



BBRAG NEWS

Bromley Borough Roads Action Group - No. 15 (April 2002)

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Editorial

A bumper edition this time, with a lengthy article on the London Congestion Charging Scheme. It includes some pictures of rush hour traffic jams, although your Editor had some difficulty in actually finding jams to photograph. If you look at the pictures in the article, you will see that a high proportion are buses and taxis which will not be affected by the scheme, and in reality traffic was actually moving along reasonably well. I must have picked the wrong day.

Other articles cover a potential new London airport not far from Bromley, the new BBRAG web site, council funding (a topical subject as local elections take place in May) and an update on the Aquila site redevelopment.

Roger Lawson, Editor

London Congestion Charging

You may have seen that Ken Livingstone, Mayor of London, has formally announced that the London congestion charging scheme is to go ahead. It will start on the 17th February 2003, or as soon thereafter as practical, bearing in mind that like most large IT projects, it is likely to run late.



Mayor Livingstone (picture left), made the introduction of a congestion charging scheme an element of his election platform, but said it would not be introduced without the prior introduction of major improvements to public transport. However, the turn out at the mayoral election was very low, and Ken's majority was not large so in practice only a small minority of Londoners actually voted for him. But it has been suggested by at least one politician that he hopes the congestion charging scheme will be such a success that he will get re-elected (hence the push for rapid implementation rather than delay matters with a public enquiry).

This article is illustrated with several pictures taken on a wet evening in the rush hour.



Trafalgar Square (North side)

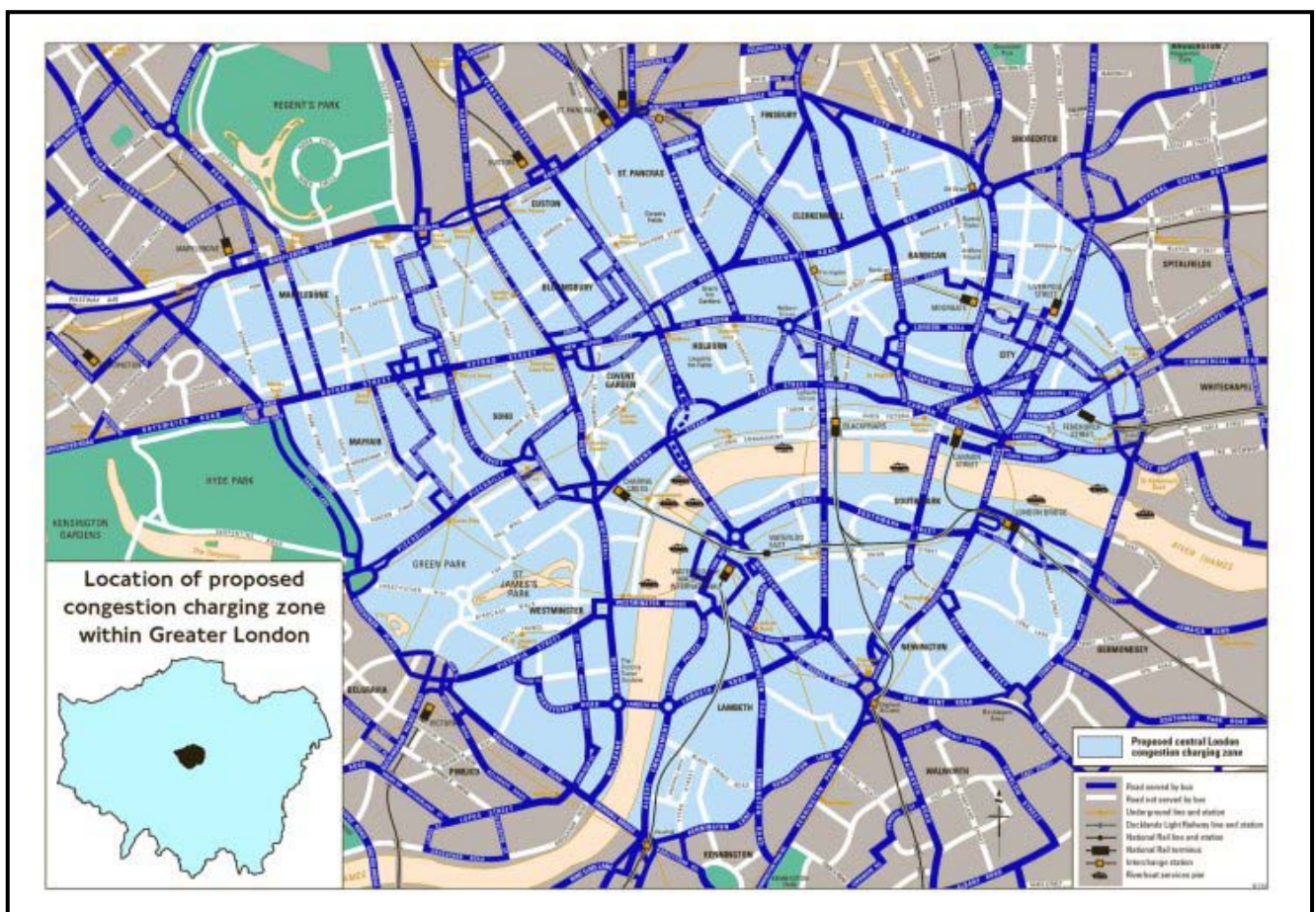
We have covered this item briefly in previous newsletters, but now that the details of the scheme are known, it seems worthwhile to review it in more depth. Refer to web site www.london.gov.uk/mayor/congest for the mayors full statement, the Transport for London report to the mayor, details of the consultation exercise, and other background information. Herein is a brief exposition.

Below is a map showing the area covered by the scheme, which is mainly bounded by the existing "inner ring road". Traffic will still be able to use that road without charge. There will be cameras positioned at all entry roads to the area and also within the area, supported by wardens patrolling the zone to enforce payment.

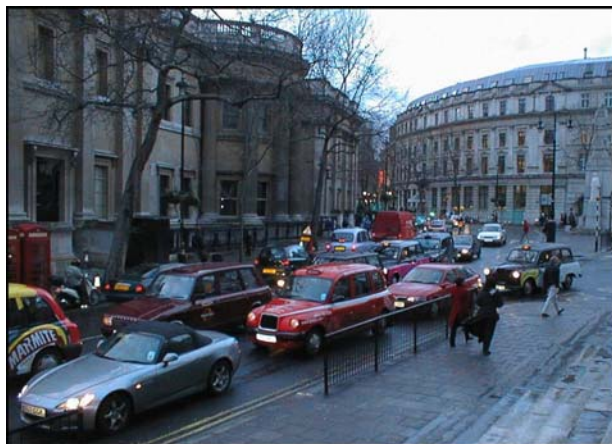
As you can see, the zone covers most of the city and west end, and covers many of the through routes that drivers from Bromley would use to get to the other side of London (one of the major problems that London has is that there are so few routes around the centre that many people choose to drive straight through).

The congestion charge of £5 will apply to most cars - there are only a few exceptions which are covered later - and will apply from 7 am to 6.30 pm, Monday to Friday only, excluding public holidays. Weekly, monthly and yearly "tickets" will be available but no extra discounts will be given for those. Payment will be by phone, internet, post or at retail outlets. *(Editors Comment: The economics of collecting a £5 charge over the phone by say a credit card payment must be truly appalling).*

The concept seems to be that you pay in advance by whichever method you choose. However, if you don't pay in advance you can pay later in the day also. The system works by photographing your car number plate and matching it to a list of "paid" ones. If you aren't in the list, and don't pay up the same day, then you get sent a penalty notice for £80 using the DVLA records. If you pay the penalty within two weeks, it drops to £40, otherwise it rises to £120 for non-payment.



Persistent non-payers can have their cars clamped or towed away within the zone, or bailiffs can be used to pursue you.



Charing Cross Road

What are the objectives of the scheme? These are oddly somewhat unclear, but the primary aim is apparently to reduce congestion for which there is strong public demand - in other words, to improve car journey times and journey reliability. So in reality, the people paying the penalty charge are paying for a faster journey time. However, every London resident is paying the capital cost of the scheme through their local taxes (although this may be recouped from income generated if the scheme is a success). The budget to set up the scheme is at least £200 million, including over £100 million of complementary traffic management measures to cope with the impact on the area immediately outside of the zone - clearly much traffic will divert to avoid the zone and hence worsen traffic on the inner ring road and surrounding roads.

It is interesting that organisations such as the C.B.I. support the scheme. Clearly, the businessman to whom £5 is a trivial amount will favour this reallocation of road space to the wealthy user.

What are the other benefits? Reduced air pollution or noise? Apparently not as regards pollution where no significant improvement in air quality is likely. Noise reduction is also not going to be significant. The major reason why these advantages will be negligible are because at the charge level chosen, there is only likely to be a reduction of between 10% and 15% in traffic

volumes, so it will only reduce it to the level that exists during summer holidays. And even that may not last as the pressure of more cars, more business and more population in London and the South-East grows. In addition, a large proportion of air pollution is caused by buses, taxis and HGVs which will not be reduced - bus numbers will actually increase - see later. So if you thought that the congestion charging scheme was a “green” policy, then think again.

Traffic Volumes and Future Revenues

At present, about 40,000 vehicles an hour drive into the congestion charging zone between 7 am and 10 am, and there are about 250,000 vehicles in total that use the zone between 7 am and 7 pm. However of the 1.1 million people entering London in the morning peak period on a typical weekday (which incidentally is rising), only 13% travel by car.

The following table gives you the likely number of vehicles that will use the zone each day when the scheme is in operation, and the likely revenue to the GLA that will result.

	Daily Vehicles	Income £ mill.
Motorcycles	24,000	0
Cars- standard charge	91,000	110
Cars- fleet schemes	34,000	44
Cars - residents	21,000	6
Cars - disabled	8,000	0
Taxis	16,000	0
Buses	7,000	0
Minicabs	4,000	0
Vans	35,000	44
Lorries	15,000	19
Penalty charges+other	11,000	34
Totals	266,000	257

Future Traffic Volumes and Income (p.a.)

Discounts and Exemptions

You can see there are a number of discounts. Residents who live within the zone only pay 10% of the charge. Taxis, and private hire vehicles (“minicabs”) are free of charge - yes you could possibly pretend to be a minicab to avoid it but you will have to register as such under the proposed future scheme for such vehicles and carry an appropriate plate.

Motorcycles are also free - not only because they create little congestion but because of the difficulty of photographing their number plates. Electric vehicles and some other low emission vehicles will also be exempt, as well as such public service vehicles as buses, fire tenders and ambulances, plus disabled (blue badge) holders.

There are however no exemptions for people who use private cars because of the difficulty of using public transport. For example, hospital nurses, doctors, police, fireman and others who work night shifts (they may arrive when the charge doesn't apply but will depart when it does). Firemen in London stations have already raised strong objections, but to no avail. Obviously some employers may pay their workers extra to cover the cost, but it seems unlikely that major public employers will do so. There are also very tight restrictions on exemptions for hospital patients.

Note also that all vans and HGVs will pay the standard charge and this is likely to increase the cost of doing business within the zone considerably. John Lewis in Oxford Street have calculated that it will cost them several hundred thousand pounds a year extra. These costs are likely to be passed on to consumers, although there may be some offsetting cost reductions from reduced journey times.

Public Transport Improvements

What are the promised improvements in public transport? There is no possibility of any improvements to the London underground for some years, particularly as the Mayor and the government are still arguing about control and funding. Likewise overground trains are at the limit of their capacity. So the only change is going to be another 200 buses. It is not clear where these will be added, but presumably mainly on existing routes. Three quarters of the additional public transport users of 20,000 people during peak periods are assumed to transfer to buses. *(Editors Comment: It is not at all obvious how more buses on inner London routes will enable many existing drivers to abandon their cars. Our former next door neighbour in Bromley used to drive into the City every day, and I also know someone who used to regularly drive to near Tower Bridge from south of Tonbridge - neither would find bus services a practical alternative.)*

Will the buses be improved? One of the major reasons why bus usage has actually been falling in recent years is their poor standard with patchy heating, no air conditioning, dirty interiors, cramped seats, unreliable service times, slow journey times, crime and vandalism, etc. In fact, at present less than 10% of people entering London by public transport do so by bus or coach for those very reasons!



The Strand

There are some initiatives promised here, which are as follows:

1. More bus priority lanes and better enforcement to improve reliability and journey times.
2. More comfortable by "improvements to bus shelters and better driver training" (yes that's what the report says).
3. New standards for cleanliness.
4. More information on routes and arrival times.
5. Better personal security, using CCTV.
6. More accessible by lowering bus floors to make it easier for shoppers, etc.

Bus journey times might also improve as a result of the reduced congestion of course.

Scheme Practicality and Enforcement

How effective will be the charging and enforcement process? Well there have been some tests performed on automatic number plate recognition and the figure was over 95%.

It is therefore the case that people are likely to pass more than one camera when travelling through the zone, it is expected that over 99% will be picked up. This level of recognition is certainly sufficient for a workable scheme. *(Editors Comment: No doubt the vendors of "unreadable" number plates will be doing good business in future though).*

However, you also have to take into account that a significant number of London drivers are unlicensed (there tend to be regular campaigns to tackle this problem, but to no lasting effect as it sooner or later it drifts down the list of police priorities). At present the police estimate that about 10% are unlicensed, but others have estimated it could be as high as 20% in some inner London boroughs. Also there will be a major financial incentive in future - after all you could save £1,300 per annum by going unlicensed.

There is also the problem of foreign registered vehicles being effectively unchargeable, so it is likely that this will be another common avoidance procedure. Think you could get your friend who lives in central London to register your vehicle and claim the 90% residents discount? Only if they don't already have a car as only one registration per resident will be eligible for a discount.

And one final possible problem - see the later article in this Newsletter concerning an appeal to the European Court by someone caught by a speed camera. If his complaint was upheld then enforcement of the penalty fines would be impossible.

The only certain and legal way to avoid paying for car drivers is probably to acquire an electric or other "alternative fuel" vehicle (exactly what will qualify in that regard is not yet clear).

Privacy

There is also the general issue of the possible invasion of privacy by having cameras monitoring every vehicle which travels into the city. Many people have expressed concern about this, as it seems that the police will have access to the records contained in the new computer systems. Potentially they could track everyone who drives into London. This is already the case though in

the "ring of steel" around the City of London that was introduced to counter the Irish terrorist threat - that may be a justifiable reason for an invasion of people's privacy, but does the desire for some people to have faster journey times justify it? The Mayor and his advisors believe there is no prospective breach of possible law here though.

Public Consultation

The GLA held two public meetings in Central London on the congestion charging scheme in September 2001. All of 54 and 62 people attended respectively. *(Editors Comment: There was no obvious publicity of these meetings as I certainly didn't hear about them).* However there was considerable press coverage and information on the GLA web site.

Details of the scheme were sent to 500 "stakeholders" (i.e. organisations such as local councils) of which 149 responded. There were also 232 submissions from other organisations (BBRAG would have been one), plus 1893 representations from individuals. The breakdown of responses was as follows.

Responses	Stakeholders	Other Organisations	Members of the Public
Number	149	232	1,893
In favour	56%	25%	36%
Oppose	13%	39%	47%
Unclear	31%	36%	17%

Public Consultation Results

Clearly from the above figures, the public and most "other" organisations were opposed to the proposal. So why was their opposition disregarded. I'll quote from the report: "It is likely that these respondents will tend to hold particularly strong opinions, and will be skewed towards those who oppose the proposed scheme." *(Editor's Comment: Maybe that line should be remembered by all politicians who aspire to high office, as a way to rubbish any opposition to their proposals).*

Of course, to treat responses that could have been very extensive as being simply in favour or not in favour is simplistic. Many people may be in

favour in principle, but don't think it will work in practice.

There has been no attempt to survey the general population of London as to their views on the matter, and the suggestion to hold a public enquiry has been rejected by the Mayor. Neither have people outside of London who may sometimes drive into the centre been consulted. However it is known from a recent N.O.P. opinion poll that 67% of people in the UK are opposed to the general principle of road charging.

Other Adverse Scheme Effects

One particular problem with the scheme is the imposition of a single boundary to the charging zone. This will create major congestion in areas adjacent to the boundary, from people trying to avoid the zone. In effect, congestion within the zone will be moved to affect other people. In fact congestion may now start to affect more residential areas when the charging zone is primarily occupied by businesses.

The report to the mayor suggests that with the new traffic management schemes in place that peripheral roads will be able to cope, but this seems somewhat doubtful. Also it seems quite likely that jams around the periphery will actually make it quite difficult to enter the central zone even if that is relatively empty. Computerised traffic models have been used to simulate likely traffic flows but these are known to be subject to major errors when compared with reality. Also extensive work to increase capacity of the inner ring road (eg. such roads as Marylebone Road) by such means as changing traffic signal phasing, and enhancements to the approaches to Tower Bridge, are assumed to be effective.

Another problem is that there will be many people who live just outside the zone, who currently frequently enter it, who will in future find it costly to do so. This will affect people's personal lives considerably, but will also affect shops and other small businesses that they visit within the zone.

Westminster City Council (the zone splits that borough) are strongly opposed to the scheme and have threatened legal action, possibly on the

grounds of inadequate consultation, but it is unclear whether they have a good, legal case.

Will It Work?

As Jenny Jones, Green Party GLA Member and supporter of the scheme, said at a recent public meeting "who knows?".

Many people feel that the charge of £5 will not be sufficient to deter enough car drivers to reduce congestion significantly. After all many already have to pay £20 per day to park in central London. If a few poorer people are deterred, then the untapped demand from wealthier folks who are currently deterred by the traffic jams, will soon absorb the new free road space.

Note that the Mayor has the ability to vary the scheme terms, so he may well increase the daily charge at a later date, rather than abandon the scheme.

Have Such Schemes Worked Elsewhere?

Singapore is usually quoted as an example of where a congestion charging scheme is effective in keeping traffic moving. However technically this scheme is very different. It does not have a fixed charge over a wide area, but a charge that varies by the route used and the time of day. It is easy to use it to tackle particular congestion "black spots". Charges are paid by electronic metering - every car user has to have an installed meter, and not by number plate recognition.

Of course Singaporean citizens are typically more law abiding and accept state control of their personal lives more easily than the typical Englishman. They also have much more regulation of motor vehicles generally - you need to get approval to even own a vehicle and the number of vehicles on the roads is artificially limited. The problem of enforcement in a country which is only a few miles wide is also very different.

Norway also has some towns with congestion charging schemes in the centre, but these were introduced specifically to pay for new road construction. Norway has particular problems with building new roads because of the

mountainous landscape, and the size of the cities in Norway is very different to London.

The Costs of the Scheme

The gross revenue from the scheme (assuming the charge of £5 is in effect) is £257 million per annum - see table above for who pays it.

The net revenue, after costs, was originally estimated to be £200 million but is now budgeted to be nearer £130 million per annum. This money will be used solely to fund improvements in public transport - at least for the first ten years, and subject to government approval of expenditure proposals.

The total operating costs of the scheme over 10 years (including initial start-up costs) are £1.2 billion in cash terms (or more like £1.3 billion in reality as they omitted some of the costs of associated traffic management improvements on the basis that they would be required anyway sooner or later).

There are some compensating benefits such as an increase in revenue from public transport, offset by reductions in parking revenues, reduction in fuel taxes and other minor impacts but these are all relatively minor in comparison to the revenue and costs of the scheme itself.

Many people have complained that the scheme is simply a way of taxing motorists, and if you look at it in that way, then it is a very inefficient way of raising revenue. About 50% of the income from the scheme is wasted on operating and enforcement costs, and that ignores the costs and inconvenience to the public of having to pay the charges. The net revenue produced is also a drop in the ocean in comparison with the funds needed to rejuvenate public transport in London - a net contribution of £130 million per annum is a very small fraction of the overall public expenditure on transport in the London area.

The report to the Mayor also attempts to do a social cost-benefit analysis, by putting a value on such matters as journey times saved, the time consumed by drivers in paying the charges and the "disbenefit" of people who are inconvenienced by having to switch to public transport (the latter is valued at £20million p.a.). Their analysis suggests there is an overall benefit.

However, consider the following statement in the report: "In general terms most of those who pay the standard charge will be *losers* - they will be unlikely to experience reduced congestion sufficient to offset the financial loss of the charge."

What Happens If the Scheme Is Abandoned?

One interesting issue is what happens if the scheme does not work - and as pointed out above there are certainly a lot of doubt about whether it will in practice be effective.

How much of the initial expenditure would be wasted, and what will be the cost to the taxpayers of London if the scheme is abandoned after a couple of years? Unfortunately the report does not make this at all clear.

The main contractors for the scheme are Capita (for the IT systems) and Colt plus BT for the telecommunications network. These have major capital costs (for example about 250 cameras with dual dedicated data links have to be installed around the periphery of the zone), but these capital costs are not identified separately and it appears as though the contractors are spreading these costs over the life of the contract of ten years. No details of the contract terms are given in the report to the Mayor.

It therefore seems likely that if the congestion charging scheme was abandoned after a year or two, then at least several hundred millions of costs would be paid out in settlement of early termination and penalty costs. In the worst case, the taxpayers of London (including residents of Bromley of course as the GLA precept funds Transport for London) could end up paying out half a billion pounds for no benefits - that's probably about £100 per household. Do you really want the Mayor to risk £100 of your money on this project? (*Editors Comment: I have asked for further information on this subject from TfL but as yet they have not responded*).

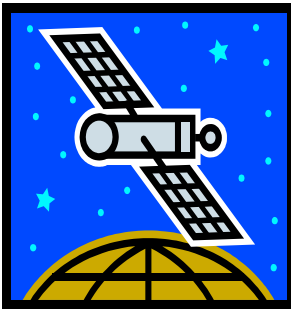
Can the Scheme Be Stopped?

Apart from the threat of possible legal action, the only way the scheme is likely to be halted is by government intervention. They could block

implementation of the scheme by refusing to approve the spending plans for the revenue to be raised. Therefore it is suggested that if you oppose this scheme you write to your Member of Parliament.

Road Pricing via Satellites

Another more general scheme for road pricing in the UK has been proposed by the Integrated Transport Commission - see Newsletter Number 13 for background on who they are,



but in essence they are a government quango introduced as part of the governments integrated transport strategy.

Professor David Begg, chairman of the Commission, has

suggested that all vehicles be monitored via satellite and charged accordingly whenever they use the roads. Suggested charges are as much as 50p per mile in central London, 10p per mile on motorways and 2p per mile on rural roads. However those are rates for peak times, and there would be no charge for some times or routes at all. For example, a motorway journey from London to Birmingham might typically cost £5. Note also that there would be corresponding reductions in fuel and/or vehicle excise duty so that the total tax revenue would not increase.

Charges could be varied also to take account of different vehicle types so there could be higher charges for HGVs but lower charges for alternative fuel vehicles. Obviously some road users would be paying more than at present, but others would pay less, particularly rural residents who are badly hit by high fuel charges.

Prof Begg appears to have put these proposals forward as a way of creating debate on the issue, as apparently he doesn't see much chance of their being implemented for some years. However he does see this as a way of tackling the congestion problems in Britain which are some of the worst in Europe - see Newsletter 13 for more background.



Traffic Congestion at Shortlands, Bromley

In fact, congestion could reduce by as much as 44% if these proposals were implemented.

Is this approach technically practical? Probably not at present. Existing global positioning systems (GPS) installed in cars (the Odyssey device covered in previous Newsletter is one of them) depend on satellites that are not under government control as they are run by the US military, which makes them difficult to use in legislation. In addition, from your editor's experience of the Odyssey system they are unreliable in use. They often take time to lock on to the satellite, and the signals are blocked by trees or high buildings so it is difficult to see how they could be effectively used in city areas. Making it an offence not to have an operating GPS would be very problematic, and you only need to physically cover the device to stop it working so you would need some other way of checking that everyone had an operational device such as cameras everywhere.

It is possible that the proposals for a new "Galileo" network of 30 satellites to be launched by the European Space Agency in 2006 could solve some of these problems though. Of course one of the major objections to this concept has been the issue of personal privacy. If implemented, this system would enable the police to track every vehicle in the UK at all times. It would also enable them to check that you were driving within the speed limit applicable to the road you were on. The possibilities for the state to monitor and hence interfere in your life are enormous. It would no doubt require a lot of political debate and secure legislation to protect certain individual rights before this concept would be acceptable to the majority of people.

One incidental benefit of this technology is that it would enable a free location and navigation service, so nobody would ever get lost at all. Refer to www.cfit.gov.uk/whatsnew.htm for more details on these proposals.

(Editors Comment: This proposal is certainly fairer and economically sounder than the London congestion charging scheme. But I think most people will be very doubtful that the government would not just use it as another way to raise tax revenue, and interfere even more with people's personal liberty. Practical difficulties appear to preclude its use for many years anyway. There are major issues with enforcement - at least with fuel duty it is somewhat difficult to evade, although the transport industry already complains about the number of foreign registered trucks operating on UK roads, who typically fill up with diesel on the continent. You also need to look at the evasion that takes place with "red" agricultural diesel to see what happens when there is the slightest loophole. Incidentally apparently someone in Northern Ireland has realised that if you mix red diesel from the UK with green diesel from Eire (the equivalent agricultural fuel), then the two colours cancel each other out so you can avoid detection!.)

As regards the ability to monitor the activities of UK citizens, the police can already track individuals by monitoring their mobile phone signals. The Trafficmaster company has also just acquired another company who provide the technology to identify the speed and direction of traffic by monitoring mobile phone emissions, even from some distance away. You can see the general direction that technology is taking us.

Driver Appeals Against Speed Law

Another possible block to both the above congestion charging schemes is the risk that prosecution of drivers based on camera evidence may be made very difficult.

Idris Francis, a member of Association of British Drivers, has appealed to the European Courts that under the European Convention of Human Rights he should not be compelled to reveal who was driving a car that was caught by a speed camera. The notice of intended prosecution requests that information under threat of certain

penalties, but he claims this forces him to incriminate himself.

You may think this is a frivolous argument but this plea is one reason why such devices are outlawed in Canada and the USA. Refer to www.righttosilence.org.uk for more information.

Privatisation of Main Road Network

Another aspect of the government's view on the road network is that there are plans to contract out all planning, supervision and maintenance of major roads to commercial organisations. A pilot scheme might commence within a couple of years. Effectively, companies would bid to operate sections of the road network for a period of years.

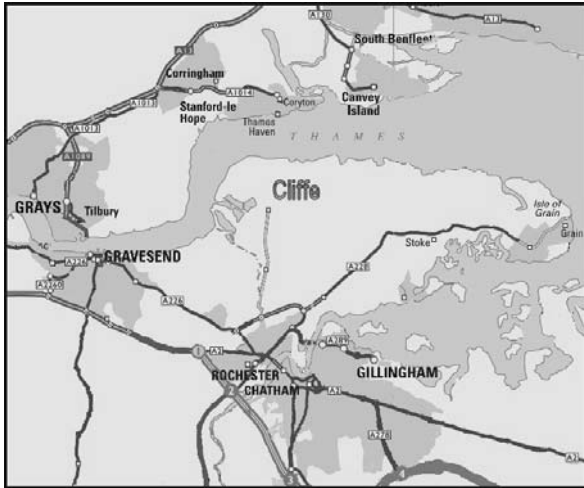
(Editors Comment: It's a bit like letting Railtrack run the railways and look how successful that was. Unfortunately, when commercial organisations are involved with running public services, they concentrate on cost savings and such aspects as safety and quality of the service get thrown out).

New London Airport in Kent?



Several newspapers have reported that one of the sites being considered for a new London airport is Cliffe in Kent - north of Rochester. See map overleaf. The site is currently primarily marshes and is otherwise fairly empty, except that there are oil refineries and storage facilities nearby on both sides of the Thames estuary, which are usually not considered ideal to have located near airports.

The runways and flight take-off and landing paths would probably run east to west (prevailing winds are westerlies and aircraft normally take off and land into wind). This could well mean that flight paths would run over Bromley. Alternatively, existing routes into Heathrow that tend to run to the north over Lewisham would be diverted over Bromley.



Site of New London Airport?

It apparently is being considered because of the longer term need to expand runway capacity in the South-East, because it has good transport links, is relatively close to London and the immediately adjacent area is not heavily populated. Rochester, Chatham and Gravesend and the general area of the Medway towns is also a relatively poor part of the South-East and would benefit from the financial regeneration that would result. However Kent County Council and Medway Council have already raised objections. There are also likely to be objections from environmental and nature bodies as the Thames estuary is an important site for birds, which could also be a hazard for aircraft. *(Editors Comment: I still think the original proposal for an airport on Maplin Sands - just off the map above to the north-east - was the ideal solution.)*

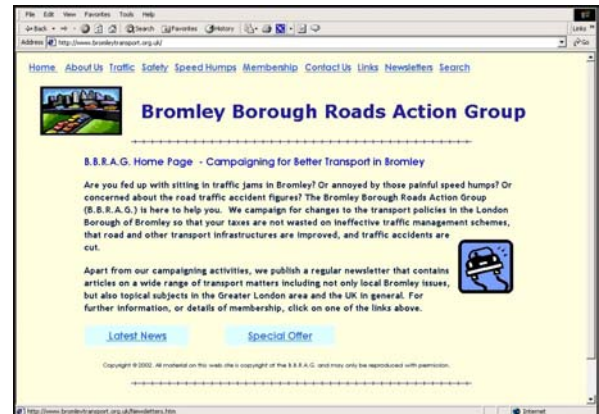
Rookery Gardens, St. Mary Cray

About £250,000 of government funding has been granted for the implementation of a "Home Zone" on the Rookery Estate in St. Mary Cray. This will include landscaping, play areas and traffic calming, with a 20 mph speed limit over the whole area. It will be interesting to see if this scheme is successful.

Note that the 20 mph speed limit will also apply to the nearby stretch of St. Mary Cray High Street but the original proposal to have a "one-way working" system on the High Street has been abandoned.

(Editors Comment: Well at least we have avoided a dangerous "contraflow" system which are the source of numerous accidents when installed elsewhere. However, I believe that accidents on the High Street are not primarily caused by excessive speed but by the presence of parked cars in a very narrow stretch of road.)

New BBRAG Web Site



Mention was made in our previous newsletter of the new BBRAG web site. This has now been finished as far as the initial design and development is concerned, although there will be continual changes made of course to keep it up to date with the latest news.

It has moved to the official location of www.bromleytransport.org.uk so please note that new address - do take a look at it if you have not already done so and any comments would be welcomed.

Features added over the last few weeks have been a guided tour of the traffic jams of Bromley, a site "search" capability so you can easily find items of relevance, and a "News" page which is updated every few days with items of topical interest - this is accessed directly from the home page so it's easy to find.

New Chislehurst Society Web Site

A couple of other new web sites are those of the Chislehurst Society at www.chislehurst-society.org.uk, plus one for a local news and listing site at www.chislehurst.org.

Council Elections

Elections for new local councillors in Bromley take place on the 2nd May. The Executive Committee of B.B.R.A.G. has considered whether to put up candidates for this election but has decided against it on the following grounds. Conservative leader Michael Tickner has said on more than one occasion that if the Conservatives are re-elected so that they retain control of the council, then there will be no more road humps in Bromley. As that is one of the major objectives of B.B.R.A.G. we recommend that you bear that in mind when deciding who to vote for.

One other item of news concerning council operations is that the Environmental Services (Operations) Sub-Committee of the council which has previously made decisions on transport matters held its last meeting recently. Some of the items in our Newsletter were gleaned from attending these meetings and reading the minutes, so there is some concern about how these matters will be handled in future which is not totally clear. The winding up of the committee results from the change to the way the council decision making process operates where it is to be a more a "leader and cabinet" form as mentioned in a previous Newsletter.

Council Funding

There has been considerable public debate recently about council funding, but the budgets for the new financial year, and hence your council taxes, have just been settled.

Your council tax will rise by 6.5%, which is slightly higher than the average in England of 7%, but is clearly way above inflation. Why is that, when the council has apparently had to make savage cuts in some budgets, including making staff redundant? *(Editor's Comment: Incidentally you might like to bear in mind when voting that the cuts in the budgets to minimise the tax rise were opposed by other parties, so the rise in your taxes could have been much worse - but if you are more concerned with the cuts in council expenditure on such services as education then your party preference may be different).*

You need to understand that only 22% of your local council's expenditure comes from council taxes. The rest comes from central government funding, business rates and charges for services to the public. The result is that a small rise in costs can result in a disproportionate rise in council tax.

Council budgets in Bromley tend to be put under pressure from three sources, which accounts for why costs rise faster than inflation and have done for several years. First central government tends to impose new obligations on local councillors all the time, so as to raise standards in such areas as education or social provision. Second, staff salaries (particularly in the education area which is a major part of the overall budget) are not under council control. Third, the Greater London Authority (GLA), headed by the Mayor of London, has raised its charges to the London Boroughs by a large amount.

The "GLA Precept" as it is known is a charge made by the GLA to cover the costs of Policing, Transport, Fire and other central services and in 2001/2002 represented about 18% of your council taxes. This year the Precept will rise by 15.2% (which is actually less than the Mayor initially proposed). This alone implies a major rise in your council taxes. Where is this extra money going?

Extra police is one of the items. So Mayor Livingstone claims that 1,050 extra police were put onto London's streets in the last year. I am sure you will agree that is a good idea. Unfortunately many of the outer London boroughs such as Bromley have not actually benefited from these extra police. The real numbers of Police are actually falling in Bromley - next year there will be 427 when there were 464 in 1997 and 497 in 1994. *(Editor's Comment: so now you know why crime in Bromley is rising and the police have difficulty in responding to emergency call outs).*

Additional expenditure on transport (via the Transport for London part of the GLA) is another reason why the Precept is rising. So what does that get spent on? Primarily on such plans as the London Congestion Charging Scheme (it may pay for itself later on but it

requires major expenditure over the coming year), proposed London Underground improvements, improved central London bus services and the Docklands Light Railway. Note that again, most of this money benefits central London boroughs and not Bromley!

The net cost which has to be met from local or central government taxes (after income from charges) for Transport for London is just over £1 billion. So for example, £304 million is used to subsidise London Buses alone. Some £404 million goes on “Street Management”, up from £315 million last year. More details on where your money goes can be obtained from the GLA who have recently published details of their budgets for the new year.

Incidentally one joker has suggested that the answer to overcrowded tube lines is to introduce a “congestion charge” for underground travellers. Say £5 during peak periods. This will reduce crowding, encourage people to stagger their journey times, and make life more pleasant for everybody. The money raised could be used to subsidise alternative transport modes such as pedestrians and cyclists. Or it could simply be used to reduce the subsidies that the system currently gets from public funds.

West Wickham Parking Scheme

Despite an expensive and extensive consultation process, the proposed permit parking scheme for the West Wickham area generated more objections than support from local residents. However council staff still proposed that further consultation be done to try to produce an acceptable proposal.

(Editor’s Comment: surely this kind of scheme which just generates administrative work with no great benefit should be dropped as part of the new council economy measures?).

Chislehurst & St Pauls Cray Commons

One item of expenditure that the council decided to reduce was to halve their contribution to the upkeep of Chislehurst Commons which is controlled by the “Commons Conservators”. This body was established by an Act of Parliament and is effectively an undemocratic, self appointed body.



Chislehurst War Memorial

One reason why the junction at the Chislehurst War Memorial is notoriously congested is that they have consistently objected to any changes, and have typically opposed taking even a foot of commons land even when there were good reasons for so doing, or they were offered compensating additional land elsewhere.

Because of the establishing Act, even the council cannot use it’s normal compulsory purchase powers and would require another Act of Parliament to overturn any decision of the conservators.

Now the conservators may be in a position where it cannot cover even essential operating costs as it has few other sources of funding. It is possible that it may even have to dissolve itself in which case apparently control of the commons might revert to the Lord of the Manor - a certain Lady Rankin.

(Editor’s Comment: this structure seems to be an archaic anachronism).

Miscellaneous Council News

Bromley Council has joined the London Clean Fuel Vehicles Working Group (otherwise known under the snappy acronym of LCFVWG). This organisation aims to encourage the use of alternative fuels. The council currently has 34 vehicles operating on LPG, including the Mayors car.

Provisional data for the 2001 year show that road accident casualties decreased by 10% to 1145, including a decrease in killed or serious injured of 55%. The decrease in overall casualties is probably statistically significant. However there was a 5% increase in accidents involving motorcyclists, probably due to their increased use. Targets for accident reduction agreed with the government have been further reduced.

An interactive CD-ROM and promotional video on Walking Buses is now available.

A report has been produced by Gareth Davies on speed limits in the borough. To quote from the introduction: "The report concludes that there is little point in establishing a speed limit, however desirable from an environmental or safety point of view, if it is not going to have any effect on actual vehicle speed." The report otherwise covers the general principles that should be applied in setting speed limits, the legal framework, such matters as enforcement, and the particular issue of Jail Lane.

Aquila Site Redevelopment- Update

Our last edition covered the subject of the redevelopment of the ex-MOD Aquila site in Bickley for housing. The BBRAG has submitted objections to this proposal on the grounds of both local traffic congestion, and worsening of traffic congestion in a wide area surrounding the development. We believe the transport assessment provided with the planning application is inadequate and the proposed solutions such as traffic lights at the Bickley Park Road and Blackbrook Lane junction will be insufficient to overcome the resulting problems.

In general terms, we believe that such a large housing development should not be permitted near the heavily congested A222 Bromley/Sidcup route.

Councillors decided at a recent meeting to retain green belt status for the site in the new UDP. However, as the site is already heavily built over, that raises some interesting legal issues. It may not stop redevelopment for housing.

There is a public meeting being held by the Bickley Residents Action Group (whom B.B.R.A.G. is supporting) on Tuesday the 16th April at 7.30 at Bromley High School in Blackbrook Lane.



Contact Information

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B.B.R.A.G. Treasurer and Newsletter Editor: Roger Lawson (Tel: 020-8467-2686, fax: 020-8295-0378, Email: roger.lawson@btclick.com), Chairman: John Nicholls (Tel: 020-8467-8284). Contact either of the above for information on the aims and objectives of B.B.R.A.G. or for membership information (membership costs £7.50 per annum for individuals or £50 for corporate membership). B.B.R.A.G. would be happy to advise or assist anyone who is concerned about any traffic, transport or road safety issues in the borough.

Our internet web address is: www.bromleytransport.org.uk. This contains much useful information including articles extracted from our newsletters. It also contains a "News" page which is updated regularly with items of topical interest.

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BBRAG Background Information

The Bromley Borough Roads Action Group (B.B.R.A.G.) stands for a more democratic and more rational approach to the traffic management problems of the London Borough of Bromley. Our initial formation some years ago was based on opposition to the kind of traffic calming scheme that was being introduced in the borough that simply caused more traffic congestion, and general inconvenience to road users, without any significant benefit in terms of road accident reductions. In fact, the money wasted on such schemes could have been much better spent on actual improvements to road safety in other areas. We now take a more general interest in all transport and associated environmental issues in the borough of Bromley and the greater London area. This includes traffic management schemes, public transport, road safety, parking policies, air pollution, other transport environmental issues such as noise, and associated local and central government policies. Our prime objective is to promote improvements in the transport infrastructure while stopping wasted expenditure on unpopular, ineffective or inappropriate policies.