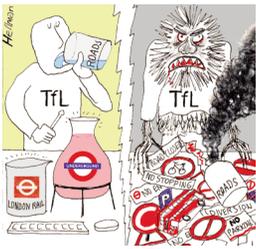


Transport for London – a case of Jekyll and Hyde

Help pedestrians, the poor bloody infantry in the battle for rational movement across the ill-paved terrain of what is supposed to be the world's greatest city



Planning in London has been published and edited by Brian Waters, Lee Mallett and Paul Finch since 1992

TfL has done a brilliant job in recent years in respect of the Underground and the extended rail system it now manages. It has increased capacity, made travel safer, more reliable and more accessible. It has undertaken long-term investment on the basis of proper analysis which will benefit the entire travelling public, and is once again the envy of transport planners across the world.

Unfortunately, in respect of roads it is the exact opposite. Capacity has been endlessly (and usually unnecessarily) reduced, the roads are much more dangerous, management of the road network is on many occasions beyond a joke, and vast amounts of money are being spent to benefit cyclists only. Oxford Street remains an embarrassing advertisement for incompetence; the curiosity of running empty buses all over London all the time continues, and the Big Lie that the congestion charge was anything other than a tax has been thoroughly exposed.

It scarcely seems possible that the same organization could be responsible for both above and below-ground activity when the latter is so much more efficiently managed than the former. Even in respect of design, below ground is pretty streamlined, whereas the streets are festooned with lines, zig-zags, curb markings, no-stopping zones where you can always find exemption areas, and the endless littering of pavements with skewed posts telling you what all the lines mean. Ugly and stupid.

It need not be like this, and there are plenty of experiments the road people could try which would be useful rather than imposed irritants. For one thing, bus lanes should mostly be freed up for use by anyone – but they would have to get out of the way when a bus came along, fitted with cameras to record anyone not shifting. Reducing capacity at the busiest times of day is a form of madness which if applied in most other operations would mean managers being sacked.

Second, TfL needs to grasp straw of managed delivery times so that congestion is not caused by unplanned and haphazard journeys. The idea of a 24-hour city, at least in respect of large servicing and delivery vehicles should be introduced as soon as is practicable. At a small scale, there is a strong case for re-opening the endless streets which have been shut off or made hopeless by the banning of left or right hand turns.

There would be also be a strong case for re-opening closed roads for taxis only, removing them from the busiest routes and allowed to think about journey options instead of being forced to join general traffic (think Strand). The current planning regime means that capillaries and veins are being closed off, pushing traffic onto arteries only. In the body this gives you blood pressure; in London it means massive inefficiencies deriving from time wasted making journeys which were far easier a generation ago.

Finally, while people like Goldman Sachs should be told to get lost when they demand road closures for their personal benefit (for example Stonecutter Street, where the City Corporation has cravenly caved in to the Giant Vampire Squid's demands), there is a strong symbolic case for closing one major road – at least east-west.

By all means keep the north-south routes running across Oxford Street, but it is surely time to ban all that east-west traffic once and for all. Travelators between the north-south roads would help pedestrians, the poor bloody infantry in the battle for rational movement across the ill-paved terrain of what is supposed to be the world's greatest city. ■

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Airport capacity – let the market decide

Mr Prime Minister, here's your answer to your self-made dilemma!

So £20 million and two-and-a-half years on the Davies Commission confirms that the South East needs more airport capacity. It seems likely that this and subsequent governments will find themselves allowing Heathrow another runway in due course – and then subject to the delays imposed by Davies' conditions.

This will neither answer the immediate need nor provide a world-beating airport for later this century. The latter should be achieved with a firm commitment and timetable, along the lines of HS2, to Fosters' integrated infrastructure project in the Thames Estuary.

The former and most urgent is to release the underused capacity at Stansted by connecting it to London. The submission to Davies by Schabas, Waters and Avery (see *PiL* 83 October 2012) 'Take Crossrail to Stansted', could be operational by 2019 when Crossrail is fully open. It will bring Canary Wharf and the City closer to STN than to LHR, thereby releasing some of the pressure on Heathrow.

We support the clear thinking of Michael O'Leary, CEO of Ryanair: "Britain got into this mess in the first place, after all, because of a centralised approach. Under the privatised BAA monopoly capacity was constrained and airlines and passengers overcharged. But thanks to the intervention of the Competition Commission, London now has the benefit of three major airports that are in genuine competition – Heathrow, Gatwick and Stansted. The improvement has been obvious to all.

Since the market is doing such a good job here, why not let it decide when and how additional runways should be delivered, rather than the bureaucrats on Sir Howard Davies's commission?

Ryanair has suggested that each of these airports should be given permission to build an additional runway whenever they chose to, subject only to normal planning consents.

A market-based solution is the best way finally to remove the political interference in UK aviation policy, and to create the additional runway capacity that is so badly needed if traffic, tourism and job creation are to be restored in the South East of England.

We urge (the) Government to grasp this nettle, and remove the dead hand of political dither. Only then will the state-imposed constraints that limit consumer choice and maintain artificially high air fares be ended, and London be able to cement its rightful place as the primary business and tourism destination in Europe".*

Mr Prime Minister, there's your answer to your self-made dilemma! ■

*Writing in *The Telegraph*,
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