



BBRAG NEWS

Bromley Borough Roads Action Group - No. 52 (May 2008)

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Editorial

This edition covers briefly the election of Boris Johnson – surely one of the most significant political events in London in recent years but as it's no longer new news and you may have had your fill of this particular subject, my coverage is relatively brief.

I do cover some aspects of the campaign against the £25 congestion charge (the Emissions Related Congestion Charge proposal) although as Mr Johnson promised to scrap the proposal it's probably simply an example of the past "politicisation" of TfL which I hope will now get substantially reformed.

As usual we are short of articles from other parts of London and other sources. Please submit any articles or letters that you think may be of interest for publication as it's hard work writing it all myself.

Roger Lawson, Editor

Election Results



Most readers cannot have failed to notice the resounding election victory of Boris Johnson to

gain the position of Mayor of London.

Against that experienced politician Ken Livingstone, he was initially not given much chance by political commentators – indeed the Conservatives seemed to have great difficulty finding anyone to take on the challenge.

But Boris managed to win by a mix of popular policies that managed to avoid offending most voters, while avoiding making the expected "gaffs". Meanwhile Livingstone ended up on the defensive because he only promised "more of the same" and many people in London had become disillusioned with both his policies and management style.

At least the above is your editor's views on the reasons for Mr Johnson's success. I am sceptical that it reflected any national disillusion with Labour as some claimed. But below is another explanation which might amuse you.

Communists Blame "Motorists Pressure Group"

The London Communists, apparently a left wing socialist splinter group – see <http://londoncommunists.blogspot.com>, blame the election of Boris Johnson on an "organised campaign over the last year by a motorists' lobby, based in Bromley, against the extension of the congestion charge to the Blackwall Tunnel and parts of Greenwich". They claim this improved the turnout in Bromley and Bexley to 60% which increased the Tory vote while the Labour vote only held steady.

Incidentally you can see your editor talking at a public meeting organised by the ABD in Greenwich in this video clip from the BBC: http://www.bbc.co.uk/london/content/articles/2007/09/24/greenwich_charge_video_feature.shtml

New Transport Policies

Boris Johnson did publish a detailed transport policy document as part of his election campaign entitled “Getting Londoners Moving” – which can be read at: www.backboris.com/assets/completed_transport_manifesto.pdf (at least before he changes his mind).

Of course motorists do expect a more sympathetic stance from Mr Johnson even though he is a keen environmentalist and cyclist (although not too good at sticking to traffic regulations according to one video recorded by a newspaper journalist who followed him across London). But as a former writer for GQ magazine he wrote this: “*the car has done more for freedom than the aeroplane, penicillin, the phone and the contraceptive pill put together*” (see “Life in the Fast Lane”).

So far few concrete announcements have been made except that he did commit to look at traffic light phasing in response to a recent question at Greater London Assembly. He also said that the Thames Gateway Bridge proposals would not proceed in their current form, but whether that means he is totally abandoning the project is not clear.

Incidentally the Guardian ran an article suggesting that TfL is considering a “cable car” as a possible replacement for a bridge. This idea has been put forward by a group of academics commissioned by Transport for London.

New Head of TfL

Boris has appointed Tim Parker as one of his “deputy mayors” and Chairman of the Board of Transport for London. Mr Parker drives a Porsche apparently and is known for his ruthless cost cutting at companies such as Kwik-Fit, the AA and Clarks Shoes. In fact he has made so much money along the way that he can afford to work for a salary of £1 per year.

Defeat Elsewhere for Congestion Charging

Local election results in Manchester showed the displeasure of voters with the proposed congestion charge with Roger Jones, the Labour chairman of the Greater Manchester Passenger Transport Authority was pushed into third place. He said “I’ve got to get myself a job because I’m unemployed for the first time since I left school”.

The seat was won by the “Community Action Party” which ran a campaign based on opposition to the proposed tolls. Clearly congestion charging is a vote loser for any politician and could have been an element in the defeat of Mr Livingstone in London as it was clear that he and TfL wanted to expand the scheme across the whole of London in due course.

TfL and the Ipsos/MORI Survey

Readers may recall that your Editor submitted an FOI Act request concerning the ERCC (£25 congestion charge) proposals for London back on the 1st January this year. It related to the public survey that was performed by IPSOS/MORI which claimed there was general support for these proposals (and this survey was performed after the formal public consultation which suggested otherwise). The request got the usual “run around” from TfL so that they clearly ran past the legal time limits. I finally got some information at the end of March, but not all that was requested, which I believe is highly suspicious. No “internal communications” have been supplied. So two things have been done:

1. A “review” has been requested to try and obtain the remaining information. I do not believe their reasons for rejections are legally valid.

2. A complaint has been sent off to the Market Research Society about the actions of Ipsos/MORI. This is what the complaint said, and it demonstrates very clearly how surveys by TfL are typically biased:

“I wish to submit a complaint concerning a survey performed by Ipsos/MORI (one of your members I believe) on behalf of Transport for London (TfL).”

This survey was performed in March 2008 in London and attempted to gauge public opinion on the proposed Emissions Related Congestion Charge (ERCC) proposals put forward by the Mayor and TfL. The results were used to justify the decision to proceed with those proposals, even though the previous public consultation clearly demonstrated widespread opposition to the proposals.

We suggest that the survey was deliberately designed to obtain a specific response, and that the design of the survey and the questions asked are contrary to the guidelines laid down by your Society.

I enclose a copy of the survey results which shows exactly which questions were asked in this survey, and the sample population. Specifically I refer you to questions QC1, QC2, QC5 and QC6 which we believe are worded and structured in contradiction of paragraph B.14 of your Code of Conduct (which states that "Members must take reasonable steps to ensure.... that Respondents are not led towards a particular answer").

The particular points we wish to raise are:

1. Question QC1 asks about "climate change". It is not at all clear why that question is being asked unless it is to suggest to the respondents that the ERCC proposal which is the subject of this survey is somehow going to have an effect on climate change. But we know from the TfL consultation document on this subject that even if there was any link between CO2 emissions and climate change (which we would challenge anyway), it is clear that the proposals are not going to have any significant impact on CO2 emissions. Indeed a recent report from the London Air Quality Network suggested that the total CO2 emissions on a wide-area basis would increase if the proposal was implemented. I can provide more background information on this if you need it.

In essence question QC1 is irrelevant and is only there to create fear, uncertainty and doubt among the respondents and to prime them to respond in a certain way to the subsequent questions.

2. Question QC2 then asks the question as to whether respondents agree or disagree with the notion that "drivers of cars that emit more carbon dioxide and do more damage to the environment should pay a higher Congestion Charge". There is no evidence that cars that emit more CO2 do more damage to the environment so this is a grossly biased statement that is used to prompt a certain answer. Even if it could be demonstrated that cars that emit more CO2 do such damage, it would still be a leading question which your guidelines specifically prohibit.

In essence this is an emotive question that is clearly designed to obtain a specific response. It is not an unbiased question.

Question QC1 and QC2 are also clearly structured so that respondents who have answered question QC1 are in the appropriate frame of mind to give the expected answer to question QC2. Again a design that is likely to bias the overall results.

3. Question QC5 asks whether people support the higher charge (£25) for larger vehicles and gives a list of vehicles that might be affected. It lists "Porsche 911, most BMW 7 series, Range Rover, Land Rover Discovery, Toyota Land Cruiser, Volkswagen Touareg and the Mercedes M Class". But in reality the proposed charge will cover many other vehicles which are much more common, which are not in the "luxury" class and which emit lower CO2 emissions. For example, some models of the Renault Espace, Volkswagen Passat (233 gm/km of CO2 thus exceeding the 225 limit), a 2 litre Vauxhall Zafira (228 gm/km), Vauxhall Vectra Estate 2.8i, Honda Accord 2.4, Volvo V70 2.5T, Peugeot 207 2.7 and Golf 3.2. These vehicles are much more common and yet they were not referenced. Why not? Clearly the mention of the selected vehicles is likely to bias the responses.

4. Question QC6 asks how strongly people support or oppose the £25 charge for vehicles that emit the highest level of CO2, but it repeats the spurious allegation that they "do more damage to the environment". Again this is a leading question. In addition the "highest" word is

underlined so as to emphasize that the vehicles affected may be somewhat extreme in terms of emissions, when in reality many of the vehicles affected will have only slightly more emissions than the average for all vehicles. This question is not worded in an unbiased way to elicit an unbiased response.

*A properly unbiased question would have been something like the following:
"Bearing in mind that TfL have estimated that the proposed ERCC charges for vehicles that emit higher levels of CO2 are unlikely to have any significant impact on the overall emissions from road vehicles in London, are you in favour of the proposed change to charge drivers of such vehicles £25 for driving into the congestion charge zone, or not?"*

5. In addition I would question whether the selected respondents are a representative sample of Londoners. Although 79% seem to have access to a car or van, 71% of the drivers claim never to travel within the Congestion Zone. This suggests that as the responses were obtained via telephone interviews, the sample is biased towards those who happen to be more "at home" than the typical London resident. Are the active car users who are most likely to be affected by the proposed changes, actually reasonably represented in this survey I would ask?

It is not of course clear from the document provided by TfL how the survey respondents were identified. Were they provided by TfL from their own list of contacts (which I know from past experience to be biased in many regards to the "environmentally conscious"). In essence I would question whether the survey sample was a statistically unbiased sample of London residents and whether the survey results are being presented as if it was when it was not.

I look forward to a consideration of the above complaints and an appropriate response."

Roger Lawson

No Privacy in London

It was recently revealed that images of cars (including their number plates and personal data derived from them such as the registered keeper) were widely now readily available to the Metropolitan Police. They have "real time" access to CCTV images such as those used to enforce the congestion charge system on the basis that they need it for anti-terrorist purposes. It has also now been revealed that the Home Secretary has signed a certificate exempting such information from the Data Protection Act which in addition permits such information to be sent overseas (e.g. to US authorities).

(Editors Comments: Presumably this includes the cameras now covering the whole of the Greater London area that are used to enforce the Low Emission Zone (LEZ). This is just one more example of how the UK is becoming a "big brother" state where ordinary citizens can have their everyday movements recorded on the flimsiest of pretexts in the name of countering terrorism and that information can be passed around the world to anyone the Government chooses to give it to. I suggest that this is just getting totally out of hand with a continued erosion of our civil liberties).

Dartford Crossing Tolls



On the 25th April a group of local MPs and other people interested in the proposed changes to the Dartford Crossing tolls met near the crossing for a public demonstration.

Bob Neill (Bromley and Chislehurst), David Evennett (Bexleyheath and Crayford) and Adam Holloway (Gravesham) were the MPs present, with your editor and representatives from the Kent Branch of the ABD and the Freight Transport Association.

The demand was for a trial of removal of the tolls to see what impact that would have on congestion. They believe that much of the congestion near this crossing is caused by having to stop to pay the tolls, and the result is severe delays to traffic at some times, and a lot of atmospheric pollution.

In addition of course there was a promise originally to remove the tolls once the bridge had been paid for, which it has been – this promise was simply ignored by the current Government.

A DfT spokesman said “Charges at the Dartford crossing help tackle congestion”. Your editor’s comments on the spot, subsequently quoted in the press were : “It is ridiculous for the Government to say the tolls reduce traffic flows. Traffic is free flowing either side on the M25 until you approach the crossing and the resulting pollution affects Dartford significantly. These toll booths create congestion that would not be there if the tolls were removed”.

Road Works to be Controlled?



We all know that road works in London are a major problem in terms of traffic congestion. This problem seems to have been getting worse in recent

years with major replacement programmes of the gas and water mains in London. And the need to install new electric and data communication links means that on many London roads, no sooner has one group filled in their holes, than another gang of workers come along and dig up the road again.

More recently the new Crossrail project has caused large holes to be excavated even involving total road closures and these works are likely to continue for many years.

But the 2004 Traffic Management Act has given highway authorities new powers and they can introduce permit schemes for road works.

“London Councils” (the representative body for all the London boroughs) is to implement such a scheme to regulate road works in London.

Anyone wishing to dig up a street will need to apply for a permit and hence the works will be able to be co-ordinated by the local borough.

To give you an idea of the scale of this scheme and how many people dig up our streets, Bromley alone expects to get about 12,500 applications and will require seven and half full time staff to handle the workload – their costs will be recovered by charging the applicants. The total bill will come to about £600,000 which they will no doubt pass on in due course to you as the customers of the utility services.

Debate on Road Pricing

On the 1st May 2008 the Institution of Civil Engineers held a debate on road pricing in Cambourne, Cambridge. There were three speakers for the motion that “road user pricing is the only sensible solution to road congestion”, and three speakers against. The latter included your editor speaking on behalf of the Association of British Drivers. This is what I said (there was not time for an academic discussion of the issues so I focussed on a personal view):

“I’m London Region Chairman for the Association of British Drivers and we look after the interests of private motorists. I live in London and I regularly pay the London congestion charge – and what a nightmare that is.

I have an office at home, so I don’t have to travel in the rush hour. I also drive a Jaguar XJ Sovereign so you can see I am very happy to pay the authorities to deter people from using the roads and obstructing my progress – which is of course the essence of road pricing. So I should be one of the main beneficiaries of road pricing or congestion charging schemes.

In fact when they were first proposed, I thought they might be a good idea. I’ve been to Singapore and Bergen where such schemes seem to operate successfully, although of course in Bergen it is used to finance more road building. The concept can even be made attractive by using the dismal science of economics. But now I am adamantly opposed to any form of road pricing.

2. Why do I oppose road pricing:

A – Firstly it won't stop traffic congestion.

B – Secondly it's a regressive tax that impacts poor people more than the rich. In fact it impacts the vast majority of ordinary working people and only benefits the idle wealthy.

C – It is also bound to require continual monitoring of people's location and a massive camera based enforcement apparatus, both an unnecessary and unreasonable infringement of people's privacy.

D – And it cannot be made to work without massive additional costs imposed on the motorist. And I would like to reinforce the point "additional". In fact to implement national road pricing in the UK could cost as much as building the whole motorway network over again. What would you prefer?

3. Fuel duty is one of the most efficient ways of raising tax – a miniscule amount of the revenue is spent on collecting the tax. But road pricing systems are notoriously expensive – for example at least 75% of the normal operating revenue in London is spent on collecting it, and in reality it has barely generated any surplus cash at all to invest in public transport (total about £14m according to one source when total expenditure on operating it has been £600 million over 5 years). It's simply a myth that introducing road pricing will not result in a very substantial increase in the total tax take from motorists.

4. Let's take the example of London as a good demonstration of the ineffectiveness of such schemes.

After 5 years traffic speeds are almost back to where they were before the charge was introduced). Private cars are down, but buses and taxis are up, with little net benefit. Air pollution is no better than it was before the charge was introduced – look at the real data, not the misleading "estimates" used to claim an improvement by TfL. View the report on our web site (www.freedomfordrivers.org) if you want more data.

Charges have crept up from £5 per day to £8, and may soon be £25 for my vehicle. And today Mr Livingstone and his administration are about to be booted out, as a result (today is the London Mayoral elections).

5. Just paying the charge wastes more time than it saves the user, and there are enormous problems with infringement. Despite what some people say, the whole system has been an abject failure.

6. Will people support road pricing more generally? Absolutely not as you only have to recall from the on-line petition set up by one of our members who got 1.8 million signatures, or the results of a recent survey in Greenwich (16% for, 77% against).

7. Will traffic become gridlocked if nothing is done to tackle congestion? No it is a myth. People adapt to congestion when there is an excess of demand over supply, as has happened in London for the last 1000 years. And the Eddington report showed that there was a great return on investment from expenditure on appropriate road schemes.

8. The answer to congestion is to tackle particular hot spots, or to invest in increasing capacity. As other countries have done. Demand management by pricing is not a practical or economic technical solution, and is abhorrent to all of us who think that people should be treated equally. So long as they pay for the facilities they use (and motorists pay £50bn a year in taxes when only £7bn is spent on roads), then there should not be any prejudice against poorer people.

In summary, there is no likely benefit in terms of reduced congestion, no environmental benefit and a major cost penalty.

The Government has even realised that it is on such a losing proposition in terms of popular support, that it is having to bribe local authorities using the Transport Innovation Fund to develop local schemes in the hope that people will get used to them – fat chance as you can see from the London experience."

The result of the vote of the audience of 66 people at the end of the debate was 29 for the motion, 33 against and 4 undecided, i.e. the motion was defeated which shows the strength of opposition to road pricing even among an audience of professional engineers.

Traffic Counts Not Rising



One often sees alarming forecasts of “gridlock” if the number of vehicles owned by the public continues to increase. So supporters of the London congestion charge claim that without it

the city would have ground to a standstill.

Recent figures made available in the London Borough of Bromley rather disprove this presumption. Bromley is of course one of the wealthiest London boroughs with the second highest number of cars per person – in fact car ownership seems to be increasing in recent years.

But these are the figures for traffic counts on 38 sites in the borough over the last 6 years compared with the base year of 2001:

All traffic	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006
7 am - 7pm	100	101.9	102	99.6	96.9	95.1
Peak Hours	100	101.7	101.3	98.1	93.4	93.8

Perhaps needless to point out that there is no congestion charge system operating in Bromley, and yet these figures are comparable to the reduction in traffic volumes claimed in central London as a result of the London congestion charge.

What is going on here? Has improved public transport or “modal shift” encouragement programmes promoted by the council had some effect? Or are the traffic counts lower because it’s more slow moving? The answers are not clear, but these figures probably give a lie to the suggestion that gridlock is inevitable.

Chatterton Village Permit Parking

Proposals are afoot to introduce a permit parking scheme for the “Chatterton Village” area of Bromley. There are allegations that some people are using it as a “park and ride” zone by parking their cars there and then catching a bus into Bromley. Other complaints are of people “using the road space for business purposes, e.g. shoppers, car sales and servicing”, or students parking while Bromley College is undergoing development.

(Editors Comments: This all seems rather unlikely and it would be interesting to know what evidence there is to substantiate these claims. This area with it’s closely packed terraced housing has had parking problems for many years and I suspect it is more an issue of residents acquiring more cars resulting in these difficulties rather than a major influx of visitors – and presumably any student parking problem would only be temporary when we all know that once a parking permit scheme is introduced you never get rid of it. I would encourage residents to vote against these proposals in the same way that other similar proposals have been turned down by residents of Bromley in recent years. Parking problems are not solved by rationing the space – all that happens is that a needless system of bureaucracy is introduced which has to be paid for by residents.)

Letters

Our previous edition got a number of responses including one reader who “cancelled his subscription” on the apparent basis that it contained anti-socialist bias, but here are some comments from Philip Jones:

“A supporter of BBRAG from its earliest days I have not always agreed with all its views expressed in the BBRAG News. However I must say that, without reservation, I totally agree with all you say in the Newsletter No. 51 (March 2008).”

He continued with even more effusive praise which your editor is too modest to print.

News Snapshots

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

+ Nottingham is going ahead with the first “workplace parking levy” in the UK, despite strong local objections from businesses. For example Boots employees will have to pay several hundreds of pounds per year even though most of them work on a site which is well outside the ring road. Boots will probably have to pass the charge directly onto the staff. The council decided that this was simpler than trying to introduce a congestion charge, but in essence they need the money to subsidise the uneconomic tram system that they have been building.

+ Bromley Councillor Nicholas Bennett recently asked some questions about expenditure on council staff. One question was about the two “Child Car Seat Education Officers” that the council employs. It transpired that although these are only part-time posts, the total cost is running at about £21,000 per annum. These staff train retailers of car seats in the borough apparently. Councillor Bennett expressed his view that these posts were “a complete waste of taxpayers money” but Councillor Smith, the Portfolio holder, did not agree. *(Editors Comments: Now you know where some of your taxes are spent)*

+ The London Borough of Richmond is planning emission based charges for school parking permits. Apparently people have been issued with permits to park outside primary schools under an informal arrangement that allowed them to park for up to 10 minutes outside the school. In future it is proposed to charge them a variable amount of up to £75 per year based on the cars emissions. *(Editors Comments: More lunacy in Richmond, and totally unenforceable – if a driver does not get out of the car and leaves the engine on they are not “parked” so could ignore any attempt to give them a parking ticket).*

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 £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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