on our internet web site at:

<http://www.bromleytransport.org.uk/Congestion%20Charge%20and%20Air%20Pollution%20July2007.pdf> (or phone for a printed copy).

### ***Using TfLs Budget for Political Purposes***

The above is a good example of how Transport for London have recently been promoting the Mayor's policies, whether the truth backs them up or not. Conservative transport spokesman Roger Evans has complained that with expenditure by TfL on advertising likely to be over £11 million this year, "A lot of spending seems to be about the Mayor's personality. Without doubt it is disguised political advertising." According to Councillor Phil Taylor of Enfield his researches have shown that the total expenditure of different parts of the Mayor's empire is at least £78 million in the last year for advertising, marketing and other communications and could be as high as £100 million

It seems that the budget for the "Your TfL" campaign alone is £2.6 million - among other things it promotes the benefit of public transport and the congestion charge plus tells us what a good job TfL is doing of course.

### ***Pollution Hits a Ten Year Record in August***

Record ozone levels accompanied the record temperatures in London on August 6th of this year. The London Air Quality Network (LAQN) said this was a combination of high temperatures and an easterly wind bringing in pollutants from the continent, adding to our own emissions. The result was an ozone level of 131ppb in Enfield which is the highest ever recorded in the last ten years. High nitrogen dioxide levels apparently contributed to the build up of ozone.

Doctors reported an increase in asthma and other respiratory problems as a result.

*(Editor's Comments: Anyone who took a trip into central London on the hottest days will have experienced the atrocious air quality for themselves, which was so apparent. But no doubt this latest "aberration" in the pollution statistics will be explained away by TfL).*

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### **Congestion Rising within the Congestion Tax Zone**

The latest report on Congestion Charging also makes it clear that congestion rose within the zone in 2005. It's still better than it was before the zone was constructed however, but clearly the increase in the charge from £5 to £8 had no positive benefits other than to raise more taxes for Ken Livingstone.

The average traffic speed in 2005 was 10 mph (down from 10.5 mph in 2003), but it was only 8.7 mph before the zone was implemented. The Conservatives have suggested that Londoners were now paying £8 per day for "congestion that they used to get for free".

*(Editor's Comments: This data also reflects my personal experience from recent driving trips into the zone with congestion seeming to return. It seems to be caused by a combination of more buses, taxis and commercial vehicles combined with more road works).*

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### **Ken to Raise Congestion Tax to £25**

Not content with making us pay £8 for the pleasure of driving into London, Ken Livingstone is now proposing to charge larger vehicles £25. He wants high emission vehicles such as SUVs and "Chelsea Tractors" to pay a lot more than the standard charge, but with cheaper rates for low emission vehicles.

There were widespread objections as a result with Angie Bray, leader of the Conservatives in the Greater London Assembly saying "Livingstone is now shifting the focus away from cutting congestion and on to raising money for the mayors other congestion causing projects."

The editor of the Financial Times (otherwise a long-standing supporter of congestion charging) called it a new "sumptuary tax" and said "there is an unmistakable whiff of class animus behind the mayor's proposal".

*(Editor's Comments: The impact on air pollution of this measure is surely likely to be negligible as private cars are a relatively small part of the total contribution of air pollution from road transport in London, and such vehicles are a relatively small part of the former anyway. Any reduction is likely to be offset by increased use of taxis, or if LGVs are not going to be subject to the same penal rates, we may see a new vehicle on the roads - the luxury "white van". In essence this proposal appears to be simply motivated by envy and the usual kind of attack by left wing politicians on the freedom of choice of the individual).*

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## TfL Attacks Removal of Bus Lanes

The London Boroughs of Bexley and Ealing have taken steps recently to suspend the operation of bus lanes. This follows the takeover of these boroughs by Conservative administrations in the recent council elections, when it seems that such a move was included in their election campaigns. For example, Ealing council leader Jason Stacey has said "We have had so many complaints and seen so much anger and bitterness towards these bus lanes from residents since they were installed."

But Transport for London (TfL) is threatening to penalise them by withdrawing funding from other projects such as road safety programmes.

In Bexley the council has already stopped using CCTV cameras to enforce a bus lane in Welling High Street, and is planning to replace the bus lane by loading and waiting restrictions.

Bexley would apparently lose an estimated £310,000 per year from penalty charges as a result. But Bexley's cabinet member for transport said: "My priority is to ensure that enforcement is used primarily to keep traffic flowing and highways clear across the borough, rather than to raise money".

*(Editor's Comments: Readers may like to compare this attitude with that of Bromley where more bus lane cameras were recently installed on Cray Avenue, even though congestion continues to get worse).*

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## More Powers for the Dictator



Ken Livingstone has managed to extend his powers over London even further. The Government recently announced that the "devolution agenda is pushed forward" and "strategic leadership boosted" by the new powers being given to him

in respect of housing, planning, waste, climate change/energy and other areas.

*(Editor's Comments: Calling this "devolution" means that Minister Ruth Kelly must think we are all idiots when in practice this will take away the power of local boroughs in many areas and put them in Ken's hands.)*

Apart from giving Ken the power to direct approval and refusal of planning applications, the additional powers that the Greater London Assembly requested to control the Mayor's excesses and monitor his activities were rejected, even though these were supported by many of the public consultation responses,.

The only sops that were included were new needs for the mayor to "have regard to responses to consultation" and "provide timely written responses providing reasoned justifications to the Assembly" but those commitments are not likely to be enforceable in practical terms.

Readers are reminded that in February the Greater London Assembly voted against the Mayor's proposed transport budget by 16 votes to 9 – all party members except those of the Labour party voted against it. But as a two-thirds majority is required to reject the Mayor's proposals, the opposition was pointless. This system will not change.

## **Ken Can Now Ban All Cars from London**

One of the most dangerous elements in the new powers being granted is the new statutory duty of the Greater London Authority to tackle climate change. This includes the duty to ensure an enduring London-wide programme of action to lower emissions of carbon dioxide. So it will now be possible for the Mayor to propose the banning of all private cars from the whole of London. It will be perfectly within his rights to do so, and nobody will be able to stop him.

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## **License Plates for Cyclists**



Ken Livingstone is concerned about the antics of cyclists – the so called “lycra louts” who ride on pavements, ignore traffic lights and

harass car drivers (*Editor: he must have been reading my complaints and others in the recent Metropolitan Police consultation on policing priorities*).

So his suggested solution is to license all cyclists and have them fit number plates that can be picked up by his omnipresent video cameras. No this is apparently not a joke, but a serious proposition from the Mayor. All it needs is a private members Bill in Parliament to give him the necessary powers.

*(Editor's Comments: the financial cost of this would be simply enormous, assuming cyclists bothered to comply. Just think of the bureaucracy involved to record all cyclists, bill them for the license, and trace them if they don't pay. It is a pity that the chance of any such Parliamentary Bill being progressed is so small as this horribly unpopular measure might finally convince everyone that Ken has no financial commonsense at all. A better solution would be to simply enforce the existing laws with a few extra policemen – it would cost a lot less).*

Postscript: only a few days after the above article was written, the Mayor started to “back-peddle”. With the Green Party, motorists groups and cyclists organisations all criticising the proposals as far too bureaucratic and likely to deter cycling, he said that there may be a

“number of practical problems” and it therefore “could only be seen as a difficult last resort”. (*Editor: what a shame the country is not going to see the results of another major innovation by our Mayor*).

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## **Parking Charges Hit New Records**



Motorists in England paid a record £1.2 billion in parking charges last year. This has soared by 82 per cent since Labour came to power in 1997. Liberal

Democrat transport spokesman Alistair Carmichael said that “*The Government clearly sees motorists simply as a cash cow. These increases have punished motorists without achieving any impact on congestion*”.

The same day these comments were made, a report was published by MPs on the Transport Select Committee on car parking. The report was highly critical of the existing iniquities caused by confusing regulations, and differing enforcement procedures operated by different councils. They recommended a single parking system, with more comprehensible signs, a more graduated penalty system and a better appeals system.

The committee received numerous complaints about over-zealous, incompetent or malicious acts by parking wardens. You can read the full report on the internet at:  
<http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm200506/cmselect/cmtran/748/74802.htm>

## **Gravesend Parking Problems**

A good example of the problems created by the adopted parking policies of local councils is that of the Kent town of Gravesend. Note that some of this report is taken from the Newsletter of the Kent Branch of the Association of British Drivers, but there is also a web site created by Gravesend resident Dave Brown where you can learn more – see [www.gravesendparking.co.uk](http://www.gravesendparking.co.uk).

Many of the town centre car parks in Gravesend are being closed and housing built on them instead. For example, the Lords Street multi-storey is being demolished, and those in Parrock Street, Rathmore Road and other parks along

the riverside are all being reduced, resulting in the loss of over 1,000 parking spaces. At the same time there are new shopping, hotel and leisure developments in the town centre which have no separate car parking provision but will generate a need for more public spaces. Although more "on-street" spaces are being provided, these are often less convenient, tend to create more congestion and are inadequate to meet the demand.

As Dave Brown's web site says: "*The idea was to force people out of their cars and onto buses by reducing the amount of available parking spaces. In many towns this philosophy may have worked, but Gravesend's proximity to both Bluewater and the Medway Towns shopping centres, has meant that Gravesend has suffered a dramatic loss of visitors. The Town Centre is dying.*"

*(Editor's Comments: A familiar story all around the country, and of course also taking place in Bromley. The Orpington Tesco site redevelopment is a good example. There is a persistent erosion of parking provision due to the Government encouraging councils to reduce car parking capacity which results in simple inconvenience to everyone.*

*As for the MPs report on car parking, I don't think it goes nearly far enough. The whole "decriminalised" parking regime should be scrapped and replaced by a totally new and fairer system.)*

### **ALG Parking Consultation**

The Association of London Government (ALG) which represents the London Boroughs is currently undertaking a consultation on changes to parking fines and regulations, including such matters as more graduated fines. It can be seen on the internet at:  
[www.alg.gov.uk/doc.asp?doc=17808&cat=937](http://www.alg.gov.uk/doc.asp?doc=17808&cat=937) or phone 020 7934 9999 for a paper copy.

Please make sure you go there and complete it so they are aware of your opinions.

### **Bromley Already has Graduated Fines**

It seems that unknown to your editor, Bromley is the only location in London which already has a system of differential penalties for different parking penalties. This was introduced in the

town centre in 1994 on an experimental basis. Contraventions of "prohibited parking regulations" receive higher penalties than contraventions in "permitted parking". Nobody seems to have complained about this system.

### **Under-reporting of Road Casualties**



Our last newsletter mentioned a report in the BMJ that suggested that the level of road traffic accidents in the UK has remained quite stable, and that any

reductions in the reported road accident statistics from the Government were hence probably due to more under-reporting by the police. The BMJ report was based on an analysis of hospital admissions.

The Department of Transport have now published a report that confirms this by a more extensive survey – see Road Safety Research Report No. 69 which can be read on the internet at:

[http://www.dft.gov.uk/stellent/groups/dft\\_rdsafety/documents/page/dft\\_rdsafety\\_611755.pdf](http://www.dft.gov.uk/stellent/groups/dft_rdsafety/documents/page/dft_rdsafety_611755.pdf)

To quote from the report: "STATS19 data (ie. that reported by the police and used in Government statistics) shows a reduction in the number of serious injuries in England, Wales and Scotland, although those in England have shown the steepest decline in all but three police forces. Comparison of the serious casualties in STATS19 for England, Wales and Scotland with the inpatient data for the same countries shows that the number of admissions is almost equal to the total number of serious casualties in the STATS19 database, rising steadily from there being fewer admissions in 1999 (by about 3,000) to there being more in 2003 (by about 1,800).

On the basis of this and the finding that admissions account for about 50% of seriously injured casualties (defined by an admission, referral to fracture clinic, or other specialised clinics, or planned follow-up at hospital), the immediate interpretation is that the number of serious casualties could be under-reported and/or be misrecorded or misclassified by as much as half, and it is possible that this has risen over recent years."

In other shorter words, the reported reduction in serious accidents is probably a myth.

There is also a discussion in the report on "what is a reportable road traffic accident" (see page 15). This makes it clear that according to STATS20 (the instructions to police for filling out the STATS19 forms) that all accidents including both non-motor vehicles such as pedal cycles and ridden horses should be reported, regardless of motor vehicle or pedestrian involvement. But we know from the case of Anja Szodowski that they are not. Indeed the report says: "Despite the Road Traffic Act and the instructions for filling out forms, many people do not report road traffic accidents involving injury".

*(Editor's Comments: The only thing that is reasonably certain about road traffic accident numbers is that the numbers of fatalities are probably reasonably accurate, and we know that they have hardly changed at all in the last few years in the UK, when other countries have seen substantial reductions. So much for the success of current road safety policies in the UK.)*

## London Accident Statistics



The figures for road accident casualties in London during 2005 have recently been published. Fatal accidents fell by only 1% from the previous year, but the "Fatal & Serious" figure (KSI) fell by 27% while minor accidents fell by 8%.

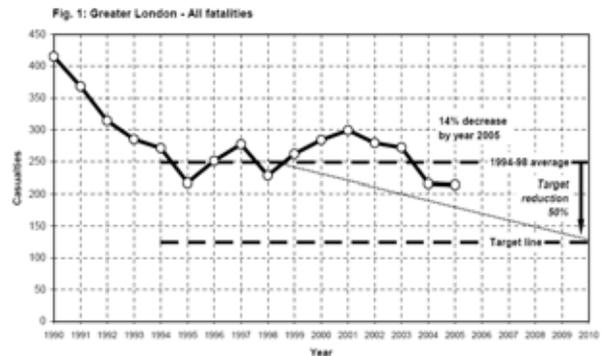
The unexpectedly large fall in the KSI figure caused TfL to query the reporting of accident data with the Metropolitan Police. But TfL were "given assurance that their procedures have been consistent for reporting and processing the data during the year, and that all collisions reported to them that comply with the Stats19 criteria have been processed and forwarded to TfL". Apart from the fact that we know that not all such accidents are reported (see previous article), the exceptionally dry winter may have had some impact.

Note that fatal accidents to pedal cyclists actually rose substantially – from 8 to 21, which may be partly a statistical blip and partly a consequence of more cycling. Even the KSI figures for cyclists are up 9% though.

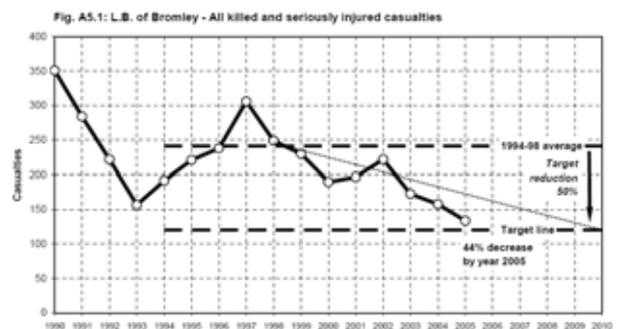
Accidents to motorcyclists fell (KSIs down 6%) which is a positive change as these accidents have been the most resistant to improvement (only down by 9% since the 1994-98 "baseline").

Car occupant KSIs were down by 23% from the previous year, and down by 61% on the 1994-1998 baseline (ie. ahead of target) which probably reflects the improvement in in-car safety technology more than anything else.

The following chart shows the trend in fatalities over the last few years as against the target.



On the latest figures, it would seem that most of the target reductions for fatalities will not be met, although the KSI ones will be, if you assume the latter statistics are reliable. The chart above shows how generally ineffective road safety policies have been in the last ten years in comparison with the previous period, particularly bearing in mind the massively increased expenditure on road safety schemes, a lot of which has been spent on speed humps and speed cameras of course. The trends in Bromley for KSIs are shown in the following chart:



A summary report is present on the internet at: [http://www.tfl.gov.uk/streets/downloads/pdf/LRSR/Quarterly\\_Factsheets/Q4-2005-Final.pdf](http://www.tfl.gov.uk/streets/downloads/pdf/LRSR/Quarterly_Factsheets/Q4-2005-Final.pdf) or the full details of individual boroughs are at: [http://www.tfl.gov.uk/streets/downloads/pdf/LRSR/Annual\\_Reports/towards-the-year2010.pdf](http://www.tfl.gov.uk/streets/downloads/pdf/LRSR/Annual_Reports/towards-the-year2010.pdf)

It is again useful to compare the reductions in serious accidents in the last year between Bromley ("no more humps" and down 15.5%), Barnet (humps removed and down 16.3%) to boroughs such as Lewisham (more humps everywhere and down only 2.1%) or Bexley (up 1.3%!).

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### **The Cities of Oakland and Portland, & Speed Humps**

This wouldn't be a BBRAG newsletter if it didn't contain at least one story on speed humps – this is just so our readers are reminded of the damage they cause, and the money that is wasted on them. This edition contains a note on some reports on the experiences of the cities of Oakland and Portland, on the West Coast of the USA, that have been recently brought to your editors attention.

Michael Cunneen published a report entitled "Oakland's Speed Hump Program: Is It Really Working" in 2004 in the American Journal of Public Health. This was no doubt written in response to a previous article published in the same journal that claimed to show the success of the speed hump program in Oakland. In Cunneen's response he demolishes the statistical incompetence of the previous claims and in addition shows that the speed hump programme was probably a waste of money. He says that pedestrian accidents fell by 9.4% in Oakland from 1996 to 2001, but in fact they fell by even more in most Bay Area cities and indeed elsewhere in California, none of whom had such speed hump programmes. In addition, pedestrian accidents were declining more rapidly before the Oakland speed hump programme was introduced than they did afterwards.

He also points out that in Oakland just ten arterial streets accounted for 40% of pedestrian accidents, but such roads are typically not treated with speed humps, so much of the money for speed humps is actually spent on residential roads where the accident rate is

already comparatively low. Hence the reason for their lack of cost effectiveness.

Mr Cunneen's report can be seen at: [www.digitalthreads.com/rada/mcoaksh.pdf](http://www.digitalthreads.com/rada/mcoaksh.pdf)

### ***City of Portland and Traffic Diversion***

An interesting report which dates back to 1998 is a "Speed Hump Peer Review" from the City of Portland (available on the internet at: <http://www.portlandonline.com/transportation/index.cfm?print=1&c=dfjde&a=ifdii>)

This report actually studied the impact of the installation of humps on accidents, traffic speeds and traffic diversion.

For example, it reported that on streets where "14-foot" humps were installed, traffic volume was reduced by 33 percent while crashes decreased by 46 percent. On parallel untreated streets (and if it's like most US cities, there should be plenty of parallel ones as they are usually in a grid like arrangement), the traffic volume rose by 4% but the accidents rose by 12 percent. Taking into account the combined figures, the crash frequency declined by 18 percent, but the really telling point is that it states that this was not statistically significant.

In other words, it is quite likely that there was no benefit whatsoever from the speed hump programme.

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### **Marlow Road 20 Mph Zone and Enforcement by Cameras**



Above is a picture of Marlow Road, Penge. A 20-mph speed limit zone was introduced into this and adjacent roads in November 2004.

Since then there have been no accidents in the zone whatsoever (at least up until the time of writing in late June). However all such schemes are reviewed after a few months.

The review concluded that the scheme has had little effect in reducing traffic speeds, and that residents are still dissatisfied with the measures that were introduced.

So four additional steps are now proposed:

a – Two additional “speed reactive” signs to be introduced on Marlow Road at a cost of £6,000.

b – Consultation be carried out on introducing parking restrictions on the kerb build-outs to prevent obstructive parking.

c – Investigation of possible road closures in certain roads on the estate.

d – “Urgent” consideration to be given to the introduction of enforcement of the 20 mph zone by speed cameras as soon as they become available (as described in our last edition and which is currently under trial by TfL).

Here are your editor’s comments on this:

As you can see from the photograph above, Marlow Road is quite a wide road, with room for two vehicles to pass, even with parking on either side of the road. With good “sight lines”, it therefore does not appear to the average motorist to be a particularly dangerous, which is probably why most people do not adhere to the 20 mph speed limit.



Other roads such as Wheathill Road (see picture above), Warwick Road and Witham Road are narrower and appear much more dangerous. In addition all these roads are used by traffic cutting through from Elmers End Road (the A214) to Croydon Road (the A213).

It would seem likely that a 20 mph zone across the whole of the area was inappropriate and unnecessary. In addition, the proposed additional measures are totally excessive considering the recent accident record.

Note that even before the 20 mph was installed there was only one serious accident in the previous 3 years, although there were also 5 slight incidents. There have been no accidents since the 20 mph zone was put in. Bearing in mind the nature of the roads, this does not appear therefore to be a particularly dangerous zone in comparison with other similar areas, if one also takes into account that the one serious accident could be a statistical blip.

The proposal for the introduction of speed camera monitoring, at enormous expense, seems to be a totally disproportionate response to the nature of the problems. And there is no proof that there are any problems outstanding. It looks very much like this response is being driven by a few local residents who have a bee in their bonnet about excessive traffic and excessive speed. In reality, trying to impose a 20 mph limit on Marlow Road itself is just silly. If anyone thinks otherwise, I advise you to drive down Marlow Road at what you consider to be a safe and natural speed without looking at your speedometer, and have someone else check what speed you are doing – it is almost certainly going to be more than 20 mph!

But other roads in the estate are probably more appropriate for a 20 mph zone, and it certainly seems a good idea to consider some road closures. For example, deterring through traffic from using Warwick Road and Witham Road as a short cut may be a good idea. Such measures are likely to be a lot more effective at reducing accidents and a lot cheaper, than introducing a system of fining otherwise responsible drivers who happen to exceed the 20 mph speed limit on Marlow Road.

Of course it could just be that the existing measures have improved the accident record anyway, so would it not make sense to wait another year or two until there was some sound statistical data? All we seem to be getting is pandering to the complaints of a few local residents while ignoring the real evidence.

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## Bus Boarders – A New Road Hazard



Above is an example of the latest hazard introduced onto Bromley's roads. No not the bus, but the "bus boarder" which is a smaller version of a kerb build-out. This picture was taken in Towncourt Lane, Petts Wood, but proposals for two of these have also been made for Southborough Lane.

Kerb build-outs have been suggested as a way to help disabled people get onto buses, and are particularly useful where buses have difficulty in parking close to the kerb because of parked cars before or after the bus stop. A Department for Transport Circular entitled "Inclusive Mobility" recommends them.

However, kerb build-outs are a potential hazard to road users – particularly to cyclists and motor-cyclists who normally ride close to the kerb – so larger kerb build-outs are normally either sloped out gradually, or have clear warning signs on them. But these new mini "bus-boarders" have no such warnings.

*(Editor's Comments: There seems to be no reason why buses should have had difficulty in getting close to the kerb at this point, and it looks positively dangerous for road users. In addition, it would be very easy for a bus driver to accidentally hit the*

*build-out, and cause passengers waiting to get off to be thrown about - one of the commonest causes of injury to bus passengers).*

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## Cameras Worsen Jams at Junctions

More than 100,000 drivers have received penalty notices in the last two years, for stopping within yellow box junctions in London. Fines were issued as a result of them being caught on cameras, which were expected to reduce the frequency of blocked junctions and gridlock – and hence reduce traffic congestion.

In reality it seems that traffic flow at such junctions has actually got worse rather than better. Drivers apparently often hesitate from entering a junction when they know there is a risk of a fine, and sometimes they simply wait too long.

*(Editor's Comments: Just think of the costs involved in issuing that many tickets, and the annoyance to the drivers concerned – to no purpose whatsoever. Will we see Transport for London apologise for yet another stupid scheme? I doubt it. And will we see this pointless scheme removed? Don't hold your breath waiting for that, because clearly whoever invented this in the first place was more concerned with raising money than improving traffic flow)*

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## Ealing Now Opposes Tram Scheme



The new council of the London Borough of Ealing have voted to withdraw their support for the West London Tram scheme (photo left from the council newsheet communicating this to residents).

Conservatives took control of the borough of Ealing, and of the neighbouring boroughs of Hillingdon and Hammersmith & Fulham in the recent council elections. The fate of the tram scheme was a major election issue.

With three out of five respondents to the consultation on the scheme being opposed, Mayor Ken Livingstone still pushed ahead. But a decision was due this summer on whether to proceed or not.

*(Editor's Comments: With this scheme being not only financially unsound, but likely to cause major traffic problems on the Uxbridge Road, it should have been killed off long ago. But will the Mayor see sense? Or more likely perhaps, will he finally listen to the electorate?)*

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## Why Business Must Oppose Congestion Charging



On the 11 August 2006, the Financial Times published an article by Robin Harding entitled "Why Business Must Back Congestion Charging". This is not the first time that the FT has shown editorial support for such schemes. It

argued that business people had a lot to gain from road user charging, despite the imperfections of the London scheme – as the author said "*the greatest step toward implementing road fees, but also the greatest step back.*" The following is your editor's response:

Before the London Congestion Charge was introduced, many business people supported it. They saw the opportunity to obtain an advantage from their willingness to pay for reduced journey times – effectively they valued their time at higher than the Congestion Charge payment. Likewise some commercial vehicle operators imagined it would enable them to reduce costs from lower trip times and greater punctuality for deliveries. But what has been the outcome? Certainly not what was expected.

In reality the big nightmare is the cost incurred in paying the charge and the associated administration and enforcement system. The hassle of paying a one-off fee of £8 is high, with the result that it is easy to spend more time paying it than the time saving from reduced congestion. And even a trivial mistake can get you into the bureaucratic nightmare of dealing with the enforcement system operated on behalf of Transport for London (TfL).

Plus some of the expected benefits from the London Congestion Charge have been illusory. For example, it was expected to cut air pollution whereas in fact pollution has gone up. No you should not believe those advertisements paid for by TfL that claim pollution has fallen which are based on "estimated" figures – the measurements of actual pollution taken at three points within the congestion charge zone clearly show pollution has risen, despite the improvement in vehicle technology and fewer highly polluting older cars on the roads since the charge was introduced.

Another claimed benefit from the Congestion Charge was going to be the large sums of money that it would generate to improve public transport. But what have we got? A system that is so inefficient in revenue collection terms that almost all of the income generated is spent on operating it. From the latest TfL report (the Fourth Annual Monitoring Report), it is apparent that the scheme operating costs are £90 million while the income (excluding penalty charges) is £120 million, ie. 75% of income goes on administration costs).

Although we have a lot more buses in London, most of the cost of these has been subsidised by general taxation on Londoners, not by the Congestion Charge scheme.

The figures look a bit better if penalty charge income is taken into account (assuming that it can be collected which proves notoriously difficult), but that simply reflects the atrociously poor compliance with the scheme, with more than 4,500 penalty notices still being issued each day.

Business people generally abhor unproductive expenses and hence they see the London Congestion Charge system as simply an inefficient bureaucracy. And when the charge was raised from £5 to £8 (which, as expected, had little impact on congestion levels), with more increases now being proposed, it soon became obvious that this was a mechanism to raise revenue (ie. a simple tax) rather than a way to tackle congestion.

So is a general road user pricing system going to be any better? Well surely business has the same concerns. If you study the proposed system it is clear that it will not only need complex and expensive technology to operate, but will similarly be administratively highly complex. In addition it will reduce transparency in the taxation system and introduce some peculiar incentives – for example it is likely to encourage more usage of rural roads as opposed to main roads which will hardly improve the road safety statistics, and unlike the existing fuel tax it will not discourage high fuel consumption.

Business people are used to living in an imperfect world, where the economics of a situation are unclear and the motives of the participants are muddled. Perhaps this is why they are so sceptical of the benefits of a general road pricing system. In a perfect world, with everyone acting for the common good, it might be a good idea. But in the bleak landscape of factional politics and Government financial juggling, it is much more likely to be exploited as a mechanism to extracting more cash from the road users than at present. Road users already pay substantially more to the exchequer than the cost of providing the road network, but at least the tax is collected in a very efficient way. In that sense it is not a wasteful system.

But introduce road user charging and not only will there be substantial implementation risks with uncertain outcomes (as with the London system where the outcome was not as expected), but it will almost certainly be a less efficient cash collection system.

Also business people tend to believe that a low cost infrastructure that is open to all is a major benefit to the stimulation of economic activity. But a road usage pricing system is a contrary proposal – it actually deters poorer people from accessing certain parts of the road system.

So sensible business people in the UK are likely to oppose any road user charging system because practical experience tells them that there is no simple low cost trick to cure road congestion.

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## Conservatives Reviewing Transport Policy



The Conservative Party have appointed Steve Norris (picture left) to head a review of their transport policy. His proposals seem to include direct attacks on low cost air travel and car usage, with a strong emphasis on environmentally based taxation (or “eco-taxation” as it is now called apparently).

On air travel, he suggests that air passenger duty should rise considerably, particularly for short-haul trips. He said in an interview with the Guardian that “*You do have to avoid creating a culture based on cheap aviation which will be as pernicious as the way of life based on car ownership has been in terms of urban planning*”.

He also suggested that the party needs to re-examine its reputation as the “*motorist's friend*” and it needed to move away from their long-standing reputation for being “*the provisional wing of the Automobile Association*”. So the suggestion seems to be for steep rises in car taxation, particularly for more polluting vehicles (as much as £1000 per annum road tax has been mentioned).

Figures released last year showed an 11% real terms drop in motoring costs, a 66% rise in bus fares and a 70% rise in train fares from 1975 to 2004. Mr Norris said: “That's absolutely wrong. What eco taxation needs to do is fundamentally address that gap simply by removing the distortion in the market place at the moment, which doesn't internalise the real costs to the environment of emissions.

*(Editor's Comments: As readers may know, Mr Norris was a two-time loser in Mayoral elections, and one can see exactly why. Presenting such anti-car policies as the solution to environmental problems is simplistic in the extreme and will not work. As you can see elsewhere, despite removing almost all private cars from the London Congestion Charge zone, atmospheric pollution did not fall.*

*The basic problem is that public transport and taxis are as bad if not worse, per vehicle occupant, as private vehicles, and surface transport is only one component in the total air pollution problem in London.*

*And charging higher taxes on bigger cars is not going to solve the pollution problem as they are such a small proportion of the private car base and will be swamped by commercial vehicle emissions. Encouraging all vehicles to use better technology to reduce fuel consumption and reduce air pollution is the way forward, but there is no good reason to hit some cars with a tax that is ten times higher when they only produce twice the pollution of an average small car. Yes the worse polluting cars only generate about twice the CO2 of the average car so the disparity is not as much as most people imagine. Much better to have a graduated tax that is phased in over some years as otherwise people who have recently purchased such vehicles are unjustly penalised as they would become instantly unsaleable. And modern vehicles are of course much better than older vehicles, so why not tax older vehicles much more highly – nobody suggests this because politically it would be unpopular.*

*One can easily calculate the likely effect of deterrent taxes such as £1000 road tax, or a £25 London congestion charge on air pollution. If you say that 10% of all cars fall into that category and half of their drivers are persuaded to replace them by more "average" vehicles then the net impact on pollution will be minus 2.5%. This amount is hardly very significant and just shows that such measures are "gesture" politics aimed at penalising the wealthy who tend to buy such vehicles rather a serious attempt to improve pollution levels.*

*Mr Norris's proposed policies on air transport will also be difficult to achieve because of international treaties, although they may make more sense. Air transport emissions are rising rapidly and are much more difficult to tackle than surface transport. Air travel is probably more susceptible to taxation incentives as holiday trips are obviously "discretionary". But any abrupt changes in taxation based on poor science and unsubstantiated allegations about the cause of global warming are not going to win the Conservatives any elections if the electorate are rational human beings who act in their own self interest.*

*Even if Mr Norris's proposals have elements of sense in them, he has an atrocious way of presenting them to the public, and any apparent attack on motorists in the kind of generalisations he makes are sure to be vote losers. Motorists - who are of course the vast majority of the population - already feel unduly harassed by the other political parties).*

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## **Portland, Oregon and Sayeed Warsi**



Another example of Conservative politicians new found "environmental" concerns was a report on the City of Portland's transport policies on the BBC's Newsnight television programme by Sayeeda Warsi ( see: <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/programmes/newsnight/4794361.stm> ). She basically presented Portland as a great success for public transport provision (picture of Portland tram above), with fewer cars, more cycling and a better environment. She suggested UK cities followed their example. The following is a commentary on this report by an Oregon resident who is an expert on the distortions created by some misguided land use and transport policies in the USA.

### **JUDGING PORTLAND BY INTENTIONS, NOT RESULTS**

"Car junkies like me are becoming an endangered species" in Portland, writes British politician Sayeeda Warsi for the BBC. Warsi has fallen for the common trap of judging urban planners by their intentions, not their results.

It is true, as Warsi says, that Portland has spent most of its transportation dollars on rail transit. Yet light rail carries only 0.9 percent of the region's passenger traffic (buses carry another

1.4 percent). In what world does it make sense to spend most of your money on 0.9 percent of your output (and not, by far, the most valuable 0.9 percent)? When over 90 percent of travel is by car, how can autos be considered "an endangered species"?

It is true, as Warsi says, that public transit ridership has significantly increased over the last ten years. But she failed to note a significant downslide in ridership in the 1980s, when Portland began focusing on light rail and lost touch with bus riders. As a result, Portland transit today carries a smaller share of commuters and a smaller share of total travel than it did in 1980, before the region's leaders began their love affair with expensive rail transit.

It is NOT true, as Warsi claims, that Portland has "eradicated over 62 million car trips a year." Transit carries 104 million trips per year, 58 million of which were carried by buses in 1985 before the first light-rail line opened. Portland's population since then has grown by about 50 percent, so it is likely that the vast majority of transit riders today would still be riding transit if not a single mile of light rail had been built.

It may be true, as Warsi claims, that Portland "car use is growing at the slowest rate anywhere in the United State." But it was not true a few years ago and it is only true today because Portland's anti-business climate has driven away employers, leading to a stagnation of the region's economy. As Warsi failed to note, even transit ridership has fallen since 2002.

It is NOT true, as Warsi says, that Oregon Governor Tom McCall "took radical steps to prioritise public transport over roads" in the 1970s. That is a strange rewriting of history, crediting McCall (who is regarded, with a bit more accuracy, as the father of Oregon's land-use planning system) with a series of decisions made over several decades by his successors and Portland officials.

It is true, as Warsi says, that Portland has built bike lanes to the airport. But they are rarely used and almost exclusively for recreation, not by air travelers or airport workers. (I have ridden the full length of these bike lanes; they follow a noisy freeway but do not go anywhere that most Portland cyclists really want to go.)

Like many reporters, Warsi seems to have judged the entire Portland area by a visit to downtown. Thanks to subsidized downtown housing, Portland's inner city has undergone a demographic change and is now occupied mainly by young singles and childless couples. Though bicycling is popular among this group, inner-city streets remain jammed with autos. Away from the inner city you will find bicycling no more popular than anywhere else in the country.

It is NOT true, as Warsi claims, that Portland's transportation vision is a result of "true direct democracy in action."

\* Portland voted down further funding for light rail in 1998 -- but the region is building more anyway.

\* Voters also rejected an expanded convention center, but they built it anyway, further demonstrating the contempt the region's leaders have for democracy.

\* Two of Portland's suburbs have withdrawn from the region's transit district so that they can provide their own, better, service at a lower cost to their residents.

\* Construction of an aerial tramway, another transportation boondoggle, led to a huge political battle whose repercussions will have lasting consequences (see <http://ti.org/vaupdate62.html>).

\* When Portland Congressman David Wu offered the region federal funds to expand the capacity of the region's most heavily congested freeway, the region's leaders turned him down (see <http://tinyurl.com/e762m>) because they don't want to risk reducing transit ridership.

If Portland-area voters had a real say in their future, they would certainly not favor the gridlock that is the admitted goal of the region's planners.

In short, Warsi's report is based largely on myths, fabrications, and selective use of data. Warsi is a vice chairman of Britain's Conservative Party. Considering her lack of skepticism and analytical skills, it is no wonder that the Conservatives have been out of power for well over a decade.

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## UK Speed Limits – No Longer “Reasonable”



The subject of setting speed limits has been covered in past newsletters (see April and Dec 2004 editions). The Government has decided to push ahead with its proposals to abandon the long established principle of setting them based on the 85<sup>th</sup> percentile of existing traffic speed (which is based on what presumably the vast majority of roads users consider to be safe based on their own behaviour and hence could be considered “reasonable”), and move to a system based on “average” speed. This means that even more road users are now likely to be breaking the posted speed limit than before.

The same policy document also enables speed limits to be set not based on how road users perceive the safety of the road, and the nature of the road but simply based on the dictat of local council staff (or at the prompting of local politicians who often see this as a vote winning proof of their dedication to road safety irrespective of its merits). 20 mph zones are of course typical examples of demands for reduced speed limits by residents, often with little reference to accident statistics or their causes.

In addition the government recently announced a review of all rural speed limits, so there are likely to be even more reductions below “reasonable” levels.

The new policy document can be seen at: [http://www.dft.gov.uk/stellent/groups/dft\\_rdsafety/documents/page/dft\\_rdsafety\\_612262.pdf](http://www.dft.gov.uk/stellent/groups/dft_rdsafety/documents/page/dft_rdsafety_612262.pdf)

### ***Consultation Results Ignored***

It seems that of the 18 police forces who responded to the original consultation on this issue, 11 opposed the change to mean speed, with only 5 in favour, on the grounds that it would result in less compliance and more enforcement being necessary. But the Government seems to be keen on raising the excessive number of speeding fines even higher, which have had no noticeable impact on road deaths.

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## Cray Avenue Bus Lane Fine Appeal Proves Council is Acting Unlawfully



In April 2006 we reported on the problems caused by the over-zealous council enforcement of the bus lane in Cray Avenue, Orpington. Cameras (as shown in the picture above) are being used to issue fines to people who only accidentally cross the bus lane while turning left, even though they are clearly not impeding buses. As a result Bromley Council is collecting very large sums in fines (more than £250,000 in six months), and the Council rejected representations from motorists.

A committee of councillors, and former Environment Portfolio holder George Taylor, considered the matter but they supported this rigid enforcement of the bus lane, although they did approve minor changes to the road markings and signage. In their view, and that of council staff, you were guilty of an infringement if you crossed the solid white line that demarks the bus lane, at any point. And pleas that it was safer to cross earlier and helped the flow of traffic if you turned slightly earlier were not listened to.

But Roy Swift, a resident of Orpington, took his case to appeal (to PATAS – the Parking and Traffic Appeals Service). He argued that it was reasonable to act as he did, and that vehicles were allowed to cross a bus lane when turning left as suggested in the Highway Code. Photos showing what happened are given below, and clearly it was a natural manoeuvre with no obstruction of buses.



The Adjudicator (Mr Anthony Engel) agreed and upheld his appeal. Mr Engel said in his written adjudication: *"The images show that the vehicle entered the bus lane but no advantage was gained over other traffic. There is a dispute over whether the road markings are correct but whatever the answer to that question, a vehicle is allowed to cross a bus lane in order to turn left – which is what happened. Clearly one cannot safely turn left without moving to the nearside in advance and I have concluded (after some hesitation) that, despite crossing the unbroken white line, this case comes within that exemption."*

Obviously this judgement suggests that the council has been acting unlawfully and they should have been using more discretion when considering such minor technical infringements. BBRAG is now asking the council to revise its future enforcement procedures, and to consider returning all the penalty fines paid in relation to similar cases since the cameras were installed.

If anyone paid a fine in similar circumstances then we suggest you write to the council asking for a refund on the basis that this adjudication clearly indicates that the former council policy was neither reasonable nor legal.

*(Editor's Comments: Yet again the council have been shown to lack a sense of fairness in their enforcement of traffic regulations. And despite the volume of complaints on this subject, they found it impossible to shift from their usual defensive position of "we know we are right and we never make a mistake". This is why so many motorists feel of late that they are being unfairly persecuted by an unthinking bureaucracy when it comes to road traffic offences).*

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## Letters

"I recently had a dispute with the local Orpington Hospital authorities concerning parking meters at hospitals, and in particular those which do not give change. Basically I consider the use of parking meters at hospitals is unjustified, and not really practicable, as one never knows how long the hospital visit is going to last, and not being able to pay the correct amount is a further cause for annoyance. I have now formed the opinion that the use of machines that do not give change anywhere, and not just at hospitals, is wrong, and amounts almost to highway robbery, and I would like to know what members think about this, and whether it might be considered worthwhile mounting a campaign to have them removed, or at least to have their use restricted in some way." T.C. Gilchrist

*(Editor's Comments: I certainly agree that hospital parking charges are becoming excessive and are a major problem for many people on low incomes. It's rather like charging for sitting in the waiting rooms at hospitals – something that nobody would consider reasonable. It does of course create the perverse incentive for hospital management to ensure people wait as long as possible within hospitals so that they maximise the revenue from this source – one of the few sources of income that local management have any control over. Surely it is necessary to set some national standards to stop this excessive exploitation of vulnerable people.*

*If you have any comments on the above letter, or wish to support such a campaign, please contact the Editor).*

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## News Snapshots

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

+ Our previous Newsletter mentioned the activities of the MAD group who destroy speed cameras. According to a report in the Daily Telegraph the actual cost of damage to such devices was £800,000 last year which was more than double the previous year's figure. It seems the police are monitoring some sites with CCTV cameras as a result.

+ Former Tory Minister Kenneth Clarke recently admitted that he was the man responsible for introducing road humps to Britain's roads, when he was a junior transport minister in Mrs Thatcher's government. He said *"I'm afraid I was responsible in the first job I had as minister for introducing road humps in this country. It was an awful mistake."*. (Editor's Comments: *well repentance is a well known way to expurgate one's sins. Of course he has more lately been involved in the promotion of speed cameras – I wonder when he will recant on that also*).

+ Mr Barry Watson of Gale Street, Dagenham recently complained to the Barking & Dagenham Recorder that his wife's human rights were being infringed by the speed humps in his local roads. He said *"My wife has arthritis and even if I go over speed humps at five miles per hour it still hurt her a lot"*. He thinks they should be scrutinised under health and safety regulations.

## 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](mailto: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 £11.00 per annum for individuals, or £8.50 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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## 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.