



The Association of British Drivers

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Way to Go!
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Response to the "Way to Go" Document

Dear Sirs,

The following are our comments on the Mayor's "Way to Go" document on future London transport policy:

1. The Achievements

You give the sheer number of buses (8,300 apparently) as one success of past transport policy. But this has been achieved only by massive subsidies of the bus network, and as you point out, a very large proportion of the passengers on buses do not pay because they have free use of them (and that's ignoring the large amount of fraudulent use where those who should pay do not).

In effect, London residents, via taxes, are massively subsidising bus travel, particularly for central London residents, when many such residents never get on a bus. Why should this be seen as a success? Providing free transport to those who could often afford to pay is a nonsense, and a general subsidy for bus travel from those who use other forms of transport does not make sense either.

In addition bus travel has risen because the alternatives have become less attractive. With increased over-crowding on underground and surface rail, and policies that deter car use by congestion charges and road obstruction, people have had to use buses because the alternatives are worse – even so their average loading is very poor.

This is not a policy success, it is sheer lunacy.

You also claim the congestion charge, and “other measures to deter the motorist” as an achievement, when we would absolutely disagree. The congestion charge has not reduced congestion which is pretty much back to where it was before the charge was introduced. Meanwhile it costs a massive amount to operate (a totally unproductive and wasteful charge on Londoners), while generating very little in surplus to spend on public transport projects.

Neither would we see the “additional bus lanes” which discriminate against other road users in favour of bus users – effectively allowing them to jump the queues – or the “pedestrian friendly phasing of traffic lights” as achievements. The latter has simply obstructed road transport without any significant benefit to pedestrians and we are glad that the Mayor is reversing that policy.

As you say, under the previous administration there was a “coherent attempt to get people out of their cars and on to public transport”, i.e. an unstated policy to discriminate against private motor cars in favour of buses and other public transport. This was not supported by any rational debate or objective and was primarily an attack on one sector of the population for political reasons and using false arguments such as “environmental benefits”. You say the “question is not how to demolish that policy, but how to develop and improve it”, but we suggest that scrapping that policy should be your main objective.

2. The Challenge

At least in this section of the document you correctly identify some of the problems associated with past policies, and the future challenges.

3. Our Principles

We completely agree with the principle that there should be no hierarchy of transport modes.

But we don't particularly see any benefit in helping “people out of their cars by persuasion, not persecution”. Educating people as to the transport choices available (e.g. by providing more information on the public transport options available), may be justifiable. But people should be left to make their own choices in essence. Many people choose to use private cars simply on rational grounds.

We strongly support the need to improve London's air quality and we agree that TfL could do more to improve the emissions from buses and taxis which contribute substantially to this problem – and which have not improved to anywhere like the same extent as private cars over the last few years.

We also support the need to listen more to the local boroughs who have a much better understanding of local transport needs than the central bureaucracy that is TfL.

We also support the objective of improving “value for money” in respect of transport for Londoners. The budgets for TfL have grown rapidly over the last few years, often to the disadvantage of taxpayers. Also it has been clear that some projects (such as new tram lines and expansion of existing ones), were simply unlikely to be cost effective and should have been abandoned long ago.

4. The way to go

We have even questioned the economic viability of the Crossrail project in the past, but we accept that as it is now committed to, it should be pushed ahead with. Likewise we agree that improving the underground and surface rail are major priorities. The latter is particularly relevant to outer London which has been often neglected by the previous Mayor.

We certainly support the proposed review of traffic lights, and the proposals to allow motorcycles into bus lanes – would it not be even better to scrap the bus lanes though?

And we definitely support a more aggressive stance on road works, which are becoming a worse problem as every week passes (and where Crossrail and other major projects are going to make even more difficult).

Improving the urban realm and using the concept of “shared space” for roads can help to improve the lives of road users, cyclists and pedestrians. We certainly agree with your comments that many cyclists in London are now abusing their rights by over aggressive behaviour, but we do support the provision of separate cycle routes or lanes where these can be provided so that there is less conflict with motorists.

We support the idea of a new London airport in the Thames estuary, so long as an adequate road transport network to support it was put in place.

As regards the Low Emission Zone, we think this does need some reforming as the scheme as introduced was not a cost effective one, and penalized some people and businesses quite unnecessarily.

In respect of the “reforming” the London Congestion Charge, we suggest it would be better simply to scrap it rather than fiddle with it. Any changes are likely to make it even less economic than it is at present, and it is already and unreasonable burden on Londoners for no benefit.

5. Our Suggestions

Apart from the proposals mentioned, we suggest some additional policy objectives should be added as follows:

- A. The construction of an improved road network, where this is possible. Every opportunity should be taken to increase the capacity of the London road network, rather than reducing it which appears to have been past policy. This particularly applies to main orbital and arterial routes.
- B. We feel it is unfortunate that the Thames Gateway Bridge has been abandoned and that there is a great need for additional river crossings east of Tower Bridge.
- C. We would like to see road safety policies revised so that there is more emphasis on best practice, more emphasis on road engineering, and less emphasis on harassing motorists unnecessarily by the use of speed cameras and speed humps.

The latter devices have been introduced in London and continue to proliferate when their benefits are questionable and their disadvantages are now well known. We are not convinced that road safety policy is properly focused in London to achieve the best results.

D. We would also like to see parking policies and enforcement harmonised across boroughs, and such measures as automatic enforcement of box junctions by cameras abandoned. The latter have not been shown to have any benefit in increasing compliance and too often motorists are being penalised by large fines for accidental and trivial errors. There are in essence too many policies aimed primarily at raising revenue from motorists by local boroughs, without adequate justification.

Yours sincerely

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About The Association of British Drivers (ABD)

The ABD is the leading independent organisation which represents the interests of private motorists in the United Kingdom. We campaign to protect the rights of individual road users and believe that road transport is a beneficial and essential element in the UK transport infrastructure. We oppose excessive taxation of motorists and are against tolls and road usage charging. We also campaign for more enlightened road safety policies. The Association is a "not for profit" voluntary organisation which is financially supported primarily by its individual members. More information on the ABD is available from our web sites at www.freedomfordrivers.org and www.abd.org.uk