

A transport strategy for a sustainable London

Transport offers some of the biggest opportunities to make radical changes towards making London more affordable, liveable and sustainable says Christian Wolmar

Transport is at the heart of the London Mayor's role, accounting for 60 per cent of spending, both on day-to-day expenditure and on longer term investment. The Mayor is able to make crucial choices about how this money is spent and deploy the considerable investment budget to enable people move around the capital in the best and easiest way.

Transport is the great enabler, but also a great destroyer, and balancing these is key to success. For a long time, we have used the notion that mobility is essential to boost economic performance, and have neglected the negative effects. The important factor, in fact, is accessibility which is a very different measure. It means ensuring that people can reach schools, hospitals, workplaces and leisure centres easily and cheaply.

Planners and politicians have, for too long, favoured road-based development rather than more sustainable modes of transport, ignoring the impact of the damaging effects.

These range from premature deaths because of bad air quality, through to obesity resulting from the lack of choice of transport modes. They are all too well-known and yet have often only been tackled through well-meaning words and the promise of 'green' policies that are never realised.

Despite this, for the most part, transport policy has been moving in the right direction, though at times with some retrograde steps and generally far too slowly. The 1960s vision of an entirely car dominated transport system with urban motorways, much in the style of Los Angeles, has rightly been scrapped, but the logic of accepting that cars cannot have total free rein in historic urban areas has never been built on.

So while there has been progress, such as bus lanes, controlled parking zones, cycle paths, massive improvements to the Underground, the imminent arrival of Crossrail, the investment in buses and the congestion charge, no one has brought together the thrust of this logic to develop a coherent strategy for the future of transport in our great city.

As a result, much of the past 40 years has been wasted in failing to follow up the logic by actively controlling the car and using the freed space for people - not only in the central area, but also from the main town centres of the suburbs. Once it was realised that the problem of congestion could not be

solved by building more roads, London needed to actively restrain car use. Now we have to accelerate this shift in emphasis that started more than a generation ago.

Ken Livingstone bravely introduced the congestion charge, which has allowed the central area to grow without seizing up completely, but there has been too little done to reap the benefits by converting traffic space into public space by schemes such as the transformation of Trafalgar Square. In the suburbs, little has been done resulting in chaos and jams every day of the week.

Every such step has been opposed by vested interests. There was much protest against measures such as closing off the northbound carriageway of Trafalgar Square, improving the front of Buckingham Palace, removing parked cars from Horse Guards Parade and Somerset House, and pedestrianising Leicester Square, which took nearly 30 years. Yet, no one would consider reversing these decisions. The logic is all too obvious. We need to build on these improvements.

A future travel and transport strategy must move away from the past assumptions and will, therefore, necessarily be radical. The key is actively to shift people away from dependence on cars, making the alternatives more attractive. Hard choices in terms of investment have to be made. In the past, there has been an approach of seeking to want all modes to be improved. This is unrealistic both from a financial and a practical point of view. Muddling through is no longer an option. We need a policy that clearly points towards reducing traffic and congestion.

A strategy to reduce demand for driving cars in crowded urban spaces can encompass many elements, from having a proactive planning process through to charging for road space. During the Olympics, there was a clear policy of encouraging behaviour change to help ensure the existing transport system is being used in the optimal way. We need to regain that focus. It was a thorough well-thought through policy of managing the demand for transport and trying to channel it into times and places where there was capacity, instead of at peak locations and periods. This is crucial. It is at the peaks that problems manifest themselves.

Cycling and walking will be at the heart of the system and the modes of choice for shorter journeys in particular.

A transport strategy for a sustainable London

- Fairer and smarter fares
- Vision Zero for transport deaths
- Cycling quietways and bridges
- Crossrail 2 and outer London tram schemes
- Pedestrianise Oxford Street
- A London-wide Ultra Low Emission Zone
- Smarter consolidated freight delivery
- A more sophisticated congestion zone
- Encourage car clubs and cleaner taxis
- Integrate London rail services into TfL
- Commitment to TfL accessibility programme
- Extend Oyster card to bikes and car clubs
- Work with business to manage peak demand



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The enabling role of transport must, of course, be emphasised and strengthened. London needs a world-class transport system that is used in the most effective and efficient way by those living, working and playing in the City. However, that does not mean simply building more and more transport infrastructure. It involves making the best use of what we have already.

The demand for travel will be managed in such a way that full use is made of the system rather than any single mode predominating. The demand for private car travel will be constrained with an overall objective of reducing the average number of journeys per year per head of population. A balance must be struck between enabling personal mobility and maintaining personal well-being and the need for travel can be reduced through better planning

How we influence travel behaviours will be central. An important component of a transport strategy is a marketing communications strategy that will ensure everyone is aware of the travel options and alternatives available and the personal benefits of each. Everyone will understand how to use the transport system, makes the choice appropriate to them on a journey by journey basis and kept informed throughout their journey.

WolmarforLondon has always been a grassroots and participatory campaign. Consequently, the business leaders, as well as community and environmental groups will participate much more fully in the decisions about travel and transport at all levels. Key elements in the campaign's policies and targets are set out below:

Fares

The fares system has become all but incomprehensible with differences depending at times on the method of payment. Moreover, Boris Johnson has favoured inner London at the expense of the outer boroughs by raising fares more and by scrapping some Travelcards or capping limits. There is a need for a fairer and more flexible fare structure, with less penalty for longer journeys which will make the system more progressive and favour those living in outer London.

Bus users will be able to buy a one-hour ticket which will enable them to take multiple journeys on the same £1.50 fare, just as Tube users can use more than one line.

Given the importance of spreading the demand on the network, a new system of smarter, off-peak fares will be introduced to encourage Londoners out of their cars.

Fares would be frozen for the first year – though with some changes to make them fairer.

The Oyster card should be extended to enable seamless use across London cycle hire and different London car clubs.



Safety

The adoption of a Vision Zero approach to road and transport deaths, introducing a wide range of strategies including a 20mph default zone throughout London and thorough investigation of all deaths to cut down on accidents.

A freight strategy that will reduce the number of lorries at peak time and the lax regulation skip lorries and tipper trucks will be tightened up to bring them into line with other HGVs.

Effective traffic policing must become, once again, one of the Met's priorities.

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Bikes

A borough-focused programme to help as many people make local journeys by bicycle. An urgent programme to install 50,000 parking spaces. Continuation and extension of new Superhighway concept. Cyclists at the heart of every road junction change. Faster progress on the TfL Quietways grid for safer cycling. New cycle and pedestrian river bridges to be built.

Infrastructure projects

Support for Crossrail 2 route, though as a metro not a regional railway. Opposition to HS2 due to damage to north London and lack of coherent scheme in Euston. Speeding up development of Tube extensions. A moratorium on new road proposals, including tunnels under Thames. Tram schemes for outer London.

Air quality and environment

London is currently consulting on air quality and the Ultra Low Emission Zone. The ULEZ must be bigger, more ambitious and apply throughout the capital. In the meantime, existing Low Emission Zone will be fully implemented and air quality regulations and will be enforced by the Police and TfL, who will have a new power to impound offending vehicles. The removal of need for yellow lines, replaced by parking controls, in historic parts of the city.

Pedestrianisation

At least three major central London roads to be closed to traffic, starting with Oxford Street. Expanded TfL funding for development of London boroughs' proposals for 'mini-Hollands'. Continued programme of improving accessibility for walkers, with removal of barriers and longer times for pedestrian crossings. The use of 'plastic and paint' to trial pedestrian and bike friendly infrastructure changes. The closure of alleyways to through traffic to promote café culture. A network of priority pedestrian routes, similar to the cycle Quietways, with an ambition target for commuter journeys by foot or cycle.

Freight

Restrictions on lorry movements at peak times and a rescinding, in specific circumstances, of night-time lorry ban. Franchising out of van concessions for each post code, thereby reducing number of deliveries. Rapid implementation of safety regulations on mirrors. Examination of the concept of consolidation centres to reduce lorry movements.

Congestion Management

A reappraisal of the Congestion Charge zone and charges to make it more flexible and extend its area to better manage

congestion and improve air quality. To help London's small businesses, introduction of Congestion Charge discounts for London VAT registered businesses using a maximum of five vehicles. Building on the Olympics experience, TfL will work with the London business community to encourage commuters to reduce peak demand on the tube and buses through home working, staggering journeys, walking and cycling.

Taxis

The provision of more ranks to reduce need to travel to ply for hire. The encouragement of a shift to less polluting vehicles by scrapping the turning circle requirement. The encouragement of electric taxis or hybrids in advance of the ULEZ.

Car clubs

Support for car clubs to reduce need for people to own their own cars. Oyster card payment platform extended across the different car clubs in London to encourage more choice and seamless travel.

Trains

More outer London rail services to be taken under TfL's control of London Overground, to raise standards for those working in London, with permanent staffing during operating hours to make it safer. Rapid assessment on the feasibility reopening of abandoned rail lines in the capital. Making use of the advent of Crossrail and Thameslink to improve and expand services in south and east London.

Disability access

Commitment to a TfL accessibility and mobility programme that will bring a ten-fold increase in the number of step-free journeys on tube, rail and bus.

Local transport

Support for boroughs which want to introduce pedestrianisation or local cycling schemes to help people make short journeys by bike.

Working with employers

A programme of working with employers, both big and small, to assess their needs and those of their staff to manage demand and improve use of sustainable modes.

This is by no means comprehensive or exhaustive. The key, however, is to make London's travel and transport system more affordable and accessible, especially for lower income users, while also serving the needs of workers across the capital. Speed, however, is of the essence. This programme will be ready to implement on the day after the 2016 Mayoral election. ■