



BBRAG NEWS

Bromley Borough Roads Action Group - No. 50 (January 2008)

In This Issue

- **Parliament Square to be “Improved”**
- **Speed Humps Double Emissions**
- **Green Party Coerces Livingstone**
- **The Mayoral Elections**
- **Traffic Calming in Tower Hamlets**
- **London Travel Report 2007**
- **Olympics Travel Plan**
- **£25 Congestion Charge**
- **Road Accidents: Prevent or Punish?**
- **News Snapshots**
- **B.B.R.A.G. Information and Contacts**

Editorial

Not a lot of news in this edition. It is remarkable how the prospect of some elections causes plans and announcements of new transport initiatives to be put on the back burner. We seem to be particularly short of significant news in Bromley, which perhaps means that Councillor Smith is doing a good job heading up the Environment Portfolio – as one gets older no news usually means good news on the political front..

Anyway with this being our fiftieth edition – surely some cause for celebration - don't forget to let me have any local news which you think would be of general interest. Also can I remind you that I welcome letters for printing that comment on any of the issues or views put forward in this newsletter.

Roger Lawson, Editor

Parliament Square to be “Improved”



Mayor Livingstone has announced proposals to “improve” Parliament Square in a similar way to how Trafalgar Square has been changed.

Readers will no doubt be aware that Trafalgar Square used to have traffic on all four sides making it a giant roundabout (picture above shows it as it used to be). It was of course one of the main arterial routes for road traffic and always has been – indeed road distances from London are typically measured from Trafalgar Square. However it was argued that this made it unpleasant for pedestrians and cut off the centre of the square from visitors (except for the pigeons who could fly there). So your editor was not immediately opposed to proposals to improve it.

But what has happened? We now simply have traffic on 3 of the 4 sides, which hardly reduces the noise and pollution. In addition because of the poor design of the new road layout with a traffic controlled roundabout on the south side that hardly permits any traffic through between light changes, there are now constant queues of traffic on the southern, western and eastern approaches for most of the day. This has not improved air quality at all.

The result of these changes is that Trafalgar Square is no longer an important hub in the London road network. Any sensible driver now avoids it altogether as it has simply become yet another bottleneck and contributes significantly to reducing traffic speeds in the surrounding area.

And what about the newly laid paving in front of the National Gallery – this has become a wide expanse of pigeon shit which is slippery and dangerous when wet. Otherwise it is used to host the “free” entertainment laid on for the public by your Mayor (it’s not free of course – taxpayers such as you and me are paying to entertain the tourists).



The plans for Parliament Square are similar, with the south side of the square (in front of St. Margaret’s Church) to be closed and paved over. The justifications are “to improve pedestrian facilities, make it safer to walk, and limiting traffic will improve local air quality”. The likely cost is between £15m and £18m.

A public consultation on the proposed change will be performed and consultants are working on suggested designs.

Speed Humps Double Emissions



Recent research commissioned by the AA show that speed humps cause fuel consumption to rise substantially (picture above is of the humps in Watts Lane, Chislehurst). Researchers at the Millbrook Proving Ground found that while a car capable of over 58 mpg when driven at a steady 30 mph, delivered only 31 mpg when it had to slow down to negotiate speed humps and then speed up again. Carbon dioxide emissions changed similarly in proportion.

Reducing speed limits to 20 mph from 30 mph also raised fuel consumption and emissions which became 10% higher as most engines are set up to operate more efficiently at higher speeds. The AA claims that this research backs up the reports previously published by TRL which showed carbon monoxide emissions increased by as much as 82% and nitrous oxides levels by 37% on roads with speed humps.

AA president Edmund King said “*Humps are a crude, uncomfortable and noisy way of slowing people down and this research has shown they are also environmentally damaging*”.

Green Party Coerces Livingstone

Edmund King of the AA also said “The Green Party has been advocating 20 mph limits across the whole of London, perhaps without realising that this policy would backfire in terms of environmental emissions”.

The publication Local Transport Today reported that as part of the deal struck between the Green Party and the Mayor to get his budget through, the Mayor had agreed to provide finance for “time-distance” safety cameras (i.e. like SPECS ones) to enforce 20 mph speed limits in all residential areas of London. This is of course subject to such cameras getting “Type Approval” after conclusion of current trials of their use.

In addition he has agreed an increase in “walking and cycling” budgets of 20% and agreed a review of all major gyratories in London to assess returning them to two-way working.

Also he has agreed to increase the role of public transport on the proposed Thames Gateway Bridge.

Readers are reminded that the Mayor only got his budget approved by the Greater London Assembly last year by obtaining the support of the Green Party GLA members. So he has to kow-tow to their wishes.

(Editor’s Comments: I think the use of cameras for enforcement of 20 mph zones is yet another direct attack on the rights of the motorist. It is an impractical limit and such cameras will result in enormous numbers of fines with no road safety benefit.

There are now over 4 million cameras monitoring the UK population which probably makes us the world leader for spying on the general public.. I believe this is an outrageous invasion of privacy.

Incidentally the Information Commissioner recently said he objected to microphones being attached to surveillance cameras which could overhear conversations and is going to make them illegal. But how he can judge they are an infringement of privacy when he considers cameras not to be, I do not understand. What is the difference?

So my manifesto would be as follows:

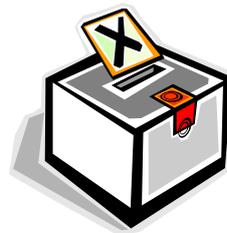
- No speed cameras of any kinds.
- No parking enforcement cameras.
- No bus lane enforcement cameras.
- No box junction and ASL enforcement cameras.
- No cameras anywhere except to ensure public safety and where the evidence so collected is used to support prosecution for serious criminal offences, or prevent such crimes..

Note that I don’t consider motoring offences as being included in the last category – they are mainly accidental infringements by otherwise law abiding citizens and the use of cameras to routinely issue “automated” tickets after the fact is not justified to override our basic rights to privacy.

Of course the authorities have been pursuing these offences because of desire to raise revenue from them. And the Green party likes the idea because they hate cars so much that they would like to remove them from our roads altogether by persecuting drivers.)

The Mayoral Elections

The elections for the Mayor of London, and the Greater London Assembly take place in May.



The three main party candidates for Mayor are Ken Livingstone for Labour, Boris Johnson for the Conservatives and Brian Paddick for the Liberal Democrats. There will no doubt be many

other candidates for the Mayoral position and this article is simply an initial review of the main party leader’s positions on transport issues.

Note that we are a non-party political organisation and support no single party consistently – indeed we have probably criticised all of them at some time in the past. But as the Mayoral position is effectively a dictatorship as regards transport policy in London, it would be odd if we did not comment on the candidates positions and past actions.

Ken Livingstone

No doubt voting for Mr Livingstone would mean more of the same that we have had for the last so many years. And as pointed out in the earlier article, his policies might be strongly influenced by the Greens. He has of course introduced the Congestion Charge, and has increased the price from the initial £5 to £8, with current proposals for £25 for larger vehicles. He has also extended the area covered to the west despite strong opposition from local residents. If you think the congestion charge has been a success then you clearly have not read my critique - see:

www.freedomfordrivers.org/London_Congestion_Charge_Report_July2007.pdf

A recent "Dispatches" documentary on Channel 4 covered some of the main other criticisms of Mr Livingstone's rule in London. A highly-paid, and unaccountable group of Livingstone's old friends seems to devise policy while Ken announces deals such as that of cheap oil from Venezuela without even informing the Board of Transport for London about it beforehand. It also revealed that he regularly likes to drink whisky even when answering questions from GLA members at 10 am in the morning. It was a pretty devastating critique of his management style and policies. You can watch this programme on your PC on the Channel 4 web site if you sign up for their new "video TV on demand" service – www.channel4.com/4od which works very well.

Livingstone now has so many enemies that there has even been a campaign launched to persuade people to vote for anyone but him, with more than one web site supporting it.

Livingstone's own campaign web site is: www.londonforken.co.uk. His only clear new commitment on the transport front so far is to make Freedom Passes valid for 24 hours per day. Currently they aren't usable before 9.0 or 9.30 am to ensure that people in employment don't get a free ride, and to encourage those who aren't paying not to worsen the rush hour crowds. Is this a logical step or simply an electoral bribe? You can make your own mind up about that. But it means the rest of the population of London will see their taxes increased of course to pay for it.

Boris Johnson

Boris Johnson's campaign web site is www.backboris.com. It has a section on transport under the heading "Getting around London", which starts by saying: "Everyone who has sweltered in a tube train stuck between stations, who has endured aggressive behaviour on the top deck of a bus, who has been gridlocked in London traffic, or who has dodged death while cycling through the streets, knows that there are serious problems with London transport".

He has promised a review of the Congestion Charge and says "The Congestion Charge must be reformed. We must re-invest more revenue in improving our roads, as well as in schemes to encourage walking and cycling. And for every £8 fee, less should be spent on administration". This may not go down well with the many Londoners who would like to see the scheme scrapped altogether. But he seems to be avoiding contentious policies on the basis presumably that he only needs to appear sane and reasonable to collect enough votes from Livingstone haters to win. Most people simply hope that he can avoid past public gaffs during the campaign.

Both Ken Livingstone and Boris Johnson have high public profiles and are well known to most people from their TV appearances. They seem to be running neck and neck in the opinion polls at present.

Brian Paddick

Brian Paddick is less well known, but his main career was in the Metropolitan Police service. His policies so far appear somewhat sketchy but his web site is: www.brianpaddick.org.

All three candidates appeared in a debate on ITV. Mr Paddick said he would only allow people who really had to drive into London to do so. When challenged as to how the rules would be set up he seemed unclear. Elsewhere he has simply said he would ban all cars in central London or charge everyone £20, although he has also supported scrapping the western extension to the congestion charge zone. His appearance on the TV programme generally seemed to show his lack of political experience and lack of knowledge of areas other than policing in the capital.

Otherwise the TV debate was a knock-about affair with no serious debate on the policy issues and the main candidates seem to be wanting to avoid specific policy commitments. I suspect the rest of the campaign will likewise be a rather shallow debate, but it is possible that we will see more policy details when they publish their manifestos.

Traffic Calming in Tower Hamlets

Back in 2003 Tower Hamlets Council proposed the most extraordinarily oppressive campaign of “traffic calming” in the area around Tredegar Square in Bow (an area virtually devoid of traffic). As usual, they claimed that “rat runs” had to be blocked off and they wanted to turn the area into a maze of dead ends and one way streets. In their public consultation on the scheme the council received 151 responses in opposition to the scheme, as against 82 in favour. Thankfully, the worst excesses of the scheme were scrapped, but the Council just could not leave well enough alone. They insisted on implementing a smaller-scale scheme – without going back to consult the local people again.

The Council have just issued a letter to residents saying that *“since the introduction of the scheme, there have been six personal injury accidents, including one serious accident, in this area compared to no accidents at all during the corresponding period prior to implementation.”*

It has therefore been decided to return the Square to its original design. So the net result is that tens (if not hundreds) of thousands of pounds have been spent blocking up the roads and now a similar sum will be spent tearing it all up again!

London Travel Report 2007



Transport for London have recently published a voluminous report on travel in London. It gives the latest statistics on travel modes, road safety and other aspects of the capital’s transport system. For the full report, go to this web page: www.tfl.gov.uk/assets/downloads/corporate/London-Travel-Report-2007-final.pdf

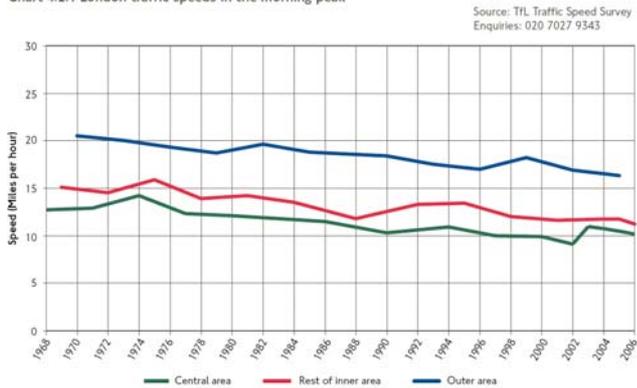
Interestingly it reports that total road traffic rose by 1% between 2005 and 2006, after 6 years of no growth. But even that change was mainly accounted for by increases in motorway usage. Despite what many people claim, traffic is not growing in most parts of London.

Total trips of all kinds have been growing though, primarily due to the increase in business and the population of London in the last few years. In fact all modes other than cars and motorcycles show increases with particularly large growth in cycling and bus use in the last couple of years. However, cars still remain the most common mode of transport at 39% of all trips (next highest is bus/tram at 19%), and is obviously even more dominant in outer London.

Traffic Speeds Still Falling

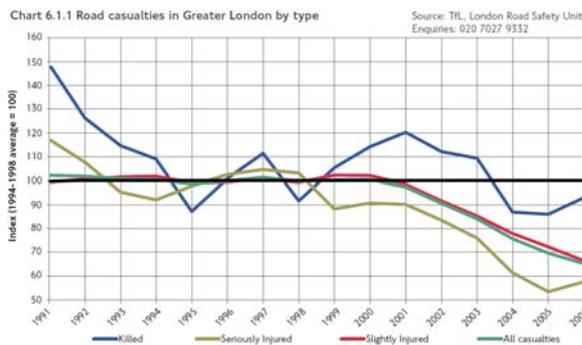
Traffic speeds have continued to fall as you can see from the chart taken from the report shown below. There was a minor improvement in the central area of London after the congestion charge was introduced, but that has now almost all been eroded.

Chart 4.2.1 London traffic speeds in the morning peak



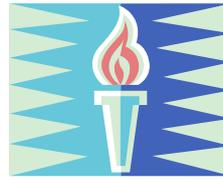
Road Accident Fatalities Not Falling

The following chart taken from the report shows the trends in road casualties. As you can see, any clear fall since 1995 in fatal accidents is non-existent (there were 93 fatalities in 2006 versus 87 in 1995 with apparent random fluctuations in between).



Slight and serious accidents have fallen but the accuracy of the statistics on those is very questionable because figures reported of hospital admissions seem to contradict them – this is currently under investigation.

Olympics Travel Plan



The London Olympics organisers have published the first version of their “Transport Plan”. It can be read in full at:

www.london2012.com/plans/transport/getting-ready/transport-plan.php

It’s specified objective is that 100 per cent of ticketed spectators (and they expect 500,000 per day) will travel to the Games by public transport, or by walking or cycling. Likewise the majority of the workforce will travel by public transport, while some officials and competitors will use private vehicles.

Some traffic lanes on existing roads will be reserved for such vehicles and fines of up to £1000 have been mentioned for accidental infringement.

Public transport will be improved to cope with the extra demand, while the emphasis is on “sustainability” – indeed this document is full of “politically correct” phrases and vague commitments to transport “a la mode”. The report claims that there will be public consultation on the plan, but clearly a lot of it has already been decided.

Greenwich issues

Note that the equestrian events are currently planned to take place in Greenwich park. Most people active in such horse based events think the venue is too small, and there are a lot of concerns among local residents about the impact on the surrounding roads of the vehicles required to bring in the horses each day (there is no sufficient space on-site to accommodate them).

With 20,000 maximum spectators whereas venues such as Badminton attract up to 150,000 it seems a poor choice. And the impact on the adjacent A2 and A102 could be enormous.

(Editor’s Comments: My advice to Londoners is to leave town for the duration of the Games and rent out your house to the visitors. From my experience of attending an Olympics event in the past, you’ll get a better view of the action on television anyway than going to the venues.)

£25 Congestion Charge



On the 18th December the Mayor's office issued a press release on a public opinion survey on the proposed "emission based congestion charge" system. This would mean large, more polluting vehicles paying £25 and smaller vehicles paying no charge at all – although the Greens have criticised the latter because they thought it would encourage more traffic.

The survey claims that two thirds of the 3,620 Londoners that were polled were in favour of the proposal with only 21% opposed.

But it looks like they asked the typical "leading" questions on climate change to get the right answers, and it is not at all clear how representative of the population of London were the people asked to respond to this survey. Your editor has submitted a Freedom of Information Act request to find out more because I am very suspicious of the timing of this survey. It looks like it has been deliberately done to counter large opposition expressed in the public responses to the consultation on this scheme.

More information will follow in due course, assuming that TfL are not too slow in responding to my request.

Road Accidents: Prevent or Punish?

The above is the title of a book by J.J. Leeming which was first published in 1969. Bearing in mind the modern propensity to punish drivers for the smallest accidental infringement of traffic laws, while road accident fatalities clearly do not fall as a result, it is timely to look at it again. The ABD has republished the book which is well worth reading and a copy can be obtained from them for £11.49 – go to the following web page to order one:
www.abd.org.uk/shop/jleeming.htm

News Snapshots

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

+ There seems to be no news about proposals to tackle congestion in Greenwich following abandonment of plans for a wide area congestion charging scheme. It may well be that this contentious matter will get deferred until after the elections in May so as to ensure that it does not become an election issue. Boris Johnson has of course already said that he would oppose any such scheme.

+ Paul Smith, founder of Safespeed and a vigorous campaigner against speed cameras died recently from a heart attack at the young age of 52. This is a great tragedy because single-handedly he had managed to destroy the credibility of those people who demand more speed cameras as the answer to all our road safety problems. See his web site at www.safespeed.org.uk for more information. It is understood that his partner, Claire Armstrong, and others are to continue his campaign.

Contact Information

This Newsletter is published by the Bromley Borough Roads Action Group (B.B.R.A.G.), PO Box 62, Chislehurst, Kent, BR7 5YB. All material contained herein is Copyright of B.B.R.A.G. and may only be reproduced with permission. Any opinions expressed herein are solely those of the author of the article or that of the Editor which do not necessarily represent the official policies of B.B.R.A.G.

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 £12.00 per annum for individuals, or £9.00 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.