

London Assembly (Mayor's Question Time) – 19 September 2012
Transcript: Mayor Question Time: Agenda item 4 – Questions to the Mayor

Darren Johnson (Chair): The first question is in the name of Assembly Member Steve O'Connell on squatting laws.

2524/2012

Steve O'Connell

Do you welcome the recent law which now makes squatting in residential buildings a criminal offence, allowing police to arrest squatters?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I do welcome it, Darren, and I think it is quite right that the law should allow owners to regain possession of their properties more quickly and more easily. There is a problem of unoccupied housing in London, but we have now got the rate of empty homes down to the lowest since the 1970s, 1.1% of the total housing stock, and we have put about 5,000 empty homes back into use with a targeted funding stream, and we are going to continue to do so.

Steve O'Connell (AM): Thank you very much, Mr Mayor. Yes, exactly, there is a balance to this story but I would like to agree with you and welcome on behalf of Londoners the fact now that London and the UK is not going to be the soft touch for squatters. Will you, Mr Mayor, confirm and indeed direct your deputy to ensure that the MPS will be fully enforcing this law with immediate effect, because clearly this does apply to existing squatters.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I am sure the MPS will be enforcing the law as they always do. They do not need to be directed by me or by anybody else to enforce the law. That is what they do. I think there are interesting and attractive things you can do to put empty homes, empty shops back into use, and that is what we want to do.

Steve O'Connell (AM): As I say, the public will very much welcome this. It will give them reassurance on something that actually has been a curse of many neighbourhoods over far too many years. However, in the spirit of sharing and giving confidence to the public, will you ensure that the MPS regularly updates the public on arrest and conviction rates for illegal squatting in their areas?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): That is a good point. I will find out. We will get some data for you.

Steve O'Connell (AM): Thank you. Again, the other balance and the other side of the coin is, do you see in your analysis that the new law will make it easier for much needed council homes that up to not, perhaps, have been vulnerable to councillors -- squatters, and also --

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I am glad you thought of councillors who might be squatting in them themselves.

Steve O'Connell (AM): Absolutely.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Yes, I would not be surprised.

Steve O'Connell(AM): I would be very surprised, Mr Mayor, but certainly do you anticipate savings that local authorities will make through the enforcement of this law, that they can then invest in building new council houses and investing in new Housing Association stock for those vulnerable people?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Absolutely. Obviously, the more you can solve the problem of homelessness by making sure these empty homes are used, which is what we are doing, the greater you can ease the strain on the waiting list, and that is a big problem in the city as everybody knows.

Steve O'Connell (AM): Yes. You are absolutely right. You mentioned earlier that the homelessness is at its lowest level for many years, but there still are many vulnerable people in London that are either homeless or in unsatisfactory living conditions, and I am pleased that you, and everyone in this Assembly, will urge that those people are supported and helped in future.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Absolutely.

Darren Johnson (Chair): Thank you. We will now move on to the next question on the order paper. That is in my name, but Assembly Member Jenny Jones is going to pursue the question. It is asking about your plans for the Olympic Park Legacy.

2397/2012

Darren Johnson

Will your plans for the Olympic Park set out an ambitious and comprehensive vision that is built to the highest standards of design and sustainability working closely with existing communities, or can Londoners expect more of the same?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I sort of answered this a bit during the opening salvos, and, yes, the Olympic Park is going to be a fantastic place to live, and there are going to be 35 km of paths and cycle routes, bio-diverse habitats, and parklands. Everybody saw that incredible profusion of wild flowers in the park during the Games. One of the most beautiful things about it, it is the biggest new green space I think in, is it, Europe? I always say it is Europe, but then somebody corrected me. Anyway, it is the biggest new green space in Britain for 150 years.

Jenny Jones (AM): Could I get the number of cycle paths again that you mentioned. How many?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Yes, I said 35 km, and I realised I that I should have the figure in miles for you. What is it, 27 miles, 25 miles?

Jenny Jones (AM): You have said that the Olympic Park can be a 'paradise' of cycling and I am sure lots of cyclists in London are quite excited about that. The target that you set for the number of cycle journeys is actually 5%, whereas I am told in Hackney --

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Which is about two and a half times what it is -- well, two times what it is at the moment.

Jenny Jones (AM): In fact, in Hackney next door it is over 10% now.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Is it really, in Hackney?

Jenny Jones (AM): In Hackney.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Superb!

Jenny Jones (AM): I don't know how often --

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): That is a fact, isn't it? That is a stunning new fact for today.

Jenny Jones (AM): Obviously, in places like Bromley it is probably 2% or 1%, I don't know. I am saying that without knowing. I know for example you set this target of 5%, which we just heard is actually quite low compared with neighbouring boroughs.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Yes, well, I am interested in what you say.

Jenny Jones(AM): There is also the fact that a lot of the cycle paths I think are planned to be 1.5 - that is metres again - and that is actually the minimum, whereas if you went on the Dutch style you could have just the most amazing wide segregated cycle -- because this is all for grabs, isn't it? This is more or less a blank sheet of paper.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): That is one of the reasons why it is so important that I have taken over the Chair of this wonderful organisation. I will take your point. I had no idea that Hackney had got up to 10%. That is very encouraging. The rates across London, as people know, are only about 2.5% at the moment. We do want to get up overall to 5%. It may be that in the Olympic Park we are being under ambitious, and I will certainly look at our target.

Jenny Jones (AM): Could I perhaps send you a list of things that you could do to make it the cycling paradise that you have talked about?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Of course.

Jenny Jones (AM): For example, making it 20 miles an hour over the whole site, just like --

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Can you reach 20 miles an hour on a bike? I am lucky if I can get up to 12 miles an hour.

Jenny Jones (AM): Exactly, but it would make it safer for the cyclists.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): The minimum is 20 miles an hour.

Jenny Jones (AM): It would make it safer for the cyclists with all the motorised vehicles.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I agree. Jenny, I am more than happy to. You are right, to a certain extent there is flexibility in the design. We will look at it and see what we can do to make it more bike friendly.

Jenny Jones (AM): I will send you some visionary ideas.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Thank you.

Darren Johnson (Chair): Thank you. Assembly Member Andrew Boff.

Andrew Boff(AM): Just as an aside, Mr Mayor, I am one of those 10% in Hackney who cycle, and it has got to the point in some areas where the cyclists are actually being resented, especially --

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Do you mean cyclists are breeding resentment?

Andrew Boff (AM): Along places like --

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Not resentment amongst motorists?

Andrew Boff (AM): On places like Broadway Market where the attitude of some cyclists is really quite appalling to pedestrians and other road users.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Are they condescending and snooty and --

Andrew Boff (AM): Extraordinarily!

Darren Johnson (Chair): I am not convinced that snootiness at Broadway Market is an Olympic Legacy issue, so if we can stick to the line of questioning, please, Mr Boff.

Andrew Boff (AM): The snootiness of cyclists down Broadway Market. Broadway Market is not a --

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I think it is an important problem. It is an important problem?

Darren Johnson (Chair): It is an important problem, but it is not part of this question, so let us stick to the point.

Andrew Boff(AM): Just on the point, though, perhaps I shouldn't have done an aside, but I hope you would welcome that this group would soon, within the next week or so, be issuing a report that will hope to improve the vision of the Olympic Park. We are very concerned that the

standards and the quality of design of housing should be an example to the rest of London. I know you haven't read it yet, but is that the direction you would seek to be going?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Yes. You will remember the vision that Margaret Ford and Andy Altman [formerly of Olympic Park Legacy Company] laid out, 18 months to two years ago. That will continue very much to inform what we do.

Andrew Boff (AM): I hope, Mr Mayor, that once you have read the report from GLA Conservatives you will adopt them wholeheartedly. There is nothing to oppose.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I am sure there isn't. I am sure it is a magnificent report and, yes, I don't think I have read it but I will make sure I do.

Andrew Boff (AM): Thank you. I will allow you to bide your time on that. Thank you, Chair.

Darren Johnson (Chair): Thank you. Assembly Member Caroline Pidgeon.

Caroline Pidgeon (AM): Accessible transport to the park is going to be key to legacy, and I welcome your announcement to keep routes at 16 stations for the time being, but there is a further 17 stations that could benefit from such routes. Will you commit to making all of these stations permanently step free from street to train, just by the use of these manual ramps?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Sorry, do you mean ramps to get on to the trains or ramps that have access to the station?

Caroline Pidgeon (AM): The manual ramps that help people from the platform to the trains, the manual ramps.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Yes. Actually, again, someone else has asked a question on this very matter - I think Richard Tracey. Looking at ways of perpetuating the ramp system that worked very well during the Games is something I have already asked TfL to look at and they are very keen.

Caroline Pidgeon (AM): That is the existing 16. Will you look to roll it out to the further 17 on top that could benefit from just that?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Yes. I don't know whether you agree. I thought that the city worked very well during the Olympic, and Paralympic Games, and we want to get the legacy benefits from that. I have asked for a list of things that we can do to get an even greater legacy from the Olympic and Paralympics, and perhaps some of them we are planning for. It may be that we can extend the ramps to all 17 of the stations in the way you describe.

Caroline Pidgeon (AM): Lovely, thank you.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): The problem that has been presented to me is that there may be IR issues. There may be difficulties with --

Caroline Pidgeon (AM): You are looking at that?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): We are certainly looking at it.

Caroline Pidgeon (AM): Thank you.

Darren Johnson (Chair): Thank you. Assembly Members Roger Evans.

Roger Evans (AM): Yes, thank you, Chair. Last week we heard from Ben Plowden from TfL that, as part of the Olympic legacy, Cycle Super Highway Two would be extended from Bow flyover eastwards.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Yes.

Roger Evans (AM): Unfortunately, it turns out that he was only talking about extending it to Stratford, which is not much of an extension. Will you reconfirm your support for Cycle Super Highway Two to be extended through Stratford past the intransigence of Newham Council and all the way to Ilford, so that residents in Redbridge can be a part of your cycling revolution?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Absolutely. I have very good working arrangements with Newham and I will make sure that I put that on my list of things to raise with the Mayor of Newham and his Chief Executive.

Roger Evans (AM): Thank you.

Darren Johnson (Chair): Thank you. We will now move on to the next question on the Order Paper, which is in the name of Stephen Knight on Olympic and Paralympic jobs.

2394/2012

Stephen Knight

Given that part of your pledge to create 200,000 new jobs over the course of your mayoralty included the 10,000 people employed in Games time activity, what plans do you have to help find replacement jobs for these, now redundant people?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Thank you, Stephen. What we have done so far is obviously the temporary jobs that people have had on the Olympics, of one kind or another, have been of great benefit to them and a great thing to have on their Curriculum Vitae (CV). To get them into other jobs what we are doing is supporting a Games graduate network, which is a way of getting London's employers to see the benefits of taking these people on. So far we have had several events. We had a London's newest workforce event here in City Hall during the Games. It was attended by about 70 employers. There are big recruitment events going on at the moment this month. There is one today. There is one on the 27 September. Employers who are interested include; Travelodge, Premier Inn and Greggs, TK Maxx, and many others.

Obviously, I am very confident that people who have done very well for the city during the games will have a head start. They will have a great qualification that will help them to get these jobs, and we are there to assist.

Stephen Knight (AM): Thank you, Mr Mayor, and I am sure we all join with you in that wish. However, isn't it true that all the things that you have referred to, however worthy they might be, will not actually create a single extra new job?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Can I say that Governments do not create jobs.

Stephen Knight (AM): Well, Mr Mayor --

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Nor do Mayors. What we do is we support and invest in projects, worthwhile projects that take people on. We are not there to invent work. We are there to support people into work.

Stephen Knight (AM): Mr Mayor, it is a very interesting answer, given that one of your key nine pledges at your election was to, "Create 200,000 new jobs from direct City Hall programmes". Don't you think that the electorate had a right to expect that when you said you would create 200,000 new jobs that that would mean that 200,000 Londoners, who would otherwise not have work --

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): They will.

Stephen Knight (AM): -- would have work during the course of four years?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): They will, and Crossrail, which is a wonderful scheme, will create 14,000 jobs over a four year period. The tube upgrade is currently on track to employ 18,300. The housing programme that we are embarked on involves 100,000. We have had a discussion about this before.

Stephen Knight (AM): We have seen the lists, Mr Mayor. Thank you for that, but if you are entirely honest, wasn't it just a little bit misleading to make up that total of 200,000 by including short-term contract jobs that would only last a few weeks during the Games?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): No, because, as I say - and it was always clear in the manifesto that those were the jobs that we were including - a great many of these people are already being taken on. They have had the benefit of a wonderful employment experience. It would be ludicrous to leave that out. They work very hard and very well. As I say, a large number of them are now going on to full-time jobs. You have taken issue in the past with the suggestion that building new homes creates hundreds of thousands of jobs, because you say a job only lasts a year. That is, a job in construction only lasts a year. I think that is a highly important addition to people's lives and to the economy.

Stephen Knight (AM): Mr Mayor, clearly any job is an important addition, but your pledge was to create 200,000 new jobs over the course of the mayoralty, and I think most people would expect that to mean that 200,000 Londoners had useful employment and paid employment over the course of your mayoralty. As you have quite rightly referred to, when we last discussed this back in May, we discovered that the element from the housing building programme was arrived at by counting each year's employment as a separate job. I think a large part of this comes down to real confusion about what you meant by 200,000 jobs.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): It is very simple, and I can help you. The point I am making is that investment in London's transport, in London's housing, in the Olympic and Paralympic Games, and in other great projects, helped to get people into work, and it is one of the best ways in tough times to make sure that you create employment. The figures, actually, I think are an underestimate of the number of jobs that are being created in London.

If you look at the recent employment figures they give great cause for hope, because you are starting to see employment rising again, and I think there is going to be a benign Olympic effect.

Stephen Knight (AM): Let us all hope so. I think everybody in this room will hope that unemployment will decline. Your Deputy Mayor for Business, Kit Malthouse, recently told the Economy Committee back in June - I suppose not that recently - that you would be publishing a definition of what you meant by a job in the context of your jobs pledge, before the Games, to clear this issue up once and for all. Clearly, that has not been published. When are you going to publish your definition of what you meant by jobs?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I think I have told you. Listen, I think most people would think that to be in employment for a year on something that is bringing in income, helping them to put bread on the table for their families, is a job. If you cannot define a job in those terms, I really do not know how to help you.

Stephen Knight (AM): Thank you.

Darren Johnson (Chair): Assembly Member Richard Tracey.

Richard Tracey (AM): Can I remind you en passant that 25,000 new jobs are going to be created by the Nine Elms development --

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): They are not even included in my calculation, so exactly right.

Richard Tracey (AM): This morning you have announced that you are going to go for the completion of the Northern line extension in the next three years, which will create even more jobs than Nine Elms.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I know, but you have to be attacked for something. It is the function of our coalition partners, the Liberal Democrats. I think that most reasonable people would say that the job creation targets were an underestimate.

Darren Johnson (Chair): Thank you. We will move on to the next question on the Order Paper then, which is on the Central London consensus on improving air quality.

2558/2012

Murad Qureshi

When will you sign up to the consensus on improving poor air quality in Central London as three major boroughs have signed up to do?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I am very happy to work with the boroughs concerned, to continue to clean up London's air but, unfortunately, I am not willing to agree to a programme that I think would do great damage to the interests of London's taxi drivers in requiring them to get rid of any vehicle more than ten years old. Already, very heroically, TfL has decided to launch the first ever age limit for taxis. That was done in the teeth of ferocious opposition from the taxi drivers. We have done that. I think now to tell them they have to scrap any vehicle more than ten years old would be simply brutal. I don't know whether that is your policy, but it is not one that I am going to support.

We are going to do various other things to improve air quality in London. I think Jenny (Jones) has a question later on about some of the emissions standards that we may be applying.

Murad Qureshi (AM): Many thanks, Mr Mayor for your response. Just to elaborate, the letter to the councils involved Camden Council, the City of Westminster and City of London Corporation, representing 500,000 residents of Central London as well as business, so I think they represent an interest of a major constituency of yours apart from the black cabbies that you have got a particular interest with.

They have asked for a number of things to be done across the buses, taxis, as well as the future of the London Enterprise Zone (LEZ). Can I just ask you a few specific questions, firstly in those --

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Silly questions?

Murad Qureshi (AM): Specific.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Specific, sorry.

Murad Qureshi (AM): You obviously need to get your hearing tested. Specific. In the joint letter from Camden, Westminster and the City of London, they called for a better deployment of retro fitted buses across Central London. In light of that, can you tell us - after four years of office - what proportion of London buses have you retrofitted, so far?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): What I can tell you is that we have just put in an order for 600 of the cleanest and greenest bus in the whole world, which will be on the streets in the next four years. I cannot give you the answer about how many we have retrofitted, but we are moving towards an ever cleaner bus fleet. What I can tell you is, contrary to the absolute codswallop that was put around during the election campaign, which everybody has now forgotten about, London does not have the worst air quality in Europe. Complete fabrication by the Labour Party. Actually, it turns out, once one bothered to do the research, that Paris, Rome, Barcelona and Athens all have worse air quality, and plenty of other cities in Britain have comparable problems. I am delighted to say, that Manchester University - people were saying that we were going to have pollution during the Olympic Games - has just done a study, the Clear Flow Unit I think it is called, that concludes that we have just delivered one of the cleanest Olympic and Paralympic Games in history. The least polluted air of any Olympic Games in history.

Murad Qureshi (AM): I didn't ask those questions at all, actually. I asked you specifically --

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I know, but I thought you had better get the answers.

Murad Qureshi (AM): -- how many buses you retrofitted. Can I answer your question for you, if you do not know clearly?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): What I will do, Murad, I will get you the answer about the number of business we have retrofitted.

Murad Qureshi (AM): I can tell you now, 10% of the total buses.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): That sounds very good. We will do more.

Murad Qureshi (AM): Given two years ago in your air quality strategy you promised to retrofit in London half the buses, can you tell us what has gone wrong?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): As I say, we are moving towards the cleanest, greenest bus in the whole of Europe.

Jenny Jones (AM): And the most expensive.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): What did you say?

Jenny Jones (AM): And most expensive.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Wrong. Wrong. On the contrary, it is a fantastic deal that London has done with the contractors. Fantastic value for money and it is the cleanest, greenest bus in the world.

Murad Qureshi (AM): Mr Mayor, whatever rhetoric that you put out the issue is your record. Can you just move to --

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): My record?

Murad Qureshi (AM): I have just given you figures and you have not disputed them.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): No, but the fact is that air quality in London has actually been improving. Last time I pointed this out I was told this was all because of the recession. Actually, it is because of a series of measures that we have put in to improve the vehicular emissions in London. We had the first ever taxi age limit. Ken Livingstone [former Mayor of London], in all his tyrannical madness, never dared to impose an age limit on taxis. It was never supported by the Labour group. We put it in. We have encouraged much more cycling, much more walking and many more electric vehicle taxis (EV) and that is how we are improving air quality, as well as a host of other measures.

Murad Qureshi (AM): Mr Mayor, another proposal that the councils put together jointly to you was the suggestion of a taxi scrappage scheme. Are you not signed up to that, at least, their taxi proposals in their joint letter to you?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I have not studied the taxi scrappage scheme, Murad. Forgive me, I will look at it and see what we can do.

Murad Qureshi (AM): That is beyond the limits of their power and that is why they have come to you. I think this actually sets the agenda for your second term.

Another suggestion they make is on the Low Emission Zone (LEZ), a phase five. Is that something you are prepared to sign up to?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I am going to look at 'LEZ Mis'. I will look at it and see what more we need to do. We will assess what impact a LEZ phase five would have, but at the moment we are achieving improvements in London's air quality by technological innovation and by stringent rules about London's bus fleet and London's taxi fleet. By the way, you mention the taxi scrappage scheme. As you know - and this was a policy that I don't think enough of may know - by 2020 we want to have all new taxis in London to be zero tailpipe emission. That means that we are moving towards EV taxis and it will be a transformation of the taxi fleet in this city.

Murad Qureshi (AM): The concerns of the particular councils in the future are going to be black carbon and smaller PM10s (scientific term for miniscule particles), so I hope that has registered with you and it is something that you can at least sign up to with the councils.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Yes. On PM10s there has been a distortion because people are moving to diesel, and diesel produces much more PM10s and we need to think about the implications of this.

Murad Qureshi (AM): Finally, if you look at your manifesto you did not make any new major commitments on improving air quality. In light of that, shouldn't you be more readily accepting of some of these suggestions made by the Central London councils across the spectrum, given that you know, and we know, that there are 4,000-odd premature deaths annually in London?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Yes, of course, we will continue to improve air quality and I am proud of what we have achieved so far. I think it will be a nice thing if the Labour group withdrew the assertion that they made during the election campaign, that London has the worst air quality in Europe. They swallowed their words. They ran up the white flag and they accepted that actually there have been improvements in air quality. If I reproach myself for one thing during that campaign it was we were very flat footed in knocking this stuff back, and you went on for ages about air quality without us being able to prove you wrong.

Murad Qureshi (AM): Can I just remind you, Mr Mayor, you have a second term here. At the outset of the term you have been approached by a cross party alliance of local authorities on proposals to tackle poor air quality in central London, a major hotspot, and you are not responding to them positively enough. I think they are doing your work for you.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): They have got some interesting ideas, as I say. I do not know whether this is really the position you would support. I think in tough economic times it would be draconian and unfair to tell sole trader taxi drivers that any vehicle over ten years must now be scrapped. I do not think that would be a just way. That is my understanding of what they are saying.

Darren Johnson (Chair): Thank you. We will move on to the next question on the order paper which is about the extension of the Docklands Light Railway (DLR) to Bromley. It was in James Cleverly's name but, Assembly Member Bacon is going to pursue the question.

2520/2012 - Extension of DLR to Bromley

James Cleverly

Can the Mayor provide an update on progress of assessing the viability of extending the DLR to the London Borough of Bromley?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Thank you very much, James/Gareth. The answer is, and James was in a discussion with Transport for London (TfL) yesterday when we went over this, we are looking at routes, we are looking at budgets, we are looking at the business plan. I think we have to be realistic. This is not funded yet. In order to deliver an extension to Bromley, which I would like to see, I think it would be necessary to have some funding from the beneficiaries in the area.

Gareth Bacon (AM): Thank you, Mr Mayor, on behalf of obviously my colleague, James Cleverly. He has asked me to ask you whether or not you would be able to commit to sending him and Bromley Council any reports or investigatory findings that TfL have made in assessing the viability of that project.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Certainly, we will do that.

Gareth Bacon (AM): Are there any to hand now that can be sent or is this something that is still to be drawn up?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I will make sure we send anything that we have.

Gareth Bacon (AM): Bromley Council are on record as being strong supporters of this project, as you might expect. Is there anything that they can do to improve its chances of being built, short of coming up with the funding themselves?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): As I say, I think in the end when these things are delivered they are delivered in partnership and it will be necessary to think of creative funding mechanisms, such as a community infrastructure levy.

Gareth Bacon (AM): Thank you.

Darren Johnson (Chair): We will then move on to the next question in the name of Assembly Member Boff on stalled developments, asking how many potential homes in London have planning permission, but are currently stalled.

2500/2012 - Stalled Developments

Andrew Boff

How many potential homes in London have planning permission but are currently in stalled developments?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): The answer is 170,000.

Andrew Boff (AM): 170,000?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): 170,000.

Andrew Boff (AM): Mr Mayor, has there been some kind of analysis of the reason behind these stalled developments, because it is very difficult to judge. That one big figure is obviously astonishing but it would be interesting to know the profile of those. I mean how many, for example, do we think are awaiting finance from the banks? How many are stalled because the developers bought at a high in the market and in some cases are trying to build inappropriately high density developments? How many are stalled because of section 106 agreements?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): All those things may or may not be factors. There is also the difficulty individual people may have had in getting mortgages and the slackness in the market, so all those things are factors. What we have done is commissioned a study across quite a broad range of the stalled projects to try to identify what we can do to 'float the boat off the rocks' and what the problem is. Developments of more than 150 homes we are typically looking at, and we want to see what we can do to get things going. I doubt very much that it is anything to do with planning, obviously not, because it has been consented. I think you are on the right track when you talk about developers who have taken a bath on the value of the site. I think that is very often the problem, they do not have the cash left to develop. We are looking at what we can do to encourage greater readiness of finance, particularly for people who want to buy their own home. I think that is one of the key problems in London at the moment and I will be talking a bit more about that over the next few weeks.

Andrew Boff (AM): I welcome that intervention by itself because I think Londoners are very concerned, obviously, with the housing problem that there is, that there is a potential 170,000 homes that could be occupied by families in London.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Yes. I mean these homes do not exist but the consent is there to build them.

Andrew Boff (AM): Precisely. I would appreciate, if possible, and I realise the data is going to be difficult to get to, an idea of the proportions that we are looking at. I think it is right that you focus on those larger developments of 150 plus, but within those developments why are they stalled? Why these in particular are stalled?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): The work is going on right now and obviously I will let you have sight of whatever we get.

Darren Johnson (Chair): That is very welcome.

Andrew Boff (AM): Thank you, Chair.

Darren Johnson (Chair): We will then move on to the next question on the order paper on affordable homes in the name of Tom Copley asking if you support the Government's proposed affordable housing holiday.

2539/2012 - Affordable Homes

Tom Copley

Do you support the Government's proposed affordable housing holiday?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I am not in favour of a policy that basically lets developers get away with not doing any affordable homes at all, and by the planning meetings, everything that is referred to me, we are as tough as we possibly can be in insisting on the highest proportion of affordable homes that we think the development will bear. Making sure

that the developers do honour their obligations to London. It is tough at the moment and frankly it has been getting tougher. We do not want the best to be the enemy of the good, and you will understand that there is always a trade-off. You do have to compromise and there are plenty of projects green-lighted in very good times by the previous mayor where they had a very small proportion of affordable homes. Sometimes that is necessary to get the thing going.

One thing I will not accept, and this is a growing problem, I think it is wrong for a local authority to decide that they will accept a cash payment in lieu of building new affordable homes. We are now insisting that there is a concrete plan to build new affordable as part of the deal, even if it is off site.

Tom Copley (AM): Thank you for that answer, Mr Mayor, but I want to have a look at your own record on affordable housing. Government figures show that only 718 affordable homes were started in the last quarter, which is the lowest figure for ten years. What is going wrong?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Those figures are misleading, if not wrong. What I can tell you is that in the first four years, in spite of the deepest recession for 50 years, we did complete 54,000 affordable homes. We think that we are on target to complete about 100,000 over two terms, probably more. We exceeded the 50,000 target that we set ourselves the first time around and we think that we can do so again.

Tom Copley (AM): I will just repeat the question, Mr Mayor, because I am not sure if you heard it.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I did hear the question. You asked me what has gone wrong and I answered that nothing has gone wrong.

Tom Copley (AM): I asked you why only 718 affordable homes were started in the last quarter.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I will repeat my answer, in case you were not here or were not listening. Nothing has gone wrong. I do not think those figures reflect the reality of what is happening, and we are confident that we can continue in London to deliver tens of thousands of new, affordable homes. Indeed, I think that we need to go further and faster and to make sure that we put public land into the mix, we make it available for development and we build more affordable homes.

Tom Copley (AM): Mr Mayor, let me just stop you there. Are you telling me that the Department for Communities and Local Government, and Eric Pickles' (Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government) figures, are wrong?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): What I am saying to you is that they are misleading insofar as you have concluded from them that --

Tom Copley (AM): Are we being misled by Eric Pickles, Mr Mayor?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I think that you are perhaps guilty of allowing yourself to be misled but let me put it no more strongly than that, Tom. I would not want to accuse you of a narrow misconstruction of some figures for party political ends, but what we are doing and indeed what we achieved over the last four years is to build a record number of new affordable homes. In spite, by the way, of introducing new Parker Morris [minimum space standards] plus 10% room sizes and insisting on a high proportion of family homes.

Tom Copley (AM): This is turning into a party political broadcast for yourself now, but perhaps if you do not believe Eric Pickles' figures, we should have a look at some other figures which are from the Homes and Communities Agency, which show that in the last year affordable housing starts fell by 74%.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): What you need to look at, Tom, is delivery.

Tom Copley (AM): I am looking at delivery. It is here in front of me. It is available online for Londoners to see.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I have sat here for more than four years now being told by you guys that we were not delivering any affordable homes and at the end of the day we did 54,000, it was a record, and I am very confident that we will continue to deliver tens of thousands of new, affordable homes.

Tom Copley (AM): At your current rate, Mr Mayor, and this is 18 months into the new funding round of the Affordable Housing programme, it will take you 16 years to deliver the homes that you say you are going to build by 2015. It will take you 16 years at the current rate. Can you tell us what the problem is?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I can tell you there is no problem.

Tom Copley (AM): There is no problem?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): No.

Tom Copley (AM): You are going to build? You are going to build these homes by 2015?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Yes. We are going to build these homes and look at what we did last time, look at what is going on around London. I am not denying that there has been a considerable recession caused by the Labour Government and its mishandling of the economy, but London is bucking the trend and we will go on with delivering a programme and, to get back to my answer to Stephen [Knight], will deliver not just new homes for Londoners who need to live near their place of work but will create tens of thousands of jobs.

Tom Copley (AM): Well, Mr Mayor, there are fire-fighters, there are police officers, there are teachers, there are paramedics, who work in London who cannot afford to live here because of the state of affordable housing and I think if they knew that affordable house building has slumped to its lowest level in ten years --

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I think it would be very sad if you were to be misled by some Labour scaremongering into thinking that we were not doing our level best to build tens of thousands of new, affordable homes. We have built more --

Tom Copley (AM): We will be more disappointed by your answer than my questions, Mr Mayor.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): We have built more affordable homes over four years than the previous mayoralty did at any stage. We are on target over a four-year period and we are on target to deliver 50,000 more and perhaps more than 50,000. I accept your complaints and your scepticism. All I would point out is that I have heard it before, and I heard it throughout the last four years and you were proved wrong.

Tom Copley (AM): It is because you have not answered our questions, Mr Mayor, but I will leave it there.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I think I have answered your question, but we will leave it.

Darren Johnson (Chair): We will then move on to the next question on the order paper which is on Police numbers in the name of Joanne McCartney, asking how you are going to maintain numbers, given Government cuts.

2540/2012 - Police Numbers

Joanne McCartney

How confident are you of maintaining Police numbers at the 32,320 mark, given the swingeing budget cuts that the Government plans for London policing over the next three years?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I do think that it is important to keep Police numbers high, Joanne. It is something that not everybody necessarily agrees with me about. A lot of people say that the numbers themselves do not matter. I think that they do matter. I think that it is important that we keep them at or around 32,000. It is what I have said. It is also very important that we get those officers insofar as we can out there where the public can see them, and that is what is going on.

Joanne McCartney (AM): Yes, Mr Mayor, we do agree with you that it is important to keep Police numbers high, not least to provide the resilience that London needs. Your election manifesto talked about keeping Police numbers over the 32,000 mark. Can you tell me today how many Police officers do we have in the Metropolitan Police Service?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Yes, it is I think 31,400 and something, from memory.

Joanne McCartney (AM): Yes, so we are already really 500 or 600 down from where you would like to be and where your election manifesto promised.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): We are, and I have raised it and the explanation for this was that there was a recruitment freeze during the Games.

Joanne McCartney (AM): We have had some recent information coming out of the Home Affairs Select Committee in the last two weeks. The Metropolitan Police Service Commissioner, Bernard Hogan-Howe on 11 September told that Committee that he could not guarantee that Police numbers would not fall below 31,000. Do you share his analysis?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): It is very important to continue to make the case to Government for funding for Police and clearly we are, as you rightly say, under serious financial pressure at the moment. I am committed to keeping numbers as high as I possibly can at or around 32,000 and that is what I propose to do.

I think people who are watching this should realise that the acid test of the success of a Police force is in what has happened to crime, and crime over the last period has been down very substantially and I am pleased with that and I think it is a great credit to the work of everybody in the Metropolitan Police Service.

Joanne McCartney (AM): Mr Mayor, I am not going to respond to that, but some crime is going up as well, some types of crime, but on the numbers, you still have not answered me. The Commissioner says that he cannot guarantee that numbers will not fall below 31,000. Why have you as yet not persuaded him that they will retain at the 32,000 mark?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I do not know exactly what he said, but by the end of the Comprehensive Spending Review (CSR) period in 2015 we will have to make the case for London again and an argument will be had.

Joanne McCartney (AM): The week before, on 4 September, your Deputy Mayor for Policing and Crime [Stephen Greenhalgh] said that he was finding it difficult, his exact words, to deliver your manifesto commitment and he stated that if numbers went down to 31,000, as the Metropolitan Police Service's Commissioner is saying he cannot guarantee, it will be a doomsday scenario. Do you agree with your Deputy's analysis?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I think I have been pretty clear that I want to keep these numbers high, Joanne, and that is the name of the game.

Joanne McCartney (AM): Would you agree that 31,000 officers is a 'doomsday scenario', as your Deputy has stated?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I think what Stephen Greenhalgh would say is that what matters is the success of the Police force in combating crime.

Joanne McCartney (AM): This is what he said to the Select Committee, Mr Mayor. He said it was a doomsday scenario.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): At the moment they are having great success.

Joanne McCartney (AM): Do you agree with his analysis that to reduce to 31,000 would be a doomsday scenario for the Metropolitan Police Service?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I do not know exactly what he said about it.

Joanne McCartney (AM): I am quoting what he said.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): He speaks with brilliantly colourful language. I think that the Metropolitan Police Service is doing a brilliant job at 31,453 or whatever they have at the moment. Whether it is a doomsday scenario, if you lose another 453, I am not certain. What I do know is that I want to keep numbers high. That is the name of the game. There are currently 4,700 officers doing back office functions. We can get them out, and we are doing a lot of work, to get them out into the frontline.

Joanne McCartney (AM): I appreciate that you are trying to get officers out to the frontline, however, the Metropolitan Police Service Commissioner, last week also stated that because he is having to axe so many staff, civilians, which includes civilian staff and Police Community Support Officers (PCSOs), that the danger is that warranted officers are having to step back into those roles. I think all of us as Assembly Members are hearing those stories from our boroughs as well, so it is going to be doubly difficult for you, isn't it, Mr Mayor, and would you agree with me that this Government is cutting Police funding too fast and too far?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Members of the Assembly will recall that we were able to get some extra funding for London policing. I think it is important that we continue to make the case for London for making the city safe. What the Metropolitan Police Service is doing at the moment is to continue to drive down crime. There are plenty of people including Charles Clarke the other day, the former Labour Home Secretary, who said you should not fetishize numbers; you should not worry about the exact number of the police. You should look at the results that they deliver.

Joanne McCartney (AM): Thank you.

Darren Johnson (Chair): Assembly Member O'Connell.

Steve O'Connell (AM): Mr Mayor, I am sure that in the coming months and years this tortuous conversation about statistics and numbers will be repeated, so we must anticipate that. Importantly to our residents, the point I made earlier, is that crime is going down. You made a commitment to extra police on the neighbourhoods and we must keep the confidence of the public up. Mr Mayor, would you agree with me that those are the things that matter to Londoners, but also there is a place for this organisation through Joanne's (McCartney) Chairmanship of the Police and Crime Committee (P&C) to hold the Mayor's Office for Policing and Crime (MOPAC) to account, for MOPAC to hold the Commissioner to account? That is where that sort of dialogue should be going on to ensure that crime is driven down, Mr Mayor,

and that the confidence of Londoners and their families to go about their business in a safe manner is the most important thing?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): That is right, and I think that most 'commonsensical' people will agree that the prime function of the Police is not to preserve a bureaucracy whole and entire but to keep crime coming down. That is what they are doing and they are doing a very good job.

As for the role of the Assembly, what I have always said, when we embarked on the reforms and I effectively became the Commissioner for London, it was always going to be in my mind that the function of the Assembly was to provide the scrutiny function of the old Metropolitan Police Authority (MPA) and I stick to that.

Darren Johnson (Chair): Thank you. Assembly Member Tracey.

Richard Tracey (AM): Mr Mayor, do you remember in 2011 when the Labour Party Shadow Home Secretary, Yvette Cooper, said that all departments including the Police would have to make savings in these hard times that we live in? Also, are you aware that there has been a poll conducted which shows that four-fifths of the public think that the efficiency of the Police depends on how well they are run, not how many numbers and how much money is available?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Yes. That is right, and so people say to me why do I make such a fuss about a figure like 32,000 or whatever it is, and perhaps Joanne (McCartney) would like to see it come down even further. The reason is very simple, because I think that in the end you can always make an argument in a great Police service for funding all sorts of things and there are all sorts of functions that you might want to spend Police budget on. So you might get to a stage where Police numbers were allowed to descend to a level where you frankly did not have enough officers out there on the streets, and that is why I want to focus on numbers, and even though it is difficult, and you will build some elaborate trap for me. It will be difficult to keep it at 32,000, it is important for us as a city to keep the Police, to keep the public, focused on that high number. If it goes down, then ultimately there will be a problem and a difficulty in getting enough Police out there.

Darren Johnson (Chair): Thank you. We will then move on to the next question on the order paper, on TfL advertising policy, in the name of Gareth Bacon asking about inappropriate advertising of a political nature on public transport.

2537/2012 - TfL Advertising Policy

Gareth Bacon

What due diligence measures is the Mayor instructing TfL to put in place to ensure there will be no recurrence of inappropriate advertising of a political nature on public transport?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Yes, Gareth, thank you. There have been a couple of incidents recently where I think that the advertisements have not been wholly wonderful. What we are doing is making sure that the Committee that vets these things - obviously it is not me

and it should not be me, I should not have direct oversight of everything that TfL puts on its buses or tube, it would not be possible for me to do that – but I think the distinction has been made now between party political stuff and stuff that is political in any kind of sense. I think what we are trying to look at is whether the rules can be adjusted so that you rule out stuff that is going to be offensive or controversial politically in other respects and party political.

Gareth Bacon (AM): Thank you, Mr Mayor. Firstly, I have to say that when the nature of these particular adverts became aware I think a number of Assembly Members contacted your office and the adverts were taken down commendably speedily after that, after you were forced to intervene. However, I have had a look at the TfL website and looked at their advertising policy, and they do have one, and it is a six-page document, half of which is devoted to reasons why adverts would not be permitted to go on buses. There are no fewer than 18 different categories, and this particular advert arguably broke at least three of them. That is almost one-fifth of the categories, and yet it still appeared. So, I think the key question really – well there are two. The first one is, when you investigated this with TfL did they advise you that any due diligence had been done at all before the advert was posted? The second question I would ask is there is a report that the Budget Committee have produced about ‘Whose Brand is it Anyway?’ is the title of it, which is about sponsorship, which is a separate, but related issue. You wrote back to the Chairman of the Committee saying that a new policy was being drafted and would be released by the end of the year, but possibly by next month. Would that be extended to cover advertising as well?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I think the short answer is a lesson has been learned in TfL by recent experiences and there is a strong desire to make sure that the screening process is now more effective and that politically offensive advertising is screened out.

Gareth Bacon (AM): Thank you, Chairman and Mr Mayor.

Darren Johnson (Chair): Thank you. We will then move on to the next question on the order paper on fire station closures in the name of Andrew Dismore.

2587/2012 - Fire Station Closures

Andrew Dismore

Is it not the case that you are holding back the publication of the list of fire stations facing closure or the withdrawal of a fire engine?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I want to thank Andrew for his work on the London Fire and Emergency Planning Authority (LFEPA) on which he sits and all I can say is that to the best of my knowledge, the LFEPA on which you sit, Andrew, has not yet made any such decision, but that if you do decide to make any such decision, I am sure you will make sure to let yourself know, so to speak.

Andrew Dismore (AM): That is a pretty silly answer, isn't it? You know that you are demanding cuts of £65 million over the next two years. You have only been able to find £14 million without cuts in fire engines and fire stations and it is pretty, well, school boy arithmetic,

even for somebody from Eton, to work out that at £1.4 million a year potentially ten one-pump fire stations are at risk. I also think you must be considering Londoners pretty stupid if you think that you do not already have a list of fire stations up your sleeve facing the chop, bearing in mind you expect the final budget done and dusted to be on your desk within two months of now.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I do not think you can convincingly claim complete ignorance of this subject since, as I say, you do sit on the LFEPA and you are there to provide a balance between the public need for fire cover and the cash available. I genuinely do not know what the solutions are yet. I do not have any such list in my back pocket, but clearly the Authority has to make savings and it is for Members to decide how best to do that. One thing that I do think has been very successful is that the London Fire Brigade has continued to produce very good results for the people of this city in reducing deaths from fire. We have one of the lowest incidences of fire in London per head of population anywhere in the country and that is of great credit.

Andrew Dismore (AM): That is based on the present provision within the London Fire Brigade. In Barnet, we already have the worst attendance times in London, over a minute worse than the average, and as I think you would accept each minute can mean the difference between life and death at a fire. So why will you not come clean and tell Londoners, the same as with the Police, what stations are facing cuts and which are safe at least for next year if not the year beyond? We cannot find out, because we have asked these questions as Labour members of LFEPA, because they are not telling us there either. The buck stops with you when it comes to things like these services. Why will you not come clean and tell Members what you are up to?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Much as I appreciate the style of invective that you bring to this place, I must tell you that you sit on the Board of LFEPA, you are there to look at this question. I do not have the answers.

Andrew Dismore (AM): Will you tell the Chair of LFEPA to tell us what the cuts are if he will not tell you? He is not here. You can tell him to come clean himself.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Can I invite you to make use of your time on the Board of LFEPA of which I think you are remunerated --

Andrew Dismore (AM): No, we are not.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Whatever.

Darren Johnson (Chair): Just to clarify, Assembly Members do not receive extra remuneration for serving on the Board.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Sorry. You might ask him yourself in one of these meetings.

Andrew Dismore (AM): That is what we have tried to do. We have tried to get the answers and he is not coming clean either. It is a problem with the Conservative Party, they are trying to pull the wool over the eyes of Londoners and introduce these cuts by stealth.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Well, all I can say is that this is something that you will have to discuss on the Board of LFEPA. I cannot believe there is some procedure that enables the budgetary savings that are necessary to be reached without approval or discussion with you. Are you telling me that there is some sort of dictatorial system in LFEPA that means that you are not going to be consulted at all? I would be most surprised. I think you have to look at what the requirements are and you have to reach a conclusion and I would be happy to study it.

Darren Johnson (Chair): Thank you. Assembly Member Bacon.

Gareth Bacon (AM): Thank you, Mr Chairman. Of course there is no dictatorial remit at LFEPA where information is kept from Members, as Mr Dismore well knows, but that does not fit the scaremongering narrative that he is trying to put out before London at the moment. The plain fact of the matter is, Mr Mayor, that Mr Dismore asked all of these questions last week and got the same answers from the Chairman of the Fire Authority, as you have given this morning. There have also been briefings, and the Labour group had their briefing before the Conservative group about the scale of the financial situation that LFEPA is facing and they were told by the Commissioner, the Deputy Commissioner and other senior officers (at LFEPA) that there was no list of stations that were slighted for closure. So, my question, Mr Mayor, is do you think that Mr Dismore believes that the officers at the Fire Authority are lying to you?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Well, it is hard to know what Mr Dismore believes, but what I do hope is that he will -- and I apologise to him for suggesting he was remunerated on LFEPA, that was a mistake, but he sits on that important committee, there are savings to be made, they have to be made in such a way as to keep London's Fire Brigade delivering the exemplary service that they do. If it is impossible to do that then he needs to make that point and he needs to make it in LFEPA, and we will look at the outcome.

Darren Johnson (Chair): Thank you. We will then move onto the next question on the order paper on major infrastructure projects in the name of John Biggs, asking what projects you have initiated.

2542/2012 - Major Infrastructure

John Biggs

With the Government talking about infrastructure investment, what projects have you initiated and promoted that are likely to lead to actual construction in the short term, in your time as Mayor?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I am grateful to John for a question that seems to be really about male machismo and the size and grandeur of the projects that we can all claim that we have initiated or promoted. If you look at the things that are currently being delivered I am very, very proud that Crossrail was rescued from the chopping block in 2010. I can assure you

there was not a member of the Cabinet, I was told, who supported the retention of Crossrail when the coalition came in. I am pleased that we are proceeding with the Tube upgrades which will massively improve the capacity of London and the liveability of the city and I am very, very proud of getting on -- by collapsing the Public Private Partnership (PPP), by the way, and getting on with the Jubilee line upgrades. London would not have got that many people to the Stratford site in the way that we did, had we not delivered those Jubilee line upgrades. The capacity of that Jubilee line was increased because we went ahead with those improvements. There are many other schemes that we are proposing and supporting; we have already mentioned the Northern line extension river crossings and so on. I believe passionately, as I know you do, John, in transport infrastructure as the way to get the economy of this city moving and we are going to continue with that. There will be more in the 20/20 vision, particularly about Crossrail 2 and other schemes that we want to bring forward and we have had a lengthy discussion already today about a new airport.

John Biggs (AM): Thank you, Chair. Given that you seem to agree that we need to invest in infrastructure, and indeed you stood on a building site last year with George Osborne (Chancellor of the Exchequer) and announced three major projects, can you tell us how much money you secured from the Government to support those three projects in the past year, and whether a single spade has been turned in the pursuit of any single one of them?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): No, but on the case of the Northern line extension (NLE) I am confident that we will get Government support and --

John Biggs (AM): Just to clarify, you said it would be built and open within three years. Is that right?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): No. Thank you for that clarification. I think the chances are us opening the Northern line extension within three years are very small, but we will start work within three years. The Transport and Works Act 1992 is already underway and I am confident that we will get that going.

John Biggs (AM): So you have the funding for that now?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I am absolutely confident that the Government will support the Northern line extension.

John Biggs (AM): You do not have the funding, but you are confident that you might get it.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Well, the position at the moment, to be totally clear, is that the Government is currently guaranteeing the future income from the business rates that will be generated in the area.

John Biggs (AM): So, you do not have any funding. Can I ask you --

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I do think that it does not in any way impede us in our work. We will get on and deliver the Northern line extension (NLE). I do think that they need to come to the table with more cash.

John Biggs (AM): So, it is not guaranteed it is going to start within your life as Mayor of London.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): If you are saying that a new train --

John Biggs (AM): Can I ask you two other questions?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): You have to be reasonable here. If you are saying within three years we could build new stations and have new trains running through --

John Biggs (AM): Well, of course there is that old --

Darren Johnson (Chair): Let us just have the Mayor's answer on this, Mr Biggs, and then I will bring you back in. Mayor, if you can just finish your response.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Obviously we cannot finish complete new stations and a new track within three years that is impossible. What we can do is start --

John Biggs (AM): I am glad you have clarified that because it is impossible and I think it is good that you acknowledge it is impossible.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): It is not impossible to start it though.

John Biggs (AM): Here is a --

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): You had a year. You did not start it.

John Biggs (AM): Could you stop interrupting me. Here is a simple question.

Darren Johnson (Chair): If you could both stop interrupting each other it might be helpful.

John Biggs (AM): You are now a great fan, it is in your manifesto, of extending the Croydon Tram to Crystal Palace which is another fairly small but quite important piece of infrastructure. Can you tell us which Mayor cancelled that scheme in 2008?

Male Speaker (AM): Supported by the Assembly Member.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Well, not everything can be delivered at once and --

John Biggs (AM): I can answer for you. The answer is Boris Johnson cancelled it.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): You can hardly say I cancelled it. You just said that I restarted it.

John Biggs (AM): I think the lesson is, and we all know this, because you have already told us, is that if you are going to do these things which London needs you need a long lead in time. It means when you first get elected you need to start the ball rolling rather than cancelling them because otherwise in your second term you are going to say we want to do them and nothing will happen on your watch. The Government will not be lined up, you will not lobby for the funding, not a spade will be turned. Another example would be Silvertown crossing. What did you do in 2008? You cancelled Silvertown crossing. You now want to build it --

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): No, I didn't.

John Biggs (AM): -- but again nothing, again nothing, nothing will happen --

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I know you and I -- you must not mislead people, John, even inadvertently. There was no plan for a tunnel. There was a plan for a bridge. There was a plan for a Thames gateway bridge and --

John Biggs (AM): No, no, there was a plan for a tunnel. You know perfectly -- well, you should know there was.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): -- that did not proceed.

John Biggs (AM): And instead you built a cable car. I asked you how I could get my car on it and you paused and suggested that I probably could not which I think is the right answer to that question.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Why would you want to drive your car?

John Biggs (AM): Because people need --

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Why can't you get your bicycle on it?

John Biggs (AM): For my constituents to prosper we need to have additional road capacity across the Thames.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): That is what we are building.

John Biggs (AM): That is what you have stopped from happening. Thank you, Chair.

Darren Johnson (Chair): Thank you. Assembly Member Tracey.

Richard Tracey (AM): Mr Mayor, John Biggs just mentioned the cable car [Emirate Air Line]. That was a project that was an idea of yours and our revered Chairman which was taken up and

completed during the course of the mayoralty. How many people rode on it during the Olympic period?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I just saw the figures. About 1 million or something like that. I think the total we were expecting during a year was 2 million and I think John [Biggs] even promised to vote for me if we built that. Did he keep that promise? Maybe he did.

Darren Johnson (Chair): He didn't even vote for me and it was my idea!

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Do we think he even voted Labour? I doubt it.

Darren Johnson (Chair): Assembly Member O'Connell.

Steve O'Connell (AM): Thank you. I must turn to the Upper Norwood extension because clearly that is something we are all very passionate about. It may be a small scheme, small but perfectly formed, just like Mr Biggs himself, however, what I would say is, would you not agree with me that it was wrong of the previous Mayor to give false hope to the people of Upper Norwood around a scheme that was never funded? The money was never there and only you recognised that, Mr Mayor, when you came into office.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I know. I know. It was --

Darren Johnson (Chair): If Members can just be quiet and then we will let the Mayor answer.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): You certainly could not accuse me of giving people false hope. What I may have done is accidentally given the Labour Party an opportunity to accuse me of cancelling stuff. We faced a huge budgetary crisis and we could not proceed with absolutely everything that was being promised, every pork barrel scheme that was being announced. We had to rationalise, we had to stop wasting money on schemes that had no prospect of delivering. Let me remind you that the west London tram, and I do not know whether Onkar [Sahota] supports the west London tram, or whether he would have been elected if this was still on the table, but the west London tram, which was a scheme the previous Mayor used to float the whole time, cost £34 million just in studies and preparation and it was being kept on artificial life support and wasting huge sums of money. It was necessary to bring an end to that misery.

Steve O'Connell (AM): Just to repeat, there is absolutely no point in promising schemes when there is no chance of funding. It only raises expectations of residents but, Mr Mayor, you will know that in the emerging Transport for London (TfL) business plan that will be published later in the year will have details around up-coming investment and it is there as a serious Mayor, and I hope you will then deliver the extension to Upper Norwood and Sutton.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Do not forget the benefits of the integration of the underground and the over-ground trains in southeast London that we will achieve with the new franchise. We are very confident that Patrick McLaughlin, the new Transport Secretary with whom I have a very good relationship, will want to proceed with that franchise. The change is

the devolution of rail powers and that is very exciting. We have done a huge amount to improve the transport infrastructure of London just in four years. The best by car scheme anywhere in the world, cycle super highways, a new bus; all these things have been done sometimes with private sector support, but they have been done very fast and very efficiently by TfL. We are now embarking on a massive road improvement programme and it is high time that we improved our roads and maybe John [Biggs] can come with me as we go around London and look at areas like Henlys Corner, on the A406, which we deem to have been completely neglected for a long time and greatly improved it. There are many other improvements we are going to make to roads and to junctions across the city.

Darren Johnson (Chair): Thank you. We will now move onto the next question on the order paper on transport fares policy in the name of Valerie Shawcross, asking are you taking the high cost of living in London into account in your decisions on fares for 2013.

2555/2012 - Transport Fares Policy

Valerie Shawcross

Are you taking the high cost of living in London into account in your decision making about your proposed transport fare increases for 2013?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Of course I will take that into account, Val, but as you would expect I will not be discussing my fares decision now.

Valerie Shawcross (AM): Do you think you will be continuing your Retail Price Index (RPI) plus 2% increase a year policy, given that we do have considerable problems of low pay and poverty in London and there has been a very interesting report from Sustrans called 'Locked Out' where they talk about poorer people having to move out of central London are now suffering from something called transport poverty because of the high cost of fares. Are you looking at how London is changing demographically and in terms of people's incomes?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Yes, I am, and there is some interesting data on this and one of the things I am looking at is the proportion of London as disposable income that fares absorb.

Valerie Shawcross (AM): Absolutely.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): It has gone up since 2001 from about 2.3% to about 3% of overall disposable income. The reasons for this need exploring. There has also been a massive increase in journeys taken by Londoners. Now, I expect that a factor in that are obviously the housing difficulties that we discussed earlier, the need for people to be near their place of work. We must also --

Valerie Shawcross (AM): Surely it is in your hands to help people, particularly the lower paid we know depend on buses. Looking at bus networks, improving them, and stopping this 'bearing down' on the bus passenger that you have been doing with your fares policy. Do you think, and I am not asking you for a specific figure now, but do you think in your fares

announcement you will be able to do something to help Londoners cope with this issue at the moment?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Val, as I said in the campaign, and I say to you now, I will do everything I can to be reasonable to people in tough times. I do accept that, but John [Biggs] has just been slating me for not proceeding with various infrastructure projects, not all of which I think had a good business case. There are many infrastructure projects -there are many improvements to our transport network - that have an amazing business case. They are extremely expensive.

Valerie Shawcross (AM): Mr Mayor, I am just talking about fares impacting on the poorer people, but if you want to digress I can tell you that --

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I am sorry, but the fares --

Valerie Shawcross (AM): -- two of the projects you cancelled --

Darren Johnson (Chair): Quickly, let the Mayor finish his sentence and then I will bring you back in, Val.

Valerie Shawcross (AM): All right. Sorry, Chair.

Darren Johnson (Chair): Mayor, if you can quickly finish your response.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): It is just to say this, you cannot divorce the argument about fares from the need to invest in transport infrastructure and I do not think it is reasonable to attack me as quite a lot of people have just been doing for not being able to proceed with this or that scheme and simultaneously to call for fares to be slashed, or whatever. What we must do is be reasonable but also proceed with improvements --

Valerie Shawcross (AM): Quickly, Mr Mayor, I do not want to protract this because you have not made the decision yet, but just to say two of the projects you cancelled were already funded. The cash was there: one was the Private Finance Initiative (PFI), one already had the money available, and two is of course the economy would be benefited by people having more money in their pockets. Last year in the autumn statement the Chancellor reduced their proposed increase in rail fares by 1%. Do you expect that to happen this year, and will you be able to pass that through to the London fare payer?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Well, obviously we have no information yet about what the Department for Transport (DfT) intended to do, or the Treasury intends to do.

Valerie Shawcross (AM): Do you want them to?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Personally I think if they can find some cash to abate fare increases across the country I think your point is a reasonable one and I certainly would

support that, but I repeat what I said last year, if that is going to happen then what is sauce for the goose has to be sauce for the gander in London.

Valerie Shawcross (AM): Thank you, Chair.

Darren Johnson (Chair): Assembly Member Pidgeon:

Caroline Pidgeon (AM): Mr Mayor, last year TfL ended with a £91 million operating surplus, largely made up from fares revenue and predictions so far this year look like around £32 million additional revenue. So this would mean that you potentially do not have to put up fares by 5.2%, according to the formula that TfL tends to use. Will you agree, and you have been saying that you want to do everything you can to be reasonable in tough times, will you agree to look at targeted fare reductions by perhaps introducing a one-hour bus ticket, early bird fares, or part time travel cards, which clearly could be afforded from some of this surplus?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): All the arguments about so-called surpluses, I mean, I think we really went over that during the election campaign. This is not just cash that mysteriously turns up that is unallocated; this is all dedicated, insofar as there is cash but it is all earmarked. We have to buy new deep tube trains for the Piccadilly line --

Caroline Pidgeon (AM): Will you agree to look at targeted fare reductions? He is not answering my question.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): -- in the middle of this mayoral term. There is currently no funding for this deep tube line and I do --

Caroline Pidgeon (AM): I am not asking about deep tube line.

Darren Johnson (Chair): Assembly Member Pidgeon is asking about targeted fare reductions.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Yes, they do, and that is why you have to have a sensible fares policy. There is no such thing as a surplus, something that washes into big fare reductions. All you can do is maintain the concessions that we have in this city and that we have extended. From November, and I would have liked to have brought it in earlier, but from November we will restore the 24-hour Freedom Pass to everybody over 60 that the Labour Government cruelly took away.

Caroline Pidgeon (AM): I have asked, will you look at introducing targeted measures such as early bird fares?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): We will make sure that we keep all concessions for young people, all concessions for disabled and --

Caroline Pidgeon (AM): He is not actually answered my question.

Darren Johnson (Chair): Can you --

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I will look at Caroline's proposals which she has made many times before for early bird fares and fares per hour, but I obviously will not commit to them now because I will be making my announcement about fares in due course.

Caroline Pidgeon (AM): You did say that you would do everything you can to bear down on fares and in fact after I quizzed you last year --

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I just repeated that to Valerie (Shawcross).

Caroline Pidgeon (AM): -- suddenly we had on the front page of the Evening Standard that you were looking to reward off-peak travellers with cheaper fares. So, it is clearly an idea that you like, so I do not understand really what is stopping you. Will you at least look to potentially trial one of these ideas to really target particularly those low income Londoners?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): What I will undertake to do is to be very clear in my reasons why, if we do not decide to proceed with these ideas. After the fares announcement I will make sure that you can properly catechise me about why we did not do your idea, Caroline, and I will give a full explanation, but I do not want to get drawn into -- I am not saying that we will not but I do not want to get drawn into a discussion on it.

Caroline Pidgeon (AM): You are sounding quite negative there but you told us time and time again that you like these ideas and you want to do everything --

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I like aspects of them.

Caroline Pidgeon (AM): -- that you can to be reasonable in tough times. Early bird fares cost £9 million. In the overall budget it is not that much. It would be a targeted measure; it would fit with what you are saying. What is stopping you?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Well, you have to find cash from somewhere else in the fares box. Many of the beneficiaries of early bird fares, for instance, would be multimillionaire bankers cruising into Canary Wharf at the crack of dawn to make phone calls to Japan or wherever it happens to be. Is that what you want? I do not know.

Caroline Pidgeon (AM): It would help the crush at peak times as well on the Tube.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): There are disbenefits to almost every suggestion.

Darren Johnson (Chair): We are now out of time so we will conclude that. No other questions on fares. We will move onto the next question on the order paper which is in the name of Tony Arbour asking about the need to verify the accuracy of borough crime figures before making statements.

2480/2012 - CRIB - accuracy

Tony Arbour

Before we praise or criticise any changes in a borough's crime figures, should we always first verify the accuracy of its figures?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Yes, I agree completely, Tony, that we need to have an accurate set of figures and that is what the Crime Recording and Investigation Bureau (CRIB) is there to do and so far there has been a reduction in the variations of crime reporting across London.

Tony Arbour (AM): Can I draw your attention, Mr Mayor, to some of the failings of this new measure. Most of the crime which is recorded comes in via the telephone and the people who answer the calls tend to classify the crime without actually probing. Can I give you a couple of simple examples? The reason I raise this is it is really quite important to you and all of us here. When you get variations of statistics, particularly statistics which vary from a long-term mean, and as long as I can remember Richmond has been the safest borough in London and recently it has slipped from that particular place and I have discovered that the telephone people, the investigation bureau, classified as 'theft' lost mobile phones in public houses and indeed a quarter of all other thefts, i.e. opposed to thefts from shops and things of that kind, were misplaced telephones in public houses which were subsequently found. Nevertheless, that went onto the borough's crime statistics and what I am suggesting to you is that you ensure that there is rigorous examination by the call-handlers to ensure that crimes are properly recorded; otherwise it suggests that places which were hitherto safe appear to be hotspots for crime.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Obviously there is a decision to be made about classification of these thefts and the Crime Reporting Investigation Bureau is there to try to reach some sort of standardisation. If what you say is true then it is a cause for hope, that there is in fact even less theft in Richmond than we previously thought.

Tony Arbour (AM): No, no, Mr Mayor, that is not the way to approach it. The way to approach it is to ensure that there is appropriate questioning when the telephone call comes in as to precisely what is the crime that is recorded. What I am suggesting is happening is that the call-handlers, because it is much easier, "Oh, you say you have had your telephone stolen" and they register it as a stolen phone without making further enquiries. If I can give you another example, perhaps more frivolous, but nevertheless went onto our statistics. There was some food stuck onto the outside of a car which was classified as criminal damage; manifestly that was not a crime. Can I draw your attention please to another area where the statistics are manifestly --

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): What sort of food?

Tony Arbour (AM): I believe it was fast because it was a sports car.

All: Oh!

Tony Arbour (AM): Can I draw your attention really to a more serious aspect of crime classification. Until now people who believed that they were being oppressed on Facebook and

they complained about that, that was hitherto classified as being a malicious communication, which is not a notifiable crime. The new Crime Investigation Bureau has now changed that from malicious communication to the crime of harassment and more than half of the cases of harassment which were reported again in this borough was criticism of someone on Facebook. Now, manifestly that is not a crime. Do you not think that this again is something where you can use your very considerable powers of persuasion to suggest to the Metropolitan Police Service (MPS) that there is some considerable investigation, and I would have thought it would not take more than a couple of minutes when a crime is being reported to find out precisely what is the crime that is being reported and seeing that it is properly classified.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I am not certain that you are entirely right there, Tony, on that last one because as far as I know, I do not use Facebook myself, but I think there is a new anxiety about cyber bullying, or whatever it is called, and new technology produces new offences and new possibilities for crime. I think we have to face the fact that there may be some problems to do with that kind of behaviour that maybe should be classified as criminal. So, I am afraid I am not just going to sit here and rule out the possibility that there can be an offence of that description.

Tony Arbour (AM): Well, obviously you are right and I sit as a Magistrate and I have seen very unpleasant cases of cyber bullying but the kind of cases which I am referring to is just a mention, somebody has 'big ears....lol'

What I am saying to you is this, that in a zeal to satisfy residents who believe that somehow or another they have been damaged and therefore they think that the police should investigate that we really should have some kind of proper filtering. As I have said to you right at the very beginning, the reason I raise the matter --

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Well, I think it is a very good point.

Tony Arbour (AM): The reason I raise the matter is that it can lead to the substantial distortion of crime figures.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Your point is made loud and clear, Tony. I am very grateful. I think the CRIB will be looking at how they can make sure that people do ask the right kind of questions to get the right data so that we do not misclassify crimes and particularly we do not over-report crimes where none has taken place and I think most people will take from what you say a broadly reassuring message that perhaps sometimes things are reported as crimes when they were not.

Tony Arbour (AM): Thank you, Chairman.

Darren Johnson (Chair): Thank you. We will then move onto the next question on the order paper in the name of Joanne McCartney on police front counters.

2545/2012 - Front Counters - Hampstead

Joanne McCartney

In response to my question MQ2302/2012 you listed a number of police buildings and front counters, however, you failed to include Hampstead Police Station as one of the front counters or police buildings earmarked for closure. What other buildings have you failed to include in this list?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): In the list I provided to you there was no intention to conceal any decision about Hampstead Police Station, simply because I was certainly unaware of any proposal to close it myself and as far as I am aware no proposal to close it has been put either to me or to Stephen Greenhalgh (Deputy Mayor for Policing and Crime).

Joanne McCartney (AM): Thank you. My question asks what other buildings have you not included in that list. We are hearing --

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I have not included this building, for instance, or many other buildings --

Joanne McCartney (AM): But police buildings, front counters in police stations.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I cannot give you an answer to that. All I can give you is a general state of the position which is that there is no secret list of police stations that are earmarked, in your phrase, for closure. What there is, is a desire to get the best possible value and use out of the 800 buildings in the police estate and where there are opportunities to get the police out and to be more visible, to have more front counters, to have more police locations in hospitals, in fire stations, council housing stakeholders, libraries, supermarkets, that kind of thing. Where we can do that rather than having some traditional great 'stalag' of a police station that is actually not as useful as it might be, then maybe we should consider it.

Joanne McCartney (AM): The reason I ask is because we are hearing rumours of other police stations and front counters that may be earmarked for closure. Again, in the consultation that the Metropolitan Police Service is doing at the moment, it talks about making changes to front counters and talks about public access points. When your Deputy Mayor for Policing and Crime, Stephen Greenhalgh, was recently in front of Select Committee, he stated that there was the need to remove some police front counters. So, bearing that in mind, can I just ask, the previous commitment that if you closed a front counter you would open another of at least good quality, has that now gone?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): No. That is the key thing to say about Hampstead Police Station where I think there is some controversy. Whatever decision is taken there, there has to be adequate compensatory provision.

Joanne McCartney (AM): Because the consultation at the moment and the Deputy Mayor in front of our Police and Crime Committee talked about public access points and talked about replacing traditional front counters with, for example, a couple of hours at Tesco on a Friday morning. Do you really think that is a good enough service for Londoners?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Well, I do not know if that was what was proposed in respect of Hampstead.

Joanne McCartney (AM): No. In general.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): No, well, I do not know whether you are accurately reflecting what Stephen Greenhalgh said. I see someone is nodding there; perhaps it was what he said. Let us be absolutely clear, what we want is to have the maximum possible engagement with the public, to make the police as available to the public as possible. If that means having police counters in lots of public locations I think that is a good thing.

Joanne McCartney (AM): Can I ask that what this looks like, I think, to us and to the general public is that the danger, because there are great budget cuts that we accept are going to be very difficult, that this does not result in just a fire sale of police counters, and that at the end of the day we have a comprehensive service across London. Are you confident that will take place?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Yes. I think Stephen [Greenhalgh] has made it absolutely clear he will not consider any proposal for closure of Hampstead or any other police station; unless and until suitable alternative provision has been made.

Joanne McCartney (AM): Can I ask how do you judge the suitability? Because when we did question Stephen Greenhalgh at our Police and Crime Committee --

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): It is about --

Joanne McCartney (AM): I think it was Tony Arbour who said that --

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): -- reassurance.

Joanne McCartney (AM): The experiment at his local Sainsbury's had been an absolute flop.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Well, there you go.

Joanne McCartney (AM): So, you know if you are going down this road you need to be evidence based and that is the concern that we have. That it is not going to be, that we are going to have police stations and front counters closing and they are never going to be put back and the alternatives are not good enough.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Well, the key test is, is existing provision actually very well used? Is it as good as it could be? Are the buildings themselves being put to the best possible use, in terms of the value of the asset? If not, how can you give a better service to Londoners? How can you have more opportunities for the public to see the police out there in the community and talk to them?

Joanne McCartney (AM): What account will you take of the public's view on this?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Public reassurance and public confidence is paramount. But I think commonsensical members of the public can see that there may very well be cases where you have a big Victorian police station that is not always ideal. That possibly is not in an ideal location, and that is where there is scope for improvement. Where you could certainly dispose of the asset and use the proceeds to improve policing in London.

Joanne McCartney (AM): So will you commit to doing a full public consultation on this?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Well, you know, I do not know quite what you mean by a full public consultation. But what I can say is --

Joanne McCartney (AM): Will you publish plans for each borough and invite the public to consult on them?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Of course.

Joanne McCartney (AM): Thank you.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Any proposals that we make on this will be, by their very nature, extremely controversial. There will be a great deal of public outcry. There will be local politicians who enviably want to represent the feelings of their constituents and we will take account of what people say. You have to go forward with plans that are, in the end, for the benefit not just of Londoners but will also help to bring crime down.

Darren Johnson (Chair): Thank you. Assembly Member Dismore.

Andrew Dismore (AM): I am sure the people of Hampstead would be interested to know that you consider their police station to be a 'stalag'. However, it cannot be right, can it, that the first the local people knew, the council knew or indeed I knew about the plan to close it was a leaked story in the *Ham & High newspaper*. Because it was not in your original published list. So just to follow up --

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I was speaking generally, Andrew.

Andrew Dismore (AM): Will you now at least promise to have a full and proper consultation with local residents about the future of the station and any suggested alternatives? A simple question.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): The simple answer, I will make sure that there is no change in the status of Hampstead Police Station, unless and until there is better or equivalent alternative provision.

Andrew Dismore (AM): What about consultation?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Well, I have given it a pretty --

Andrew Dismore (AM): No. So the answer is no?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I have given a pretty clear answer of that. There is inevitably --

Andrew Dismore (AM): Your clear answer is there will not be.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): -- a lengthy political process in which distinguished local representatives will make points and we will listen to what you have to say.

Darren Johnson (Chair): Thank you. Assembly Member Evans.

Roger Evans (AM): Thank you, Chair. We have various rumours circulating about police properties within my constituency as well. I think what we would all like to see is some sort of process behind the way these are announced. Rather than things leaking out through rumour and possibly misinterpretation in some cases of letters that come out of Scotland Yard. Can you make sure that there is a proper process around this so that we do not get campaigns set up, for example, in places where the police station is not going to close?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Well it is very difficult to stop local politicians campaigning on this kind of issue, and, you know, making a fuss about nothing. I mean, what can I do, it is what they are there for. What are you proposing?

Roger Evans (AM): What I am proposing is that we do not have communications from the Deputy Commissioner, for instance, which say that everywhere is being considered for closure and nothing has been decided yet. Because that is just a licence for people to work to set up campaigns --

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I see what you mean.

Roger Evans (AM): -- in places where there is no need for one. At least, if there is going to be bad news let us concentrate where the bad news is and not at a lot of ghost campaigns as well.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Well that is a reasonable point. Why don't I see if I can do what I can to get to the bottom of this and see if we can speed this whole thing up and get some clarity and avoid clouds of suspicion being cast over places that have no threat over them whatsoever? We will see what we can do about that.

Darren Johnson (Chair): Thank you. Assembly Member O'Connell.

Steve O'Connell (AM): Yes. To be helpful, he referred to a consultation earlier which is a consultation about rolling out of the local policing model. I think you and everyone here will agree that the history of the Metropolitan Police Service and its approach, shall we state, has been somewhat random in its decision making around the closure of the estate in the past. I would like to perhaps share with you, and hopefully you all agree that I believe that there is a process. The process is around the consultation of the policing model. Unusually, for the Metropolitan Police Service they are consulting on how the borough commands need to be delivered in their boroughs. That consultation is out there at the moment. When that response is in, Mr Mayor, you may be aware and hopefully you will be aware, that the Metropolitan Police Service, I would suggest and I would urge, then we look at where they need their estate. Look at their present estate and then use that science to judge what is surplus. In the past, as we know, and hence the campaigns know, they have closed down stations in a very random manner. So, to be helpful, Mr Mayor, I would suggest, and I would suggest that you urge that your Deputy Mayor for Policing and Crime does put pressure on the Commission and others that there is a clear process, a transparent process and a fair process so the problems that Roger Evans has, and others have are not repeated. More importantly it is a very transparent process so the public can understand if at the end of the day there is a decision about closure of a station, there is a rationale behind it, and operation rationale, and that the public are taken along with that decision.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Yes. I think most people, as I say, can understand that if a police station is unfit for purpose, if the accommodation is not suitable for staff or the working conditions are not good. If the public do not have ready access. If it is an old

fashioned structure that is not suitable anymore, most people understand that it is wise for the Metropolitan Police Service to realise the value of that asset and to create other provision. What we want to do is make sure we consult as widely as possible but get on with the job of getting the police out there.

Steve O'Connell (AM): Lastly, Mr Mayor, I know it is very tempting for all local politicians to whip up a storm of excitement if there is a threat to any stations, real or imagined. The experience I had in one of my boroughs, was when a station was sold in Sutton. A great big 'for sale' sign went outside. I put my tin hat on expecting a lot of abuse and heavy posts in the inbox. I heard nothing. That is because 200 or 300 yards down the road a new front counter had opened that the residents of that particular area of Sutton have welcomed. So as a salutary lesson, Mr Mayor, these things can be done properly if managed in the correct manner.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Of course. Yes, of course that is right. However, what you can never guard against is the opportunistic campaigning of people in some parties, brackets, all parties. Who may try to whip up public anxiety unnecessarily?

Darren Johnson (Chair): Well, on that note before we stoke up more public anxiety, let us move on to the next question. TfL planning comments in the name of Roger Evans asking about Transport for London's comments on planning applications regarding parking.

2506/2012 - TfL Planning Comments

Roger Evans

Transport for London, when making comments on planning applications to local authorities, often demands that the level of parking is reduced, regardless of the impact on the local economy or on residential amenity. Will you encourage TfL to take a more flexible approach to ensure that local needs are fully taken into account, especially in outer London?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Yes. We are trying to be as effective as possible and we are looking at how, particularly in the London plan, we can make adjustments to have further flexibility, particularly in outer London.

Roger Evans (AM): Well, that is a very welcome response. With some of our outer London town centres of course, we need to have parking to help to rejuvenate the town centres and improve the economic situation there. So when we have proposals for developments there that include parking it would be helpful if Transport for London (TfL) did not try to get the numbers of parking places put down when local people have decided that those are the numbers that we need to have to resource that retail project.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): There is always going to be tension between the need to prevent traffic congestion and the desire of developers to have a lot of parking spaces. I hear it the whole time. I remind everybody the TfL trainees or the TfL guys who are now leaving, do not forget most journeys in outer London by car are barely more than a mile in length. It is absolutely crazy for everybody to be stuck behind their steering wheels when they could be seeking alternative -- well, they are all just disappearing. They are going off to make life even better for London and for Londoners, which is what they have been doing successfully over the last four years. Thank you very much TfL. No, they are fed up with the porosity of decent questions from the Assembly. The complete failure. I mean, here I have been more generous, more open, more transparent than almost any time in history and you have failed to lay a glove on me, yet again.

Darren Johnson (Chair): Well, let us assume that our TfL graduates have learnt everything they need to know from the Assembly and this Mayor's Question Time. Let us get back to the point about parking provisions.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Anyway, so that is the trade off we have to manage.

Roger Evans (AM): May I just make the point on residential developments. Not least because a future Commissioner (of TfL) may have been in the audience just now for all we know. That restricting parking places on residential developments often leads to an overflow of unwanted parking into neighbouring streets. Should that not be something that TfL bear in mind when they comment on those proposals as well?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Of course. You have to be realistic. Then on the other hand we want, as far as we possibly can, to stop people making unnecessary trips by car, which causes pointless congestion.

Darren Johnson (Chair): Thank you. We will move on to the next question on the order paper then, which is in the name of Jenny Jones asking will you look at reducing or removing exemptions from the congestion charges for certain vehicles.

2395/2012 - Diesel cars in the congestion charge

Jenny Jones

Will you look at reducing or removing exemptions from the congestion charge from those vehicles which come under the CO2 emission threshold, but which cause considerable localised pollution?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Yes.

Jenny Jones (AM): Is that the answer?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Yes.

Jenny Jones (AM): Wow. If you were so cooperative every time, you know, we would get on so much better.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): We get on famously already, would you not say?

Jenny Jones (AM): Do you think you are going to actually look at those exemptions for diesel vehicles that are quite polluting?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Well, you heard what I said.

Jenny Jones (AM): Well, you will remove or tighten those exemptions?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): There is a consultation we are going to get underway. My ambition is, as we were saying earlier on, my ambition is to have many more zero tailpipe emission vehicles in London and we consider the way the congestion charge can be used to achieve that.

Jenny Jones (AM): So will you also review the greener vehicle discount scheme?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Yes.

Jenny Jones (AM): Who is going to do this? It sounds quite interesting.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): TfL are going to do the work and there will be a public consultation on the changes.

Jenny Jones (AM): Have you got a timeframe for that?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Yes, but I want to give people maximum possible notice, but this is not yet ready to announce in detail.

Jenny Jones (AM): I mean, it sounds very interesting. It sounds like the sort of thing I might want to contribute to. So you will let us know when it starts, will you?

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

Jenny Jones (AM): Have you been influenced by the Policy Exchange's work on this? Their report 'Something in the Air?' Because they have actually said, I mean I do not often quote from Policy Exchange, which for the viewers is a right-wing think-tank. It actually says you should do actually this, remove or reduce exemptions.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Well, I had not actually seen the Policy Exchange document, but I will study it.

Jenny Jones (AM): Well, I expect there is somebody in this building who would let you have a copy of that. Thank you, that is great.

Darren Johnson (Chair): Thank you. We will then move on to the next question on the order paper, benefit sanctions for young people in the name of John Biggs.

2557/2012 - Benefit sanctions for young people

John Biggs

Your recent announcement with Chris Grayling of a pilot for young unemployed Londoners was widely reported. How will you ensure that the pilot is properly evaluated and that only quality placements are secured?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Yes, thanks very much, John. I think this is a good scheme and a good idea. The basic idea is that 6,000 young people seeking work through Jobcentre Plus will continue to get their benefit. They will also do some work experience which will be good for the community where they are doing it, good for the organisation that takes them on. Also its good for them, it gets an important qualification on their Curriculum Vitae (CV) and it tries to break the cycle that you cannot get a job unless you have a qualification, you cannot get a qualification unless you have job. It is a way forward we think.

John Biggs (AM): So you would agree though that the quality of the opportunity --

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Yes. It certainly needs to be monitored and the Department for Work and Pensions is going to do a full evaluation. To which we will contribute.

John Biggs (AM): I have two concerns about this policy. I think the first is that it sort of ever so cleverly says there are a few people who are young and are idle and should be encouraged to work and to avoid a life of indolence. I put it to you that there are no younger people of that disposition as there are old Italians of that disposition. I mean, most people want to get on with their lives and work hard. So it is at risk of stigmatising and labelling people. So can you clarify that you accept that the vast majority of young people who are not working are not working because they cannot find employment? This included graduates, this includes school leavers, and it is a serious problem which needs to be addressed. This proposal is a tiny strand of what might be done to encourage people.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): There are currently in London, I think, 15,000 18 to 24 year-olds who are on Jobseekers Allowance (JSA) and that number has been rising, in spite of the good employment figures that we have been discussing. One of the problems that young people talk about is the difficulty of getting a qualification and the difficulty of making themselves seem ready for work to employers when they are in that position. This is a way of getting them into a place of work. Giving them the confidence that grows in someone if you are in a place of work. Helping them to be more competitive, to understand what it is to have a job, and while simultaneously paying them the benefits while they are looking for work. I think that seems to be a wholly benign scheme.

John Biggs (AM): This is a European social fund pilot, so will you guarantee that it will have the same level of resource and care and attention if it was rolled out on a larger scale?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Well, we will have to see how successful it is. You know, I am certainly attracted to it. It is part of the general work that we are doing in London to get young people into work. I am proud that 76,000 apprenticeships we have done now since August 2010. We think we can get up to 100,000 by the end of the year, and we are going to deliver 250,000 over this Mayoralty.

John Biggs (AM): Would you accept that there is risk that it is a rather blunt instrument and that there will be many people who will have very good reasons why they are probably not best suited to this sort of programme and you need to be discerning in the way in which it is applied?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Well, you know, I think it is an opportunity not a stigma. I think it is something that will help young people to get work.

John Biggs (AM): If it is an opportunity it does not require compulsion nor does it require compulsion --

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): The people that I met who were going to embark on this scheme seem to me to be very positive about it.

John Biggs (AM): So it does not require compulsion or it does require compulsion?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Well, for myself, I see no reason why somebody who is in receipt of benefit who is looking for work should not benefit from an internship, an opportunity to work.

John Biggs (AM): So in some circumstances it might require compulsion, or in all circumstances?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Well, you know, I want to see young people get the opportunities that they need and --

John Biggs (AM): So you have not really gone through --

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): This scheme certainly, as I understand it, involves a withdrawal of the benefit if the internship lapses.

John Biggs (AM): Right.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Is my understanding of how if the work experience lapses.

John Biggs (AM): Ok, right.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): That seemed to me to be a reasonable way of doing it.

John Biggs (AM): I think a lot of people will, on the face of it, see that as having some merit. Basically you did a media opportunity in the summer, but you have not really thought through it. Can I ask you another question then, which is --

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Sorry, I don't follow your argument

John Biggs (AM): -- you had a media opportunity this summer, but you have not really thought through this. The other question is do you support the --

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I have thought it through; I think it is a very good idea.

John Biggs (AM): So it was your idea?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): No, but I think it is an extremely good idea and I am perfectly happy to support it.

John Biggs (AM): Right, ok. Do you support the living wage and do you support the minimum wage?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): As you know, in London we have greatly expanded the London living wage and had much more success that the administration you supported in getting private companies, banks and law firms to pay it.

John Biggs (AM): Well, fine I am delighted to be put right on that. Because if you calculate 30 hours a week for ones benefit, that works out as £1.86 an hour. Which is less than a third of the minimum wage. If you include the 10 hours compulsory job search then it is about £1.20 an hour, which is less than contractors in China have been criticised for paying workers.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Look, you can make these arguments, John.

John Biggs (AM): Well, it is an argument, and I have made it.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I think most people will think that a way of helping young people to get employment experience whilst they are on benefits is a good way forward. Lots of young people complain that they cannot get jobs because they do not have the relevant experience. Lots of employers complain that the reason they do not take people on is because when they present themselves for employment they do not understand what it is to be in a place of work. If they do not understand that you have to turn up on time, you have to be presentable and all the rest of it. That is something that you can learn through this scheme, and I think it is wholly benign.

John Biggs (AM): You would accept very finally then, that we have been here before with previous schemes, that the quality of the placement and the supervision and the commitment to making sure it is a quality training experience that gives people confidence is vital to making this work?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Yes. That is why we are doing the study.

John Biggs (AM): Ok, thank you.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Why we will be evaluating it. You know, if you are really going to say that we should not be trying to get young people into places of work --

John Biggs (AM): No, no. Nobody said that --

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): -- we should keep them sequestered on benefits.

John Biggs (AM): Nobody said that. Stop getting carried away.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Are you out of your mind?

John Biggs (AM): Stop getting carried away.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Are you out of your tiny mind?

John Biggs (AM): Stop getting carried away. Nobody is suggesting that.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Well, what are you suggesting?

John Biggs (AM): I was suggesting that you have a responsibility and --

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I think you are -- I think that --

John Biggs (AM): -- and I'm pleased --

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I believe you have a sort of aversion --

John Biggs (AM): I am pleased that you acknowledge --

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): -- to encouraging young people to work.

John Biggs (AM): -- Absolutely not! I think they should all --

Darren Johnson (Chair): All right. Have you both finished?

John Biggs (AM): -- be driving into the fields. Thank you.

Darren Johnson (Chair): Let us move on then. The next question is in the name of Victoria Borwick on volunteering. Victoria herself was a volunteer during 2012 and we congratulate her for that, asking if the Mayor has plans to take advantage of the increased interest in volunteering on the back of the Olympics.

2532/2012 - Volunteering

Victoria Borwick

Does the Mayor plan to take advantage of the increased interest in volunteering on the back of the obvious success of the Olympics?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I do. Victoria, thank you for all your work you did during the games. Clearly, we want a great legacy from the volunteering. That is why I recently appointed Veronica Wadley as my new senior adviser for Team London volunteering charities and sponsorship. Already we are working hard to make sure that the Team London ambassadors have plenty of new stuff to do and that they continue to be involved in the life of the city, and indeed that we expand the Team London ambassadors and other volunteering groups. Because they were phenomenal success during the games.

Victoria Borwick (AM): Well thank you very much indeed. I think all of us, I know there were other people around the table who had family members involved as volunteers. So I think we would all support that and I was delighted to hear about the initiative today where people will be offered, hopefully, jobs. Because I know that many of the games makers were hoping to use this as an opportunity that would help their employment. So are there particular priorities that you are going to direct Veronica to or anything else you want to tell us about the work that she is doing?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Yes. Over the last few years we have done a huge amount across quite a wide range. There is the Mayor's fund, there is the mentoring schemes. There is the literacy schemes. All sorts of things that we are trying to do. Veronica's job is to try to bring it all together, to give it a fresh impetus and to mobilise the huge numbers of volunteers across London who want to help and to get them stuck in.

Victoria Borwick (AM): Thank you very much.

Darren Johnson (Chair): Thank you. We will then move on to the next question in the name of Andrew Dismore on the AssetCo takeover, asking if you have met Sir Aubrey Brocklebank the Chairman of the private limited company that purchased AssetCo?

2546/2012 - AssetCo Takeover

Andrew Dismore

Have you met Sir Aubrey Brocklebank, Chairman of AB and A, the private limited company that bought AssetCo for £2?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Well, look, Andrew, I am not sure whether or not I have met Sir Aubrey Brocklebank. It may be that I have come across him at an event in London. I

cannot exclude that possibility. It may be that there is a photograph of me and Sir Aubrey Brocklebank somewhere. I have no particular memory of meeting the gentleman that you mention. What I can say, which I think would put it in the direct as usual with your forensic brilliance you are directing me towards is I can say he is -- that the Premier Fire Service business, the sale of Premier Fire Service business to AB and A will make no difference at all to fire cover in London, which will remain excellent and better, as I said earlier, than most other places in the country.

Darren Johnson (Chair): Sorry. Just before I bring the Assembly Member Dismore in can I ask the Assembly to agree to suspend selling order 2.9(b)? So, that we can continue with the remaining questions.

All: Agreed

Darren Johnson (Chair): Thank you, Members. Andrew Dismore.

Andrew Dismore (AM): Well, I am sure it is possible you may have come across him at an Old Etonians alumni get together. But --

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Is this -- come on you guys this is the third time you have --

Andrew Dismore (AM): That is not really what this is about.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): What is wrong with my school?

Andrew Dismore (AM): Right. Well, do you think it is appropriate for the entire --

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): -- monkeys working away at the school. Honestly, why don't you just grow up you guys?

Andrew Dismore (AM): Right. Do you think it is appropriate for the entire maintenance programme of London Fire Brigade, fire engines, rescue units, turntable ladders all the rest of their kit, now to be run from a semi-attached house in Northamptonshire?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I am sorry I did not hear your question because I was so indignant about your -- what were you saying?

Andrew Dismore (AM): Do you think it is appropriate for the whole of the fire brigade maintenance programme, rescue units, fire engines, turntable ladders, and all the rest of their kit to be run out of the Northamptonshire semi-detached house?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Well, I do not know what goes on in the semi-detached house in Northampton -- is that the domicile of Sir Aubrey Brocklebank?

Andrew Dismore (AM): That is the registered office and domicile of Sir Aubrey Brocklebank, yes.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Well, I do not know. All I can say is that we have no reason to believe that there will be any deterioration in the fire cover provided in London since the sale of AssetCo to the interest that you mentioned, anymore than there has been in the five sales of the business that have taken place since Valerie Shawcross (former Chair of LFEPA),

oversaw the first PFI deal when it was sold to British Gas/the Latis Group. It was then flogged on to the Asset Investment Group, then to AssetCo and now to Sir Aubrey. It makes no difference to fire cover in London, that is what I am concerned to protect and to improve.

Andrew Dismore (AM): Well the problem is not with the contract itself when it was originally let, the problem has been the lack of enforcement of the contract under the previous Chair of LFEPA who was somewhat seduced by AssetCo's hospitality I think. It is the case, is it not, that this newly raised private company of which Sir Aubrey is the sole director bought the lock, stock and barrel of the contract for £2. He has no obvious financial backers. His company has filed no previous accounts. There is no accountability to the stock exchange because it is a private company. His only experience of vehicles apparently is racing his Citroen 2CD car racing team. His only track record is of dissolving and liquidating companies. I think that Londoners might consider your previous answer to be somewhat complacent. Is it not time that LFEPA's Chair --

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I think, you know --

Andrew Dismore (AM): -- met Sir Aubrey --

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I think you have got to cool down it there.

Andrew Dismore (AM): -- to find out what he is really up to?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): You know, honestly I think what most Londoners want to see is a safe city and a city where there is adequate fire cover. That is what the London Fire Brigade provides. There is no reason whatever to believe that the transition of the holding company will make any difference to that record anymore than it has on previous occasions. You said the same thing about AssetCo. I seem to remember exactly the same stuff about AssetCo and during that period death from fire in London continued to come down and we continued to operate a very good fire service. That is what we do or the fire service will do.

Andrew Dismore (AM): Well the problem with AssetCo is it runs on a monthly basis only by the amount that comes out of the fire authority's monthly subventions to it. It has got £15 million worth of debts. There is no clear programme for anything particular. There is no clear indication of how the replacement of the Fire Brigade fleet is going to be financed. How is AssetCo going to do that with none of these financial backers, with no finances behind it? How is it going to pay or raise the revenue to replace the fire engine fleet which is part of the contract?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Well, there is an LFEPA, as you well know. As we discussed earlier on, your job, my job, our job, is to make sure that from that budget we find the savings that are necessary while simultaneously continuing to deliver improvements in fire cover. That is what LFEPA is there to do.

Andrew Dismore (AM): Well, that is caught in the 'pint pot', that is caught in the pint pot, is it not?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I will make sure that you do it.

Andrew Dismore (AM): You need £15 million at least to replace the fleet, in fact, you took £15 million out of the LFEPA budget to subsidise the police before. The fact remains that this is at a very, very unstable situation and is it about time its contract is terminated?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Well, you know, I think it is very interesting the Labour Party, which pioneered the flogging off of these assets are now opportunistically turning against this process. It was, as I say, under a Labour Chair of LFEPA that the first PFI deal was done. I do not know whether you protested, Andrew, from your lofty vantage point in the House of Commons where you then served. The history does not relate whether your Olympian gaze was distracted to your affairs of the fire brigade in London then. That was what happened. Several sales have subsequently taken place and in all those transactions throughout that period there has been no reduction in fire cover, quite the reverse. London now has 331 fires per 100,000 people, compared to the rest of England which has 442 fires per 100,000 people. The rate of deaths from fire in this city has been coming down. It is a great, great credit to all the hard working men and women of the London Fire Brigade.

Andrew Dismore (AM): A large number of whom are going to be losing their jobs probably. But the point about this is it is not the contract that is the problem, the problem is the lack rigorous enforcement under the previous Chair of LFEPA which allowed this situation to develop. Effectively AssetCo is bankrupt, and Sir Aubrey Brocklebank simply does not have the financial backing, so far as we can see, to sustain this. It is about time that you and the Chair of LFEPA got a grip on this and actually made proper arrangements for the long term sustainability of maintenance to the Fire Brigade fleet.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Well, as I say, the period of the private contractors, which began under a Labour Chair of LFEPA, has been marked by steady progress in reducing deaths from fire in London. It makes no difference to fire cover in this city and I am content to be judged on that record.

Darren Johnson (Chair): The Labour Group are now out of time. So we will end that question there and we will move on to the next question now which is on Olympic transport in the name of Richard Tracey asking what lessons have been learnt from the Olympics.

2513/2012 - Olympic Transport

Richard Tracey

What lessons have been learnt from the Olympics that will help improve transport in London?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Thanks, Dick. I thought there were a number of things that went well during the games. The things I have seen that we want to pursue are the travel ambassadors, they did a great job. We will not drop that, that was a fantastic scheme. The freight journey planner worked well and we need to look at what we can do to keep freight deliveries happening at times that will help reduce congestion during the day. The ideal blue lighting underground stairs around the city, doing things faster to get the tube moving again when there is a problem, that was very important. That worked well, that is something that we need to keep going with. Ramps on the tube, which Caroline Pidgeon mentioned earlier on. I think also the variable messaging were very good. The signs on the side of the road, telling you what were going on. They worked well we need to look at how we use those in the future. Those are some of the things that worked well. I have to say to Londoners, I cannot promise that the state of Olympic transport bliss is something that we can always guarantee. Simply because as everybody who is driving around London knows now, road works are an inevitable factor of life with an old system with old pipes and all the rest of it. They are coming back, we look to the lane rental system to try to reduce those. We are inevitably going to be upgrading the tube, and that will have an impact on timetabling, particularly at weekends. So, you know, I

cannot pretend to you or to anybody that I can wave a magic wand and get rid of those hard necessities.

Richard Tracey (AM): I think there is no doubt, everybody accepts, I believe, that all aspects of TfL worked extremely well; the buses, the underground, the over-ground. The boats, indeed, worked terrible well.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): The boats did work well. They did not get enough of a thank you, the boats.

Richard Tracey (AM): I used them and they were very good, I must say. The other thing though that I think came out of the operation of transport during the games was the interrelationship between TfL and the main line services, the Network Rail. Do you not think that this really proves the point to Patrick McLoughlin, the new Secretary of State, that how well it will work to have TfL and yourself with far more oversight of the mainline rail services, which is what you have been seeking in your policy?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Yes. As I said, I think to John (Biggs) earlier on, there is -- Justine Greening (former Transport Secretary) was a keen supporter of this initiative, but we think we have not lost momentum and we think that we will make some progress on that south eastern franchise at least.

Richard Tracey (AM): Yes, and certainly the mainline train services run very efficiently and fast. There were stations obviously where there were special precautions that had to be put in place. So, I think the lessons are there. The other thing I am interested in as a lesson from the Olympics, do you think that home working will increase as a result? It is something that has been talked about for many years, and indeed a good many people were encouraged to work from home to avoid the alleged transport problems, or predicted transport problems. Do you think more people will start to work from home?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Well, you know, it is a very good question. Everybody prophesised that the internet would make it possible for people to work from home. It does not seem to be happening. Ridership continues to rise, both on the tube and on the buses. I am afraid human beings like to be with others. That is one of the reasons why it is such a good idea to get people into places of work. It is because they learn from each other, and they need to be there to gossip, to criticise other people, to imitate. They need to be around the water cooler. It is fascinating that that whole idea of people sitting at a computer terminal and then every so often breaking off to go and eat a piece of cheese from the fridge or make another cup of coffee, or whatever, or get depressed, which is what you do. It does not catch on. People like to be with other human beings in a place of work. I am not discouraging people from working at home but I merely observe that as a social phenomenon it does not seem to have caught on.

Richard Tracey (AM): We were being told in the bulletins from Network Rail that they had spare trains available if they were necessary. Do you think they could use some of those spare trains to have rather longer trains on the commuter routes now?

Darren Johnson (Chair): Quick answer to that, because the Conservative Group are out of time as well.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Well, the answer to that is, yes.

Darren Johnson (Chair): That was a very quick answer, good. We will move on to the final question of the morning then in the name of Jenny Jones on sponsors for the World Athletics Championships --

2396/2012 - Sponsors for the World Athletics Championships

Jenny Jones

Will you argue for some basic criteria for sponsors to ensure the Championships promote healthy eating?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): The answer again --

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): -- is, yes.

Jenny Jones (AM): Look I have not had 12 minutes for years and I have now got five minutes to fill. So that because --

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): You could find we have got five minutes on this.

Jenny Jones (AM): Is that because you agree with the Vice Chair of the Royal Medical Colleges and Chair of their Obesity Steering Group. He was talking about the Olympics and he said --

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Do we have to have five minutes on this? Sorry, move on.

Darren Johnson (Chair): We do not have to have five minutes, but Jenny can exercise her five minutes if she wishes.

Jenny Jones (AM): I would just like to make it clear exactly what you are going to do. Professor Terence Stephenson said: "It is very said that an event that celebrates the very best of athletic achievement should be sponsored by companies contributing to the obesity problem and unhealthy habits." Of course at the World Athletic Championships in 2017 you actually will have some opportunity to make a difference there and refuse to take advertisements and sponsorship from unhealthy manufactures.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Such as?

Jenny Jones (AM): Well, I am suggesting that it would not be a good idea to follow the International Olympic Committee (IOC) and take sponsorship from people who, perhaps, are not very ethical and also do not produce the sort of food that actually contributes to any sort of healthy life.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Which companies? I mean, if you are talking about McDonalds, are you?

Jenny Jones (AM): Amongst others, yes.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Well, if you are hostile to McDonalds, I have to say that I do not share your view. I think there is a lot of bourgeois snobbery about this.

Jenny Jones (AM): This is not about snobbery, this is about highly processed, high fat, high sugar, very unhealthy foods.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): The problem, you know, this does not go for all fast food outlets by any means, I think there is a discussion to be had about the proximity of fried chicken shops with schools and all the rest of it. When it comes to McDonalds I would remind you, Jenny, that -- and let me ask you what did Usain Bolt eat on the day he ran the second fastest 100 metres in history?

Jenny Jones (AM): All right, let me bring you --

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): What did he eat?

Jenny Jones (AM): Let me bring you back --

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Do you know the answer?

Jenny Jones (AM): Let me bring you back --

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Shall I tell you what he ate? He ate McDonalds.

Jenny Jones (AM): Let me --

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Now I have to say --

Jenny Jones (AM): Look, just because he is a supreme athlete does not mean he is sensible. Do you know for example, I mean, I do not know if you know this or not, but there are restrictions on advertising on television (TV) and foods that are high in fat, salt, sugar and so on are not allowed to advertise during children's TV. So why not have this at a sporting event? It makes sense to actually not link unhealthy food with supreme athleticism.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Look, this is most amazing. Are you saying that we should prevent Usain Bolt from eating the food he wants in order to run 100 metres. Are you --

Jenny Jones (AM): Could you --

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): -- saying? Or are you saying that we should allow him to do it, but conceal that fact from the children of the world?

Jenny Jones (AM): You have never really understood the process here. The process here is that I ask you questions and you answer them.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Well, I think I have answered.

Jenny Jones (AM): So you said yes at the very beginning to my question, which was, will you argue for some basic criteria for sponsors. What sort of basis criteria are you imagining then if you are not going to not use manufacturers of unhealthy food? What sort of basic criteria are you thinking?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I think what --

Jenny Jones (AM): Money? The size of money they give you?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): To be totally serious, what I think these companies would say is they do their -- you know, they do promote healthy alternatives and they do try to -- I think there is stuff that you eat at McDonalds that are not hamburgers. They would argue that what they are providing is no less healthy than plenty of other things --

Jenny Jones (AM): Do you read anything about this sort of food?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): -- people could buy in --

Jenny Jones (AM): It is absolutely appalling. I think you are going to bring out an obesity Strategy soon, are you not?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): The problem with hamburgers --

Jenny Jones (AM): If you bring out obesity --

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): The problem with hamburgers is not necessarily what they contain it is the number of them that you eat.

Jenny Jones (AM): Oh, please! Please, that is ridiculous. Honestly! All right, listen. Will your Obesity Strategy -- can you stop heckling please, it is incredibly rude. Will your Obesity Strategy -- can you shut him up?

Darren Johnson (Chair): Yes. If Members can be quiet while Jenny concludes her questioning.

Jenny Jones (AM): Will your obesity Strategy look at the role of junk food and drink sponsorship and its impact on children's eating habits? Will it?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Yes. I am trying to draw a distinction between McDonalds, which to the best of my knowledge makes a big effort in this, and I understand that you have strong criticisms of the firm, but it does make a big effort, as far as it can, to promote the healthiest possible stuff on its menu. It is also a massive employer --

Jenny Jones (AM): Can you please answer my question about your obesity Strategy?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): -- in London.

Jenny Jones (AM): Will it look at the issue of junk food?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Yes, I think it is right that we should look at some of the junk food that is being sold across London. Particularly, I am concerned about the rash of fried chicken shops that appear often very, very near schools. It is difficult --

Jenny Jones (AM): What did your 'yes' mean at the beginning when you said you were going to look at basic criteria? What did your 'yes' mean?

Darren Johnson (Chair): Right. A very, very quick final answer to that because the Green group are now out of time.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Well, as I say I am sure McDonalds can satisfy you about the healthy eating that they promote. That is the criteria that we would look at. Nobody is proposing to get the local, you know, flash fried 'frazfurtter' den to be sponsoring the 2017 Athletics competition.

Darren Johnson (Chair): Thank you. That concludes the questions. So thank you to the Mayor. There will be no other business, that concludes the meeting. Thank you, Members. Thank you, Mayor.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Thank you.