

Mayor's Question Time – 9 September 2009

Transcript: Questions to the Mayor

2287/2009 - Thames

Richard Tracey

Will you be meeting with Thames Water to discuss the overflow of 20,000 tonnes of raw sewage into the Thames in July, which poses a health risk for river users including rowers and swimmers?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): This is a question about the overflow of 20,000 tonnes of raw sewage into the Thames in July. The tragic thing is, of course, that this is not an uncommon event. Owing to the fact that we do not yet have the proper sewage that we need in the city, I am afraid that raw sewage does occasionally get into the Thames. Clearly, it is something that I am encouraging Thames Water to get on and deal with, in particular by constructing the Thames Tideway Tunnel which provides a long-term solution; but I am informed by the Health Protection Agency and the City of London Port Health Authority that incidences of disease resulting from these overflows of sewage into the Thames are actually surprisingly low. That may be due to under reporting. We do not know. But the incidence of disease that you ask about is surprisingly low.

Richard Tracey (AM): I am afraid, Mr Mayor, that is a rather unsatisfactory situation, particularly in regard to the comments that you receive from others. I was particularly approached by the rowers because, as you know, Putney is in my constituency and we have really the world rowing centre, if you like, at Putney. They feel that there is enormous danger and what I would hope is that you would approach Thames Water, the Environment Agency and, indeed, the Government – and there is a petition on the Number 10 website, an e-petition, currently about this whole situation – because it is very dangerous to the rowers and the sailors.

It is extremely common, as you say, because the Thames, for some ridiculous reason, is treated as open water in the same way as the sea might be treated and, in fact, the 20,000 tonne discharge was small beer in a way compared to a 900,000 discharge which had gone on.

Now this kind of thing really has to be stopped by early improvement of the various Thames Water facilities, would you not agree?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I absolutely agree, Dick, and that is why it is critical we get in the Thames Tideway Tunnel. The tragedy of the great Bazalgette improvements was that they did not really deal with this in the long-term, they did not cope with a city of our size and the problem is, at the moment, that, in the event of sudden downpours of rain, which we experienced in July, what can happen, of course, is that the sewage pipe discharges into the rainwater discharge which, of course, goes into the Thames in greatly diluted form. Until we have the Thames Tideway Tunnel there will be no long-term solution to that because, I am told, at the moment, the only other option is for the effluent to discharge into the streets and that is not what we want.

Richard Tracey (AM): No, of course. The trouble is that the Thames Tunnel will not be completed until, I think, 2020. Surely, in the meantime, there should be warnings to the likes of

you, representing Londoners, from Thames Water, when this is going to happen and all measures, such as the improvement of the Mogden centre, should be brought forward?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Yes. That is being accelerated and you know that we are encouraging the Mogden Sewage Treatment Works and I am certainly in favour of warning systems though, clearly, the most transparent warning system will be a very sudden and torrential downpour which will alert people to the possibility that there will be the kind of overflow that we have described.

Mike Tuffrey (AM): You referred to the Tideway Tunnel and in your Water Strategy in the summer you were commendably strong in your support for that. So can you please have a word with Hammersmith and Fulham Council where Thames Water has gone on record as saying that the council's calculated tactics of non-cooperation concerning the construction of the tunnel, is not only delaying it but increasing its costs? So can you please speak for Londoners to your colleagues - Conservative colleagues - in Hammersmith and Fulham and ask them to stop blocking Thames Water's construction and get this tunnel built?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Well, you will be relieved and not surprised, Mike, to know that Sir Simon Milton [Deputy Mayor and Chief of Staff] has already had conversations of the kind that you describe. I am aware of the issue. I really think that we cannot afford to be NIMBYist¹. This is a fantastic project for London. It will deliver huge numbers of jobs, let alone the long-term improvements in London's river quality for generations to come.

I have swum in the Thames very, very happily. I swam in the Thames at Chiswick. Did not do me any harm. Notably. Thank you, the Member for East London, has interjected that I fell in. I did not fall into the Thames; I fell into another river, a tributary of the Thames. I intend to fall into all of London's rivers by the time I cease to be Mayor! The Thames is, at Chiswick, actually perfectly swimmable and I would encourage you, Liberal Democrats and everybody, to share their confidence in the Thames by swimming in it.

Mike Tuffrey (AM): I will leave it there. Thank you.

Tony Arbour (AM): I wonder, when you are discussing Mogden with Thames Water, you might raise a much longer standing problem, indeed two much longer standing problems. One is the Mogden pong and the Mogden mozzies. For years my constituents have been plagued by mosquitoes accompanied by the most awful smells from Mogden. Thames Water has made the point that their difficulty is that it has, itself, to fund any works which are going to be required to deal with the problems, both that which has been set out by Dick [Tracey] and the problem of the smell and the mosquitoes.

I wonder if, whilst you are talking to Thames Water, you could ask them about the difficulties that the Office of Water Services (OFWAT) has raised with them about the way these improvements to Mogden and the conditions of my constituents in Twickenham and Isleworth can have their environment improved. My understanding is that OFWAT has to give consent for substantial sums of expenditure to be raised on infrastructure and I am told -- and this is a report which has just gone to Hounslow Council on the matter where it says that OFWAT is unwilling to recognise further odour prevention works at Mogden as an obligation or a fully supported service improvement.

¹ Acronym - the initial letters of *not in my back yard*

I can tell you that the many Londoners who support you in that part of London do think that something should be done about the smell and the mosquitoes as well as the stuff flowing into the river and I would be very glad if you would investigation that relationship.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Well, thanks, Tony. I think that everybody listening to you will consider your constituents redoubtably defended on those points. I will look into the mosquitoes and the pong and I will get to the bottom of the point you raise about OFWAT's apparent reluctance to see the necessary improvements to the Mogden Sewage Treatment Works. I am informed that they will be completed by 2013. Admittedly, that is some way off still but it should bring some alleviation of the problems you describe.

Joanne McCartney (AM): In your answer to Mike Tuffrey you stated that Sir Simon Milton has been to speak to Hammersmith and Fulham Council, who are blocking this scheme, but you failed to say whether he had been successful in persuading them. Could you enlighten us?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I hesitate, Joanne, to go into the details of the conversation between my distinguished colleague and friend and borough leaders across London, but I will say that I do think it important that we get this project done and am sure that all councils, including Hammersmith and Fulham, will recognise the long-term benefits to London of the Thames Tideway Tunnel. I am sure we are all *ad item* on that point are we not? We are.

Len Duvall (AM): They are silent over there!

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): No, we are. They were nodding. Everybody agrees. Good.

2177/2009 - Bus services

Jenny Jones

KPMG recently suggested the following options for funding the bus subsidy in the event that government contributions are insufficient:

- Increasing fares;*
- Reducing the coverage or volume of the network;*
- Cancelling, deferring or re-scoping committed projects or infrastructure enhancement; and*
- Reducing the network quality standard or the removal of one or more of the quality incentive regimes.*

Which of these options are you considering?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Thank you, Jenny. This is a question about a very good KPMG report, a substantial piece of work, in which, broadly, we asked them to look at the operation of the bus services with a view to, in particular, establishing whether the gross cost tendering versus net cost tendering was the right way to go and all sorts of questions like that, the routes, difficult questions that we asked --

Jenny Jones (AM): Would you answer my question please?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): -- and, as you rightly say, they produced all sorts of options. I do not think that any of them need, on their own, to form part of our solution and we will certainly review all options as we take forward the bus service. I regard the KPMG report

as a valuable and constructive bit of work. It does not mean that we have to follow anything that they say.

Jenny Jones (AM): No, but, presumably, KPMG has looked at all the options and these are the four options that it has come up with, all of which could be really damaging to public transport in London, particularly as we all know the Government is going to try to cut subsidies and the bus subsidy is expected to rise by £100 million in the next ten years so how are you going to make up that shortfall? If you do not pick one of these options, what sort of ideas have you got?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I think you have got about 15 different hypothesis and ifs in that question and you are assuming that the bus subsidy will be cut and you are assuming that I am going to take up any of these options, and I certainly am not saying that. I think that the bus service in London is a glory of our system: it works very well, it conveys two billion passengers, two billion rides a year, and ridership, in spite of the recession, continues to be very strong, and I do not see any particular reason to draw any of the conclusions that you invite me to do.

Jenny Jones (AM): I am not asking you to draw a conclusion; I am really saying KPMG - it is a good report you have said, a valuable report - has come up with these four options. Now, presumably, they have done the work, you have to pick one or so of these.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): No. I am sorry. Let us be absolutely clear. These options would theoretically arise - and they are not the only options - in the case of a cut in subsidy for buses --

Jenny Jones (AM): That is not going to happen?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): That is a hypothesis that I refuse to contemplate.

Jenny Jones (AM): So you do not expect that to happen? That is what you are saying. We are not going to be put into this position?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I am certainly not, today, operating on that assumption. I think that it is very, very important that Londoners continue to rely on the first rate bus service that they get.

Jenny Jones (AM): Now your new bus is not even in these budget projections is it, so we are going to need even more money for your new bus?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): If you are asking a question about the new bus which will be developed by private contractors, then I imagine that the cost of that development of that new bus will be borne by the industry and, as for the rolling out of the bus and as everybody knows because I have said it about five billion times - or people who follow these conversations will know - we are going to have some new buses, new prototype new buses on the streets by the back end of 2011 --

Jenny Jones (AM): You are saying that your new buses are not going to cost any extra money over and above what we are expecting the replacement of buses to cost?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): No, that is absolutely right. If you look at the current cost of a bus, £250,000, roughly speaking, buys you a new bendy bus. We think that we can

get a wonderful new bus for London which will be considerably cleaner, greener, lighter and exactly what this city needs for much less than that --

Jenny Jones (AM): At no more expense. Thank you. No, that is a wonderful commitment and I am sure we will all be grateful for that. Thank you.

Richard Tracey (AM): Mr Mayor, this is, of course, rightly called an independent strategic review of the buses and, surely, in its independence it has to face the fact that, in the next few years, whichever party is in government, there will have to be some very hard choices about different aspects of the economy and bus fares and bus subsidies and so on have to be one of them. Now you, as Mayor, will be one of the people having to face up to these hard choices.

We are regularly told in emails - I am sure you get them, the same as I do - from an eminent councillor in Ealing called Councillor Phil Taylor who makes a close study of the buses - that the bus subsidy has gone from, I think, £50 million to £600 million plus in the last nine years, that actually London buses is not run as efficiently as it could be and that some very hard choices will have to be made.

Now, do you not believe that the questions that we have been hearing from Jenny Jones are, in many ways, actually unrealistic?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I do. Thank you, Dick. I think that most people in London greatly appreciate the bus service that they get. Obviously, we are doing a great deal of work at the moment to ensure that we maximise the economies we can find in Transport for London (TfL) and a huge amount of effort is going on now to do that. Peter Hendy [Commissioner, Transport for London] is leading that work in a very, very capable way.

But I do not want to do anything - and I am sure everybody here would agree with this ambition - that is going to prejudice the ability of Londoners to get around. They have come to rely on a wonderful bus service and it is very, very important that we maintain it.

2478/2009 - Bus Services

Valerie Shawcross

Can Londoners be confident about your stewardship of their bus services?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Again, I would say to Val that, if you look at what has happened on the buses in the last year - 18 months or however long it is now - I do think there have been some improvements. I think, I would single out the very substantial fall in bus crime which was an important part of our manifesto.

It is something that Londoners really care about very, very much. They do not want to be disturbed, they do not want to be hassled and they do not want aggro on the buses. It still goes on. There was far too much of it. I am very, very pleased that, because we have been able to deploy a great number of uniformed people, loads more Police Community Support Officers, on the buses, there seems to have been a very substantial reduction in bus crime.

I am sure, Val, that you would join me in congratulating the work of the police and TfL in bringing that about. It has gone down by 18%, according to the figures, and I, as the Mayor,

now parrot the figures with full confidence that they are correct. I am delighted that it has gone down in that way. I think it is important that people's experiences on the buses should be safer.

Second, we, of course, now have iBus which is a very, very important addition to the smooth running of the bus service and of benefit to passengers, and there are further improvements that we have in the pipeline that we have already discussed.

Valerie Shawcross (AM): Thank you, Mr Mayor. Those are, indeed, very welcome and a good continuation of the previous Mayor's policies and we are glad that you have continued that focus. Seriously, I think it is important that crime is tackled on the buses and people feel that.

I wanted to ask you about some other key changes you have been making to the bus service in London. Looking back on your comments on the bendy bus, I can see that your interest in the bendy bus is usually from the outside and you have not considered the passengers who actually use the bendies and find them fast and convenient --

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): No, that is not true. That is not true at all.

Valerie Shawcross (AM): Now two of the key central London commuter routes were changed over the summer - the 521 and the 507 - so I went down to talk to some of the passengers on the 521 and got some comments from them. A lady from Bromley said, "There were more seats on the bendy bus so I am having trouble getting on". A lady from Southwark said, "The bus is more busy and I don't see how it can be more environmental to have more buses. I come home from St Paul's at it is more difficult to get on at night coming home". There are quite a few comments about the lack of seats on the bus.

If you do not trust me, *The London Paper* ran some comments on the 507 when the 507 changed. A lady from Peckham said she was sad to see them go and a lady from Winchester said the bendy buses allowed people on and off more quickly. A chap called Mark from Vauxhall - I like this one - said, "Wow. Boris has really stolen all the seats on these de-bendified busses. They travel in pairs now like a bendy bus with two drivers and no bend".

So what is your answer, Mayor, to the passengers on the 521 who say they want their high capacity, fast moving and easy access bendy bus back?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Val, I just want to obviously begin by congratulating you on the heroic conservative campaign that you have run to keep the bendy bus, this fantastic spirit of archaism and atavism that inspires you. Not since the campaign to restore the Giles Gilbert Scott telephone boxes has there been such a determined piece of nostalgia brokering by people --

Valerie Shawcross (AM): Do you have an answer to some of the passengers' comments though?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I want to say that this was something that was very, very heavily discussed throughout London and in fact, throughout the world; thanks to the Mayoral election campaign of 2007/08 it became one of the big global issues, the bendy bus and its replacement. I think there was scarcely a population on the planet that was not aware of the controversy.

The point I am making is it was exhaustively and democratically debated and a very clear manifesto -- This programme, John, is watched across the world. There are people, sleepless in Seattle, who are now watching us deliberate, and quite right too. Nobody was unaware of the programme. It was democratically approved.

I want to be absolutely clear about one thing because you make some very serious points. There are advantages to the bendy bus. We have always been clear about that. It does have easy access, as you rightly say, and it does allow buggies on very smoothly. It is a big, capacious machine.

I had to take a decision about whether, on balance, it was right for London's roads. It is more than 60 foot long. It is a big, big machine. It is often involved in traffic hold ups. You can produce lots of vox pops in favour of the bendy bus. Of course you can, Val, and I salute you for your work. But, I could produce thousands and thousands of people who take exactly the opposite view.

There was a clear democratic manifesto commitment to phase out, as economically as possible, the bendy bus in favour of a sensible replacement. We are in the process, as you know, as we have discussed earlier on, of developing a cleaner greener bus for London that London needs, and we shall do so.

Whatever you say about the bendy - and I take your points - you could not, in the long-term, ask Londoners to put up with machines of that kind because they are too big, they are fuel inefficient and they emit too much noxious vapour of one kind or another.

Valerie Shawcross (AM): We have just been talking about the KPMG report on buses which you commissioned because you were looking to make savings on the bus service. KPMG says, as Jenny [Jones] said, the bus service in London is very efficient and it points out that if you want to make some savings the options are unpalatable: cuts in services, poorer quality, higher fares or drop some new projects. It does point out that policy changes - like the expensive development of the Routemaster and the replacement of the bendy bus - are going to add to the costs of the service. Do you actually know, approximately, now how much additional cost per year is being incurred because of the removal of the bendy buses from the 507, 521 and 38?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): On those detailed figures, Val, I am sure that TfL officials will be happy to get back to you, but --

Valerie Shawcross (AM): No, but do you have a feel of it? You have an opinion on the bendy bus but do you have a feel for what the cost is of what you have done? Just a ball-park figure. Roughly.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): As I say, I am more than happy to get back to you with the detailed breakdown of the figures but there is no question at all, in my mind, that it is the right thing to do, the cost is supportable and your question was based on a hypothesis from the KPMG report. Your question began with, "If you think it necessary to make substantial cuts in bus funding". Now, the point I want to make to you is that I am very, very far from convinced that it would be right to make substantial cuts in bus funding if that is going to lead to a deterioration in the service provided to Londoners, particularly during a recession.

Valerie Shawcross (AM): But the purpose of that report was to find savings. It is a good report. I think it has been very professionally done and I congratulate TfL on commissioning it.

Are you saying you have forgotten what the figures are or you have never seen them? Do you have any idea, in general, have you seen from TfL any figures about what the replacement programme for the bendy buses would actually now cost in additional cost per year, in totality? How much is it costing Londoners? Roughly. Not to the last penny but give us a feel for it.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Val, I am very happy to revert to you with the figures. I am afraid that you have not given notice, in this question, of wanting a detailed breakdown of the cost of the replacement of the bendy buses. Had you so done, I am sure that we could have satisfied you here and now, but you are going to have to wait until I can get back to you.

Valerie Shawcross (AM): OK. Mayor, because you made the point earlier on that this was the big issue in your election manifesto, it is a flagship policy, I would have expected you to have had a look at some costings and have a feel for it, even if you cannot remember the detail, and I appreciate that is difficult.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Well, I will be quite serious. If you want to elucidate your constituents and you want to ask a serious question then you have got to give me notice.

Valerie Shawcross (AM): Let me just help you out then, Mayor. Let me just help you out. This flagship policy, which is your highest profile policy on the bus services, those three routes is costing, now, a fact, from the contracts, £3.3 million per annum, additional. I think that there is a good estimate of £28 million per year. What I do not understand is how --

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Let me just remind you and remind everybody listening that the cost, in fare evasion alone, associated with the articulated buses was running at about £8 million per year. There are very considerable --

Valerie Shawcross (AM): Mr Mayor, why do you think there was fare evasion on the bendy bus?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): There was very considerable fare evasion on the bendy bus.

Valerie Shawcross (AM): What caused the fare evasion, Mr Mayor?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Because people were getting into the habit of getting on that bus without swiping on. I think that is completely wrong.

Valerie Shawcross (AM): Is it because people were not just entering at the front of the bus; they were entering further down the bus on the other entrances? Because the bus you have replaced the 521 on - I took a journey on it this morning - also allows rear access which is unsupervised. So how can you possibly be saving money on fare evasion if you are also allowing people to get on the back of the bus?

The environmental argument does not stack up because you could have, much more cheaply, bought new bendy buses which would have been cleaner and greener, but you are running more buses. You are certainly not going to cut traffic congestion because you are certainly taking up up to 30 metres more road space now than you were and, I think, the evidence is that the old bendy buses did load faster. Despite all your other claims there is no evidence at all that the bendy bus was dangerous to cyclists any more than any other bus.

So what I want to know is, what is the rational basis of this policy that you have taken, because nothing you have said actually stands up to any scrutiny in terms of looking at the evidence?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): This is a decision taken in the interests of Londoners and of London traffic and the people who use the roads in London. You say that they present no threat to -- and, additionally, I would point out that, by getting rid of so-called free buses, you do clamp down on fare evasion. I do not accept what you say about replacement buses; most of the replacement buses will not allow access of the kind that you describe.

Valerie Shawcross (AM): The 521, Mr Mayor, is a new bus --

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I do not know whether you paid this morning or not, Val, but --

Valerie Shawcross (AM): -- it is a new design and it is designed to allow rear access. So I do not see how that will change fare evasion.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): As I said, most of the buses replacing the bendy bus will not allow any kind of fare evasion and I hope you would support that. Are you in favour of that?

Valerie Shawcross (AM): I would love to see much more enforcement on bus fare evasion --

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Well it is about time you spoke up for that. You have sat in this place for eight or nine years and I do not think we have heard a peep from you about cracking down on fare evasion.

Valerie Shawcross (AM): We very much want to see cracking down on fare evasion but I think that is about having more fare evasion teams on the buses. If you think that --

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Which is what we have done.

Valerie Shawcross (AM): -- changing to this new single decker which allows rear access is going to be any more secure from fare evasion than the bendy bus, then it is just factually incorrect. The new bus is designed and does allow rear access --

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): No. Sorry, I think we have got to be very clear who is being factually incorrect. You are being factually incorrect because the majority of the buses that will replace the bendy bus will not allow for the kind of fare evasion which you seem to be encouraging, if not condoning, and I think you should issue a very clear statement, Val, that you do not want to see people refusing to swipe on --

Valerie Shawcross (AM): We definitely want to see the end of fare evasion --

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Good.

Valerie Shawcross (AM): -- and, I think, if you think that the new 521 deals with that then you are actually wrong and I do suggest you have a look again. I will leave it there, Chair.

Roger Evans (AM): It is interesting to see, on a return from a long summer break, that Val's campaign to preserve the bendy buses continuing apace.

The reason that there were problems with these buses was the second car nature of them, the fact that control of fare evasion was not allowed in the second car. It made them more dangerous on the roads. I have to say we had an incident in my constituency a couple of years ago where someone was trapped beneath a bus and dragged for over a mile because the driver could not see what was happening with the rear car of the bus. A very serious incident. It also made them prone, of course, at first to having engine problems where they caught fire and the driver did not know what was happening in the second carriage either. So there is a whole safety issue here as well really.

I guess what I would really like to see are some figures from the new routes, the 521 and the 507, on fare evasion, because I am sure we will see a reduction, and is there work that you are doing to demonstrate that reduction now?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I am sure that, given what Val has said, we will be looking at the impact on fare evasion of the replacement buses and I will make sure that you and the Assembly have whatever data we accumulate as soon as we get it.

Roger Evans (AM): Can you also look at the level of reduction in crime on some of those services as well because the number 25 bus, which is an articulated bus that has not yet been replaced, was the bus serving east London with the highest level of petty crime a few years ago and that, also, was because of a lack of control over what was happening in the second car? Again, we would like to see improvements in the level of crime on that service in future?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Thanks, Roger. All I will say is that, yes, it is true and I was glad that Val, in her question, did pay tribute to this fact. It is true that bus crime has come down very considerably in the last year. I think that was something that Londoners cared very, very much about. I think some of the behaviour on the bendy bus has been disreputable, has been threatening sometimes and it is important that we deal with that.

Jenny Jones (AM): That is an interesting point. Are you going to tell the Metropolitan Police Service Commissioner to increase police officers on the buses? Are you going to tell him to do that?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Do you detect in that question a brilliant attempt to drag in another subject? Characteristically ingenious.

Jenny Jones (AM): All right. Can I get back to the KPMG report because I do not know how much this report cost? It probably cost quite a lot of money. I do not know. Do you know how much it cost? I mean we are probably talking -- I do not know if Val [Shawcross] knows how much it cost? It was a lot of money was it not? Yet, they have come up with four recommendations which you appear to be rejecting. Now that is not very good value for --

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): No.

Jenny Jones (AM): Oh you are not rejecting them? You are not rejecting these --

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Sorry, no. That is not all they came up with, Jenny.

Jenny Jones (AM): No, but they have suggested how you are going to get out of this --

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Do you have a feeling? I have sort of got a groundhog day feeling about this question. I mean we went round this.

Jenny Jones (AM): Well if you answered the questions I would not keep asking them. You have said that there are other options and yet this very good report did not come up with any other options.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Well, Chair, through you, I think we gave this a fairly good kick of the cat about ten minutes ago but I am more than happy to repeat to Jenny that, although the KPMG report was very valuable and was particularly useful on the question of gross cost tendering versus net cost tendering and all the other assorted questions and, I think, very much demonstrated the success of the London buses and the way they are run, I do not think --

Jenny Jones (AM): Are you ruling out these four options? Are you ruling them out?

Darren Johnson (Chair): Jenny [Jones], if you just let the Mayor finish the answer.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): -- that I am obliged --

Jenny Jones (AM): He is just talking without any point.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I do not think I am obliged, now, to say which of this by no means exhaustive list of options I am thinking of taking up, in the event of a hypothesis which, as I said earlier on, I do not, for one moment, accept.

Jenny Jones (AM): No, the shortfall is not a hypothesis; it is a fact. That is going to happen. Anyway, thank you, Chair.

Darren Johnson (Chair): Thank you. Can we now move on to the next question on the order paper which is on inflation and fares in the name of Caroline Pidgeon?

2478/2009 - Inflation and fares

Caroline Pidgeon

In the light of the July Retail Price Index showing a fall of 1.4%, will you make a statement about your plans for public transport fares in London from January 2010?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Caroline has asked for a statement about our plans for public transport fares from January 2010 and, as I said earlier on and there are lots of questions about all this today - I think John [Biggs] has got one later on down the order paper - we are in the process of looking at the fares and TfL's business plan, obviously. This is not something that you would expect me to publish today. Today is not the day for it. But all I will say, and I hope you will agree, is that fares in London will remain extremely affordable and competitive by comparison with other major cities.

Caroline Pidgeon (AM): Come on, Mr Mayor, stop teasing us. Give us an indication as to what you really are going to do in terms of fares this year. You are supposed to be about a really transparent style of government. Take this opportunity now to let Londoners know whether you are going to be sticking to the inflation plus 1% formula and therefore reducing fares for Londoners next year.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Let me repeat, Caroline, in spite of your very enticing invitation to explain our thinking now, our thinking is still being elaborated. A great deal of work is being done, as I said, right at the beginning, on TfL budgets of all kinds, led by Peter [Hendy, Commissioner for Transport, TfL], and we are going to have a fares package which, as I have said, will ensure that Londoners' transport fares remain affordable and competitive by comparison with other major cities.

Caroline Pidgeon (AM): But last year you were really quick to get out the bad news and that was on 4 September². You are saying now is not the time to get it out. Why are you delaying when, surely, it is going to be good news?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I do not want to anticipate -- why should I not save up the good news?

Caroline Pidgeon (AM): So it will be good news for Londoners will it?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): All sorts of work still has to be done and it would be wrong and precipitous of me, no matter how alluring these invitations, to share our thinking now.

Caroline Pidgeon (AM): But given the Government has instructed the train operating companies to reduce their regulated fares, surely you are going to have to do the same for London?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I think, with due respect, Caroline, I cannot fail to answer the same question more than four times. I am not going to tell you now what the fares package for January 2010 is going to be because now is not the time to uncork that particular vintage.

I will remind you, just in case people have forgotten, that roughly 40% of Londoners on all kinds of buses - probably more on the bendy buses obviously - travel free at the moment already. We have introduced measures to help people in the economic downturn that we are suffering. We are helping people with cut-price travel on Income Support and people who are looking for jobs and that is the right thing to do for Londoners.

I hope everybody still supports those measures and we will continue with those measures, whatever the fare package produces, and we will continue to make sure that Londoners have a Freedom Pass for 24 hours a day, and it is vital that they have that, particularly -- Normally there is a great cheer when I mention the Freedom Pass. Is everybody in favour of the Freedom Pass or have you dropped your support? You are. 24 hours a day. Thank you. We will maintain our support for young people to travel free on the buses because that helps many hard working families on low incomes throughout this city.

Caroline Pidgeon (AM): I put it to you, Mr Mayor, that you cannot, in terms of the formula, pick and choose when you are going to use this formula or not, and I think Londoners are going to expect, given the economic climate, for you to keep your side of the bargain and to, at the very least, freeze fares for next year. But I accept you are not going to give us any hint at all of what you are planning to do for next year.

² **Mayoral Press Release:** Mayor announces fair and affordable fares package to sustain massive investment in London's transport; 4/9/2008 (http://www.london.gov.uk/view_press_release.jsp?releaseid=18677)

Can I urge you, when you are finalising your fares statement, will you consider, perhaps, some new strategies to encourage more people to use London buses? For example, looking at our one hour bus ticket campaign, that we mentioned to you earlier in the year which is proving very popular across London, time limited tickets, that would make it easier and more affordable for people to use the buses.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I am aware of your proposal. The trouble is there is a cost implication in that. Several of your colleagues have already pointed out that bus subsidies are already under some pressure and --

Caroline Pidgeon (AM): Will you consider initiatives such as that to get more people using buses?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): -- I think that other users of the buses who listen to your suggestion should be aware that your proposal would have fare implications for them. So it is not cost neutral --

Caroline Pidgeon (AM): Will you consider such proposals that might other people on to the buses?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I think, Caroline, I have given about as fair an answer as I possibly can to your brilliant proposal --

Caroline Pidgeon (AM): Yes or no? It is quite simple. Will you be considering other options such as that?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I will be considering it, but I will be unlikely to take it up, for the reasons that I have outlined.

Caroline Pidgeon (AM): Thank you very much.

John Biggs (AM): I think Londoners are aware that you have not yet been able to confirm that you have ever used a bus under your mayoralty, and I think more seasoned observers would be aware --

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Are we having a completely demented Question Time? Demented.

John Biggs (AM): -- that, under your mayoralty, you have a policy of basically a sound bite every day, and you are saying that today --

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): What do you mean, I have not had a -- nonsense.

John Biggs (AM): -- is not the day for your fares sound bite. So I think we appreciate that there is a bit of news manipulation here, but can I remind you of what you said to the Assembly's Budget and Performance Committee earlier this year where you, basically, blasted into your predecessor and said that he had been cynical and opportunistic in electioneering by not following the Retail Price Index (RPI) plus 1% formula and that you would never stoop to such a level and that you would be bound by it. You said, very clearly, RPI plus 1% was the driver. You used that as the shroud to justify your 6% increase, I think it was, last year. I asked you whether you might change the decision on RPI plus 1% and you said, "No". You said, "In

view of the fact that RPI is likely to be lower in 2009 than it was in 2008 that reduction will, of course, be fully reflected in the fare package”.

Are you telling us that you are minded to follow the RPI plus 1% formula or that you are retreating from that and you are going to find another justification for a fares increase for Londoners?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I think this is really a repeat of Caroline’s [Pidgeon] question --

John Biggs (AM): I want your answer.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): -- and the answer is that this is not the time or the place for me to announce the fares package for January 2010 and I am not going to do that. There are, as everybody accepts, very, very considerable pressures on the TfL budget. You, yourself, in your Assembly report admitted that the fall in ridership is putting considerable pressures. We had the disastrous collapse of Metronet. We had Tube Lines racking up bills. We have very, very serious pressures on the TfL budget. That is why, as you can imagine, I am ensuring that a fantastic amount of work is being done by TfL to strip out whatever costs we can in order to deliver, as I said right at the beginning in my answer to Caroline [Pidgeon], an affordable solution for Londoners that maintains our competitive fare structure compared to other cities in this country --

John Biggs (AM): OK. Do you recall that at that meeting in this room you stated, very clearly, that, in your view, the previous Mayor had been cynical in his electioneering in refusing to follow the RPI plus 1% formula?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Well if you remember what happened was that the real tragedy for TfL finances was that there were repeated cynical electioneering - exactly right - attempts to hold down the fares below what the delivery of the service actually required. That created massive long-term pressures in TfL finances which are still with us today. Yes, frankly, it is true that we are still paying the price for those decisions.

John Biggs (AM): Right. But you justify your decision that RPI plus 1% was the formula negotiated with Government and that you would be bound by that?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I do not believe there is a formula negotiated with Government. All I said was that I thought that the decision chronically to --

John Biggs (AM): I will remind you if you like. There is a formula negotiated with Government about the funding of Crossrail which was based on fare revenue being linked to RPI plus 1% --

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): There was a chronic refusal by the previous administration to be brave enough to give TfL the funding it needed through the fares package. I do think that was cynical, I do think that was electioneering and it did leave long-term problems with the TfL budget. There is no question about it.

John Biggs (AM): OK. Well if I was an ordinary Londoner I would say you have had about six opportunities to confirm that you will continue with your policy of RPI plus 1% which would imply a fares reduction this year - you have refused to bind yourself to that - and that, therefore, they should expect a fares increase. Is that a reasonable conclusion?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): John [Biggs] and Caroline [Pidgeon], what you can certainly conclude is that there are real pressures on the TfL finances. These are, very largely, chronic and historic pressures that have been built up by repeated refusals to deal with the necessity to charge a reasonable price for the service in the last ten years. That has left real problems with TfL finances.

But I am not now, today, going to reveal what we are doing with the January package because now is not the time.

John Biggs (AM): OK. So it would be fair to say then that every popular decision crowns you in glory and every unpopular decision is someone else's fault. Is that a fair summation?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): No. I am more than happy and more than willing to take unpopular decisions. The sad thing is that the previous inhabitant of this office did not take those unpopular decisions and did not do the right thing with the fares package when he had the opportunity.

Jenny Jones (AM): I am a bit worried that you are just putting your head in the sand and not accepting what everybody seems to know; that public spending is going to be cut and cut quite savagely and, in fact, there are people on your Conservative team here - if you can call them a team because a team works together does it not - on your Conservative Group, who actually want more and bigger cuts in public spending even than we might envisage. So you seem to be not prepared to say anything about difficult decisions.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I do not understand this at all. Not only do I accept the need for cuts in public spending but I think, if you look at what we have been doing in this building, and indeed what all of you -- I congratulate you on the cuts you have been instituting in your allowances of one kind or another. I think that is --

Jenny Jones (AM): But you cannot have cuts and ...

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): -- absolutely correct. That is why we have been able to freeze the council tax, our share of the council tax precept --

Jenny Jones (AM): You are expecting bus passengers to pick up the cost?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): -- that is why we are making cuts of £2.4 billion in the TfL budget --

Jenny Jones (AM): Back to buses. Buses. Buses.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): -- that is why, I think, about 1,000 people have come out of London Underground --

Jenny Jones (AM): You are expecting bus passengers --

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): -- 750 people from the back office --

Jenny Jones (AM): Buses. You are expecting bus passengers to pick up the slack. You are going to drive people off the buses. You are going to put more cars on the road.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Absolute nonsense. Not for the first time I simply do not know what you are talking about.

Jenny Jones (AM): And, as John [Biggs] says, you are going to just say, "Oh it's not my fault; it's the Government's fault" whenever it happens.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Jenny [Jones] --

Jenny Jones (AM): But if you do not plan. You have got to have a plan. I do not understand why you cannot tell us about your plan, because your plan must contain some of the options we have gone through today.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I am not going to discuss, now, what the fares package is going to be for 2010 --

Jenny Jones (AM): Thank you, Chair.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): -- but, suffice it to say --

Jenny Jones (AM): Absolutely no point in asking questions.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): -- it will be no surprise to you or anybody watching and anybody in London, there are huge pressures on our budget. We have a massive black hole to deal with --

Jenny Jones (AM): Thank you, but you are not giving us any ideas about what you are going to do. Thank you, Chair. I have heard enough of repetition and irrelevance.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): -- and, no, I am not going to reveal the fares package today.

Richard Barnes (AM): Is it not the truth, Mr Mayor - and I note John Biggs has disappeared before he can hear it - that, thanks to the financial incompetence of this Government and its failure to begin to project what local government financing and rate support grants are going to be next year that all of us involved in local government are, almost, living in the dark because we do not know what our funding is going to be next year? We do accept the honesty of the opposition - the current opposition - that there will be cuts in national funding and local Government funding, but for us to sit down here today and predict exactly what the fares are going to be next year is, quite honestly, ludicrous - from Jenny Jones and John Biggs' demands - because we do not know what the funding is going to be when the Chancellor himself has not got the courage to stand up and say what the cuts in local Government finance are going to be.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): No, I think, Richard, you are absolutely right. If you look at a macro level, you can certainly see that the failings of the Labour Government, over the last ten years, in many ways mimic the failings of the previous administration here in this place because, by its failure to make the economies when the money was rolling in to the exchequer, by its failure to keep a rein on public spending then, it has made Britain's fiscal position absolutely disastrous.

It has made our ability to weather, our national ability - as I repeatedly say, London will come through very well - the recession so much more precarious by its fiscal profligacy in the period

of the earlier part of this decade. This country is paying for it now and that is why, when you look at the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) countries, it is Britain that is going to be lagging, according to projections, in coming out of the recession. London will, of course, lead the United Kingdom (UK) out of the recession and there are parts of the London economy that are doing far, far, far better than some of the gloomsters predicted. But that is no thanks to the Government.

Richard Barnes (AM): Is it not also true, Mr Mayor, that it is not just bus fares which are under colossal pressure, but also social care and, indeed, support for the poorest members of society, thanks to this socialist Government that we have got, and their latest announcements on housing subsidy is really a disgusting reflection on their achievements?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Correct. It is staggering financial mismanagement that, at the tail end of the Government, it suddenly discovers that the cupboard is bare and all sorts of programmes which were for the benefit of people on the lower incomes in society, are suddenly impossible to pursue, it claims. I really think that is a tragic indictment of the way this Government has been conducted over the last 10/11 years.

2331/2009 - A&E Closure

James Cleverly

Will the Mayor join me in deploring the closure of the Queen Mary's Sidcup A&E from 8 pm to 8 am every night?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Thank you, James. You and I know, because we followed this very, very closely, that that is a decision that was greatly resented by local people in Bexley and in Sidcup and it is something against which both of us campaigned and I am disappointed by that decision.

All I can say is I wrote to the independent reconfiguration panel in March to protest, and I am afraid that we have not been successful. There are issues surrounding the recruitment of enough nurses to keep the accident and emergency (A&E) department going, but that is not a case that I have been successful in making and, of course, I join you in expressing my deep regret about the decision.

James Cleverly (AM): Thank you, Mr Mayor. I want to focus specifically on the night-time closures of the A&E department. The decision was made using the very precise phraseology that, "A temporary closure has been brought in place to ensure patient safety" but this decision was made at very short notice. Despite the question marks over the A&E department at Queen Mary's being in the public domain for months the management team at the new south London hospital's National Health Service (NHS) Trust brought this decision, at very late notice, claiming it was forced into it by circumstances beyond its control.

Do you not feel that, in this case, that further undermines public confidence in the ability of Queen Mary's to deliver adequate health services and, actually, that that exasperates the position that has been created by the cuts brought in by the Government?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I do. As you and I have discussed, and everybody in the area knows, there is a powerful case for keeping the A&E going at Queen Mary's in Sidcup just because, for instance, of the risk of road accidents on the A2 and the A20 and the need to have

a nearby A&E to deal with them. That is one of the reasons why so many people in the area were keen to preserve it.

We have not been successful in that campaign and, I think, to anticipate a question I think Andrew [Boff] is going to ask about NHS across London, we are faced with very considerable cuts. There is no doubt about it. There will be, I am afraid, serious economies being made in the NHS. What I think we are going to need is a strategic view across London about how to protect those services. I think we should be working together with the boroughs to devise a London-wide response to the planned NHS cuts because, otherwise, we will see a repeat of the kind of thing that happened at Queen Mary's, where the NHS simply comes and salami slices away at individual services.

James Cleverly (AM): Thank you. Actually, on that, with regard to having a strategic view on this, will you write to NHS London? One of the points that was raised in the Health and Adult Services Scrutiny Committee at Bexley Council, where the management of the hospital trust was questioned, one of the things that came to light was, despite now having three hospitals within a single NHS trust and despite having the ability to manage finances across the three hospitals, it seemed that little or no planning was put in place to use those economies of scale and to use that flexibility of scale to ensure that absolutely core health provision was maintained at Queen Mary's Hospital.

So will you write to NHS London and demand that it looks at the strategic use of both human resource and financial resource across London to ensure that we get these core services delivered?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Yes. James, I am certainly very keen to ensure that we take a strategic view about the provision of health care in London and that we work together with the boroughs and with the primary care trusts (PCTs) to protect vital services. I thought the arguments for keeping the A&E at Queen Mary's in Bexley were very good. I am sorry that we seem to have lost those.

I do think that you have to introduce a bit of balance into this conversation and you have to recognise that we need reform in the NHS and there are improvements that can be made. We should not be stick-in-the-muds and there are things that can be done to improve the NHS. That is all I will say. But that, I think, must be done by looking at the strategic needs of London as a whole.

James Cleverly (AM): Thank you for that final point. I think you are absolutely right. The improvements that need to be made in the efficiencies of the NHS are widely known. However, my great concern with this is that the bringing together of the three hospitals to form the one super south London hospitals NHS Trust was exactly designed to allow the management team to have the flexibility to deal with pinch points and pressure points like the A&E at Queen Mary's Hospital and they seem to have singularly failed to take advantage of that structure.

I would ask that you support my calls both to the local hospital trust and NHS London to take full advantage of those structural changes to maintain the essential services across South East London.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I am certainly willing to help you, James, in that or, indeed, any other matter.

James Cleverly (AM): Thank you.

2479/2009 - Affordable Housing

Nicky Gavron

Are you aware of any boroughs whose housing policies could be counter-productive to achieving your 50,000 affordable housing target?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Nicky asks whether I am aware of any boroughs whose housing policies could be counter-productive to achieving our 50,000 affordable housing target and the answer is I am not aware of boroughs who are pursuing policies contrary to that. As far as I am aware all the boroughs accept that we are right in having this goal. There is widespread acceptance across London that we should not be dropping our ambitions in spite of the incredible difficulties that we face with the downturn in the housing market. I am sure that you are going to elucidate me as to what the point of your question is.

Nicky Gavron (AM): I wanted to talk a little bit, with you, about wider policy and then get on to some policy in particular. Mayor, is social rented housing a dead end?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): No. It is very, very important and it is a vital component and a huge component of what we are doing.

Nicky Gavron (AM): Do you recognise that quote? It was attributed to Sir Simon Milton in *The Mirror* on Monday.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I neither recognise it nor do I think that it, in any way, represents Sir Simon Milton's views.

Nicky Gavron (AM): I am very relieved about that. I was not so concerned about that but I am certainly concerned when it is on top of comments from Stephen Greenhalgh, who is the Leader of Hammersmith and Fulham and the Housing Adviser to David Cameron, who says that council estates are barracks of the poor, and Localis, the high level Conservative think tank who say that council estates are warehousing poverty.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I am determined, Nicky, to go ahead with policies that, I believe, will generate the maximum quantity of new affordable housing in this city and, indeed, to improve housing throughout the city. I deprecate the policies of the Government which are determined to take away funds and to divert funds that were going to go to the improvement of homes in London through the Decent Homes programme and I have instructed the Homes and Communities Agency (HCA) to countermand that and to make sure that Londoners who are expecting those improvements are going to be able to get them. I hope you support me in that, by the way.

Nicky Gavron (AM): I would support us getting Decent Homes money.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Good.

Nicky Gavron (AM): You seem, though, by diverting to that, to be distancing yourself from this high level group --

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Which high level group? There is no high level group in City Hall

Nicky Gavron (AM): This is Localis which is a high level group. There is correspondence between your Adviser, Richard Blakeway, and this group. Is that because you too, like them, are worried about seen as Shirley Porter-esque? That is a quote from --

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Shirley what?

Nicky Gavron (AM): Porter-esque - ie social engineering in terms of the way Shirley Porter [former Conservative leader, Westminster Council] did it.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Look. I cannot speak for this group since you are introducing it to this conversation for the first time. I have no knowledge of this high level group. I do not know at what level it works. It is not anything to do with the formation of policy here in City Hall.

We are determined to go ahead, in spite of all the difficulties we face, many of those difficulties created by the Government at the moment, the new building and the creation of as many affordable homes as we can. It is extremely difficult. You know how difficult the housing market is at the moment. I think that we have done exceptionally well to get as far as we have in our targets with local boroughs. I congratulate the boroughs on the progress they are making. Normally you ask me about how all the boroughs are doing and you attack the Conservative boroughs for not agreeing to the targets, do you not?

Nicky Gavron (AM): At the moment I am extremely concerned about what looks like a very worrying emerging wholesale attack on the very existence of social housing.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): But you are talking about a group of which I know nothing, that has nothing to do with City Hall, that you have decided to introduce into the -- who are these people?

Darren Johnson (Chair): Let Nicky ask her question. Do not cross-examine her. That is not the role.

Nicky Gavron (AM): In that case then I want your view on each of these proposals.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Proposals from whom?

Nicky Gavron (AM): These are proposals from the Conservative high level policy. Market rents for all housing.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Look, I am sorry, Nicky. I do not feel obliged, in any way, to comment on the strategy or the recommendations of some group of which I know nothing and that you have decided to introduce into the debate here in City Hall. We in City Hall have a programme and an agenda which we are working on, with the boroughs, to deliver more affordable housing across London. This group is, frankly, irrelevant to our proceedings.

Nicky Gavron (AM): OK. I just want you to know what they are discussing. No security of tenure. They want to tear down the Berlin Wall of varying tenures and rent levels. No capital investment in social housing. No duty to house the homeless. Your comments on those?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Look, I do not know who these people are. They are nothing to do with City Hall. Insofar as you may or may not be representing their position accurately their suggestions bear no relation whatever to the policies that we are pursuing.

Nicky Gavron (AM): I am very relieved by that. That means, therefore, that you would give a pledge to fight a Conservative Party manifesto which included these proposals?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): As I say, I am determined, with the funds available to us and with the support that we have got from across the boroughs -- I think 14 out of 16 Conservative boroughs, 6 out of 8 Labour boroughs, 4 out of 5 Liberal Democrat boroughs and 5 out of 5 non-aligned boroughs have so far signed up to our targets. I am determined to go ahead with the very ambitious programme that we have for giving Londoners the housing that they need in spite of the excruciating difficulties that we face because of the slowdown in the housing market.

Nicky Gavron (AM): Let me just take, on the ground, Hammersmith and Fulham now, because there, there are 7 well built and popular estates, roughly 5,000 homes, and they are up for demolition and replacement with no promise that there will be a replacement of social rented units on them, let alone an increase. I would like from you a cast iron guarantee that, under your leadership, there will be no reduction in the number of social rented homes?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Yes.

Nicky Gavron (AM): That regenerated estates will have the same, or higher, levels of social rented housing?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Well, I can certainly tell you that on -- I think we are now getting to the crux of your question. It is really about Hammersmith and Fulham, right? The position is that officers have met with colleagues in Hammersmith and Fulham to discuss their plans and the borough has given a clear commitment, in their consultation document, not to reduce the level of social housing provision in the borough and to promote mixed and sustainable communities. For the last year, 2008/09, the first year of the targets, Hammersmith and Fulham delivered 285 affordable homes, of which more than half - 150 - were social rented.

Nicky Gavron (AM): The target you have negotiated with them is 25% lower than the one you actually suggested originally. I just want to know that council tenants on the estates will still have a home in the same ward, because what is being said is that they will not be able to be housed on those estates, necessarily. Will they have a home in the same ward? I want you to understand --

Richard Barnes (AM): It happens in every borough.

Nicky Gavron (AM): It does not happen in every borough.

Richard Barnes (AM): Yes, it does.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I understand where you are coming from. I understand the question that you are asking. The reality is that Hammersmith and Fulham is producing more social rented housing. I am determined that it should do so. It is joined in that by the vast majority of other London boroughs.

Nicky Gavron (AM): That is rubbish because it is not going to replace at the same level, from what the council says. Can you see why council tenants are rather terrified? Here is one quote, "We fear for our estate's future". They are terrified.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I certainly think it is wrong to scaremonger and to give people a false impression about what the intentions of the council are.

Nicky Gavron (AM): Well, I am going to leave it there.

Steve O'Connell (AM): Mr Mayor, if we can move back to pan-London policy and away from Hammersmith and Fulham for the moment and also get away from policy by think tank? If those of us that have read *Observers* and *Guardians* over the years took notice of think tanks then we would all be going pretty crazy. So let us place think tanks where they should be, which is aways over there.

Would you agree that the threat to quality of life on our housing estates has been very much this raid by Government on the Decent Homes programme to cross fund national house building programmes, probably in the northern part of the town? I met yesterday with the Chief Executive of Sutton borough and I can tell you that Sutton has agreed now your targets and it is incandescent, over there in Sutton, with the way that it is losing some £112 million of funding to bring them up to a three star borough.

So would you not agree that, placing to one side, some of the petty party politics that have been mooted this morning, the fact of the matter is that, if either side of this Chamber has at heart the quality of life of our people in social rented accommodation, we need to be lobbying the Government very hard - and I know you have written to John Healey [Minister for Housing and Planning] - to have second thoughts to make sure that it releases, timely, the funding that has been promised to the boroughs to maintain, to good order, the social rented accommodation in this town?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Absolutely right, Steve, and I know that you had a question later on on this very point. I hope that Labour Members will agree with what Steve is saying and that it is completely wrong that this Government should be taking away Decent Homes funding which people had been expecting and which was going to lead to the improvement of 100,000 homes in London, to bring them up to a habitable standard.

I think it is unbelievable that Labour Members have not made more protest about this. Or maybe they have? Have they? I do not know whether they have or not. They remain in sphinx-like silence on that subject. I hope though that they will join in supporting, Chair, what Steve says, because I think it is deplorable. That is why I believe that the HCA should, effectively, countermand that and the London HCA should make available funding for the Decent Homes programme for all two star Arms Length Management Organisations (ALMOs). I have made that absolutely clear.

Richard Tracey (AM): Mr Mayor, are you still supporting Wandsworth's innovative Hidden Homes policy --

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I certainly am.

Richard Tracey (AM): -- and promoting it around the country?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I am. Thank you for bringing it up in your usual timely fashion, Dick. I had forgotten the Hidden Homes -- it is rarely off my lips but, this morning, I had not yet dragged it into the conversation. Thank you.

2343/2009 - Spending

Brian Coleman

Can you reassure Londoners that you have the drive and determination to drive through the substantial spending cuts (especially in Transport for London) that are going to be required in order to fulfill future public sector spending targets?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Thank you, yes. That really gives me an opportunity to repeat – since Jenny [Jones] likes me to repeat my answers to her – the answer I gave to Jenny, which is, yes. I think that we, in this building, and we, in the Government of London, have actually been leading the way in the country in showing how you can make important economies and that is why we have been able to freeze the precept in a way that I think Londoners deserved and that is why we are pursuing savings of £2.4 billion in TFL and we have made the savings that we have in the LDA. I do think it is vital that we show robust determination in pursuing those savings.

Brian Coleman (AM): There is now general acceptability, is there not, out there on the doorsteps, that we need substantial spending cuts? I am not talking about headline grabbing tinkering with Members of Parliament's (MPs) pay and all that silly trifling nonsense. I am talking about serious deep 20% spending cuts. Many local authorities up and down the country are now getting officers to work on 20% cuts over three years and that is going to be incredibly painful across services in our capital city, not just at the borough level but at our level as well. I think what Londoners are looking to, Mr Mayor, is a lead from you that, frankly, you have got the balls to drive through serious spending cuts, which will mean ending areas of service?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Well, Brian, there is one little point I want to -- obviously you are right that there will be substantial economies but I think you should bear in mind that many people, looking at public spending and listening to this conversation, will realise that over 85% of public spending are salaries for public officials – of which, of course, you are one. Or three!

Brian Coleman (AM): Or three. I was going to say three if you believe *The London Evening Standard*!

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Of course there are a great many emoluments and perks that go with those salaries. I think people are fully aware that the great beast of Government and the great Leviathan of public spending is, in fact, composed, not just of services and infrastructure investments and benefits to the community of all kinds, it is composed of spending on public officials.

I think, actually, that you are wrong in what I thought was an attempt to deprecate some of the economies that were outlined yesterday by the leader of the opposition because I think those are the kind of thing that we need to be attacking and I do think, Brian that if you drive --

Brian Coleman (AM): Mr Mayor, they are complete red herrings are they not? Utter red herrings.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): -- down spending on people's taxes and you stop people running up excessive bills across Government then you can work wonders with the overall profile of Government spending. Many a mickle makes a muckle if I may be so bold as to suggest to you, Brian.

I do not, at all, disagree with you that we need to make substantial economies, but what I will tell you is I do not think you can ignore the salaries, the perks, the privileges and all the rest of it that go to public servants across this country, because they certainly inflate the bill.

Brian Coleman (AM): I am sorry, if people were really interested, therefore, in reducing those sorts of bills, they would be removing tiers of Government. You cannot set up tiers of Government and then baulk at the costs of those tiers of Government once you have set them up. What you can do is strip out tiers of Government to make substantial savings and 10% off Ministers' cars or salaries is a complete red herring, because what we are talking about here is a national debt approaching £1 trillion and we are talking about 20%, over three years, spending cuts.

So that will mean, in TfL, for example, that you have got to look at, surely, closing down whole sections of TfL's work. Now, presumably, you are doing, and your officers are doing, that sort of contingency planning?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Let me take you back to the basic thinking. You are certainly right to say that there is a huge fiscal problem. I think, as a nation, we are failing to grapple with one of the most serious problems which is public sector pensions and we need to have a proper grown up conversation about that and about the long-term affordability of the current structure of public sector pensions. We are not doing that at the moment.

But if you are going to invite me to cut infrastructure projects, investment in things in bricks and mortar and cabling and train tracks that will deliver long-term benefits for London, rather than cutting salaries and fripperies --

Brian Coleman (AM): But you are actually not going to have a choice are you? When the new Chancellor comes in next year you will not have a choice will you?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): -- then let me tell you, I would much rather cut salaries. But you should be aware, Brian, that that is, in itself, not pain free because, as everybody understands, although the London economy is incredibly resilient and incredibly robust and 70% of it is in the private sector, there are large numbers of people in this community who do rely on the State for their employment.

You are right to say there is no pain free solution here, but simply cutting public sector jobs, of course, also produces an eventual cost to the State in the form of unemployment and the attendant social ills. So there are no easy solutions here.

I am not going to agree with whatever manifesto you lay out before me to cut essential services or essential parts of what TfL does. What I am determined to do is to take out cost, and that is what we are doing and that is what we will intensify.

Brian Coleman (AM): But you know. You are an experienced politician. You are not daft. You know you are not going to have a choice. That an incoming Chancellor of the Exchequer of whichever party -- you know that in a Conservative manifesto only --

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): With due respect to you, I do not need you to tell me that.

Brian Coleman (AM): Mr Mayor, let me ask the question and then I will let you answer it! You know that an incoming Conservative Chancellor has said he is not going to ring fence anything except the NHS. You know that should there be a new incoming Labour Chancellor - which I doubt, but there might well be - that, again, the Labour Government is talking about substantial public spending cuts. So you are not actually going to have that choice. You know that, throughout London, councils are looking at the possible ending, for example, of building schools for the future funding, on which many of our local authorities are relying to rebuild.

So tinkering with trivia or just looking at a few job cuts is not going to deal with the situation that you will be presented with by the Government in your loss of grant. The only alternative will be for you to raise the precept which, presumably, you are not going to do during your first Mayoralty, and this group will support you, wholeheartedly, in a precept freeze. Perhaps you could give us an indication of where your view on taxation for Londoners should be on a precept freeze?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): That is Mike's [Tuffrey] question later on. Mike has got a question on that.

Brian Coleman (AM): But, if the grant goes, your only choice is to either raise revenue through the fare box or to raise the precept, or a combination of those. So which will it be?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Obviously it is always open to Members of the Assembly who draw more than one salary, for instance, to give them up. How about that? Popular? No. There are plenty of things --

Brian Coleman (AM): If I thought that would fill the £3 billion black hole that you have got in the TfL accounts, I might do it. But you know you have got a black hole there to fill, never mind what is going to happen to your future grant. Now how are you going to deliver the cuts necessary and give the political direction to London that will be needed to get us through those cuts?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): As I think followers of this conversation will know, over a long period we have been through some pretty painful decisions here. There are things that we have been obliged to postpone and projects that were being kept alive that had no realistic hope of being properly funded because there was no capital investment for them, that we have scrapped.

I am delighted by the fresh invitation that I am getting to outline the TfL business plan in advance. I am not going to do that. There is a great deal of work being done on it and, obviously, you can scrutinise that when it appears, Brian, but I am not proposing, now, that we should direct our fire at - and I am sure that Londoners and Members of the Assembly will support me in this - vital services and vital improvements that this city needs. I am much more interested in finding the savings that can be found - and I think the leader of the opposition is absolutely right - across Whitehall and across Government as a whole, in expenditure on public servants and their perks and fripperies.

Brian Coleman (AM): All right. Just one final thought. Can you tell me then what instructions you have given to officers about your medium-term financial planning for the whole Authority, not just TfL?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Well, as you know, we are going through a period where I want to see very, very substantial economies, not just in the budget of TfL, but in the LDA,

which has reduced headcount by 30%. Of course, in this very body, we have cut 180 officials and been able to freeze the precept and, in the Metropolitan Police Service, clearly, there is huge pressure to find further cuts of about £68 million this year, I believe.

Darren Johnson (Chair): OK. Well after that supportive questioning from a leading member of your administration, it is probably time to hear from one of your political opponents now --

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Leading by example.

Darren Johnson (Chair): -- so John Biggs!

John Biggs (AM): Obviously I speak as one of your supporters on this issue and you have the assurance of Labour Members that we will rush to protect you from the knuckle scraping tendencies of the Conservative Party if they come to pillage London and take away its resources! I think I welcome part of your response where you are saying you will stand up for London against a Government which is planning to slash our services. That is a reasonably clear statement from you is it?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Well, I certainly think that this is not the moment -- I hope everybody agrees. No matter how seductive Brian [Coleman] was in his invitation to me to lay out various things that I wanted to cut in TfL, that is not the way we should approach it, folks. That is not the stuff to give the troops. We have got to defend and protect vital services for Londoners, and I will do that.

John Biggs (AM): I think Londoners and the wider public will welcome, also, Brian's [Coleman] revelation that, as is fairly widely known, in the unlikely event that there was a Conservative Government there would be massive cuts in spending which would threaten those services which you have already told us are essential for London's continued prosperity.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Well, I certainly think there are going to be economies and I am going to encourage economies but I am not going to have economies for things that I think are essential.

John Biggs (AM): It is fascinating to have a Conservative Mayor who desperately needs a Labour Government!

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I do not need a Labour Government. That would be the last thing. As I said earlier on, the last thing this country needs is any more agony from this Government whom we have had for quite long enough.

John Biggs (AM): You highlighted also - this is a bit of a weasely way out - that there are lots of ways to make savings through trimming the fat, if you like. Can you assure every police officer in London that their pension will be safe under your administration, in the event that there are spending pressures?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): The pension fund arrangements of the Metropolitan Police Service will be completely protected. I have no doubt about that whatever.

John Biggs (AM): OK. And civil service pensions as well in London? Or are they part of the bloated fat that can be cut?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): As I said earlier on, I do think there is a discussion to be had about public sector pensions and we need to --

John Biggs (AM): OK. So you might withdraw the GLA family from the national pension fund agreement?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): We need to look at that.

John Biggs (AM): OK. So we take that as a possibility. I wanted to ask you another question.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Unfortunately I do not have - much as I would like it - jurisdiction over this subject. I think it is important to raise it.

John Biggs (AM): OK. Talking about, in Brian's [Coleman] question, your control over the GLA family and he specifically refers to TfL, but it is about the wider GLA family. You refer to the LDA. Are you happy that you have control over that? By which I mean, on the headline you have cut staff, but there seem to be an awful lot of consultants coming in the back door. Do you think that is under control? Some of whom are the people you made redundant, of course.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I do think that Peter Rogers [Chief Executive, London Development Agency] is doing a very, very good job of getting a grip on some of the worst excesses of the LDA which, I think, had lost credibility and lost support over the last few years in London.

John Biggs (AM): Right. This is the question, I think, you have been trying to avoid answering today, and it is that, in the media in the last week, a clear statement was said that we have our hands on the tiller of the Metropolitan Police Service, we are not going to roll over like we did before and we are not a rubber stamp. Do you believe, and can you clarify, that you have the controls and checks and balances over the Metropolitan Police Service in London which gives you the satisfaction, as Mayor, and which demonstrate, also, that you understand the boundaries between your responsibilities as Mayor --

Darren Johnson (Chair): Is this in relation to public spending?

John Biggs (AM): Yes, it is in relation to spending.

Darren Johnson (Chair): Can you clarify the question then, John?

John Biggs (AM): And the proper exercise of independent duties by the Metropolitan Police Service?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Yes. Let us be absolutely clear that the arrangements of the Metropolitan Police Authority give political accountability and oversight to London and, of course, as a condominium with the Home Office, but the operational management of the Metropolitan Police Service is in the hands of the Commissioner of the Metropolitan Police Service, Sir Paul Stephenson, and he does an extremely good job, as I have said tirelessly over the last few days.

Darren Johnson (Chair): John, I am only going to take more questions on this if it is related directly to public spending cuts, which is the question. So if it is about policing and public

spending cuts and accountability issues, then fine. If it is the wider issues then you are on the wrong topic.

John Biggs (AM): Absolutely. It is about policing and public spending. No, no, no. This is clearly about public spending because, in his interviews, Mr Malthouse said that things are not written down and they are done on a handshake. So can you assure Londoners that there is no handshake about budget spending cuts within the Metropolitan Police Service which we do not know about?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): The Metropolitan Police Authority, on which you sit, draws up the Metropolitan Police Service budget and you are there to scrutinise it.

John Biggs (AM): I think at roughly the same time as you gave us the assurance about RPI plus 1% on fares you said that you were committed to preserving police numbers in London. Can you repeat that commitment today?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I certainly am determined to protect front line policing as far as we possibly can in the current financial circumstances.

John Biggs (AM): So, substantially, you are saying you are on our side rather than the side of Brian Coleman and the Conservative Party on this issue?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I think Brian [Coleman] makes a very, very good point and very trenchantly and powerfully put, which is that there must be wide ranging economies across Government, and I think everybody watching this would support him.

All I am trying to say, respectfully and humbly, to you is, I think, it is our job, here in the GLA group, when people come and say they want to make cuts, to distinguish between cuts in personnel, cuts in waste, cuts in ludicrous fripperies for Government officials and cuts in vital services for Londoners. It is, intellectually, not a difficult distinction to make. There is a huge amount of flab and fat to be taken out and that is what we are going to do.

John Biggs (AM): So you believe that, whatever the scale of cuts from whatever the Chancellor is, you can meet that need through flab cutting in City Hall?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): You are again asking me to try to outline a strategy to deal with a hypothetical situation. I am determined to protect the vital investments that this city needs whilst cutting, as far as we possibly can, wasteful public expenditure.

John Biggs (AM): So you will be making announcements in the next few weeks, presumably, as the budget approaches, of the cuts in flab that you are proposing for the coming year?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Obviously in the TfL business plan you will see a great deal of information about that, of course.

John Biggs (AM): And they will protect services, protect police numbers, protect fire cover and remove these things which were never necessary in the first place?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): In the nature of the political dispute there is going to be a debate about where the cuts fall and what is essential and what is not essential. That is something that, I am afraid, we cannot anticipate here in this Chamber this morning.

John Biggs (AM): So you cannot rule anything in or out at this stage?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): What I will tell you is I do not want to see front line policing and cuts in London's fire protection and I certainly do not want to see anything that diminishes our ability to make the big infrastructure investments we need in this city to make it more liveable, more attractive and more wonderful to live in.

I think that we are in danger of talking ourselves into a sort of psychosis of destruction and going around assuming that we have to eviscerate wonderful schemes that actually would be of great long-term benefit. Let us just be a little bit more positive in our approach to this and let us remember that we can make the necessary savings without doing damage to the essential things that we want to do for London.

John Biggs (AM): Right. The problem with lists of course is that things not on lists, we might conclude, are going to be treated differently. So you have not said anything about increasing fares and you have not said anything about cutting bus services, for example. So my conclusion --

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): No. I have given you no list. There is nothing either on or off --

John Biggs (AM): Yes, you did. You said police, you said fire cover, you said essential things. Anyway, thank you, Chair.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Come on. Do me a favour. Come on. All I am trying to do is give you what my thinking and my objectives are here, which is that I accept that we have a duty, at a time of real financial difficulty, to try to cut waste, but I am going to stick up very, very strongly and passionately for the things that, I believe, London needs.

Tony Arbour (AM): There is no one on this side, Mr Mayor, who does not support your long-term aim about protecting the vital services which Londoners need. I think the debate is, what are the vital services which are being provided by this building and by the GLA family - and it is those things that we need to concentrate on. The boroughs are looking to you to set an example, and I suspect the Conservative Party nationally is looking to you to set an example, of the tight ship that we are going to need to have over the next couple of Parliaments. There can be no doubt that there are very many people in London and outside who believe that the lean ship can get rid of really a great many passengers.

You have said that we have to be very cautious about indicating what cuts or economies need to be made because that affects jobs and, clearly, that has a knock on effect, you know people are not paying tax and all the rest of it. But it is not the function of the GLA to provide jobs. It is not the function of the GLA to provide outdoor relief for people who would otherwise be unemployed --

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Of course not.

Tony Arbour (AM): What we ought to be looking at - and I want your assurance that we will be looking at - is continuing along the route that you have already set. It was a marvellous example, you freezing the council tax. Of course you were followed in that by many of the London boroughs. We would expect you to do the same.

I see no sign of your freezing of the council tax or the reduction of the council tax in Hammersmith and Fulham or the freezing of council tax up and down the country which has meant that vital services have been, in any way, affected. I see no reason to suppose that any future changes, any future economies that you make, are going to make services worse.

We are going to be behind you. We are going to seek to stiffen your sinews to --

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I do not think they need any stiffening but I am grateful for your medical ...

Tony Arbour (AM): Boris, I think it is important --

Darren Johnson (Chair): Can we wrap this up into a question, Tony?

Tony Arbour (AM): Yes. I think it is important and I would like your assurance that you are going to set that example that we have asked for, that you are going to show the rest of the country what a proper Conservative administration can do in delivering proper vital services without making harmful cuts. We are convinced -- and I have come here on many occasions suggesting things --

Darren Johnson (Chair): I think he has got the question. You are in danger of answering your own question now.

Tony Arbour (AM): OK. Right.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I am grateful to you, Tony, and I think, actually, that not only this administration but the whole GLA body has shown the way in making the cuts that we have in our office costs. I look to all GLA Assembly Members to show a lead in that, and I think some of you have.

Clearly, by reducing the headcount here, painful though it is, by making economies here of many, many millions, by cutting the LDA in the way that we have, by squeezing fat out of the police and, above all, by cutting into TfL budgets, we have been able to make very substantial economies. That is why we were able to lead the way in freezing the council tax. You can have no doubt that it is my intention to pursue a similar agenda over the years ahead.

Richard Barnbrook (AM): Thank you, Chair. I think Boris and this house here will be quite happy to listen to what I am about to say. I think the idea is to lead by example, Mayor Boris, and this idea of cuts I suggested last year, not only the idea of trying to reduce the staff down by cuts - which is probably a good idea, I am not 100% sure - and to reduce our wages down.

I think there are a lot of fat cats sitting round this table and really do not warrant the £100,000 plus wages a year. To be quite honest, I think we should take an example of Doncaster where the Mayor there has halved his wage - in fact, more than that - and he has got rid of a lot of the unnecessary woodwork inside there. I would be quite happy - and I mean this with sincerity - if you, Mayor Boris, were to get rid of the whole of this GLA element here that, in itself, would save this city thousands. You standing as a Mayor. We are not necessary to your functioning.

James Cleverly (AM): Unaccountable dictatorship. Interesting.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I am very, very interested in that proposal of political hara-kiri by the --

Richard Barnbrook (AM): Save more money. Lead by example.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): -- Member. I do think that it is important that this body, which has considerable executive powers over London, is properly scrutinised and I am sure Members would agree with that. That does not mean that I do not think we can do it more cheaply. We can do it more cheaply.

I was very pleased, by the way, to see the leader of the opposition, yesterday, take up an idea which I think I floated, that we should get rid of all these ridiculous Government cars that they have. Why not? Absolutely. I think it unbelievable that all these -- not just Ministers but civil servants. Not just civil servants; huge numbers of people on the taxpayers' payroll are ferried around London in cars --

Richard Barnbrook (AM): It does not answer the question about halving your own wage.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I think it unbelievable. Why is that? There is a very good public transport service. These people should be conveyed by our public transport service so that they know the issues affecting it and so they can be counted upon to stick up and protect it, and protect it from people who are driving around in taxpayer funded cars and who think that we can cut public transport in London. I think it absolutely incredible that people should be advocating anything of that kind --

Richard Barnbrook (AM): OK. Thank you very much. You have answered that.

Kit Malthouse (AM): Mr Mayor, I, for one, welcome the fact that you have, perfectly legitimately in your role as Mayor, set a very ambitious budgetary strategy for the Metropolitan Police Service over the next three years. Would you agree with me that the taxpayers of London are ill served by the ridiculous debate about quantity rather than about quality? We do not have to look very far in London for some shining examples of doing more for less in Wandsworth and Westminster, both of which regularly levy the lowest council tax, half very often, of their neighbouring boroughs' council tax, and yet are, consistently, at the top of the Labour Government's league tables, not only for general performance but also for some of the performance they give to the most vulnerable in society through their social services and children's services' departments and that, often, those councils which charge the most for tax are those that are seen to fail most spectacularly and, co-incidentally, happen to be under Labour Party control.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): That is absolutely true and the size of a Government or a Government department is often in inverse proportion to its effectiveness. That is something that I think the whole of Government needs to bear in mind. We have a situation in this country where the State's share of gross domestic product (GDP) has been growing and growing and growing. There are now huge numbers of people, frankly, who are on the taxpayers' payroll when, in my view, they do not need to be. That is the basic problem with the shape and structure of the economy in this country today.

2484/2009 - Mayoral Direction

Len Duvall

You had to compel the board of the London Development Agency to provide funds for your educational academies program via a 'Mayoral Direction'. Why did you force the LDA to provide funding for academies against the Board's wishes?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Thank you, Len. Your question relates to the Mayoral direction for the LDA over academies and it is absolutely true that some members of the LDA Board had doubts about the proposals on academies. It was necessary, eventually, to issue a direction to get that going. I think that was the right thing to do. I hope you agree with me since, after all, as far as I understand it, academies are official Labour Government policy.

Len Duvall (AM): This is not an issue about whether academies are good or bad. I am a supporter of academies. It is an issue about another constitutional relationship mess that you seem to be getting into, not just on policing, but within the LDA.

You say some had doubts. Well, actually, they all signed up to a recommendation at the end where they had real reservations about your proposals, and one of those reservations is that the model that you proposed - and presumably you have got the hand on the tiller of the LDA, or your adviser has, because this is an important policy for you - did not have value for money. They said that your model did not have value for money. Why do you think they said that?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Well, I am determined that we should be helping London's children to get the skills that they need. I do not think, if you look at the record of education in London, that it is good enough. It is a major cause of social inequality in this city. You say that you support the academies' programme. I do not see why, therefore, you are objecting to our attempt to promote --

Len Duvall (AM): Sorry, Chair, can I just interrupt the Mayor because he is not answering the question about value for money?

Darren Johnson (Chair): Come in with an additional question then, Len.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I am determined that we will get value for money from the academies' programme, I think that it is an extremely good development for the academies' programme and, indeed, for this body, that we should be getting involved, because so many of the problems in our society are related to under-achievement of kids in school. If we can make a difference there - and they affect policing, they affect all the issues that we have been discussing, the rowdiness on buses or whatever it happens to be - then I think that we should.

You say that there is some sort of constitutional issue here. I find that absolutely satirical; that you think there is some sort of constitutional issue here. What you have got here is nothing but the most naked and transparent procedure by which everything that goes on between the LDA and me is entirely public.

Len Duvall (AM): Why did you need to put your special adviser then on the Board, if there are not some relationship issues there? What was that about then?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Well, there is every good reason for having as close as possible a relationship between this body and the LDA.

Len Duvall (AM): Why is it that a number of people that you appointed to the LDA did not have confidence in the proposals put forward in that paper, that you would have been advised of and consulted on, did not support - and there are some declared supporters (make what you like of what their declarations) - supporters of academies did not feel comfortable in supporting those proposals along. I have only just raised one on value for money. If you have not answered how you are going to do that maybe you will share that in the transparent world that you live within. Hear you saying that it does not really matter about value for money on this issue. As long as it is your proposal it will go through. You will make sure that Board actually has to administer it, through your direction, and that is really all you are concerned about. Tell me how you are going to do value for money?

I share the concerns that you have around education and life opportunities for young people in London --

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Good.

Len Duvall (AM): -- there is no problem about that. I might have a view about academies. Was this the right way to do it? There were alternative proposals proposed. Have you blocked that investigation into alternative proposals that the LDA has asked? What is your position on value for money and have you blocked any alternative proposals that would have offered value for money on life opportunities for young people in our schooling system around that?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I am absolutely determined to use the LDA to improve the life chances of kids across London and I do think that there were some issues around various members of the LDA Board who had difficulties with some of what was proposed. I think those difficulties have very largely evaporated, irrespective of the direction that we gave them. But what you cannot say is that there has been anything here that has been less than transparent. I think the problem with the LDA --

Len Duvall (AM): What I am saying, Chair, the checks and balances of the LDA, which have advised you there are doubts about the model you are proposing on value for money and, like all the other answers we have had this morning - on your flagship policies, whether it is buses, whether it is your spending programme and the plans for the spending programme - you are not coherent in coming up with suggesting where is the direction of travel, except that is the path you are going to. The people that you appointed --

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Sorry, I am not coherent in coming up with suggesting what the direction of travel is except the path I am going on?

Len Duvall (AM): - on the LDA, people you trust and have confidence in, have said, "Boris, hold on here. There may be another way to achieve your objectives". You have ignored them. They have said, "Give us direction". They have set out a number of issues and you do not seem to have any answers on a major piece of flagship policy for your administration. I find that really worrying and I suspect other people do around this table.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I think most people will find it peculiar that you seem to be hostile to us assisting in the academies programme when these are widely supported by the Labour Party, they are widely supported across London and I think that they offer a real prospect of improvement in the life chances of kids in London. I am determined that we should go ahead with them.

What you have, instead of the closed door behind the arras dealings that used to go on, with the LDA being stealthily ordered to do this or that, you have a transparent system whereby our relations with the LDA are absolutely public and open to scrutiny. I have decided, in the interests of the academies programme, it was necessary to issue a direction and I am very, very pleased that that programme will be going in, and I hope you are too.

Len Duvall (AM): What must be worrying, Mr Mayor --

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Are you or not?

Len Duvall (AM): -- is that your people that you appointed, the people that you take advice from, have told you, "Be careful of this proposal, there may be other ways to do it" and you have got a closed mind. If anything, that brings in a worry about some of the earlier questions we have had about the stewardship and your administration and the direction of it over the coming years. You are not prepared to listen or take advice or even walk the extra mile to see if their alternatives would give the same outcomes in a different way. That is what it says. And you need to think very carefully about that because, if it does not come right, or if you are blocking some of the LDA issues, then you have got a constitutional relationship. By the way, you have not answered why you put your special adviser on to the LDA --

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I did answer that.

Len Duvall (AM): -- if that is not a relationship, what is?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I did answer that because I think it is important to have a close relationship between this building and the LDA. In my view that relationship should be made even closer, if I may put it that way --

Len Duvall (AM): Oh well we might be in agreement on that.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): What is that?

Len Duvall (AM): Might be in agreement on that.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I think we should be. And I think, given, Len, --

Len Duvall (AM): If you find the courage to do it.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): -- that actually you support the academies programme. By your own account you support it. I think your line of questioning is very, very perverse and I hope that you share my satisfaction that the LDA has gone ahead and decided to support it.

Len Duvall (AM): The line of questioning might be perverse when you are challenged about who is value for money, and if you are not prepared to look at the value for money issues, as you lecture us here at every Mayor's Question Time, it says to me that you choose which value for money options you want to look at and which ones you do not want to do --

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): That is my job.

Len Duvall (AM): I might be a supporter of academies but I am not blinded to look at alternatives if I think that is it. That is what you are proving that you are.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): What I think you need to do is to direct your complaint to the Government which you nominally support --

Len Duvall (AM): Oh please! Not my fault, guv.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): -- and register your objections to the expansion of the academy campaign, which I think is a --

Len Duvall (AM): Are you in charge of the LDA?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): -- flagship of Labour Government funding.

Len Duvall (AM): Are you the Mayor of London? Take some responsibility.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): It seems to me really, really bizarre I am being attacked for not taking responsibility and also for issuing a draconian and dictatorial direction. I really do not see how you can have it both ways. I am either a dictator or I am not taking responsibility. Work it out. Which one is it?

Roger Evans (AM): Those of us who sat through the previous eight years of secrecy in the LDA and, frankly, Stalinist control from the centre, actually welcome the new transparent approach.

Can I ask you though, Mr Mayor, to build on that by issuing a direction, or even just advice to the LDA, that they make more, or all of their agendas if possible - I accept some things are commercially confidential - but everything except those confidential figures should be public documents, so that we can all see what is happening at the LDA Board and form an opinion?

Brian Coleman (AM): And the minutes.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): As far as I am aware they are all put --

Brian Coleman (AM): No.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Oh no. Are they not? No. Are they not on the web?

Roger Evans (AM): Mr Mayor, there is some way to go on this and I would suggest that you take, as a model --

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I am sure that we can rapidly satisfy the very, very strong appetite that I am sure there is out there in the public to read the LDA minutes on the web and we will get them out there.

Roger Evans (AM): Can I suggest you take, as a model, the work that has been done in the Fire Authority, where virtually none of the material now is in the exempt section, and it has not actually harmed the functioning of that Authority.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I will certainly look at the work of the Fire Authority with renewed pleasure and confidence and I will see what I can do to invite the LDA to learn what lessons they can.

Darren Johnson (Chair): OK. We have a commitment from the Mayor there. Andrew Boff?

Andrew Boff (AM): Mr Mayor, will you join with me in congratulating the Mossbourne Academy which has --

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Yes, I will.

Andrew Boff (AM): -- in Hackney, which has achieved such marvellous results in the last round of GCSEs and the first results since it was opened and has improved the life chances of many of the young people who attend that school from some fairly deprived areas of London? I would hope that you would join in --

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I do. I wholeheartedly join in your support of the Mossbourne Academy, which I am sure is echoed by Len Duvall and other passionate advocates of academies. Why, then, do they seem to stand in the way of our programme to give other kids across London similar advantage? Heaven knows.

Andrew Boff (AM): Would you also, Mr Mayor, accept that the Mossbourne Academy was set up without a penny of LDA money?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I am sure you are right in saying so.

Andrew Boff (AM): What would you say, Mr Mayor, to somebody who is unemployed and unskilled in east London being told that actually £8 million of the money that should be spent on their skills now, is going to be spent on a programme that could actually get its resources from elsewhere?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): If by that you mean that we should not be embarking on the academies programme --

Andrew Boff (AM): It is a fairly strong hint!

Tony Arbour (AM): Exactly right.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Seems to be what you are driving at! What is wrong with the Conservatives today?! What is going on with these guys?! I would have to say, respectfully, that I do think the academies programme has value and I do think we should be supporting it but I think we should be adding value and I want to make sure that the academies we support do have some extra dimension of value.

Andrew Boff (AM): Thank you, Mr Mayor. When this Assembly comes to conclude how it will scrutinise this investment in the future, would you suggest we have two scrutiny committees; one for outer London and one for inner London? We could call the inner London one the Inner London Education Authority and we can call the outer one the Outer London Education Authority?! Do you not think that you have enough to do without doing education as well?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): No, because, as I say, I do think that there is a huge problem, in London, with under achievement of kids in schools. We have far too many, 40%, of 11 year olds unable to read and write and we have massive problems with kids not getting into the jobs that they need. The kind of academies I think we could focus on will help in that direction. I see absolutely no harm and, indeed, every good in us getting involved and showing a lead.

Andrew Boff (AM): Thank you, sir. Can we expect, therefore, that we, perhaps, will be starting up some independent hospitals for where we feel that there are health inadequacies within? That might be a good idea. The principle is the same. It is not the job of this GLA to embark on controlling education and skills --

Tony Arbour (AM): Quite right.

Andrew Boff (AM): That is the remit and that is what we should be doing.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I take very humbly and sincerely the point that you make. I profoundly disagree with you. I think that we have a duty to all of London to do our best to maximise the life chances of kids who are, frankly, being let down and betrayed by this Labour Government and, if I can do anything to make a difference with the tools that are available to us here in the GLA, then I am going to do so.

Darren Johnson (Chair): Jennette Arnold, very briefly, because Labour is on its last half a minute. Not of its entire history; just for this session!

Jennette Arnold (Deputy Chair): Well I am glad I am the last woman standing to speak!

Jennette Arnold (Deputy Chair): Chair, thank you. It was just to extend what Mr Boff had said. I just resent the cherry picking approach and will the Mayor join me in congratulating all those other academies - in fact all the schools in London - who have done so well --

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): All the what, Jennette?

Jennette Arnold (Deputy Chair): All the schools and all our young people --

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Yes, of course.

Jennette Arnold (Deputy Chair): And also will he recognise that the success of the academies, including Mossbourne in Hackney, is due to the excellent leadership of the Labour Mayor of Hackney, Mayor Jules Pipe?

Darren Johnson (Chair): Very quick answer to that.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Look. I have very friendly relations with all sorts of people in local Government in London including Jules [Pipe] --

Jennette Arnold (Deputy Chair): The answer is, yes, excellent leader!

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): -- but what I will say is that I am grateful to you, Jennette, for your support - since you are about the only person offering it! - for our academies programme. I believe, Jennette, that you are right and that our actions and our willingness to intervene and our willingness to put our necks on the line will be vindicated.

2336/2009 - 462 Bus Service

Roger Evans

My constituents have expressed considerable concern about the poor reliability of the 462 bus service. What is TfL doing to ensure that the reliability of this route, which has been deficient for a very long time, is improved?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Thank you, very much. Another extremely helpful question from my beloved Conservative colleagues! Roger, I am grateful, actually to you and to your constituent, because you are perfectly right that we did identify some anomalies on the 462; two drivers who were causing difficulties. One bus service was, in fact, running early, as I understand it. I may be doing an injustice to your constituent, but I understand that he was sitting in the pub watching as the 462 arrived, repeatedly early, and leaving early, in such a way as to deprive him and his fellow drinkers of the chance of using that bus service before they had had a chance to drain their last drinks. That was a deplorable state of affairs. I am grateful to him and to you for bringing this to our attention. TfL has now rectified that and the bus drivers in question have both, as I understand it, been disciplined.

Roger Evans (AM): Thank you, Mr Mayor. You are, as usual, far better briefed on these matters than many of us around the table.

Yes, the bus does run early and, I understand, at the weekend, one of them actually ran 14 minutes early. Now very few people turn up 14 minutes in advance for the bus so they were, understandably, upset if they learned that it had arrived before they had at the stop. Perhaps a slightly unusual experience on some other bus routes in London.

What sort of sanctions do you actually have against the operator, because this has been a long-term problem which has been going for a great deal of time and it may be necessary to bring those in?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I am grateful for that. The operator in this case was of course Arriva. Arriva has disciplined both drivers. I am not clear that we thought it necessary to impose any particular sanctions on Arriva although, clearly, if there is a recurrence of this, we will have to look at that.

Roger Evans (AM): Is that a statement that it is being monitored carefully and there will be sanctions?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I think we can take it from the activities of your constituent that there is going to be very careful monitoring of this particular bus and bus stop in the future and everybody will be on tenterhooks to make sure they do not turn up too early.

Roger Evans (AM): I think the constituents in mind feel that we should be monitoring things, rather than leaving them to do it.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Roger, if there is a recurrence of the problem and if we feel that the problem lies with Arriva rather than with two aberrant drivers then, clearly, discipline sanctions will be imposed by TfL upon the contractor.

2281/2009 - Amnesty for Illegal Immigrants

Richard Barnbrook

According to the Purchasing Managers Indices (PMI) across all regions, London saw the steepest rate of job cuts in July. The unemployment rate generally is becoming alarming. With this in mind will the Mayor now agree that to give amnesty to illegal immigrants would exacerbate London's growing unemployment problem by potentially bringing thousands more people onto a job market of diminishing opportunities?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): The question asks whether it is a good idea to be considering giving an amnesty to those who have been here for a very long time without regularisation of their status in circumstances of growing unemployment.

I would merely point out that many such people who are here and have been here for a very long time are already in employment and, therefore, the kind of people we are talking about are not adding to the unemployment register. What we want to do is to see if there is a practical way, that does not create a magnetic lunar pull to attract illegal immigrants to this country, to regularise the status of people who have been for a very long time, who are law abiding, who are loyal to this country, who want to be part of society and to allow them to enter into the economy properly by paying taxes.

That is why we are still considering - and I think this body has played a good role - in promoting the idea of an earned amnesty. I am pleased with the support that, at least some of you, have given this suggestion. Thank you, Jennette [Arnold].

Jennette Arnold (Deputy Chair): The Assembly.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Thank you. Sorry. I am grateful to you, Jennette, for the work you and I have done jointly on this.

Richard Barnbrook (AM): I think what the Mayor and this house - I have to say the other side of this floor and not this side of the floor - seems to not understand is the fact of illegal immigrants. The term illegal means they are here without legality and you can say they are long-term or short-term but we do not know. You, I am damned sure, cannot prove to me whether they have been here for two days, two hours or two years.

What is more important, it seems that this consideration -- a bendy bus here, a bendy bus there, uniforms here, polka dot shoes here, timetables there is really quite irrelevant when the statistics - and these are Government statistics - from the Purchasing Managers Indices on the regional accounting for job losses shows that London had the steepest fall in July. Let us go back to some statistics --

Darren Johnson (Chair): There is very little time left so if you want to wrap it up into a question otherwise you might not get an answer.

Richard Barnbrook (AM): I think Labour went over 64 minutes so there is 1 minute 14 seconds. The unemployment statistics. This is by the Office for National Statistics. March to May 2008. Unemployment showed 2,600 in London. Government statistics, not black market ones. March to May 2009: 310,000. That is an increase of a 50,000 loss of jobs in London. The Olympic contract working - whatever it may be, if anyone knows if that is on track or not - had, in the last couple of months, 10,000 foreign employees - and this is from GLA statistics -

coming in. Now every job that goes to somebody that is illegal or being brought in here, outside the local community, takes away a job from Londoners.

Darren Johnson (Chair): Right. Let us have a brief answer to that otherwise there will not be any time left.

Richard Barnbrook (AM): I will continue with this. It is against your own comments, Boris. In here, in the agenda, it is the 13th Mayoral agenda, it says, "I will continue to work to ensure that we do all we can to tackle the unemployment --

Darren Johnson (Chair): Right. You are now out of time, Mr Barnbrook.

Richard Barnbrook (AM): -- issues faced by Londoners for young graduates to long-term jobless people". How can you work on behalf of an idea that this amnesty will benefit Londoners and their employment without this worked out? Forget the buses. Forget all the routes. I believe you have 40 seconds to reply on the grounds of what Labour was given.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Can I give an answer? My answer is that you will not promote employment in this city and you will not help people back into jobs by promoting prejudice and discrimination against people from any other part of the world.

2348/2009 - Air Quality

Gareth Bacon

What was discussed in your meeting with Jim Fitzpatrick MP on 3 August, and has any additional support been proposed by the Government to help improve London's air quality?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Thank you, Gareth. There was a good productive meeting with Jim Fitzpatrick [Minister of State for Food, Farming and Environment] - kind of! Clearly, the Government needs to be aware of the serious challenge presented by the European Union's fines for air quality standards and they are, I think, in need of waking up to some of the problems that we face in this city, as a result of national policies, that reduce our air quality and make it less breathable and less sweet than it should be; and we are going to be giving them, by the end of September, an Air Quality Strategy which will have lots of very, very good components; making the bus fleet cleaner and greener, as we have been discussing right at the beginning. I know it has the added support of almost everybody except Val [Shawcross].

We are also going to be pioneering in London the use of low carbon vehicles in the GLA fleet and promoting retro-fitting - a lot of the nitrogen oxides in London comes, in fact, from old boilers and that is why retro-fitting is so important - and dealing, in particular, with the bad air quality hotspots on London's roads that let the city down.

I am confident that, with that package, we will be able to persuade the European Commission that we are on target to improve, very considerably, the air quality in this city.

Gareth Bacon (AM): Thank you, Mr Mayor. For some context on this, this is something that has been kicked around in the Assembly in numerous fora, both in Plenary meetings, in Mayoral Question Time meetings and also in Environment Committee meetings. The Environment Committee produced its own report on this a while back and I think some of the

recommendations are being actively considered by yourself and Isabel Dedring [Mayoral Advisor on the Environment, GLA] for your forthcoming Air Quality Strategy.

But the limits were set by the European Union ten years ago, in 1999, and came into effect, in terms of particulate matter (PM₁₀), in 2005 and the nitrogen dioxide (NO₂) limits will come into effect in 2010. There are eight areas in the UK that currently fail at the limits that have been set by the European Union.

When I asked you this question back in May you reported back about the working party that had been set up around about the end of January with representatives of this building and with the then-Minister, Lord Hunt. Now, round about the time that I asked that question numerous Labour Government Ministers had decided that Gordon Brown was not the saviour of the universe and were all deserting what was, at that time (and still is), the sinking ship that is the Labour Government. Lord Hunt was among those who were reshuffled so, of course, we have got a new Minister, Jim Fitzpatrick.

At the time that I asked you the question, you indicated that, actually, the Government has not been terrible forthcoming in terms of practical measures to deal with the PM₁₀ limit breaches. Has anything that the Government brought up at the meeting in August improved from that situation?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): No. What we need to do is to get an understanding from Government that this has got to be solved at a national level, and it cannot simply heap the blame on us here in London. Of course we are going to produce an Air Quality Strategy that will lead the country and, indeed, I think lead Europe, but they need to take national measures as well. I think 40% of concentrations of PM₁₀ and 20% of concentrations of NO₂ in this city actually come from outside London, so we cannot deal with air quality in London without a national strategy.

Gareth Bacon (AM): Absolutely right. I completely agree. Has the Government come up with any measures at all? I know that the Air Quality Strategy is quite far-reaching and some of the measures that you have mentioned I am quite familiar are in terms of your thinking for that. But has the Government come up with any of its own measures to recognise the fact that air quality is a national problem?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I suppose the only thing you could say in its favour is it came up with the vehicle scrappage scheme.

Gareth Bacon (AM): But that is more about an economic kickstart than anything else.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): But, theoretically, it has an incidental air quality benefit.

Gareth Bacon (AM): OK. Has it shown any interest in addressing the issue?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): No, not especially. No. I think there is no point having a polemic about this but, I think, its initial tactic was to see if they could shuffle the blame on to us here in London. I do not think that is intellectually possible or defensible. We need to come up with a joint strategy that will stop the Commission from pursuing what, I think, would be an ill-judged fine.

Gareth Bacon (AM): OK. Thank you.

2461/2009 - GLA precept 2010-11

Mike Tuffrey

When you announced your 2009/10 Budget you said that, "In this time of economic uncertainty, it is more important than ever to deliver value for money and to keep taxes as low as possible. When people are feeling the squeeze, the last thing politicians should do is hit them with tax increases". What are your plans for the GLA precept in 2010/11?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Thank you, Mike. Obviously, as we have heard repeatedly today, I am not disposed to set out my plans for our tax and spending in the future, but I think I did say earlier on that it was my absolute determination to do everything I could to pursue the freeze in the council tax that we initiated last year.

Mike Tuffrey (AM): I am grateful for that. I do not want to get back into the discussion we have had but the fact is we are still in the middle of a savage recession, people are worried about their jobs and losing their jobs and they are worrying about losing their houses, and I think the more certainty that you can provide, whether it is in relation to fares or to council tax, the better.

I appreciate there is a process but, in relation to council tax, I do not want to ask you what you are going to do, I want to ask you what you are trying to do, what you actually want to do, given that the numbers you published in the Budget Guidance³ mean that if functional bodies come back in those ranges, a freeze in the council tax should be perfectly possible. So will you give Londoners some good news and say that you are endeavouring to freeze the council tax precept?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I love you guys. I have tried to show, in all candour, what I want to do, but I am not, now, going to steal my own thunder. Why should I?

Mike Tuffrey (AM): The trouble is you say that but you do not. I have the Budget Guidance here. I have read it three times and there is no reference here to your aspirations about council tax for next year --

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): But I gave you that just now, Mike.

Mike Tuffrey (AM): This is June 2009. You published it before the summer break --

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Yes, but is now September 2009. I have just given you my aspiration.

Mike Tuffrey (AM): So you are aiming to freeze the council tax for next year. You have never said that clearly before. That would be welcome news if it is.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I think I said that about 48 seconds ago. Did anybody hear me say that?

Mike Tuffrey (AM): No, you talked in generalities.

³ 2010-11 Mayor's Budget Guidance - <http://www.london.gov.uk/gla/budget/index.jsp>

In relation to fares, I do not want to re-open that but I do want to put it on the record. Last year you published your fares decision on 4 September, so it is perfectly proper for us, from all sides, to say, "Now we're 9 September. Isn't it about time we had an announcement?" So we are looking forward to that very, very soon. Thank you, Chair.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Thank you, Mike.

2289/2009 - Northern Line Closures (1)

Richard Tracey

The Northern Line is the most heavily used Tube line on the Underground network. Closing it at 10 pm will cause massive disruption to tens of thousands of people. For how long is Tube Lines proposing to close the Northern Line from 10pm?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): OK. The short answer, Dick, is that I accept the point that you make about the disruption that this could conceivably cause, but it is far too early to say that there will be anything like the closures that were described. I think you are referring to an *Evening Standard* article⁴. It is too early to say. Do bear in mind that one of the lunacies of the Public Private Partnership (PPP) programme is that we are under this crazy position whereby we cannot unreasonably refuse requests for access to the track.

There is no doubt at all that if we are to get the improvements in capacity the Northern line needs, and people watching this who use the Northern line should recognise, that it will be vastly improved; there will be a fifth more capacity on the line, it will reduce journey times by 18%, everybody in Brian's [Coleman, Assembly Member for Barnet and Camden] part of the world will benefit from it, I hope. We need to get this done.

Of course there will be some disruption but whether or not that disruption is exactly reflected in that *Evening Standard* article, I am afraid, is just too early to say.

Richard Tracey (AM): Yes, I understand what you are saying. This is a very sensitive question, I am sure you appreciate, the whole matter of the closures, because people have seen the previous problems with the Victoria line evening closures and people are now seeing the weekend problems with the Jubilee line. The fact is, I think, that Tube Lines has not fulfilled the requirement of seven months' notice for these closures.

It is particularly sensitive, in my case, in the southern part of the Northern line because, of course, in many cases, there is no other way of people getting home to Tooting and parts of Wimbledon and Morden and so on. So it may be possible to think about some of these evening closures in central London, where there are alternatives for quite a few of them, but most certainly not at the extremities at the north and south.

So, can I ask that you will stress to TfL and Tube Lines that it really is not acceptable to go ahead with the evening closures?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Well, Dick, I am not going to get drawn into what we can or cannot say now to Tube Lines. I think we will have to have a very robust conversation with them and we will have to ensure that they do considerably better than the performance we

⁴ Northern line could close from 10pm on weekdays for upgrade – *Evening Standard*, 26/08/09

are currently seeing on the Jubilee line which is chaotic, in my view, and a real indictment of the whole PPP process. A disastrous indictment of the PPP process.

But, I am afraid I cannot, now, sit before you and rule out any evening closures, Dick. I just cannot do that. I cannot confirm that there will be evening closures, but it is just too early to say. All I am going to have to offer you is the prospect of keeping you and your constituents as closely informed as I can about the discussions that we have.

Richard Tracey (AM): I am grateful. It was reported in the press that you were going to have an extremely tough conversation with TfL and Tube Lines about the closure programmes. Have you had that yet or is that in the near future?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Are you talking about the Jubilee line or about the Northern line?

Richard Tracey (AM): Well I think it is about their general conduct but I presume, at the moment, Jubilee line, but then, obviously, you will be moving on to the Northern line.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): You are correct in that and there are discussions taking place shortly.

Richard Tracey (AM): Thank you.

Brian Coleman (AM): Mr Mayor, you will know that up there in Barnet we are a very cultured lot and we enjoy our nights at the West End theatre or concerts and what have you and that this evening closure from 10 pm is going to put the kibosh on all those thousands of my constituents who enjoy that sort of thing, or, indeed, enjoy spending a night in the West End wining and dining and what have you.

A couple of years ago Tim O'Toole [former Managing Director, London Underground] offered me a stark choice: we could either have weekend closures or we could have three weeks closed in August. I said the roads of Barnet and Camden would not cope with a complete three week close down, even in August. Can you ask Tube Lines and TfL to come up with options perhaps that the commuters and the users of the Northern line could choose the least worst scenario, rather than have an option imposed on them?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I will certainly make sure that we consult with you and with your constituents about what option we choose for getting this work done. I feel a sheer curiosity, really, to confirm that it would be your view, as I believe Mayor of Barnet, that it would be quite wrong -- in the many other mandates that you have, it would be your view, as the tribute of the people of Barnet, that it would be absolutely wrong to include, amongst the things that you wish to see cut from TfL, the upgrade of the Northern line? Would I be correct in saying that?

Brian Coleman (AM): You would, but I could give you a list of the things I would be happy to see cut from TfL. Perhaps you would like that list, Mr Mayor, would you? Would you like that list?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I am always open to your suggestions and interest --

Brian Coleman (AM): Cycle routes; surface transport; the pedestrianisation schemes; the endless pointless fiddling about with road junctions. The entire surface transport department

could go and I do not think any resident of Barnet would lose a day's sleep, or a night's sleep, over it!

Darren Johnson (Chair): Brian, we are straying away from 10 pm closure.

Brian Coleman (AM): I think the Mayor led me astray, Chair!

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I do not think that your point of view is universally here but, obviously, I am sure that your constituents would be interested to hear about your daily sleep!

2367/2009 - 2012 Paralympic Games

Dee Doocey

When will the broadcasting contract for the London 2012 Paralympic Games be awarded?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Dee, thank you. The answer is that the broadcasting contract will be let in the next 12 months and The London Organising Committee of the Olympic Games (LOCOG) hopes to make an announcement on that.

Dee Doocey (AM): Right. Does that worry you, Mr Mayor, on the basis that that no planning can take place by the media until the broadcast contract has been let? Surely you recognise that, in order to maximise television coverage, the broadcasters will need to have input into the scheduling?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Well, I am told that there is plenty of time to ensure that there is adequate coverage of the Paralympics and I am determined to make sure that that is so, but if you think there is a real risk to this then clearly that is something we must raise with LOCOG and I think we need to spell out what the anxiety is. But my information is that there is plenty of time between now and 2012 to get the scheduling right.

Dee Doocey (AM): Right. My information is that it is a real risk and that planning really does need to start now. I know this is something that is very dear to your heart, which is why I am raising it with you, because you are on the Olympic Board, you have got a representative on LOCOG --

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): OK. Could you send me something explaining what the risk is and I will put it to LOCOG and to the Board?

Dee Doocey (AM): I will indeed, Mr Mayor.

Can I also ask you, please, if you could promise to do everything in your power to ensure that the Paralympics - which, as you know, is always much more successful for us than the Olympics - is broadcast during peak viewing time on mainstream free-to-view TV?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Are you asking me to exercise editorial control over the BBC?

Dee Doocey (AM): No, no, no. What I am asking you to do is to make sure that --

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): It is one of the few institutions upon whose tiller we do not yet have our hand, Dee!

Dee Doocey (AM): Actually this is not a laughing matter. My concern is that the Paralympics is treated in the same way as the Olympics is and that it is not put on some terrestrial TV that you have got to pay for. I want to make sure --

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): OK. You are worried about --

Dee Doocey (AM): -- that it is on mainstream TV, that you will do everything you can to make sure that it is broadcast during peak hours and that it is free to view.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Can I propose that I see if I can get you a conversation with LOCOG about this and we put your concerns to them?

Dee Doocey (AM): I think that would be great. In the meantime, would you agree that you will do everything in your power, as Mayor of London and as one of the people who is responsible for the Olympics - on the basis that you are a member of the Olympic Board - to ensure that it is on prime television and it is free to view?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I will do my utmost to make sure that the Paralympics is viewed by the widest possible audience commensurate with the limits I have to my rod.

Dee Doocey (AM): On free to view TV.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): If I had it in my power to determine TV schedules obviously I would, but --

Dee Doocey (AM): No, no, no, we are not talking about TV schedules. Really, do not play games. Will you agree that you will do everything in your power that the Paralympics is broadcast on free to view TV?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Yes, I will certainly help in that respect.

Dee Doocey (AM): Thank you.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): But there may be limits to what I can achieve there, Dee [Doocey], is what I am telling you.

Richard Barnes (AM): Will you assure Dee Doocey and, indeed, the Assembly that we are doing everything that we possibly can to ensure that both the Olympic Games and the Paralympic Games are the most accessible Games that have ever been held and that accessibility covers free to view viewing for the disabled people at both of these elements of the Games and accessibility does mean television contracts. The latter, which is not within your control, may be influenced but it is certainly questionable but, given the prominence we are giving to the Paralympic Games, it will be foolish of the television schedulers to ignore it.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Absolutely right, Richard, and I pay tribute to all the work you are doing to push the rights of disabled and the importance of the Paralympics and getting London ready for the Paralympics up the political agenda.

Richard Barnes (AM): Thank you.

2318/2009 - Decent Homes Funding (1)

Steve O'Connell

Has any progress been made in your discussions with the Government over its raid on funds to upgrade over 100,000 of London's poorest quality social homes? What level of funding has been necessary to divert from other housing programmes in order to plug this gap, and what will be the effect on housing delivery in London?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Steve, I think I can give a pretty brief answer to this because we have substantially had the discussion earlier on. I think this is infamous. I think it is something we should all be working on together. This is a cut that Londoners do not need or deserve and with the London HCA [Homes and Communities Agency] we are countermanding it and ensuring, to the best of our ability, that all two star arms-length management organisations [ALMOs] are able to go ahead with the improvement of Londoners homes in the way that was promised and the way that they expected.

Steve O'Connell (AM): Yes, thank you, Mr Mayor. We will keep this brief. As you say, we did discuss this earlier but I would like to go away, particularly to my residents in Sutton and to the leader and the Chief Executive there.

There are something like 900 families in Sutton that will suffer from this raid on affordable funding and I would like assurance from you, Mr Mayor, that you will use all your lobbying powers to enable those families - normally families who are the least privileged in the borough - to actually get the facilities that have been expected of them. In fact, by delaying the implementation, the proportion of work will actually include and involve remedial costs to the borough.

So, Mr Mayor, I am heartened that you are taking a robust line on this, but I would like to go back, particularly to those families in Sutton, to give them some comfort.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): You certainly can, Steve, and I am sure they will be very grateful to you for representing them in the way that you are. I do not know whether Sutton has had its inspection yet --

Steve O'Connell (AM): It is about to.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): It is about to have its inspection. If Sutton achieves two star rating status then we are determined to make sure that we reinstate the funding necessary to go ahead with the Decent Homes scheme for those families.

Steve O'Connell (AM): Thank you, Mr Mayor.

Andrew Boff (AM): I am sure everyone living in social housing is going to be delighted that the Mayor is behind them on fighting this raid by the Government which is purely an electoral raid to try to provide money in its more marginal constituencies prior to a general election --

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Well said, Andrew. Welcome Conservative support.

Andrew Boff (AM): Would it be possible for your Office to provide the implications of this raid on each of the ALMOs affected, broken down by borough? It would be fascinating reading, if that information could be provided.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): In London?

Andrew Boff (AM): In London.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): There are 13 --

Andrew Boff (AM): But actually broken down and what that will mean for each of those -- what loss in investment in housing that --

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): You mean as Steve was saying because he had a statistic of 900 families?

Andrew Boff (AM): Yes.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): We will certainly see what we can do to provide you with those figures.

Andrew Boff (AM): Thank you very much.

2307/2009 - Congestion Charge

Andrew Boff

What services are provided to payers of the Congestion Charge?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Thank you, Andrew. I think your question is basically directed at the honoured members of the diplomatic community who are here amongst us, some of whom do not pay the Congestion Charge. The Congestion Charge is a charge for use of the roads. It is a charge that reflects the damage done to the environment by polluting vehicles such as bendy buses and cars in particular. It is, therefore, a charge for a service, it is not a tax, and I think that is a point that we need to, as tactfully and as diplomatically as we can, get across to the corps diplomatique of London.

But I would stress that 70% of legations and embassies do pay the Congestion Charge and they are to be congratulated and they are to be supported for the contribution they are making to improving London transport.

Andrew Boff (AM): Thank you, Mr Mayor. It appears to me that the embassies with the better lawyers are the ones who are not paying. I do not agree with the Mayor that this is a charge because I do not think that the person who is paying the charge is getting anything over and above what everybody else gets as a result of investment in transport infrastructure. I do think it is a tax and I think it is a regressive tax and I think it is a tax that has probably got the highest collection rate of any tax in the United Kingdom --

Jenny Jones (AM): Is he on your side?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): This is proving to be a great day for Conservative unity!

Andrew Boff (AM): I would urge you, as you so rightly created a precedent in getting rid of the Western Extension, I would like you to complete the job and get rid of the eastern extension zone. Thank you very much.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Andrew and I – as indeed did Victoria [Borwick] – had long conversations on this when we shared a many, many happy hour together at various hustings. We have lost Warwick [Lightfoot] [Councillor, Kensington and Chelsea]. Warwick [Lightfoot] is the only one of the quadumvirate not here.

We used to go on about this a great deal and I think that there is a wide measure of agreement that the Central Zone Congestion Charge does work and it is a sensible measure which I am not going to remove, but the Western Extension Zone was anti-democratically imposed without proper consultation. We had a consultation which gave the very clear view of Londoners that they wanted it removed. We are going to remove it and I hope that, at least in that considerable respect, Andrew, that you and I, once again, march in lock step and that we are, at least, agreed on that one.

2476/2009 - Columbus tower

Mike Tuffrey

Is there a danger that your comments to the Evening Standard about the Columbus Tower ("There is already a planning consent for a tall building on this site and the development itself would deliver a significant contribution to Crossrail" 28/08/09) have in effect prejudged the outcome of the representation hearing you are going to hold to hear arguments for and against the application before making a decision?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Thank you, Mike. There is a question here about whether my comments in the *Evening Standard* about the Columbus Tower are, in any way, prejudging the outcome of the representation hearing? The answer to that, of course, is no.

Mike Tuffrey (AM): And I do not want to invite you to further compromise yourself by talking about the scheme itself, although I should say that this questioning is not because I am, in any way, hostile to the scheme and I believe, in fact, the Liberal Democrat Member of the Planning Committee was the only one in Tower Hamlets to vote in favour of it. But I think --

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Sorry, you voted in favour of it?

Mike Tuffrey (AM): Yes. Apparently. But I am not here to --

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Oh I see.

Mike Tuffrey (AM): My only comment on the substance would be, if we are to have tall buildings, Canary Wharf is certainly a place to look to put them.

But it was more the procedures around because this is really quite a historic moment – at the end of two and a half hours of questioning so bear with me, Members – for the first time the Mayor of London will make a positive planning decision and the sage of Westminster over there said – and I paraphrase – that when the Johnson Mayoralty has come and go, the one thing that Londoners will remember you for are the buildings that you leave behind.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): They are going to be very distinguished. Very handsome --

Mike Tuffrey (AM): Well this is the issue. So --

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): -- and the transport infrastructure.

Mike Tuffrey (AM): Well the buildings in particular will be particularly --

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): No. There will be so many wonderful things. You will be weeping by the end, you will be praying for us to stop doing things, by the end of it.

Mike Tuffrey (AM): The point is can you try to tell us when you were --

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Not only will I try; I will tell you.

Mike Tuffrey (AM): You will tell me when you will or will not intervene in local planning? You got elected saying, "There is far too much intervention and I am going to leave it all to the boroughs". Developers and councillors and Londoners --

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): But these guys want me to be more dictatorial. Some times.

Mike Tuffrey (AM): What I am asking you to do, in the remaining seconds of this session, is to clarify for us when you will intervene and when you will not. Simply saying, "I will try not to intervene" does not give people the guidance.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Do you know, Mike, I just do not think it would be wise for me to elaborate on my answer because I think it is possible that anything I said about the circumstances in which I decide to intervene or not to intervene could be taken out of context by a smart planning lawyer and used in any future appeal. So, since I do have a *locus standi* in this matter I really do not think that I can comment.

Mike Tuffrey (AM): I am not asking you to comment about this particular thing, but with these things that you take over --

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I know you are not, Mike. I know that you have the best possible intentions and you have nothing but benevolence towards me and --

Mike Tuffrey (AM): Unlike your colleagues!

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): -- towards this office and I am sure that is true and it would be the last thing in your mind, to invite me to get into any kind of tangle with the law and I --

Mike Tuffrey (AM): But councils and developers and Londoners need to know because, on these matters, when you take them over, you are not just judge and jury but you are also legislator because you write the London Plan --

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I know.

Mike Tuffrey (AM): -- and people do need to know when you will or will not intervene.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I know, Mike.

Mike Tuffrey (AM): Particularly on tall buildings where I really am at difficulty to know what your stance on tall buildings is.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I know. But if you think about it for a moment you can see that any description I gave of broad principles of when I was or was not going to intervene in matters relating to tall buildings could be wrenched out of context and used in a future legal proceeding on this matter. Therefore, I think, I should, probably, abstain --

Mike Tuffrey (AM): If you were making them in respect of that application, yes, but, in general --

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I think you will find plenty of stuff in the London Plan about our view on tall buildings. I am on record as saying that tall buildings are not inappropriate where they are in clusters or where there is a history of them, but I really do not think it would be right for me to go beyond those anodyne statements now.

Mike Tuffrey (AM): Can I just then move on to that in terms of the procedures around how you will handle the first ever --

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): You completely missed that one.

Mike Tuffrey (AM): I did I am afraid. How you will handle this first ever decision. Tony Arbour, some years ago, led a scrutiny the Assembly did around how planning decisions --

Darren Johnson (Chair): Right. Quick answer to this because you are now out of time.

Mike Tuffrey (AM): The Planning Committee is starting to look at these issues. Will you look positively at any advice that the Assembly's Planning Committee unanimously might give you about how to handle this hearing, given the --

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Yes. We will hand this expeditiously and judiciously and in the interests of London.

Mike Tuffrey (AM): Well, no, I am asking you, will you take advice from us --

Darren Johnson (Chair): Thank you. We are out of time on that question now.

2175/2009 - DSEi Arms Fair (1)

Jenny Jones

What is your view of London's hosting an international arms fair?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I think it is sad but necessary, Jenny.

Jenny Jones (AM): Oh you think it is necessary? You think it is necessary to have an arms fair when the Metropolitan Police Service is doing everything it can to fight knife crime and gun crime.

You seem to have changed your mind because, in March this year, you said it is inappropriate. I can read you the whole quote if you like. In March as well you said, "With regard to my responsibilities as Mayor, my priority is to ensure that the event organisers absorb all the costs associated with policing the event". Can you tell me what progress you have had on that? With your hand on the tiller have you instructed the Commissioner to send a bill to the event organisers?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): No. Let us be absolutely clear that the Metropolitan Police Service is recovering the relevant costs in the normal way and it certainly does not need any instruction from me or you or any other member of the Metropolitan Police Authority (MPA) to do so.

Jenny Jones (AM): But they can only recover the costs inside the event; they cannot recover all the costs outside. That was something like 4,500 officer hours. That seems, to me, an awful lot for the people of London, a real burden for us, when the police officers could be doing something else.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Well, Jenny, I gave you my answer in all sincerity. I think what is taking place is sad but necessary in the sense that I do not believe that it is in my power to ban the arms trade and nor is it actually something that I could credibly advocate, given that we have massive overseas military commitments and we have an extremely successful arms and weapons industry that employs many, many thousands of people in this country and generates billions in tax revenue --

Jenny Jones (AM): Quite apart from the national aspect, surely, when we are --

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): It is a legal business. It is conducted under very, very tight rules, as you know.

Jenny Jones (AM): Well that is interesting about the rules because, actually, they have invited China and there is an arms embargo against China, and yet they are inviting China. It seems to me that they are not actually doing any good for London and Londoners do not want it. The majority of people in that area absolutely loathe it and want to get rid of it.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): My dear Jenny. This is something that is legal and sad but necessary. You make this point about policing and the views of the majority of Londoners. I would say that, with the greatest respect to you and to many of the causes you support, there are some things that you support that cost the police fantastic sums of money and waste a great deal of police time which are also --

Jenny Jones (AM): Did not cost anything this year.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): -- perfectly legal and which we would not want to stop.

Jenny Jones (AM): I am very disappointed in your answer.

Darren Johnson (Chair): Thank you. That concludes the questions.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Thank you.

Darren Johnson (Chair): Can I thank Members for their robust and independent questioning from all sides today, thank the Mayor for his answers and thank the public gallery for the complete lack of interventions today which has made a change in these past few months!