

Chapter I

SUSTAINABLE TRANSPORT FOR LONDON

The best is still to come

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INTRODUCTION

London can't grow and London won't work, unless we reduce the demand for travel and switch people to cycling and walking. This means that Transport for London (TfL) must not only find ways of persuading people to leave their cars at home, but also to encourage car owners to occasionally stay there with them. This involves a revolution in thinking, far more radical than the congestion charge and road pricing. We need one of the biggest public transport authorities in the world to divert its customers off its peak time bus, tube and train services and onto walking, cycling, teleworking or flexi-time.

The great thing about the changes being made to transport in London is that the best is still to come. The successful introduction of the congestion charge and its expansion westward has been the most high profile change, but the growth in bus services and bus passengers has been the key investment which has kept London moving. Bus travel is up by over 40% since 1999 and this accounts for the 4% shift in modal share from cars to public transport in recent years. This makes London the only major city in the world where we are winning the battle against cars clogging up and polluting our streets. However, these achievements disguise other significant and equally important initiatives which could have an even bigger impact.

I want to tell you three remarkable things about London's transport system which you haven't heard before and I want you to finish the article thinking differently about how things could work in the future.

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SIXTY BILLION POUNDS IS NOT ENOUGH

The first remarkable thing is that the massive investment programme between now and 2025 won't be enough to get rid of over crowding and congestion. It is essential that London gets to spend £30bn upgrading the tube; £13bn on Crossrail; £7bn increasing capacity on the railways and a few more billion on projects like the East London Line Extensions and the DLR extensions. All these are essential, none of them is sufficient on its own and none of them is the number one priority.

In order to support the almost 1 million new jobs and 450,000 new dwellings expected in the next twenty years, the capacity of the public transport networks will need to be increased considerably, or we will be faced with even worse overcrowding and congestion than we have now. This year's publication of TfL's big strategy document 2025 was significant for the fact that it recognised the gap between future demand and its own ability to meet it. I don't under-estimate what a change of mind set this is for transport professionals and engineers who dream of new schemes and millions of users riding on 21st century infrastructure. Nor do I under-estimate how successful TfL have been in using and improving existing infrastructure with over a billion passenger journeys on the tube for the first time ever and over sixty million on the DLR. These are massive under-takings, but simply not enough.

The reality has dawned on TfL, and more slowly on the Mayor's office, that there are essentially two ways of bridging this gap between the likely demand for travel from 900,000 additional Londoners in 2025 and the increase in the supply of transport which comes from an investment programme of over sixty billion pounds. Having squeezed every improvement in capacity out of the existing system, we can either increase the supply of transport by adding further projects and further billions, or we reduce the demand. Reducing demand for travel can be achieved through a combination of transport and planning policies, many of which TfL has already begun to adopt.

TALKING PEOPLE OUT OF THEIR CARS

My second remarkable fact is the success they have had from spending just a little money on Travel Demand Management (TDM). The number of car journeys to and from school has been cut by an average of 7% in those schools adopting a school travel plan. This is remarkable because it is the most advanced of several TDM programmes which will have just as big an impact as the congestion charge, or road pricing, if they are all done on a large enough scale. It is a very different approach to transport planning because we are trying to do lots of small things on a large scale. London is over half way towards its goal of every school having a travel plan by 2009, a year ahead of the Government's national target. It is still early days, but this tiny £13m annual budget is significantly reducing school run congestion in the morning peak.

The two key things in spending the annual TDM budget of over £30m are promoting long term cultural shift and aligning these measures with the work of TfL on the rail, tube and bus networks. Clearly £30m is far short of the hundreds of millions of pounds which will be required to bridge the gap between anticipated growth in demand and the supply, but it is enough money to allow TfL to try things out and to get on a very fast learning curve.

One of the key lessons of recent years is that we need to give travel plans and personalised marketing the same preparation time as we allow for minor infrastructure projects. If a school or workplace decides to adopt a travel plan then it will take three or four years to develop and implement. The travel plan also needs to be backed up with money for relatively small scale investments covering everything from cycle parking, to pelican crossings and teleconferencing facilities. Some of this needs TfL investment and some has to be private, or public partnership money. I'm not expecting TfL to provide money for showers, but I do expect them to make the economic case to companies about the benefits of their staff walking and cycling more.

Achieving a significant cultural shift in the travel and lifestyle habits of Londoners requires far more than a large marketing budget. We have to provide alternatives which go with the flow of modern lives. Car clubs are one of the best examples of this with a 60% growth in membership during the last year. Much of this growth is commercial, as a good idea takes off, but the fact that TfL are now investing nearly half a million pounds a year on helping car clubs does help explain why 70% of all the car club members are now in London. Having established car clubs as an attractive life style choice for ordinary Londoners, we now need TfL to help spread them outside of central and inner London, especially to the suburbs where car clubs are the ideal alternative to second car ownership.

When I was elected seven years ago as a Green Party member of the London Assembly, I didn't expect to be using my leverage over the Mayor's annual budget to make car clubs an every day choice for Londoners, by pushing for a vehicle to be available within easy walk of everyone's home. Yet all the research supports the argument that car club members generally take the environmental option when they are given a straight choice between the cost of a car journey versus the cost of using public transport, cycling and walking. Research from Switzerland showed a 72% decrease in mileage from motorists who switched to a car club and surveys in this country show car club drivers being eight times more likely to use public transport than average drivers. However, we do need to keep the fares down in London in order that people have the financial incentive to make the environmental choice. It is worth remembering that since 1997, the Government has allowed the cost of public transport to go up faster than the cost of motoring. It's no wonder that since the Greater London Authority was set up in 2000, car use has stayed level in London, but gone up by over 5% in the rest of the country.

The TfL travel advisers are aiming to approach 100,000 people this year, in order to discuss their travel needs and whether they can travel more sustainably. There have been stand alone schemes targeting a particular area and also, the start of the three year pilot in the borough of Sutton, which aims to combine all the so called 'soft measures' into one concentrated effort to change travel behavior in and around Sutton town centre. If the £3m investment in Sutton does pay off, then another nine town centre schemes will be rolled out across London, many of them in outer London. The big challenge in the coming years will be to align the personalized marketing approach with the work TfL is doing to spend its billions upgrading the tube, or the railway system, or even the planned changes to the North Circular.

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Cold calling on people's doors is a hard sell for even the most enthusiastic car reducing evangelists. Chatting to people and offering them advice when they are about to face major disruption to their travel arrangements is an easy, foot in the door strategy.

The big, congested transport interchanges are also an obvious starting point with vast numbers of commuters coming off over crowded trains and trying to squeeze onto packed out buses and tube trains. A series of signs which take them on a short walk from Victoria Station to Millbank or Trafalgar Square, might encourage several thousand people to take stroll rather than fighting it out for elbow room underground, or on a bus. The TfL project called 'Legible London' will provide a coherent set of pedestrian signs throughout central & inner London in the next few years and will be rolled out to outer London town centres as part of a new area based approach to promoting walking. Legible London thus provides the mapping infrastructure which TfL will use to divert some of the estimated 19,000 trips a day on the tube which are actually quicker to walk.

The TfL approach to Travel Demand Management (TDM) is cost effective, but it has to be done on a large enough scale to make an impact across the whole of London. The full implications of this long term investment need to be spelt out, as it is easily equivalent in scale to the hoped for additional investment in buses, or to that of some rail/tram schemes.

The same rule applies to walking and cycling investment, only more so. The best way of achieving an increase in supply/capacity on London's roads is through large scale modal shift away from cars and towards more sustainable forms of transport, especially walking/cycling. Achieving the high levels of walking/cycling found in many European cities will not only make London a healthier, less polluted city, it will also free up capacity on the trains, buses and trams.

If TfL are serious about cycling being 5% of modal share by 2025, then we will need to invest over £100m a year, rather than the thirty something million I have managed to push it towards with the last three years of budget agreements. I know that this is more than Cycle England are likely to get out of this Government for spending on cycling in the rest of the country, but if we genuinely expect as many Londoners to get on their bikes as there are on trains in London, then why are we happy to spend £7bn increasing capacity on rail, but question spending a fraction of that on cycling?

Despite walking's 21% modal share, spending on walking in London is hardly mentioned by TfL. And despite the problems faced by pedestrians, funding for walking is shockingly small, especially when compared to spending on transport in general. Journey for journey, if TfL's spending on walking reflected spending on the Underground, London's walking budget would be over a billion pounds. This is almost 50 times the £22.3m spent on walking in the capital in 2006/07. After years of standing still, progress is being made for London's pedestrians, but we now need ambitious projects which catch the public's imagination. The Mayor's 100 public spaces has made a start with high profile changes to Trafalgar Square and there are many others in the pipeline. If we expect Londoners to walk more, then we have to make the experience as worthwhile as possible. TfL has to realize that it is creating places that people live, chat and

hang around in, not just high capacity engineering projects. The public spaces programme is a bit by bit transformation which adds up to a huge investment in recreating London as a people friendly space.

One of the biggest challenges in transforming London will be to reverse the mistakes made over two decades or more in building large one way systems through the heart of many London's communities. These gyratories were part of the very outdated 'car is king' approach to planning which has failed us so badly. They are urban racetracks which are bad for cyclists, bad for pedestrians and bad for local businesses. TfL currently has a list of a dozen gyratories which are being considered for turning back to two way, as they did with the Shoreditch gyratory in 2003. The challenge for TfL and the Mayor is not only facing down the motoring lobby, but making this a priority when it could actually decrease the total flow of motorized traffic. It requires a leap of faith and an act of political will to go through with projects which bring hard to measure benefits to pedestrians and communities, but have clear disbenefits for existing users. Yet, without such changes the scales will remain tipped towards the car driver and everything else that TfL does to encourage walking and cycling will be that bit less effective.

For TDM and the promotion of walking & cycling to achieve a long term cultural shift in travel behaviour, they need to be implemented in conjunction with planning policies which reduce the need to travel and end the built in reliance on the car. Which brings me onto my third remarkable fact.

BEING A BIT DENSE

The number of dwellings per hectare for new developments has risen from 48 in 2001, when the Mayor's London Plan was being written, to 104 in 2005 when it was an established part of planning system. The arrival of the London Mayor has dramatically changed the way we are building in the capital. You can argue that many of the office blocks are simply too tall and shouldn't be built that high in sensitive locations, but the overall drive towards higher densities does mean that we have more compact housing developments throughout London. A compact city, if well designed, should mean a more human scale and accessible city with mixed use communities of shops, workplaces and services, all within easy reach.

The contrast between London and the rest of the country, shows one of the reasons why traffic is not growing in London, whilst it is still rising elsewhere. Over the period 2002-2006, dwellings built on previously-developed land in England and Wales were built at densities of between 33 to 43 dwellings per hectare in each region, compared to 87 dwellings per hectare for London. Mass transit is easier in London, simply because there is a higher density of people making up the necessary mass.

Despite this fundamental change since the arrival of the London Mayor, I feel that planning is still the big area where the Mayor is falling short and as a result TfL is having to pick up the pieces for the mistakes which he is making. For starters, we have far too many car parking places being approved. Why does a major transport interchange like the Stratford City Development need 10,000 new car parking spaces? Or Kings Cross, in an area which is

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already in breach of European air quality legislation, need over a thousand car parking spaces? These are appalling decisions, which show how the Mayor has failed to understand the environmental agenda. Ken Livingstone's analysis is that we can have the conventional economic growth, with TfL picking up the bill for all the increases in capacity and environmental mitigation measures. What many of his advisers fail to accept is that their approach is counter productive and is pushing up the cost of trying to make London work as a less polluted city. The more car parking you approve, the more you encourage the car dependency which you are then asking TfL to spend millions trying encouraging people to break free of.

The contradiction between the Mayor's economic and planning policies and his transport and environmental policies is illustrated is best illustrated in two ways. The first is his failure to take seriously the decline in local high streets and suburban town centres. A belated campaign to save post offices from closure can't disguise seven years of neglect over local businesses. Resistance to the growth of the supermarkets and the spread of clone town developments has been led by a few local authorities, with the Mayor being quietly supportive of the global franchises. The Mayor has ignored the implications of this local decline, not only in terms of a loss of the cultural diversity which is one of London's great strengths, but also the simple fact of millions of people having to travel further to work, shop and play.

The second example of the Mayor simply not being a green is the Thames Gateway Bridge. This is a projected six lane bridge in east London, which was first put forward as a strategic link between the north and south circular roads. The local community and environmentalists have been successfully resisting it for the last twenty five years on the grounds that it will generate traffic and pollution. The Mayor has included a couple of dedicated bus lanes and a tolling system in his proposal to mitigate the impacts, but it remains an environmentally damaging scheme, which was acknowledged in the recent Inspector's report from the public inquiry. The Mayor supports the new road because he believes it will bring jobs. It is an old fashioned and discredited assumption that new transport infrastructure automatically equals regeneration and despite the Mayor's failure to justify his job creation claims to the inquiry inspector, it is a fallacy which the Mayor is clinging to.

THE FUTURE

The London Mayor has adopted this country's most radical and detailed set of plans for dealing with climate change. With a little pushing from the two Greens on the London Assembly he has made this a genuine priority for his budget and all kinds of wonderful projects are now getting off the ground. If all this work is followed through, then many of these initiatives will be seen as just as big and as important as the introduction of congestion charging. If we manage it well, then there will be a real symbiosis between the emerging Travel Demand Management agenda and the multi-billion pound infrastructure budgets. This combination of new capacity, TDM and using existing capacity fully, will enable us to bridge the gap between supply and demand in a growing city. It will also benefit the environment as London's density increases and we have more people using less resources to access what they need.

According to the London Mayor, the main problem with this optimistic vision of London's future is a lack of Government resources and the danger of a new Mayor not giving the new initiatives sufficient support. I accept that these are dangers, but so is the problem of the new investment and the TDM approach being unable to cope with the mistakes of his planning policies. Over the next few years, London could lead the way in helping major cities and towns to rethink their approach to transport. We could have a cleaner, less polluting future, but only if we combine the best in transport policies with a drive to reduce the need to travel by building communities which give people easy access to the services, shops and employment which they need.

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