



BBRAG NEWS

Bromley Borough Roads Action Group - No. 53 (July 2008)

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Editorial

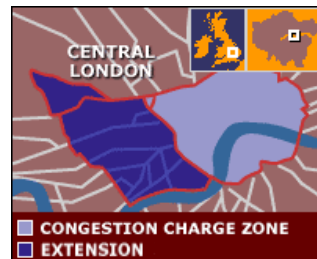
This edition contains a mixture of topics including coverage of possible new transport policies in London and the problem of "furious riding" by cyclists.

It includes some good news for motorists, but also the usual bad news where motorists, and even the disabled, are discriminated against on quite spurious grounds.

Don't forget to let us have your comments for future publication, supportive, or otherwise. We'll print anything as long as it's reasonably rational and to the point.

Roger Lawson
Editor

Johnson Announces Congestion Charge Western Extension Consultation



Boris Johnson has announced that there will be fresh consultation on the Western Extension of the London Congestion Charge, commencing in

September. This was a promise in his Mayoral election manifesto.

This is what he said in the press release that was issued on the 1st July (full details can be seen at: www.london.gov.uk/view_press_release.jsp?releaseid=17573):

"The previous Mayor made the decision to introduce the western extension in the face of overwhelming opposition. Unlike my predecessor, I am going into this with an open mind and this will be a genuine consultation. It is high time that politicians listened to the people whom they represent and I am proud to keep the pledge made during my election campaign to hold a further consultation. Londoners can be assured that, whether they stand for or against, this time their opinions will be respected and we will abide by the results.

The western extension is a massive issue for those that live and work in the west of our city and the consultation is likely to elicit strong views. This is not a referendum, so it won't be limited to a 'do you or don't you want to keep it?'

Yes, there will be the option to scrap it, but there will also be other options including keeping it and changing certain aspects of it, like whether it should operate all day. But this will be an opportunity for everyone with experience of the extension to tell me whether they want to see it removed, improved or if they are simply unmoved."

Editor's Comments: It is a pity that a simple referendum has not been selected to get the unbiased views of the populace. Let us hope that this is not another consultation as were many previous ones issued by Transport for London, with leading questions, and containing spurious statements, of which an example was given in our last newsletter).

New Routemaster Competition



Another election promise of Boris Johnson was the commitment to scrap bendy buses and replace them by a new version of the beloved “Routemaster” – updated for the modern age of course. He received

a lot of criticism from his foes over the cost of this proposal, and the costs certainly seemed somewhat unclear.

But not to be discouraged, Mr Johnson has announced a prize competition for the design of the new bus. There are several prizes and there are categories for younger entrants so everyone can have a go – no relevant experience required it seems – see www.tfl.gov.uk/aneewbusforlondon for more details.

For those who have forgotten what a Routemaster looks like, or otherwise want to wallow in nostalgia, the Routemaster Association have lots of nice photographs on their web site – see www.routemaster.org.uk from which the above picture is taken.

Editor's Comments: Let's keep it small and nimble so it does not clog up London streets, and block pedestrian crossings – one of the most annoying aspects of bendy buses in my experience. And a cleaner power plant must certainly be important also.

£25 Congestion Charge Scrapped



Let us welcome the announcement by Boris Johnson that he is cancelling the proposed Emissions Related Congestion Charge due to come into force in October. This proposal

included a charge of £25 for some vehicles and no charge for low emission vehicles.

BBRAG opposed the proposal because it clearly was not going to have any environmental benefit – indeed its detractors estimated it would actually raise total emission levels.

This is what your editor had to say in a press release issued by the ABD:

“The £25 Congestion Charge was simply a way of raising more tax supported by eco-fascists and those left wingers who like to tax the apparently wealthy. It was backed by a biased consultation process, misleading opinion polls and ultimately a refusal by the former Mayor to listen to the views of his own electorate. We are glad that Mr Johnson has stuck to his election pledge and ditched this unreasonable attack on motorists. The ERCC was the most unfair and disproportionate tax ever proposed in Britain”.

The ABD supported the challenge by Porsche with a judicial review to this proposal. Porsche are now going to be paid their legal costs, which they are donating to charity. But the ABD is still pursuing complaints about the wording of the opinion polls used to support this proposal, and Freedom of Information Act requests concerning the way these polls were used to manipulate public opinion.

Speed Table Noise & Vibration



Readers may well recall the problems caused by a speed table at the junction of Copers Cope Road and Worsley Bridge Road in Bromley (photo above before pedestrian refuges installed). Adjacent resident Kerry Turner has complained about damage to her house, and constant noise and vibration since the speed table was put in. Plus there have been several accidents caused by vehicles hitting the speed table too fast and being diverted off the road into her fence and garden. The only response from the council was to install some pedestrian refuges to try and reduce traffic speeds, but to little effect (photo below showing damage to one of them already apparent from vehicle strikes).



The latest accident happened on the 23rd May. To quote from Mrs Turner: *“This is probably the worst I've seen caused by the 'Speed table', certainly in terms of personal injury. The extent of damage was far more terrifying to witness. The car hit the pedestrian island (recently installed for safety reasons), before snapping a tree in half. The car was a complete wreck. We were literally shaken out of our beds! The speed table is an even bigger threat to the lives of pedestrians and motorists.*

Also, the 'pedestrian islands' have done nothing to prevent further damage to our house. In fact, we now have water entering the house from various areas from the serious level of vibration caused by the vehicles.”

Mrs Turner is calling for urgent action by the council to remedy the problem, but this is just one of a number of similar complaints recently received by your editor from other parts of London.

For example, Caroline Jones of Ilford has the misfortune to live on a bus route where a speed table was installed. The speed table is just metres from the side wall of one of the affected properties and buses go over the hump about 150 times per day, often at excessive speed. To quote from her *“We have felt movement of our property, vibrations rip through, with a feeling that the property was about to tear in half by the force of the vibration and an impression that the windows were about to explode with the force. The vibration goes through my floor and through my chair and through me. We have informed our council about the vibrations but they are refusing to do a vibration monitoring study saying that the onus is on us to prove vibrations.”*

(Editor's Comments: Councils have been installing speed tables and humps without considering the consequences or the impact on residents. And once they have been installed, at considerable expense, they are deaf to the complaints of residents. As I have said before, the only thing to do with these speed tables is to remove them and replace them with alternative road safety measures, but getting council staff to admit they have made a mistake, and to allocate some budget to fix the problem is almost impossible. It requires endless persistence and legal threats to get anywhere. This is simply unjust as the noise and vibration can make life a misery for the people who have these devices inflicted upon them.)

Child Car Safety Seats



We previously published some critical comments on the cost of the two part time employees paid by Bromley Council to advise on installation of child car seats. Here's a response

from council officer Gareth Davies which justifies a different view:

“Research from Which? and the AA Motoring Trust suggests that two-thirds to four-fifths of car seats are wrongly fitted, and one-third are actually dangerous. Safety tests were carried out by experts from the Transport Research Laboratory (TRL) at the Britax test facility in Andover, Hampshire, using realistic child dummies sitting in Britax child restraints. The seats were deliberately installed incorrectly to illustrate the consequences of miss-fitting. Andrew Howard, head of road safety at The AA Motoring Trust, says: ‘Fitting a child seat incorrectly is a serious issue and one that parents or childminders must not ignore. We estimate that around two thirds of all child seats are incorrectly fitted and a third could cause serious injury to the child..’

Recent research in Bromley suggested that four-fifths of seats are still are not fitted safely and that parents do not know which type of seat to buy for their child's age or weight. Parents were, in the most part, wanting to know how to fit a seat correctly, but sometimes the seat they had been sold could not be made to fit their car at all. Some parents put their child in a seat facing the wrong direction!

In 2006/7, Bromley Road Safety Officers and Trading Standards Officers inspected the selling of seats by retailers in Bromley and found that most did not know how to fit one correctly, or how to advise parents on safe fitting. Currently there is nothing in place, locally nor nationally, to ensure seats are sold correctly. Bromley decided to take the matter in hand by introducing an Accreditation Scheme for car seat retailers and put in a bid to TfL for funds. The stated objective was ‘To ensure all car seats are sold with correct installation and usage advice. To raise awareness of car seat installation issues with parents. Reducing the number of unnecessary injuries to children that could easily be prevented. Quality control using the ‘mystery shopper’ technique providing monitoring of the service..’

After a successful bid to TfL, the Accreditation Scheme is being developed by officers in order to be rolled out across the Borough. The scheme will hopefully become a nationally recognised accreditation in time. Once the scheme is established retailers will, we hope, want to keep their accredited status and will be willing to pay for the training themselves. Once training is sought, private providers will become available.

In 2006 the law changed regarding which children must use car seats, but if the seat isn't fitted correctly then there is no safety benefit. Bromley has a good road safety record in all areas, when compared with other local authorities, but there have still been 65 child car passenger casualties in the past three years, so we cannot be complacent.”

New Policies at TfL?



At the end of June, the Greater London Assembly had the opportunity to question the three people who are likely to have most influence on future London transport policies in the new regime of

Boris Johnson – namely Tim Parker, Kulveer Ranger and Tim Hendy.

Tim Parker is a deputy Mayor and new head of the Board of Transport for London (TfL). He recognised that the bus network was enjoying a renaissance, that modal shift had been achieved to some extent, that the “Tube” was creaking under the weight of demand and the travel plan for the Olympics and Crossrail were significant future challenges (incidentally Crossrail finally received the Government consent to go ahead a few days ago).

Parker said that the priority was to make TfL more efficient but it was too early to say what his reforms might be. When questioned on the size of the bus subsidy in TfL, currently budgeted for £600m for 2008/9, he said “we cannot assume that the cup that runneth over for the last eight years is going to be running over quite so extensively in the next four”, after referring to the clouds on the economic horizon.

He also expressed concerns about millions of pounds of apparent expenditure on projects such as the Cross River Tram and Croydon Tramlink extensions where there is no funding or Government approval in place. But he expressed support for the view that TfL can assist people to get off CO2 emitting forms of transport and into using their legs and getting on bikes and felt it was absolutely essential to do that. That didn't stop Green member Jenny Jones from attacking his current choice of car and suggesting he should get rid of his Porsche.

Kulveer Ranger is the Mayor's Director of Transport Policy and the most interesting comment he made was that there was no hierarchy of transport modes. *"The motorist is not at the foot of all traffic modes"* which will be news to many who have seen this view espoused regularly by transport engineers in TfL and London boroughs. Jenny Jones found this confounding and said *"I've always had a very good relationship with TfL but clearly that's probably going to change now"*. Ranger said that *"The Mayor feels that the difference between this administration and the previous one is that we aren't going to pander to one group or another"*

(Editor's comments: what a breath of fresh air this will be, with pressure groups of cyclists and pedestrians, lead by the Green group, promoting all kinds of lunatic agendas to the disadvantage of the general public, and particularly other road users, in the past).

Ranger said the Mayor was also keen to slim down the "transport strategy" which he suggested was too detailed. Presumably this means that local boroughs will have more control over their local activities which many would welcome. A less dictatorial agenda from TfL would be appreciated.

Peter Hendy disclaimed there had been any simple road user hierarchy in the past, and that applying any such hierarchy to traffic signal setting was not simple anyway. (Incidentally residents of west London have suggested that some lights have already been rephased to improve traffic flow as per the Mayor's election promise). Hendy reinforced the point that the new Mayor seemed *"as committed to environmental sustainability as the old one"* and he expected some strong policy initiatives in the areas of walking and cycling.

Finally on the subject of road space allocation he said *"there's more to encouraging cycling than painting cycle lanes"* – a wise comment indeed.

Kulveer Ranger also hinted in the Times newspaper that there might be significant changes to the London congestion charge system, which were already heralded to some extent in Johnson's election policies. He said: *"Flexibility around hours of operation, flexibility around how it is charged; all of those things are options we're looking to consider"*.

Bus Lanes



The denial above of any "hierarchy of transport modes" in London is of course surprising to anyone who reads the justifications for bus lanes put forward by TfL and local borough engineers where it is clear that bus passengers (i.e. public transport users) are given priority over private car users.

Bus passengers are given dedicated road space, that private car users are not allowed to enter, but the reverse is not the case. And in respect of the amount of road space allocated to them, per person transported, bus passengers typically get more space and are of course allowed to jump the queues at congested points of the road network.

Here's a report from local resident Paul Hemsley on the situation in Ealing:

Ealing Council had been in a long running dispute with ex Mayor Livingstone over the suitability of two bus lanes in the borough. They decided to review all the bus lanes and their operation in Ealing. For this they set up a cross party committee of councillors to scrutinize existing and future use of bus lanes in the Borough.

They co-opted representatives of various interested organisations to the panel, and although these did not have voting rights, they were given the opportunity at each meeting to put forward suggestion or oppose proposals on behalf of the group they represented. The ABD was asked to represent the motorists' interests in the 4 meetings that took place over the year.

Generally the meetings were well attended and thanks to a very strong lady councillor chairman, the TFL indoctrinated Ealing Council Transport Department personnel were forced to give in and agree that a review on all aspects of the Bus Lanes as being operated in Ealing was necessary. Whether any major changes are implemented it remains to be seen.

(Editor's Comments: I think all bus lanes should be justified only if they enable the transport of more people in total than if the lane was used by any vehicle, i.e. one would count the number of buses and the average passenger loading and compare that with the same figure for a typical ordinary road lane where all vehicles are permitted. There would of course be few examples where bus lanes would be justified on that basis.

I see no reason to give some road users preference over any others because it undermines freedom of choice, and is not a solution to our transport problems. It suggests that somehow bus passengers are more meritorious than other road users, and should be given favourable treatment, which is simply nonsense.

And in case anyone tries to justify that on environmental grounds, it's worth pointing out that we have published articles previously that show that per passenger bus journeys emit just as much air pollution as car trips, and in some cases such as particulates, they are actually worse).

Cycling and Road Safety



Cyclists in the Borough of Kensington & Chelsea will be allowed to ride the wrong way down certain one way streets in future.

Apparently Councillor Daniel Moylan was prompted to make the change after noticing hundreds of cyclists breaking the law and ignoring the no-entry signs on such streets near his home. He said to the Times: *"If this is what bicyclists want to do and they can do it safely, then we see it as our responsibility to adapt the legal position to allow them to do it legally. The alternative of having a policeman standing on the road to catch cyclists would be foolish and unworkable"*. *(Editor's Comments: a sound principle and I look forward to all speed limits being removed on the basis that there are millions of motorists breaking official posted speed limits every day. But whether this policy will improve safety for cyclists in this instance remains to be seen).*

A relevant quotation is this one from John Snow – CTC President: *"If a camera followed me on my bike, it would be bound to find me breaking the law somewhere, including riding the wrong way down one-way streets. It's the inescapable reality of riding a bicycle"*.

Some readers may also have noticed the exchange of correspondence between your editor and Ray Ransom of the Meridian Cycling Club in the Bromley based Newsshopper newspaper. He said in the letter on June 4th *"cyclists did not kill any pedestrians or motorists last year"*. The following was my response:

"It is a pity that people like Ray Ransom who choose to write letters to the newspapers seem often not to bother checking their facts. Mr Ransom claims that "cyclists did not kill any pedestrians or motorists last year". Simply wrong. City fund manager Nick Bancroft was killed in November last year while walking across the road in London. This case was widely reported and can be found easily on the internet. A similar case was reported in the same month in the West Country.

As Mr Ransom may know the police stopped collecting separate accident figures for pedestrian/cyclist fatalities some years ago which is probably unfortunate given the modern tendency of aggressive cycling by "lycra louts". But there are lots of cases reported in the press if you bother to look for them. One has to question whether the other information Mr Ransom provides is any more accurate.

Clearly there is too much harassment of pedestrians by cyclists and similarly too much aggression shown to cyclists by motorists. But there is obviously a double standard when cyclists can flaunt traffic laws and suffer no penalties - indeed politicians such as Boris Johnson and David Cameron are caught doing it without much public censure. While motorists are heavily fined, can lose their license and hence their jobs for trivial and often accidental infringements of traffic laws."

Soon after the above exchange of correspondence, another case was in the news where 17-year old Rhiannon Bennett was killed by cyclist Jason Howard. Mr Howard appeared in court and was fined £2,200 for "dangerous cycling". Rhiannon's father said the fine was laughable and he should have been charged with manslaughter. The cyclist was on the footpath and apparently shouted "move because I'm not stopping" before crashing into her.

Or consider this email received from Martin Kicks who pointed out the above incident: "I am writing to you because I too have been knocked over by a cyclist riding on the pavement travelling at speed, the cyclist shouted some profanity and cycled away unscathed, ironically the road has a cycling lane with very little road traffic."

The picture below is from a previous edition and shows cyclists blatantly ignoring the law by riding through a red light near Tower Bridge – and you can stand there any day and see numerous instances of such repudiation of the law.



When Traffic Offences are Void

A good example of how motorists are treated in a prejudicial manner is the recent revelation that some London councils have not been refunding fines for traffic offences when they have subsequently discovered that the fines were illegal.

For example yellow box junctions that do not comply with regulations, or parking tickets that show insufficient information are known to have been issued, but when the councils concerned discover their mistakes, they do not go back and refund all the people who have wrongly paid fines. Indeed, Nick Lester of the London Councils has argued that they have no duty to do so and that it "would not be a good use of public money to repay the penalty".

(Editors Comments: he seems oblivious to the fact that this money was extracted from the public illegally and from its rightful owners. Collecting money by illegal means is of course a criminal offence, e.g. obtaining money by deception, and if anybody who reads this finds they are the victim of one of these events then I suggest you report it to the police).

Speed Humps & the Disabled



Mobilise, a magazine for the disabled mobile, recently published an article written by their Information Office, Sally Roe. This covered the impact of speed humps and was prompted by a letter from Angie Griffiths who said "It doesn't seem to make any difference what speed or angle you attack the wretched things, they cause physical pain!".

The article covered many reports of the negative impact of speed humps on disabled people with a variety of medical conditions.

It also reported that the DfT had never undertaken any research into the impact of humps on disabled people – only healthy people were used in their tests. To quote from the article: *“So although the DfT thinks it is perfectly ethical to install speed humps that they admit cause some motorists pain, they say it would not be ethical to investigate the number of people who might experience pain, or the long-term impact on their health”*.

Neither, as the article points out, has there been any research into whether speed humps have resulted in fewer casualties overall in the UK, or whether they have increased. Delays to ambulances from speed humps may have a significant impact for example.

The author also spoke to Paul Smith, Chairman of the Spinal Injuries Association who expressed concern about the initial treatment of newly injured people and the route they take to hospital. As it is very important to keep such people as immobile as possible while getting them to hospital quickly and he would welcome more research into the issue.

(Picture above: one of the speed humps in Watts Lane, Chislehurst, for which a petition was recently raised to have it removed – an answer is still awaited from the council on that).

Mobile Phone Parking



Westminster City Council introduced the idea of paying by mobile phone for time on a parking bay some years ago and a number of other London boroughs such as Wandsworth,

Camden and Tower Hamlets have similar schemes. They were introduced to replace parking meters and “pay & display” machines which were vulnerable to thefts of cash from them – all you needed was a copy of the keys to empty them at will, and the result was a major loss of revenue.

Professional gangs of thieves also took to drilling into the machines, or in many cases simply pulling the whole machine out of the ground and taking it away.

However, many people have great difficulty paying via a mobile phone, as Jeremy Clarkson amply demonstrated on Top Gear recently in Westminster. Of course those without a mobile phone, or those unwilling to give their credit card numbers out to call centre operatives, also found it impossible. In addition, the fact that the schemes vary in their mode of operation, and being registered in one borough does not help you in another, creates extra confusion and difficulty.

One also has the problem of disputing claims that you had not paid, when you had. At least one case has been reported where someone parked, validly paid for the parking, but then was issued with a penalty notice. This was only accepted as being wrong when he complained. The basic problem being of course that no ticket is issued that you can use as evidence of having paid.

Bromley Council introduced such a scheme on an experimental basis in Orpington when the demolition of a large multi-storey car park to make way for a new Tesco put additional pressure on street parking provision.

It is claimed to be a success, with some 700 people registering to use it. There are therefore plans to extend it.

(Editor's Comments: I am opposed to these schemes. Having to register is time consuming, and requires you to provide confidential personal information which should be totally unnecessary when all you are doing is buying a parking ticket. In addition it will take longer when you have to pay, and in my view is likely to become very vulnerable to fraud where people evade paying. This is yet another retrograde step in modern life, and a further difficulty being put in the way of ordinary motorists. It will be particularly annoying when you want to park in a borough other than one you have registered for. Such schemes should not be extended).

Speed Cameras

All safety camera partnerships have recently published their financial figures for the 2006/7 financial year. Here are some figures from the London results.

The London Safety Camera Partnership issued 359,798 NIPs (Notices of Intended Prosecution to discover the drivers), which was up 11% on the prior year. But only 159,626 resulted in the issue of a Fixed Penalty Notice and those actually fell from the prior year by 7%. So the success in tracing offenders was definitely worse.

Even more disappointing (if you consider these are truly criminal events) was the fact that only 126,128 were paid. This did result in income of £7.5 million from fines, but costs totalled £8.8 million and thus they had a deficit of £1.3 million.

(Editor's Comments: Clearly the non law abiding fraternity have learned that there are several easy ways to avoid paying a fine – just blame a visitor from overseas as the driver who has now gone back to Timbuktu. Only the normal law abiding motorist who has accidentally collected a ticket bothers to pay it. What a silly way to run any system and yet another reason why speed cameras should be outlawed).



Opposition to speed cameras has been so strong that there are numerous cases of cameras being destroyed. The picture

above is taken from a web site at www.speedcam.co.uk/index2.htm which contains a very large collection of such photographs and is well worth visiting to see the impact of this underground movement.

They seem particularly active on the A2 and A20 in south east London where cameras get repeatedly destroyed. The authorities seem to have given up putting them back in some cases.

It is interesting to look at the accounts for the London Safety Camera Partnership where apart from £5.1 million on staff costs the next largest item was “equipment maintenance” which is presumably where the costs of repairing and replacing damaged cameras is located.

(Editor's Comments: My only comment is that when people object strongly enough to laws that they feel result in unreasonable persecution, but politicians do not listen, some people will take the matter into their own hands).

Letters

From Terry Hudson:

“Concerning the future of the Thames Gateway Bridge mentioned in your last edition. Firstly let's get rid of the Dartford Crossing tolls and see what effect this has. If another new crossing over the Thames is required, then we should plump for a tunnel. A tunnel starting directly from main roads both sides of the river would take up less land in this densely populated area, it would not require the knocking down of hundreds of homes and blight peoples lives with a major road on their doorstep. This, I believe, would not create the opposition that the threat of a major new surface road scheme will have. Though tunnels have added safety concerns, they do not have to shut because of high winds, as the Dartford crossing often does, are less intrusive in the landscape and would, I have thought, be less costly to maintain.”

From Colin James:

“Last night I went to a concert at The O2 Arena. As public transport would have taken a long time from Bickley I drove there. All of the roads in the vicinity are double yellow lined, although perhaps you can park a mile away. I was astounded to be faced with a £20 parking fee by NCP. This is fleecing the motorist with no one to adjudicate. Perhaps you can inform your members of this so that they are not faced with the same expense. After the event I did note that you can book parking in advance, although I do not know the cost. Even an exorbitant £10 or whatever it may be would seem (although it would not be) a bargain.”

(Editor’s Comments: It was a deliberate policy of the London Mayor and Greenwich Council to deter access by private cars to the Millenium Dome (since renamed the O2). This was of course one factor that contributed to its financial failure and turned it into a complete disaster as a project. Certainly it is unlikely that the residents of Bromley would attempt to travel by public transport to this venue, particularly in the evening – which probably explains why I have never been there.)

News Snapshots

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

+ Mercedes have invented a car that is almost immune to speed humps. They recently demonstrated a modified “S-class” vehicle that pre-scans for humps and uses an enhanced version of Mercedes “Automatic Body Control” system to mitigate the impact of the hump even further. Mercedes claim it is very effective up to about 20 mph but would add 3,000 Euros to the cost. *(Editor’s Comments: Mercedes S-class is already very good over humps and better than most vehicles from my recent experience of one. But surely it would be wiser to get rid of the humps to start with).*

+ The City of London is to scrap free parking for electric vehicles. Since 2001 the City has issued over 1000 annual parking passes and car parking permits but the schemes are being scrapped because the City claims that it has encouraged too many electric car owners onto the streets, where they are adding to congestion.

(Editor’s Comments: Can’t say I have noticed enormous numbers of electric vehicles on the streets of the City of London so I am sceptical of the alleged reason for yet another abrupt change in policy that frustrates the ability of car purchasers to make decisions based on known future economics).

+ Parking in London is the most expensive in the world according to a report published by Colliers International, a property consultancy. Monthly parking rates in the City of London are now £586 with the West End not far behind. That’s twice the cost of the equivalent space in New York and more than twice that of Tokyo. Daily parking rates are similarly high at about £35 in the City which is followed by Amsterdam, Moscow and the Hague for expensiveness. The cheapest is Delhi which costs less than £1 per day. *(Editor’s Comments: Remember, this is not just because of the high cost of land in London, it’s a direct result of planning policies that distort the natural economics).*

+ Westminster is to trial a system in its Queensway car park where parking charges will vary based on how close it is to being full. It hopes to attract more users than at present. No doubt this is one aspect of the impact of the London congestion charge and its western extension which has resulted in many car parks in central London being under-utilised. The cost of car parking will be displayed as an hourly rate at the entrance, and might be as low as 20p per hour when it is relatively empty.

+ London Transport’s Oyster card system suffered a massive failure some weeks ago due to possible invasion of the computer system by “malware” that damaged the cards of anyone who used them on the day concerned. It seems it may be a case of “cyber-terrorism” as there was no financial benefit likely to the perpetrators. Two weeks later a second failure occurred which resulted in 200,000 “pay-as-you-go” Oyster card users getting a free ride. Peter Hendy, Transport Commissioner was reported as being “incandescent with rage”. Meanwhile Dutch University researchers are intending to publish a method to clone Oyster cards and other “smart cards” but TfL seem unworried by the threat.

+ Westminster is to phase out the clamping of vehicles and simply issue parking tickets unless the vehicle is causing an obstruction when it will be towed away. Apparently this change of heart has been prompted by the annoyance it causes. However, those who receive multiple unpaid tickets may find they are towed away in some London boroughs even if they are not currently committing any offence under new regulations just introduced.

+ Total road casualties in 2007 fell by 4.9%, which is similar to the national figure of a decline of 4%. Both fatal and serious accidents in London fell by 4%, and most categories fell. Even powered two wheelers declined by 4.9% which was a problem area in previous years but pedal cyclists total casualties rose by 0.4% overall and serious accidents to cyclists rose by 20% - this is probably accounted for the rise in the level of cycling combined with increasingly risky behaviour by cyclists as mentioned elsewhere in this newsletter.

+ An additional 100 charging points for electric vehicles are to be installed in London, trebling the number available. In addition an "Electric Vehicle Partnership" is to be set up.

+ The Low Emission Zone (LEZ) which commenced in February resulted in 6,200 penalty charge notices being issued by the 3rd July (at £1,000 each, reduced to £500 if paid early). But there were 4,000 "representations" which mainly rely on providing evidence that the vehicles will be made compliant within 28 days. No information is yet available as to whether this scheme has had any noticeable impact on air pollution levels.

+ The Government is to press ahead with turning the hard shoulder of some motorways into extra running lanes. Possible locations already identified are the M3 and M4 approaching the M25, M23 junctions 8-10 around Gatwick and the M25 between junctions 5 to 7, and 23 to 27. Usage might be limited to "car sharers", i.e. multi-occupancy vehicles, or people who had paid a special toll, or crawler lanes for larger vehicles, or perhaps a combination of all three.

(Editor's Comments; I am not necessarily opposed if it can be done safely, although charging would introduce an objectionable precedent. However it's really tinkering with the main problem which is lack of sufficient capacity. Road building should be considered when demand is sufficient to justify it, rather than this approach of "doing anything but build new roads").

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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