

COMMENTS ON 'WAY TO GO'

SUMMARY

1. Reducing carbon emissions from transport must be a policy priority.
2. We support proposals to increase public transport capacity and use.
3. We also strongly support the commitment made in 'Way to Go' to increase levels of walking and cycling though the document does not make clear how this is to be achieved. However we would observe that it will involve substantial improvement in the public realm, in 'liveability' and in the quality of life of Londoners. Measures must include a reduction in the overall speed limit on most roads from 30 to 20 mph.
4. Priority in the use of scarce road space must be given to 'cleaner, greener, cheaper and more efficient' modes. This is the best way to ensure fairness for all. Abandoning the road user hierarchy is not helpful.
5. Some measures to smooth traffic flow, such as co-ordinating road works and managing responses to unforeseen incidents make sense. Others are likely to be counterproductive. Increasing road capacity, for example by altering traffic light timing and increasing the capacity of junctions, is likely merely to displace congestion and increase traffic and emissions of CO².
6. The most effective way to smooth traffic, improve the public realm, promote walking and cycling and restrain carbon emissions, is to reduce traffic levels. This must be the central element of transport policy in London.

About Campaign for Better Transport

Since 1973 (when it was known as Transport 2000) Campaign for Better Transport has contributed to the development of transport policies and programmes that improve the quality of people's lives. We aim to reduce car use and increase travel on foot, by bicycle and by public transport.

OUR COMMENTS

These comments broadly follow the structure of 'Way to Go'. Our response is organised under the following headings.

- Have recent achievements been identified?
- 'Have you identified the key challenges facing transport in London?'
- Do we generally support your principles for developing policy? If not what other principles should apply?
- Are there things we think the Mayor should do to improve transport in London which are not identified here?
- Do we agree with the approach to encouraging people to walk and cycle.
- Other proposals in 'Way to Go'

Have recent achievements been identified?

The discussion document describes the policy of the previous Mayor as "a policy which – whatever its faults, whatever its side-effects – at least amounts to a coherent attempt to get people out of their cars and on to public transport." The document goes on to say that "The question now is not how to demolish that policy but to develop and improve it." We agree with this conclusion.

However one of the most important recent achievements has not been acknowledged. Over the last few years London turned around its transport fortunes. From having been a transport laggard among the major cities of Europe, London enjoys a new status as a leading city in urban transport policy. The status has been underpinned by the movement away from the car towards walking, cycling and public transport. This partly accounts for London's current attractiveness as a cultural, business and tourist destination and has made it a transport model for cities across the world. This status must be protected.

Have you identified the key challenges facing transport in London?’

Unfortunately this section of ‘Way to Go’ overlooks many of the most acute challenges and identifies other factors which should not be considered challenges at all.

Challenges which have not been mentioned include for example:

- Reducing carbon emissions from transport in London
- Reducing the environmental impact of traffic on London thus making London a more liveable city
- Improving specific areas of the public realm dominated by traffic
- Realising the large potential for more trips to be made on foot and by bicycle
- Meeting additional public transport demand arising from modal switch and predicted population and employment growth
- Addressing capacity constraints on the road network by encouraging a transfer to more efficient modes.
- Reducing deaths and injuries on the road network.

‘Way to Go’ compares the transport system to an ecosystem in which competing interests must sometimes be balanced, implying that provision should be made for the most efficient means of travel while the least efficient are discouraged. But the document then mentions a “feeling of oppression compounded by the thought that public transport is the only option” and immediately afterwards implies that traffic lights should allow more time, and the roads more space, for motor traffic. This is not consistent; as the document admits elsewhere, other means of travel are more efficient than the car.

Do we generally support your principles for developing policy? If not what other principles should apply?

Respecting choice

We agree that alternatives to the car must be provided and made attractive. However ‘Way to Go’ is confused and ambivalent. The document recognises that ‘there are cleaner, greener, cheaper and more efficient alternatives’ to the car but says that a hierarchy of transport modes is unhelpful and misleading. Forswearing the use of incentives or disincentives, it claims people can be helped out of their cars merely by persuasion. The suspicion remains that the choice to travel by car is respected more than it deserves.

Hierarchy of modes

It is not that some modes are ‘morally superior to others’. The hierarchy of transport modes is useful because it recognises that some modes are ‘cleaner, greener, cheaper and more efficient’ than the car and should be provided for accordingly. The hierarchy also reflects the fact that, as the modes of transport compete for scarce road space, priority should be given to those that make most efficient use of space and benefit the most people.

Protecting the environment

It is misleading to acknowledge that air quality is poor and that CO² output is continuing to rise and then to cite the fumes from buses and taxis while not mentioning cars. According to ‘Action Today to Protect Tomorrow, the Mayor’s Climate Change Action Plan’, cars account for 49% of CO² emissions and buses and taxis for 9%. Again, this provokes the suspicion that car travel is being unfairly favoured.

However we agree on the need to move beyond dependence on the internal combustion engine. The ‘polluter pays’ principle should apply. It is a commonplace that policy should provide carrots and sticks – the sticks will often be financial penalties.

Outer London

Transport in outer London has been neglected for the last eight years and longer. We agree that there is much potential for improvement. Campaign for Better Transport published two reports on this subject in 2007. They are summarised in our briefing paper:

http://www.bettertransport.org.uk/system/files/improving_transport_in_outer_london_0.pdf

The reports themselves are available on the following links:

http://www.bettertransport.org.uk/system/files/Better_Transport_in_Outer_London_0.pdf

http://www.bettertransport.org.uk/system/files/low_carbon_transport_in_outer_london_0.pdf

The reports say, among other things, that alternatives to the car should be improved and the need (but not the freedom) to travel should be reduced. See immediately below.

Connecting transport and planning

We agree it is crucial to link transport and planning policies. For example good public transport should be provided before major development sites are occupied. Much can be done to reduce the need to travel including: locating new development near public transport; providing services and amenities within walking and cycling distance of where people live; and adopting appropriate density and parking standards. See our 2008 publication:

http://www.bettertransport.org.uk/system/files/Masterplanning_Checklist_executive_summary.pdf

Transport for all

Programmes to make the tube accessible for people with disabilities should be protected. Any cuts in TfL expenditure should fall elsewhere.

Value for money

We support the allocation of resources to Crossrail and modernisation of the tube network. However we are concerned that no new tram proposals are now being funded. The planning of CrossRiver Tram and extensions of the Croydon Tramlink and the DLR to Dagenham should continue to be funded so that these can proceed as soon as financial conditions allow.

Are there things we think the Mayor should do to improve transport in London which are not identified here?

Underground and rail

With limited resources, we agree it is right to concentrate on building Crossrail, modernising the Tube network and proceeding with various DLR and London Overground projects including the East London Line and the North London Line. We support moves to integrate national rail with the rest of the transport network, increase train capacity and frequency, extend Oyster card and improve the security and environment of rail stations. In future rail stations should become the focus for higher density development in outer London.

However it is also essential to continue to plan new light rail proposals such as the CrossRiver Tram, the DLR extension to Dagenham docks and the Croydon Tramlink extensions even if the projects cannot go ahead for the time being. It is an anomaly that a major city like London should not be funding any new tram schemes. Rail-based transport, not buses, should form the public transport framework for the development areas of the Thames Gateway.

It is also necessary to plan for the next generation of public transport to replace buses on busy routes. The potential of Ultra Light Rail and lower-cost tram schemes, which enjoy the energy efficiency of rail and the capability of using carbon neutral propulsion systems such as methane derived from waste, needs to be thoroughly investigated. Such schemes have the potential to be much cheaper than conventional tram schemes and yet would provide the rail-based public transport that attracts people out of cars.

The roads and smoothing traffic flow

Some measures to unblock the traffic such as co-ordinating road works or managing responses to unforeseen incidents make sense. Others are likely to be counterproductive. Increasing road capacity, for example by altering traffic light timing and increasing the capacity of junctions, is likely merely to displace congestion and increase traffic volumes thus exacerbating congestion. In turn this will increase emissions of CO² and other pollutants.

We are not convinced that the red phase of traffic lights can be reduced without harming pedestrian amenity and safety. We would like to see the studies, which, it is claimed, show that this is so. However, if it can be shown that traffic lights serve no useful purpose whatsoever, we would obviously not wish to retain them.

Reducing traffic and traffic speeds to smooth traffic flow

Reducing traffic is the obvious and proven means of unblocking traffic and smoothing traffic flow. To neglect it would be perverse. Reducing traffic must be an important objective of traffic policy. The measures available to regional government include:

- Road pricing and placing a levy on workplace parking
- Steadily reducing the availability and cost of parking
- Reducing the road space available to general traffic
- Improving the alternatives to car travel.

The potential of reducing traffic speeds, for instance from 30 to 20 mph, in order to improve traffic flow must also be investigated. In congested conditions, slower, steadier speeds are likely to be more efficient than traffic which travels spasmodically at higher speeds. Clearly this would also complement reducing speed limits for other reasons such as tackling road casualties and making walking and cycling more attractive.

Making London more liveable: improving the quality of life and the public realm

Campaign for Better Transport has welcomed the improvement in the quality of the streetscape that has resulted from, for example, the acclaimed scheme in Kensington High Street which involved, among other things, pavement resurfacing and the removal of guard railing and other street clutter.

However this is not the only, or even the most important, means of improving the quality of the street environment. 'Way to Go' fails to acknowledge that nothing damages the quality of the public realm as much as the volume of traffic in London and the measures that have been adopted over decades to accommodate it. Numerous areas of the public realm in London continue to be dominated by traffic.

This subject was considered in detail in a report by Gehl, Architects and Urban Quality Consultants, for TfL and the Central London Partnership, 'Towards a City for People, Public Spaces and Public Life – London 2004'. The report concluded that London suffers from a domination of vehicular traffic whilst pedestrians and cyclists, as important users of the city, are often given low priority and inadequate facilities. The report concluded that London has tremendous potential as a city for walking and cycling and a high quality public realm; its main recommendations focused on:

- Creating a better balance between vehicular traffic, pedestrians and cyclists
- Improving conditions for walking and cycling
- Improving conditions for resting and simply passing time
- Upgrading the visual quality of the streetscape
- Promoting a shift in mind-sets towards a more people orientated city culture.

The GLA and TfL would do well to revisit this report whose recommendations have not been implemented. In this context we have serious concerns about the abandonment of the public realm project for Parliament Square and the 100 spaces programme. We also note that many substantial gains can be made by dismantling London's major one-way systems.

Do we agree with the approach to encouraging people to walk and cycle.

Supporting policies to encourage more walking and cycling is fundamental to our aims. We welcome the proposal to introduce a bicycle hire scheme and we favour creating routes where cyclists will be safe, though we wonder why, if this is the intention, half of the funding for the LCN+ has just been withdrawn.

While 'Way to Go' claims that it is the intention to promote walking and cycling it lacks proposals to make this happen. The proposals cited, such as the cycle hire scheme and allowing cyclists to turn left on red, while welcome, seem arbitrary and piecemeal. No measures to encourage walking are specified at all.

Much more is needed. Some measures are needed to support both modes, for example:

- 20 mph as the default speed limit in all residential and shopping areas
- Widespread public realm improvements to reduce traffic domination, improve the quality of the general streetscape, make the city more liveable and create the right, safe conditions for higher levels of walking and cycling. This should include removal of major gyratory and one-way systems
- Traffic reduction and reallocation of road space from general traffic to allow walking and cycling facilities, including cycle lanes, adequate footways, crossing places (and bus and light rail priority)
- Policies to reduce the need to travel and average journey lengths, thus making it feasible for many more journeys to be made on foot or by bicycle (this applies particularly to outer London, much of inner London already enjoys the necessary dense pattern of housing, services and amenities).

In addition to enhancing liveability these measures would reduce road deaths and injuries, improve health through more active travel and bring economic benefits by enhancing asset values and making London more attractive as a location for business and tourism.

Other proposals in 'Way to Go'

We have a few comments to make on other proposals or topics mentioned.

Fairness to all

This appears to be another way of suggesting there should not be a hierarchy of road users. The modes of transport, and some non-transport activities, are in competition for scarce road space. Space should be allocated to the 'cleanest, greenest and most efficient' modes. This will also be fairest as people travelling by car are frequently outnumbered by those travelling on foot, by bicycle and by public transport.

Oxford Street

No, we cannot leave Oxford Street as it is. It is almost impossible to cycle along Oxford Street, conditions for pedestrians are seriously sub-standard and high levels of congestion are caused by TfL's own buses. If this were not sufficient impetus for change, growing competition from shopping centres at Shepherds Bush and soon from Stratford, will make it necessary to secure a transformation of the street environment. The number of buses using Oxford Street must be cut and other arrangements put in place.

An airport in the Thames Estuary

We warmly welcome the Mayor's opposition to the expansion of Heathrow but do not agree that an airport in the Thames Estuary is a viable option. Such a proposal has already been dismissed several years ago, commands little parliamentary support and would encounter stiff opposition on various environmental grounds including that it would contribute to an increase in carbon emissions from aviation.

A tunnel under Park Lane

Removing traffic from Park Lane (and extending Hyde Park) is a good idea but we are not in favour of spending hundreds if not thousands of millions in building a tunnel – the money would be much better spent elsewhere. Steps should be taken to remove traffic from Park Lane only when they can be accompanied by a comprehensive traffic reduction programme.

Removing traffic from Central London for the Olympics and after

An excellent idea. It will happen sooner or later; the sooner the better.