

London Assembly (Mayor's Question Time) – 26 January 2011

Transcript: Question and Answer Session with the Mayor

61/2011 - Threat of Tube strike on the Royal Wedding day

Richard Tracey

Given that Associated Society of Locomotive Engineers and Firemen (ASLEF) agreed with London Underground to work on bank holidays, will you join me in condemning ASLEF's threatened strike action and all the disruption it would cause Londoners and visitors alike on the day of the Royal Wedding (29 April)?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): You are asking about a strike on the Royal Wedding day. As far as I know, there is no current threat to public transport on the Royal Wedding day from a strike and I am delighted by that because I think that any such action would have been outrageous.

Richard Tracey (AM): Thank you, Mr Mayor. I share your pleasure that this threat has gone away since we put this question down to you. Of course, the ongoing threat of Tube strikes, both from ASLEF and from the National Union of Rail, Maritime and Transport Workers, goes on; sabre rattling goes on. The Prime Minister, David Cameron, said recently that he agreed with you about a threshold being brought in for essential services like the Underground trains; a threshold for striking. Of course, in the future we could see another threat; a strike during the Olympic Games. Are you continuing your lobbying of the Government for this legislation and, indeed, are you also talking to other relevant --

Dee Doocey (Chair): I think you are getting away from the question.

Richard Tracey (AM): It is very relevant, Madam Chairman.

Dee Doocey (Chair): No, you are getting away from the question. Could you stick to the question that is on the order paper, please?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Let me just say this. I am delighted that ASLEF has decided to call off or to deny that there was a threat of a strike. Though I saw it reported on the front page of the *Evening Standard* in black and white and very big headlines that someone at ASLEF was threatening a strike on the day of the Royal Wedding on 29 April, I am delighted that they have called that off. I think that is the right thing to do. Clearly there are issues about strikes being called in a way that is, I think, vexatious and not in the interests of the wider union membership and that is something we are going to address.

Richard Tracey (AM): So, Mr Mayor, do you agree that every step should be taken by Government and by yourself and Transport for London (TfL) to avoid any consequences of these sorts of strikes? You mentioned driverless trains at Mansion House --

Dee Doocey (Chair): No, no, no. Driverless trains are not to do with the Royal Wedding and a strike.

Richard Tracey (AM): They might be very relevant, indeed. Do not try to gag us, Madam Chairman.

Dee Doocey (Chair): I will if you are straying from your question.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Do you want me to answer that, Dee?

Dee Doocey (Chair): No, I do not wish you to answer.

Dee Doocey (Chair): James Cleverly, do you have a point of order?

James Cleverly (AM): In the London Government dinner the Mayor gave a speech where he specifically linked the introduction of driverless trains as one of the measures in reducing the impact of threat.

Dee Doocey (Chair): No, it is nothing to do with the question. If you read the question it is very, very specific and it is very specific to the Royal Wedding.

James Cleverly (AM): Strike action and the Royal Wedding --

Dee Doocey (Chair): No, strike action is not about driverless trains. I am not having a debate.

Richard Tracey (AM): I think the public will note this sort of nit-picking by Opposition Members, which includes you, sadly.

Dee Doocey (Chair): Well, whoever likes can note it because then they will see that I am a very balanced Chair. The next person is Joanne McCartney.

Joanne McCartney (AM): Thank you, Mr Mayor, and I am sure the public will also note that the Tory Group are making fiction at the moment.

Dee Doocey (Chair): No, that is not a question. Come on.

Joanne McCartney (AM): Can I ask, Mr Mayor, you wrote to ASLEF on 14 January saying, and I am quoting your letter here, that you were, "pleased to note that ASLEF has now said there will be no strike action on the day of the Royal Wedding" That was 14 January, well before our plenary last week and well before the deadline for putting motions down for this group. Can I ask, why do you think the Tory Group are still misleading the public and peddling this fiction that action is still threatened on that day?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I do not know when Dick tabled his question and I cannot comment on that.

Joanne McCartney (AM): The deadline was last week.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): What I can say is that he is absolutely right, as usual, to draw attention to what was, I think, a serious threat. As far as I can understand the report in the Evening Standard, it was made by a senior member of ASLEF and I am glad that wiser counsels have prevailed and we are not going to see that. Dick [Tracey] had a serious point also to follow up which is that we need to long-term measures to prevent such vexatious action.

Joanne McCartney (AM): In that letter, again dated 14 January, you said you would like to meet ASLEF. Was that to talk about this strike action or other strike action?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Not specifically, no.

Joanne McCartney (AM): So when Richard Tracey asked you to take every step to make sure that we do not have strike action on the day of the Royal Wedding and when, in your election, you said that you were going to have a plan to deal once and for all with endless Tube strikes and were going to be proactive, you are not going to take that opportunity for a meeting to forward that agenda?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Well, watch this space, Joanne. You seem to have the advantage of a letter from me. I am not going to --

Joanne McCartney (AM): You signed it.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Such is my good nature that I am going to keep from you the response from ASLEF but I do think that what we need to do is look seriously at some of the strikes that have been taking place over the last few months. They have been in response to some tough decisions we have had to take about ticket offices and other measures. I think they have all been in the interests of London Underground and of the wider travelling public.

I have to say I think that most of these strikes would have fallen foul of what I think are essential reforms that need to be brought in to stop the calling of vexatious and unnecessary action, led by the union leadership and which is not in the interests of their members and, in many cases, not even supported by the majority of their members.

Roger Evans (AM): Mr Mayor, you will notice that members of the Labour Group in particular seem to be quite keen to play down this threat and take sides with the unions. Can I ask you to speculate in turn why you think that should be? Has it got something to do --

Dee Doocey (Chair): No, can you stick to the question, please.

Roger Evans (AM): Well, they were asking for the Mayor --

Dee Doocey (Chair): This question is about the Royal Wedding.

Roger Evans (AM): -- to speculate on the Conservative Group's motivations around this. I am merely asking for the Mayor to give us his view on the Labour Group's. Could it possibly be because of the headquarters their candidate operates out of or the supporters that their candidate has for the coming election?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Let me put it this way, Roger. I do not think it is irrelevant to what is going on that the Labour Party generally is funded by the unions and the Labour candidates are also funded by the unions. That is the way these things are.

24/2011 - Cycle funding

Jenny Jones

Will you correct the official record regarding the Transport for London press releases of 16th June 2008 and 28th May 2009 relating to investment in cycle funding?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): You are asking me to correct information set out in a TfL press release and, of course, at the time this press release was issued, which I think was 16 June 2008 and 28 May 2009, they were correct. Those represented the plans for investment in cycling. In the first instance, in 2008, we almost got up to the level of spending that you want to see. It was £44 million out of £45 million. Then the following year, if you will remember, what happened was that we decided to re-phase the cycle super-highways. So we did not spend quite the super colossal amount of public money that I know you would have wanted to see spent on cycling but we did, nonetheless, spend a pretty stupefying sum of £57.1 million. I think that was pretty good going.

You will say these press releases were misleading. I am sure that, at the time they were issued, they were issued in good faith and those did represent the intentions. What we are doing particularly now is re-phasing the delivery of cycle hire and the cycle super-highways in order to take account of the very different financial circumstances. I think most people will understand that. Rather than just water-cannoning money at things and justifying your existence in that way and thinking that you are promoting cycling simply because you are spending huge sums of money on it, what people want to see is the increase in ridership and they all want to see people using more hire bikes and that is certainly what we are achieving.

Jenny Jones (AM): I am glad you used that word 'misleading' because I was wondering how to work that in. I do not think for one moment that TfL did not put out those press releases in total good faith. I do not doubt that.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Then good.

Jenny Jones (AM): What I do doubt and what I know has not --

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Why did you say they were misleading?

Dee Doocey (Chair): No, no, no. Let Jenny respond, please.

Jenny Jones (AM): What has not happened since is any correction on those figures, because in 2008 you claimed to be spending £55 million. I say "you" because obviously you were quoted in the press release and you are, as you have told us before, TfL; so I say "you". You said, "A record £55 million to be invested in cycling this year", which was a £10 million increase over the budget that had been planned, but you did not actually spend that extra £10 million. It was carried over into the next year and at no stage have you, TfL, ever put the record straight.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): No, just to be fair to us, I think I did have several discussions with everybody about the necessity to re-phase the cycle super-highways. I mean that was a well-known fact. It was --

Jenny Jones (AM): OK.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): They are coming in more slowly than we had originally wanted but, you know, we are facing a pretty serious fiscal crunch.

Jenny Jones (AM): Of course. That is not my point, Mr Mayor.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): We had to take some steps to economise. I think most Londoners will look at what we are doing on cycling and actually think we are doing an incredible amount.

Jenny Jones (AM): In 2009 you claim to have spent £111 million, which was a record amount. You mention in this press release, "The Mayor and TfL are investing a record £111 million this year". Now, you only actually spent £57 million.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I just said that, Jenny.

Jenny Jones (AM): That is just over half.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): You are saying --

Jenny Jones (AM): No, you were not using the figures, Mr Mayor.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I just told you that.

Jenny Jones (AM): You were not using the figures.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I just told you that.

Jenny Jones (AM): You were using words like 'stupefying' and 'huge' and things like that. You actually said --

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Super-colossal. I said it wasn't super-colossal but it was stupefying.

Jenny Jones (AM): You actually spent just over half, OK? So now we have still got £64 million in two years that you have claimed to spend that has not been spent. Do you get my point?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): No. Well, I see what you are driving at but, again, you are --

Jenny Jones (AM): You have misled Londoners and you have misled cyclists about how much you are spending on cycling and that amount of money could easily have delivered the London Cycling Network, which you have stopped building and which you will now apparently never finish.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Well, no we have not. No, we --

Jenny Jones (AM): So the money left unspent could have been spent on the London Cycling Network.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I understand what you are saying and I think you were kind enough at the beginning of your remarks to say that at the time those press releases were issued - and that is really what you are commenting on - they were issued in good faith. It is still true, irrespective of the fact that we were not able to push quite that amount of money out of the door, we still spent a huge sum of money on cycling. We have the cycle super-highway programme underway and we have a very, very big --

Jenny Jones (AM): But you have never set the record straight.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): We have a --

Jenny Jones (AM): You have never admitted that you only just spent over half what you promised to spend. Do you see that you cannot promise to spend something and get all the credit for the promise and then not spend it?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I do not remember getting any credit from you for anything, Jenny. In fact, I think at every stage you have cavilled and carped about just about everything we have done on cycling and I --

Jenny Jones (AM): I think it is time you came clean and you admitted that you have misled London; you have misled cyclists on how much you have spent. In the first two years you were here you actually spent £64 million less on cycling than you claimed to spend.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Well, as I --

Jenny Jones (AM): Are you not embarrassed in the least?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): No, because, as I said, at the time those press releases were issued those represented the spending proposals. You are particularly aerated about the second year, 2009/10, where, as I say, we made it abundantly clear that we were re-phasing the cycle super-highway programme. So I do not think you can beat us up too much, Jenny. We have invested a huge amount of money in cycling but we are facing a massive fiscal crunch. It is very, very difficult --

Jenny Jones (AM): Nobody is arguing about the crisis we are in. What I am arguing about is the fact that you promise money you do not deliver and I think that is misleading --

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

Jenny Jones (AM): -- and you should always set the record straight.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Can I just say I think what you need to do is you need to reset your approach because it is not always about spending money. That is not an end in itself. To spend taxpayers' money is not the final goal of politicians. The final goal of politicians is to increase the sum of happiness of their electorate. That is what we are trying to do and --

Jenny Jones (AM): This is about delivering on your promises. It is about delivering on promises and not telling Londoners something that is not true.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Well, you know, Jenny --

Jenny Jones (AM): Thank you, Chair. I am not getting any further on this.

Andrew Boff (AM): Mr Mayor, do you not think that the self-proclaimed voice of reason across the way there would have actually pointed out and given credit for the huge increase in cycle ridership in London under your stewardship?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Well, it would have been nice and thank you, Andrew, for everything you do to champion and promote cycling. I have to say, yes, it would be nice occasionally just to hear a sort of faint bat squeak of praise from Jenny, who claims to love cycling so much. I never see her on a bike.

Jenny Jones (AM): I come in before you in the morning. I do not arrive at 10.00am!

Andrew Boff (AM): Is the Mayor aware that my journey into City Hall of a morning in 2008 --

Dee Doocey (Chair): You are straying from the question.

Andrew Boff (AM): I am cycling on this journey!

Dee Doocey (Chair): Yes, I am sure you are, but we are talking about the press release: investment in cycling.

Andrew Boff (AM): Sorry, I was a bit staggered there. Are you aware that my journey cycling on a bicycle, which is what the press release was about, into City Hall in 2008 constituted me coming down one of the now-cycle highway routes accompanied only by the delivery guy from Darwin's Deli? Now I am almost tempted to suggest we introduce a congestion charge for that particular route, there are so many cyclists now using --

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Well, thank you, Andrew.

Andrew Boff (AM): -- that route and for every cyclist that is a reduction in the number of people who are using cars, who are using buses, who are using things that contribute to greenhouse gases. I am really surprised and are you not, Mr Mayor, that the Green Group does not give you credit for the contribution that you have made to date? It is an outstanding success so far.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Thank you very much. Just on the cycle super-highways point and the reason why I think that the funding levels in 2008 and 2009 are defensible, on the cycle super-highways already we are seeing in some areas 100% increase in traffic. The good thing that the people who are getting on their bikes and using the cycle super-highways are very often people who have been deterred from cycling and are nervous and see the cycle super-highway as something that is reassuring and will keep them from coming to harm. I think we have got 34% of people using the new routes are new cyclists and that is a very encouraging statistic.

Andrew Boff (AM): Thank you, Mr Mayor.

198/2011 - High pay

Len Duvall

Are you comfortable with levels of pay in your administration?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Thank you very much, Len. Well, the answer is yes in the sense that we have made sure, since I came here, that we are much more transparent about expenditure than the previous regime and all salaries and expenses and major decisions about expenditure over £500 are now published. I think that is important. Overall, the gross pay bill in City Hall is now substantially down and there are considerably fewer people earning more than £80,000 a year. I do not say that in any particular spirit of rejoicing – these are very tough times – but it is necessary for us in the public sector to make economies where we can.

Len Duvall (AM): Do you not accept that in one of your earlier statements on pay you said,

“Hardworking Londoners will find it shocking that there are many executives inside Transport for London who are earning so much money. I am sure this is not the case in the real world.”

Do you not think as a voter or Londoner that you misled me when the situation is this: in terms of TfL's pay and City Hall? In 2008/09, 231 staff were earning over £100,000. There are now 251 staff earning over £100,000. That is up by 9%. You mentioned City Hall. In City Hall there were 15 staff in City Hall earning over £100,000. That has gone up 27% under your regime.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I just do not recognise these figures at all.

Len Duvall (AM): These are your figures. I will tell you this, Chair. These are your figures. They come from TfL's annual report and City Hall statistics. I do not use it but your Conservative mates use it as their prime matter of top people's pay. There are over 70-odd people in TfL earning more than the Prime Minister. Do you think, then, if I listened to your earlier statements on high pay, that I would feel somewhat cheated and misled by that statement?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Len, I am surprised that you are taking this tone, because these are things that we discussed many times. Frankly, when you look at the Bureau of Leaders and elsewhere, it is a fact that City Hall's gross pay bill, the overall pay bill in this place, is now down. When I took over it was £27 million. It is now down to £19 million; that is around a 30% reduction, all right? Yes? There were 52 people earning more than £80,000, there are now 32 people earning more than £80,000 in City Hall.

In TfL there has been an 8.5% reduction in the number of staff earning more than £100,000 in the last year. That is due very largely to the decision of the senior executives at TfL to lead the country and lead the national debate in forgoing their bonuses and to take a pay freeze, and I salute them for that. I think that was the right thing to do, and this is in the overall content, by the way, people should realise, of £5 billion we are taking out of TfL in savings altogether.

But to get back to your point, which is your question about people earning more than the Prime Minister, let me speak directly on that point because it is something that people jump up and down about. We are losing the services recently or very shortly of the Managing Director for Surface Transport, David Brown, who is, in my view, an extremely able servant of the city. He is going, it will be no secret to anybody here, to a private sector firm where he will - I will have to look at the figures - roughly speaking triple his income. We have to recognise that some people who are serving TfL are in a market where their salaries will be, I am afraid, much smaller than their commercial competitors or the potential firms that could lure them away. We have to take account of that if we are going to run the kind of efficient service that Londoners would want. I believe it would be a false economy to strip out the top echelons of TfL, to denude ourselves entirely of the kind of talent we need to run transport in this city.

Len Duvall (AM): All very important points, but the issue is what you said about high pay. "Hardworking Londoners will find it shocking that so many executives inside Transport for London are earning so much money. I am sure this is not the case in the real world." It is not me saying that. I have a particular view about it. It is you saying it, and I am saying, in those statements that you make, in the many statements you make, you mislead people into thinking that you are going to do something about high pay. It is not me that wants to do something about high pay. In that sense I have a view about it. Some of it I might agree with, some of it I might disagree with in terms of your view. It is not about gestures around bonuses, it is about what are you going to do about high pay. But let us turn to low pay.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): With respect, I have just answered that point, and there has been an 8.5% reduction in the number of employees on more than £100,000.

Len Duvall (AM): Let us turn to low pay. In that sense, you wrote to me recently and said in terms of low pay - no, what you wrote to me - we will save that one for later if this carries on. This is what you said to the Guardian,

"Low pay. The capital relies on the work of many who carry out the city's essential functions on a daily basis. Is it right that their skills and commitment to London's success are recognised? One of the most fundamental ways of doing this is to ensure that all Londoners are paid properly."

Now, if I read that, I would think that you would take low pay seriously. This is from your previous Mayoral report when you omitted to say that you did not agree with the Assembly's position in funding the lowest-paid workers in this building; it would only cost around £50,000. That £50,000 is pittance compared to what you pay out to consultants in this building. That you could not bring yourself with that statement, squaring that statement, to support the lowest paid working in this building. I do not understand. Is there something wrong with what you say. Should I believe what you say? Should Londoners believe what you say or are you going to continue to mislead them on statements around payments, whether they are low paid or high paid in terms of what you say?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Just on the London living wage and low pay generally. I think this administration --

Len Duvall (AM): Low pay in this building.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I think this administration has done more than any previous administration to spread the benefits of the London living wage across this city and I think the work that we have done on it has been remarkable. As for low pay in this building, absolutely no employee is paid, as you would expect, less than the London living wage. It is true that there is a small handful of staff who were recommended to have a 4% pay increase. I thought that in the context of an overall Whitehall pay freeze that was not the way forward. Although the final decision is with the Head of Paid Service, I did agree with his view that nobody in the GLA group should receive other than what their colleagues were receiving across Whitehall, so I thought his decision to have a 0% increase was the correct one.

I just want to go back to what you were saying earlier on about high salaries, because I really do not think you should be allowed to get away with it, Len. The number of staff earning more than £100,000 a year at TfL --

Len Duvall (AM): Well you should tell your Conservative friends in Government that, not me.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): -- has fallen by 8.5% this year. Since you have brought up pay in this place, and you are making such a meal of it today, I will just remind you that when I arrived - and Londoners should hear this - the administration, supported by you, had 52 people in this building who were on more than £80,000 a year. There are now 32 people on more than £80,000 a year and the overall pay bill has fallen from £27 million then to £19 million today. I think that is fair, I think that is reasonable and it represents, I think, the kind of approach that Londoners want to see.

Len Duvall (AM): Staff earning over £100,000 in this organisation since you arrived have gone up 9%. That is in TfL, your figures.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): That is not TfL.

Len Duvall (AM): Staff in GLA earning over £100,000 in this organisation has gone up by 27%. That is your figures. It is your mates in central Government that use these arguments. It would be better, rather than you lecturing me about what I should be saying about people on high salaries, when you should be talking to your Conservative colleagues about lecturing them, and I never heard you say that. The issue is you make statements, you never stand by them, you never deliver on them, you say one thing and you do another and that is the issue on high pay. That is the issue on high pay here and that is the issue on low pay.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I think I have been consistent. With respect, I am being accused of inconsistent.

Len Duvall (AM): You are misleading people.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I am being accused of misleading. I have given you the figures. You do not like the figures; you do not seem to like the reality that we have --

Len Duvall (AM): Your figures, your figures.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): -- that we have reduced the number of people earning more than £80,000 very substantially. In TfL we have reduced the number of people earning more than £100,000 this year by 8.5% and I think that that represents exactly what Londoners want to see. I am disappointed, frankly, by the tone you are taking, Len, this morning. I thought that you had become more commonsensical and reasonable.

Len Duvall (AM): Not with you Tories.

151/2011 - The lot of rail commuters

Caroline Pidgeon

Has the lot of rail commuters improved during your time as Mayor?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Yes, it has improved very considerably, Caroline, because there have been a great many improvements, not least the rollout of Oyster pay-as-you-go on National Rail.

Caroline Pidgeon (AM): Let us talk about your promise to Londoners back in 2008. You said,

"Above all, I will stand up for rail commuters in London and champion their cause by working tirelessly with the companies who operate our railways to improve the dire service."

That is your words. One of the things you said in your manifesto is you said you would fight for more manned stations at night. How many additional staff are working at railway stations at night as a result of your interventions there?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): How many what staff?

Caroline Pidgeon (AM): You said you would have more stations staffed at night. How many additional staff are working at railway stations at night as a result of your intervention as Mayor?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): You mean staff of the train operating companies or network rail staff?

Caroline Pidgeon (AM): Yes. Any staff, whether it is network rail or train operating companies.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I cannot give you those figures. What I can say is that as a result of what we did there are more British Transport police, particularly, at suburban railway stations.

Caroline Pidgeon (AM): But in terms of train companies?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): The critical point is that what we need is to have more of a say in the franchising arrangements, and you have been party to many of those discussions. I could also have mentioned that we have extended the East London Line schedule with lots of brand new trains on the East London Line. We have improved frequency and capacity, new stations at Shepherd's Bush and Imperial Wharf. There is going to be the further extension to Highbury and Islington and to Clapham Junction and we are delivering an orbital railway in London and it is a fantastic achievement. So I think I should have mentioned that.

Caroline Pidgeon (AM): OK, that is London Underground, though.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): What I think we need is to get the Department of Transport to understand if they want to get the kinds of improvements in service that the London Overground has delivered then it would be in their interests and the interests of London commuters if TfL was given a stake in the franchising operations. That does not mean that we want to control it. This is not some crazed land grab by me. I do not want to take over every network in the country, but I do think that TfL should have more of a say.

Caroline Pidgeon (AM): I think fair enough to make the points from London Overground and I think we all welcome the work TfL has done on that. But you said that you would fight for more staff at stations at night across the network and the actual fact is since you became Mayor your

intervention has resulted in no extra staff at night at stations across London, so I think you have misled Londoners on that.

Let's move on to your rail summit last year; let's move on to a different point. I will come on to this point in terms of franchising later.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Are you all [Assembly Members] taking some sort of line together?

Caroline Pidgeon (AM): After your rail summit last year you agreed --

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Do they [Assembly Members] get briefed?

Caroline Pidgeon (AM): Are you listening to my question, Mr Mayor?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): What a load of drivel. What a load of absolute drivel.

Dee Doocey (Chair): Sorry, Mr Mayor, that is out of order.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): It is not.

Caroline Pidgeon (AM): You are taking my time on this.

Dee Doocey (Chair): That is out of order and you know it.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Well, I think it is accurate.

Caroline Pidgeon (AM): Mr Mayor, after your rail summit last year you agreed a joint statement with train companies and you said one of the key things was improving information for passengers. A year later how has this actually improved?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Well, for instance in the recent snow event, as far as I can remember - I will have to give you more detail on this, Caroline, offline. As far as I can remember there were significant improvements in the information, even if it was not adequate, and I think we did learn some lessons from the previous snow event.

Caroline Pidgeon (AM): I think if you talk to rail passengers across London, the recent snow was again an appalling example, particularly Southeastern. I was looking at someone who tweeted, "Just got my daily, 'No disruption' email from Southeastern. I laughed and laughed". That is what commuters were saying; the information was appalling. So what have you done as Mayor to make sure that train companies are really providing the information for customers, as you promised in your summit last year?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): We have made it very clear to the train operating companies that they have to do a much, much better job, and there has been a great deal of traffic between us and the train operating companies (TOCs), particularly Southeastern. I think actually if you compare you are making a very good point. In a way you are making my case for me, because when you look at the comparative performances of TfL and the train operating companies, we did much, much better, even on the overground sections of the underground railways. You have to ask yourself why that is so. I think it is because basically TfL do a better job and should be given a say in the franchising of these overground railway companies, because that is how we will be in a position to ensure that they do inform their customers correctly.

What you are doing is very clever, of course, Caroline, because you are trying to blame me for something unfortunately that I do not control. I like your tactic, because what it does is it strengthens me in my case to Government. When I have even supposedly well-informed Members of the London Assembly seeking to blame me for the failures of the train operating companies, it shows to me that there is now no difference in the public mind between the two, or indeed, in trying to mislead the public.

Caroline Pidgeon (AM): Can we move on to my next question, because you are really just filling in time.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): It shows to me that there is a case for TfL having a much bigger say in the franchising arrangements.

Caroline Pidgeon (AM): The point is in your rail summit last year you made agreements with the train operating companies that you were going to take on these things. In your manifesto you made it clear that whilst you did not have control over the train companies you would not shirk your responsibility as Mayor. I think many Londoners would feel that you are just basically -- the train companies are running rings around you; you are misleading Londoners on this. Let us actually move on. You are saying about sharing of franchises --

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Are you going to be the Liberal candidate? Maybe you should be the Liberal candidate. I think she should be.

Caroline Pidgeon (AM): Isn't the real prize here, Mr Mayor, to show Londoners that you are taking responsibility. Here is a positive suggestion to you: that actually you need to be saying, "We want to take over other suburban rail services in London". That is your way forward here. If you really are the champion of rail commuters in London you need to start working now to strip out all the suburban rail services before the franchises are re-let in 2014. That would be the real price to show that you are taking up the concerns of rail commuters. Will you commit to look at that today?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I do not know whether you have been listening to anything I said. You kept interrupting when I was trying to make exactly that point. Of course that is what I am going to do.

Caroline Pidgeon (AM): No, you were not making that point. You said you want to jointly award franchises. I am saying let's strip out the suburban inner London rail services and you run them like you run the overground so well, as your press release coincidentally said this morning. Will you look into taking over these suburban rail services, yes or no?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I am delighted that you pay tribute to what we are doing, Caroline, and I do think it is true that we are doing a good job on the London Overground and on the London Underground.

Caroline Pidgeon (AM): So will you look at whether you can strip out these services and put in to run them for the good of rail commuters in London who are suffering?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I am certainly in favour of us having a much bigger role in setting the franchises.

Caroline Pidgeon (AM): Yes, or no, will you look at it? Will you look at it?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): But I have to tell you, and I am going to be totally frank with you, in my conversations with Government and with the Department of Transport, I do not think I have yet received any kind of indication that they are anywhere near giving us control of all the

railways, total control of all the railways, in London, because I am afraid there are implications for other passengers beyond London, and that is a difficult argument. I prefer to go down the route of saying that what we want is a stake in the franchising arrangements. For us now to say that we want to take over every single railway in London and throughout the Greater London area is, I am afraid, not politically liveable at the moment.

Caroline Pidgeon (AM): The suburban one, the suburban ones. Not the ones going outside London but the suburban ones inside London. You could easily take over those. You could start the negotiations now before 2014. Will you, yes or no, look at that to help rail commuters?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Yes, I will look at it, Caroline.

Caroline Pidgeon (AM): Thank you very much.

Dee Doocey (Chair): Before I call the next speaker, can we welcome the students from Ranelagh Primary School from Newham, who are sitting looking very attentively at all this. I am not quite sure what they make of it. You are very welcome.

Richard Tracey (AM): Mr Mayor, I really do not think we should miss the fact of the gratitude of the travelling public of London for you delivering the pay-as-you-go Oyster on mainline trains, and, of course, you did it much more quickly than your predecessor, who failed to deliver that. You say you are not having much success, it sounds, with the Department for Transport ministers about some stake in the franchising or getting people on to boards of the TOCs. Do you want us to start lobbying with you for that, because it does seem to be a step forward?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): It would be a great step forward. I do not want to sound as though I am being - what I like about some of these people, Caroline in particular today, is you want me to become Mussolini. I welcome that vote of support and I admire your general enthusiasm for me taking over every single - 70% of railway journeys begin or end in London. I would control, under Caroline's proposals, 70% of the national railway. Fine, I am in favour of that. It would be a fantastic thing for London to run the country's railways. Why not. I am all in favour of it. All I want respectfully to say to Caroline and to you --

Dee Doocey (Chair): No, no, you are answering a question from Richard, you are not going back to Caroline's question.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I am answering the question. We have got to do what is politically sensible and reason. I am not convinced that asking the Department for Transport for the right to run every railway in the UK is absolutely the right way forward. I think that you are correct, Dick, and what we need to look at is sharing the franchising operations and having more of a say, because that is the way to get better information to the passengers and that is the way to have a fully integrated overground/underground Metro-style railway service. But I will look at what Caroline says; I will look at it.

Gareth Bacon (AM): Mr Mayor, for the record, please could you advise the Assembly to what extent the rail operating companies are answerable to you, as Mayor of London, regarding their staffing levels and arrangements?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I hesitate to accuse Caroline of misleading Londoners but I do think things have come to a pretty pass when a Member of the Assembly, who is supposed to know a thing or two about the constitution of London and how things work here, actually tries to blame me for the staffing levels of the TOCs. But I am delighted to say that Caroline will not be misleading Londoners forever.

Dee Doocey (Chair): She must be delighted with the publicity you are giving her, but carry on!

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Dee, do not be jealous, you are very famous too. You are very famous and you will become ever more famous.

Dee Doocey (Chair): Carry on. You are answering a question.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Caroline is right to draw attention to this issue, and I am delighted that she wants to ascribe to me these titanic powers, and we are going to do what we can, but I think that the route that Dick has suggested is the more pragmatic one and the one more likely to be successful.

Gareth Bacon (AM): So it is fair to say that the rail operating companies are not currently answerable to you regarding their staffing levels at stations or anywhere else?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): No, and they should be, they should be.

Gareth Bacon (AM): The performance of Southeastern Trains and Southern Railway during the snow disruptions late last year was generally regarded as woeful. To what extent are the rail operating companies answerable to you as Mayor of London for their performance during snowy conditions?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): You are putting your finger on it. At the moment, constitutionally, all I can do is do what I did: ring up the Secretary of State and say, "Come on. These guys have got to move their trains. Why is that they cannot get through from Bexley or wherever it is when everybody knows that they could make more of an effort?" We do that, but what I would like to see is more direct accountability. I would like to see us having a stake in the franchising arrangements. I hope this whole conversation is turned into a kind of clip that is broadcast into the Department of Transport so they can see how Londoners no longer make any distinction - in the mind of Caroline herself - between the train operating companies and me. It is now assumed that I run all these things; therefore, it is now democratically essential for us to have a stake in it.

Gareth Bacon (AM): As indeed you indicated in your proposals for devolution which were published seven months ago. We have now established that the rail operating companies are not answerable to you in terms of staffing, they are not answerable to you in terms of performance. We think that they should be. To what extent do you believe, then, that Caroline Pidgeon is misleading Londoners by suggesting otherwise?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Len Duvall has just gravely misled Londoners all morning with his erroneous statistics and failure to make a distinction between Mainland China and Hong Kong.

Dee Doocey (Chair): Is that an answer to the question Gareth has just posed?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): -- and Caroline Pidgeon. Caroline Pidgeon alas is trying to mislead Londoners about my role in train operating companies. You are misleading Londoners.

Dee Doocey (Chair): Enough. I am now moving on. Steve O'Connell is the next speaker.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): There are more flights to Mainland China from Paris and Frankfurt than there are from London. Fact. OK, Len is still saying, "You are in charge". He is still saying this.

Dee Doocey (Chair): You are not behaving very well.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): They are all trying to say a load of complete twaddle and I am allowed to get the ball back over the net.

Dee Doocey (Chair): I am not happy with you at all. I will take it up with you afterwards.
Steve O'Connell.

Steve O'Connell (AM): I do not know how to follow that, actually, to be honest. Mr Mayor, I do not think I can follow that, to be honest, but let's try to bring some semblance of order to this wonderful meeting. What does worry me is that clearly you are not responsible for the franchise within London but there is an aspiration here that it is expected by residents that you do have a significant say and it is rather odd that the future chair of the Assembly's Transport Committee, I think, Caroline, should state such inaccuracies, shall we say?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I prefer 'misleading statements'.

Steve O'Connell (AM): OK, whatever; semantics. The point I am making is why I have been lobbied by residents is they do not think that you have a control over that. Many residents actually know their facts and they know that it is not TfL and they know that it is not you. What they have come back to us to say is that actually, over the last couple of years, they have reflected on some fantastic successes: London Overground, trams, the upgrade on the Tube, safety on our buses and elsewhere. What they are saying is this was a job well done by the Mayor and can we not give him, and can the Government not give him, more control over the rest of the transport infrastructure? What do you say to that?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I think that is completely right and I congratulate you for the great job you are doing but also to your constituents who have pointed this out to you. I think it is true. One of the things that we campaigned on was safety on public transport, and it has greatly increased and improved. That goes directly to what Caroline was saying about the Overground. You make these points about my role in the train operating companies. Actually, safety on the rail network overall has improved. There are very, very few incidents of violence every year and we are working very hard to bring them down. Again, I think that the things that we have done, particularly for Croydon putting in the East London Line - as you know, we have great plans for the tram and other improvements - I think these will deliver long-term benefits for Croydon and for other parts of outer London.

Steve O'Connell (AM): Just to finish, Mr Mayor, I think there is a logical connection between the improvements that have been delivered in the last 18 months and for them to give you more influence over the infrastructure. It is logical to me and to my residents.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Yes, but what would be helpful, I think, would be if this great Assembly, which obviously is at one on this point - and Dick was offering to do this - could make the point more vehemently to Government.

Dee Doocey (Chair): I have got a point of personal explanation from Caroline Pidgeon.

Caroline Pidgeon (AM): I think the Member and the Mayor are trying to say that I do not know the facts about who runs train operating companies and so on. I would like to say I clearly do understand the role there, but the Mayor clearly stated in his manifesto that while the Mayor currently has no control over the management of London's rail services, he will not use this as an excuse to shirk responsibility and the Mayor should stand up for Londoners on every issue that affects the city, whether he has direct control or not. That is why I am trying to follow up from the Mayor's rail summit last year.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): That is exactly what I have done. With the greatest of respect, Caroline – with very diminishing respect – that is exactly what I have done.

Dee Doocey (Chair): Mr Mayor, this is not a debating point. It was a statement and that is finished, so we are now moving on.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): It was also rubbish, but there we go.

Dee Doocey (Chair): Before we go any further, can I welcome students from St Bernadette's School in Harrow, please. We are now moving on to the next question.

65/2011 - Police bonuses

Tony Arbour

Does the Mayor agree with me that it is quite wrong to offer bonus payments to police officers for performing tasks which one might reasonably expect them to perform as part of their duties? Can he confirm that the bonus sum paid out by the Met this year, reported in the press, was £28 million and what he is doing to tackle this?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I do agree with you that bonus payments for police officers are not appropriate and I am in favour of a simple and fair pay scheme.

Tony Arbour (AM): Would you not think, Mr Mayor, that the elected police commissioners should be given the right to control police pay, and whether or not bonuses ought to be paid, given that currently among the sort of things that the police receive bonuses for are working in areas with a high crime rate, which you might well think was exactly what you expect police officers to do? They get bonuses for good attendance, they get bonuses for working as a team, they get bonuses for willingness to learn, the kind of thing that most employees, you might think, would consider to be part of their job. Yet in the police field, commissioners – and we fully anticipate that you are going to be the Commissioner for London – ought to be able to control themselves how police are paid. Do you not think that is something we should be doing?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Yes. The whole thing is being reviewed by Tom Winsor but the general direction is to try to – these bonuses are part of a national pay agreement which we in the Metropolitan Police Association (MPA) do not actually control – bear down on them. For instance, the Commissioner Sir Paul Stephenson himself does not take a bonus, and I think he is right in that. The bonus payments are themselves actually being reduced from £29.4 million in 2009 to £21.5 million in 2010/11. But I basically share your point, Tony, that people should not receive bonuses for what are standard things that they do as part of their job.

Tony Arbour (AM): I am pleased to hear you say that, and I very much hope that the remaining £20 million which is being spent on bonuses in the Metropolitan Police Service (MPS) is squeezed out as soon as possible, given the budgetary restraints that we have across London.

Can I draw your attention to another area where additional payments are being made, which represents a very, very substantial proportion of the police bill, and that relates to overtime payments? Were police commissioners to have the power to control payments for overtime, that is a payment which I imagine that a rational police commissioner, as you will be, would be able again to squeeze out and ensure that London Council taxpayers, who are paying for the police force, actually get proper value for money; given the extraordinary Byzantine system that exists for paying police overtime.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): There has got to be a balance here, Tony. The police do a very difficult and sometimes very dangerous job and it is right that they should be properly paid, but I do not think that we want to see money being wasted. The whole objective of what we are trying to do now with the police budget is to get money out of the back room and out of non-frontline expense and put into getting people out there on the street, and I think we are going to be successful in that.

Tony Arbour (AM): You have drawn attention to the fact that the Commissioner does not accept a bonus and ACPO officers in general in the MPS do not accept their bonuses, yet nevertheless, the amount of bonuses which are still being paid out by the MPS is greater than anywhere else in the country. Is there not a kind of dissonance here? The leadership are setting a proper leadership example but it does not appear to be followed throughout the service.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Well, I have just given you the figures for this year. Last year £29 million; it is down to £21 million this year. The bonus system is part of the national pay and conditions that we cannot unilaterally abolish, but there is a move going on to get these out of the system. Sir Paul Stephenson has himself spoken out against the bonus system.

194/2011 - Bankers

John Biggs

How many banks have left London in the last year?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Thankfully, I do not think that we did lose any financial services institutions from London last year, although plainly we have to be vigilant about maintaining London's lead in what is a vital sector for the UK economy.

John Biggs (AM): You can almost predict my next question, then, which is you said earlier --

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I would never predict your questions, John, not at all.

John Biggs (AM): You said earlier that you never get the figures wrong and yet in January last year you said that up to 9,000 bankers were likely to leave London because of the new tax rates. What was your evidence base for that and why did you get it so wrong.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I do not remember saying anything about 9,000 bankers myself. I think I had a figure of 4,000 somewhere I saw but, anyway, maybe you are right and maybe it was 9,000.

John Biggs (AM): It was 9,000; let's be clear.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): OK, well, my brief says 4,000. Never mind. It was true that there was alarm at one stage that --

John Biggs (AM): I think it was your alarm, wasn't it?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): -- there would be a considerable flight of financial services people from London. Thankfully, thanks to the common sense that we were able to inject into the whole conversation and thanks to some of the wisdom shown by this Government and indeed the last Government, we did not see dramatic measures that would have penalised London and London alone. People do want to see bankers punished and I understand the emotional force of those arguments. I understand why people feel so resentful of people who engineered a massive disaster in the world

economy and who took huge sums of taxpayers' money to replenish their balance sheets and now seem to be using it to pay themselves enormous bonuses. I do understand why people feel so enraged, frankly, and I share that feeling. What I am not willing to see is a unilateral attack on financial services in London and not to do whatever measure that is proposed as part of a global solution. If President Sarkozy could get a Tobin tax to work globally then it might be interesting but as far as I can make out it would be difficult to impose.

John Biggs (AM): It will not surprise you, or I hope it will not surprise you, that Labour Members do not want to see a unilateral attack on financial services in London either, but we do think it is legitimate to question the morality of bankers who have screwed this country and created massive economic problems for us. When you look at alarm being raised, I think you will find the records show that there was only one person raising that alarm and that was you. So I would like to know, again, why you - and I think people in your own party take this view as well - created such an alarmist smokescreen which turned out to be false. What are your priorities?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): There are difficult decisions being taken the whole time by banks about where to locate and where to expand their offices, and I think it is important to be aware that they can choose to locate elsewhere.

John Biggs (AM): Of course they can.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I want to make sure that that does not happen and that London remains attractive and competitive.

John Biggs (AM): I suppose a concern we have about - say, for example, you had influence over the national rail service in London. A lot of us in London suspect that you would have special carriages for bankers because --

Dee Doocey (Chair): No, you are straying from the question.

John Biggs (AM): -- because there is a question in the minds of Londoners, I think, about who you are standing up for in this, and fundamentally you got the balance wrong. Do you accept that?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): No, because I think most commonsensical people can see behind what you are trying to say and they recognise that banks yield very considerable sums in tax revenue for this country, I think £31 billion from London financial services alone; that is a lot of money. That pays for a lot of schools and hospitals and I would not want to see that tax revenue going to some other jurisdiction.

John Biggs (AM): So when, finally, in the Financial Times - I agree not a very good newspaper of course - in October said, "Banker exodus fails to hit city", did you look in the mirror and say, "Oops-a-daisy, got that one wrong. I need to apologise to Londoners and indeed I need to recognise that I got the balance wrong in misjudging the anger Londoners feel about the way in which bankers have helped to wreck or almost wreck our economy?"

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I am not quite certain what you are saying. Again, I do not think we got it wrong, because I think it was necessary to make people aware of the fact that these industries are mobile, and it was important to get that point across. If the exodus did not happen, then I think that was a good thing. I am not quite clear from what you say whether you think it would have been a good thing if they had gone.

John Biggs (AM): Some of them, I suspect, yes.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): How many?

John Biggs (AM): I think the ones who have a misplaced morality, but the questions are to you.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): 10%?

John Biggs (AM): The question is to you.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): 10% or how many?

John Biggs (AM): No, I want the financial services jobs to stay in London but I want our financial sector to be guided by the studious pursuit of good business and profit-making for the UK, but guided by good morality. There we are, I am answering your question. The question to you is when you jet off - as I am sure this question time is merely delaying you from doing - to Davos for your weekend of hobnobbing with bankers, do you have a new message for them in terms of the standards they should be exhibiting as good citizens of London?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I think last year I told them that it was time for the masters of the universe to become the servants of the people. I think that is absolutely right and I think it is a message I will be repeating this year.

Roger Evans (AM): I think that phrase, "the masters of the universe should become the servants of the people", could apply to so many more people outside the banking system, possibly former politicians who got the country into the state that it is in. Does it depress you considerably to reflect that Mr Biggs actually represents not only the financial centre at Canary Wharf but also the financial sector in the City across the river? Do you think that he is acting in the best interests of his constituents and his businesses by pursuing this vendetta?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): To be fair to John, I listened very carefully to what he said; he said he is in favour of a strong financial services industry in London and I think he is right in that. He then seemed, in an irascible aside, to say that he wanted to see it reduced in size. OK, he does not want to see it. Sorry, there has been a change of plan; he does not want to see it reduced in size and in that respect I think he is also right.

Roger Evans (AM): I think perhaps a source of some of this confusion, Mr Mayor, which some of the Members on the other side of the table feel, is perhaps a lack of appreciation of how the economy works in the area. Have you done any work which might help them which looks at not just the number of bankers who are paid huge amounts of money who are employed by the banks but the number of specialists and middle managers and secretarial staff and cleaners who rely on these businesses for their living? Indeed also the number of small sandwich bars and restaurants and pubs and suppliers of stationery and all of the support that is provided for financial services in London. Have you heard anything from Members of the Opposition about what they would suggest to replace the banking sector if it disappeared and they needed to have a new economy for London?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): No, I have not heard any coherent thoughts about that. I am in favour of rebalancing the London economy, I am in favour of boosting manufacturing, and one of the few encouraging figures this morning or yesterday was the increase that we are seeing in manufacturing. But I do not see any evidence at all that you will boost manufacturing by reducing the importance of financial services. I have not yet heard any convincing arguments on that from John or his colleagues.

Dee Doocey (Chair): I have got a point of personal explanation from John Biggs, and there will be no debate on it.

John Biggs (AM): And for the record I am very proud that I am of the Left and that I support people in the East End of London, but I did use to work in the financial sector and I have good relationships with my constituents who work in this sector and I advocate very strongly on their behalf. They are an important part of London's economy. I think this mischief-making by Mr Evans is purely time wasting, Chair.

60/2011 - Eviction of squatters

Steve O'Connell

It is estimated that there are 20,000 squatters in the country, the majority of whom are in London. Despite recent Government advice, law-abiding homeowners still have no option but to go through complex and expensive legal proceedings to evict trespassers from their homes. Will the Mayor join with me in calling on the Government to grant the police greater powers to evict squatters without a court order?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I fully support the Government's proposal to reduce the time taken to obtain an interim possession order from one week to 24 hours.

Steve O'Connell (AM): Thank you, Mr Mayor. In all our constituencies over a period of time we have had evidence of squatters to various degrees, and the detrimental effect often it has on neighbourhoods and sometimes feelings of safety, so I am very happy that you would agree with me that the police should be given greater powers of discretion to evict squatters. I would refer you, Mr Mayor, and perhaps you would like to comment, to the recent quite high-profile incident on Boxing Day in Highgate where a rather large property was occupied and it took 25 days to release it. What do you think of the comments by the ringleader, a Latvian chap who is perhaps an international squatter, I do not know, that this is one of the few countries that you could get away with squatting for such a long period of time relatively scot-free? Surely we should be lobbying the police and Government to give the police stronger powers to evict squatters in our areas.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): You are absolutely right and I think the system seems to be crazy. If that story is correct, then it is outrageous and I think that is why the Government's proposal to reduce the time for an interim possession order is absolutely right. The problem of squatting, of course, is exacerbated by the number of empty homes and we are using considerable sums of money - £60 million available - to bring 2,000 empty properties back into use since I became Mayor, and I think that is the right way to go.

Steve O'Connell (AM): Clearly it is correct that if we reduce the number of empty properties, ipso facto we have reduced the opportunities for squatters, but I think one of the problems here is that the police have to go for a court order which will be instigated by the owners, sometimes absent owners. What I am looking at urging you towards is to work together for a change of the law whereby police in particular circumstances do not need to go for a third-party possession order, but when there is a breakdown of law and order and a detrimental effect on residents the police can go ahead and, given a proven need, evict squatters in any case.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): That is a very interesting proposal, Steve. I wonder what statutory change is actually necessary to give the police the powers that they would need. It might be that they could make the evictions under normal law against breach of the peace or whatever, but I am certainly happy to look at it.

Steve O'Connell (AM): Clearly when there are acts of criminality within, drug dealing, etc, they would have those powers, but sometimes it is the longstanding occupation of those premises when

there is an absentee owner and it is very frustrating for the police and neighbours. Perhaps together we can work towards a possible solution.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Yes, I would be very happy with that, and can I propose that you bring it up with Rick Blakeway [Mayoral Adviser on Housing].

Steve O'Connell (AM): OK, thank you very much.

201/2011 - Mayor's transport strategy and TfL business plan

Valerie Shawcross

What is your main worry with regards to London's current and future Transport needs?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Val, I think the main worry about current and future transport needs is that we have the investment in infrastructure to deal with the growing population in the city and that we have successive governments in the next 20 or 30 years that recognise the need to invest in London.

Valerie Shawcross (AM): Good morning, Mr Mayor. Thank you for that, and I think that is indeed a very key issue. If we can just reflect back on the things you said you were worried about in 2008. I am looking back now at one of your Back Boris flyers in 2008 before the election, this is what you were worried about then. You said,

"London transport is in a mess. How come you pay more every year and yet things just seem to get worse?"

I put it to you, Mr Mayor, that having just put up the fares again by 2% more than inflation, an inflation-busting rise, with two closures causing constant problems, both planned and unplanned - and we have had a terrible experience on the Metropolitan Line in December with 415 disruptions in one month on one line. I put it to you that Londoners are actually saying right now, "How come we pay more every year and yet things just seem to get worse?"

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Actually, if you look at what is happening, and we had a long conversation about this last time - like a sort of 'Nam flashback, this is a rerun of the conversation we had before - on the Tube you are seeing, in spite of the difficulties we have had and in spite of the extreme weather, the strikes and everything else, an increase in riders, a very substantial increase in riders and that is an amazing thing for London Underground to have pulled off. It is happening - and this is the key point that you are right to focus on - against a background of difficulty, particularly on the Jubilee Line and on the subsurface lines, to do with signalling. That is why it has been so essential that we secured the funding that we did to do the upgrades. I think one of the things that I want Londoners to understand is that I know that people have felt hacked off by the disruption, particularly on the Jubilee Line and the subsurface lines, though not exclusively those, but the disruption is, I am afraid, part of an essential process to improve the oldest Tube network in the world and that is what we were doing.

Valerie Shawcross (AM): I have just got the benefit here - and I appreciate you have not got this detail. We did a sample of what had happened on one Tube line in one month. You mentioned severe weather and you mentioned industrial action there, I think, and you mentioned upgrading. Can I explain to you that there were only two incidents of those 415 disruptions which were industrial action? There were only 24 that were weather, and actually the largest number of them was clearly management failings, because it was staff absences and shortages. There were problems of train

failures in the stations, all the things that should be dealt with by better management. I think you are misleading Londoners when you say --

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

Valerie Shawcross (AM): You gave them the impression that things would not get more expensive and that they would be less overcrowded and they would become --

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): No, come on. You can do better than that.

Valerie Shawcross (AM): -- more reliable.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): You can do better than that.

Valerie Shawcross (AM): In 2008 you were worried about, let me just quote this, "Rush hours should be renamed crush hour". Very colourful. Road congestion is indeed an issue, Mr Mayor, particularly now the Western extension has been removed from the congestion-charging zone, and yet in the Mayor's Transport Strategy on page 277 you say that the aim of the strategy is, "To limit the rise in congestion to only 14%".

There have been reports from the navigational technology industries that London is the most congested city in Europe. Was not your claim to tackle car congestion in London totally misleading because actually you are planning for a 14% increase in congestion in London?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I hesitate on hugely misleading Londoners, Val, but you are, because what is happening on congestion now is that after - let's talk about traffic congestion - there is been a very difficult period caused by the need to do a lot of roadworks particularly with Thames Water, and they have been overwhelmingly responsible for the bulk of increased congestion in London. We are now beginning to see improvements at last, thanks to the permit scheme that we have brought in. You are starting to see average road speeds, average speeds, increasing, admittedly to not supersonic levels - 9.4 miles per hour - but it is going up, it is moving in the right direction at last, and if the Government gives us what we need, which is a lane rental scheme, we will be able to make even further progress.

This is in no way to minimise people's feelings of frustration. Of course people will be feeling frustrated, but we have to do it. It has been necessary to do a great deal of the roadworks. We are now, I hope, turning the corner with the roadworks and --

Valerie Shawcross (AM): But all of those things were known about.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): -- you are starting to see improvements in road speeds and that is something I think you should tell Londoners.

Valerie Shawcross (AM): All those things were known about and were factored into your Mayor's Transport Strategy.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): What, the increase in road speeds?

Valerie Shawcross (AM): Your plans for trying to co-ordinate roadworks, etc, the water plans, they were all known about, so your current, extant, up-to-date Transport Strategy is still planning on there being a big increase in congestion, so there is not a clear plan to deal with that overhang there.

In 2008, let me move on, you were worried about orbital transport links, in particular orbital transport links in outer London. You said, "Let's have new orbital bus routes in outer London" and I think that probably attracted an awful lot of support. You said in your manifesto,

"I'll commission a trial of orbital express bus routes for outer London. They will be a distinct mode of transport connecting key terminals with coach-style vehicles and limited numbers of stops."

That is a very clear picture of express routes. In fact there have not been any orbital bus services at all.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Yes, there have. There was the X26.

Valerie Shawcross (AM): The X26 has been there for 150 years, we know that.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): You are misleading Londoners.

Valerie Shawcross (AM): There is nothing in the business plan that says you are putting together orbital routes for the future. On page 80 it says --

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Page 80 of what?

Valerie Shawcross (AM): Of the Mayor's Transport Strategy, your Mayor's Transport Strategy. You say, "There is low demand for orbital public transport, especially in outer London". That is a really big jump backwards.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): No, it is not.

Valerie Shawcross (AM): Why are you not worried about orbital transport in outer London any more?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): We have succeeded triumphantly in spite of all your gloom and all your negativity; a great geyser of negativity, you are. We have succeeded in having an orbital rail link in London for the first time ever. It is a fantastic achievement. And, yes, we did trial orbital bus routes.

Valerie Shawcross (AM): What was that, sorry? Which projects are we referring to there?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I am talking about the orbital rail network that we have --

Valerie Shawcross (AM): Ken Livingstone's orbital rail network?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I am sorry, I did not see Ken Livingstone there when I launched it.

Valerie Shawcross (AM): It would have been gracious of you to invite him to cut the ribbon on the project that he planned and initiated.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Oh, give me a break. I did not hear the former Mayor congratulating Sir Alan Greengross on the congestion charge when it was Sir Alan Greengross' idea. Did he ever mention it?

Valerie Shawcross (AM): It was not.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): It was. It was, actually. I did not hear the former Mayor congratulating John Gummer on Trafalgar Square. Did he ever? I do not think he did. I am delighted to say that we have introduced --

Valerie Shawcross (AM): We absolutely love the orbital rail network.

Dee Doocey (Chair): Enough, enough.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): -- a wonderful orbital rail network and you just said that we love it. That is more like it, Val. I think you are better when you are positive.

Valerie Shawcross (AM): We love the orbital rail network, but --

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): And we did try some orbital bus networks.

Valerie Shawcross (AM): -- it is not an outer London orbital fast-bus service.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): We did trial some orbital bus networks, particularly the X26 and, as it says on page 80 of the --

Valerie Shawcross (AM): Mr Mayor, I was using the X26 to go to work 30 years ago.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Yes, well, we increased it. We increased it to see if people wanted to use it more and I am afraid it did not work. Some things you try and they work and some things do not work.

Valerie Shawcross (AM): Do you think the passengers in Barnham are using the X26? Do you not think passengers in outer London boroughs were led to believe that they were going to get a rapid orbital bus network, and do you not think the passengers in northern outer London boroughs will feel misled and that they have been let down by that promise?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): No, because I have been very clear throughout that we would trial it. They were not misled. They got exactly what we said. We trialled it. I do not think that it proved its worth. I am not going to waste lots of taxpayers' money on a project that actually doesn't deliver value for money.

Richard Tracey (AM): Mr Mayor, is it not really very important in setting your Transport Strategy and TfL setting its budgets that everything is costed and that there are funds available to pay for it? Do you remember the last Mayor, Mr Livingstone, said that he was going to build a cross-river tram, which I think was going to cost £1.3 billion? The money was not available, like so many other hair-brained schemes he had. Then, of course, he also froze the fares in 2007, against the advice of the likes of Peter Hendy, as Peter Hendy --

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): No, but he had put them up by 12% the previous year.

Richard Tracey (AM): Indeed, but then froze them in 2007 for blatant political reasons and created a black hole for you to secede to. Is that not appalling management?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Absolutely right, and I might mention that he spent £34 million on a study for the Ealing tram. Has anyone been to Ealing recently? Do you notice a tram there? Have you seen a tram in Ealing? How can he spend £34 million and produce absolutely no evidence of a tram whatsoever? I think that was the kind of incredible financial mismanagement that took place under the last administration. He would have listened to the kind of claptrap that people have been talking today and might well have chucked lots of good money after bad and invested in

bus routes or proposals that do not actually deliver value for money. We have to look at delivering value for money. As I have said, there is a fantastic record over the last couple of years of improvements in public transport. I am delighted that from time to time, Val, you actually pay tribute to them.

Richard Tracey (AM): The economic understanding of the Members over there, of course, is totally exemplified by the chaos that the last Government have brought this country to. We must not allow Londoners or the rest of the country to forget that. It is all down to the Labour Government and they are just as bad on their economics.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): That is absolutely right, and that is why it is necessary for us to make the economies that we have but to continue to invest in public transport and to make the case for continued investment in transport. That is why I make the point about aviation and I repeat my challenge to Len Duvall. If he can prove that there are more flights from London to Mainland China than there are from Paris or Frankfurt, then I will eat my hat.

Dee Doocey (Chair): Sorry, Mr Mayor, that is nothing whatsoever to do with this.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): But if not, then I think he should make a pilgrimage of apology to this place, scourging himself, flagellating himself with a copy of our report into aviation. He should.

Dee Doocey (Chair): I am quite disappointed at the tenor of this meeting. I really do think it ought to be a question and answer session. There are faults on all sides. If it continues like this I am going to suggest that we break while people reflect on the fact that we are at our very best when we are asking the Mayor questions and the Mayor is giving answers.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Can I possibly make a point in response to that? I agree with that. I do think it is disappointing when there is a series of obviously planted questions designed to elicit one particular party line which is all co-ordinated on this side of the table. I am perfectly prepared to be more than reasonable and to have a very, very collegiate exchange with my friends on this side but not when they are being nakedly political in the way that they are.

Dee Doocey (Chair): I think you have a point, but also can I say that if you keep referring back to questions that have been answered before and you keep referring by name to Members that you wish to highlight, it does not help the situation.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I am very sorry.

Dee Doocey (Chair): I am asking you please, all of you, to just reflect on the fact that we are much better when we are asking questions and just getting answers.

59/2011 - Rob Holden resignation

Andrew Boff

Does it concern the Mayor that the resignation of Rob Holden, one of the country's most widely respected engineers, as Crossrail chief executive, was brought about in part by the reportedly ,hands-on approach of Transport for London?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Rob has decided to step down because he thinks it is the right thing for him and the project to leave now that Crossrail is well underway, and I thank him very much for everything that he has done for Crossrail

I do not think it was ever going to be reasonable to expect Crossrail to have a chief executive who steered the thing through until 2018 and I think that it is a good thing that we are now able to find someone who can do that job.

Andrew Boff (AM): Thank you, Mr Mayor. First reports indicate that Rob Holden was concerned about the hands-on approach of TfL. Have you any concerns regarding the management style of TfL in the management of Crossrail?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): No.

Andrew Boff (AM): According to the Financial Times today, if Woolwich Station is to be ready for Crossrail, it needs to be signed off by TfL within the next six days. Is that not cutting things a bit fine for such a major project?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Yes, it is going to be tough and I am very keen that the Woolwich box argument be settled very soon.

Andrew Boff (AM): Do you think there is any connection between Rob Holden's departure from this scheme and the fact that we have such a pitifully small window available to us in securing that Woolwich Station is actually built in time to be connected to Crossrail?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): None that I am aware of, but clearly, as I said to you just now, I want the Woolwich argument settled as fast as we possibly can. Clearly we do not have much time to do it.

Andrew Boff (AM): Does it not concern you that that is a very small window of opportunity?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I am sure that we will be all to do a deal. Back to the main point of your question, I think Rob Holden did a very good job and I am grateful to him.

Andrew Boff (AM): Is it worth you, Mr Mayor, reviewing the Crossrail project and how TfL are managing it to date?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): There is obviously going to be an issue about a huge project like that and the role of TfL, the role of the Department of Transport and there will be questions about the exact governance structure. I am content this is a condominium between us and the DfT and that we have the right arrangements in place.

Andrew Boff (AM): Thank you, Mr Mayor.

1/2011 Homeless

Richard Barnbrook

According to CHAIN there was a 6% increase in people sleeping rough at some point on the streets of London last year. With this mind is your target to end rough sleeping in London by the end of 2012 achievable?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Thank you. I do believe that the target of ending rough sleeping by 2012 is achievable; yes, I do.

Richard Barnbrook (AM): So you obviously do accept the fact of the information back from CHAIN that last year there was a 6% increase in rough sleeping in the streets of London. I obviously will not be using the word “misleading”. Are you concerned that during the deteriorating economic situation it will throw your Strategy off-course with the idea that rumours are coming out from the Ministry of Defence (MOD) that 7,000-plus service personnel will be made redundant? Obviously a sizable amount of those will end up coming to London. You are obviously fully aware that there are sections of ex-service folk living rough in London, so do you still believe you can achieve that target by the end of 2012?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I think you are making a sensible comment on the economic difficulties that we face, and there is no doubt that the position is tough and there will be people who are driven to homelessness and to rough sleeping. But we are determined to tackle it and there has been a very high reduction in the number of entrenched rough sleepers throughout the project. We have, particularly, a project called *No Second Night* which is designed to make sure that if you do end up on the streets for one night, then all the agencies that are responsible for tackling rough sleeping do get a grip on the situation and that you should not spend a second night out on the streets. That is proving successful.

Richard Barnbrook (AM): I am going to come back about the ex-servicemen in a moment, but in the Evening Standard it said, “London, 2011, men forced to sleep in bins”. There are 50 people who are actually sleeping rough in Haverstock Estate in Southall. Again, the idea of the 24-hour stop-mark is not actually proven to work with these 50 people now into two or three weeks living rough.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): There is a charity called Thames Reach, which is a member of the London Delivery Board which Rick Blakeway set up and which we set up here in City Hall, and they are working with those men that you mentioned. They say they are going to help them get the accommodation that they need. They confirm at the moment there are only eight people in this position, but we are obviously working hard to sort it out.

Just on rough sleeping and the general problem – and we have been around this many times here – there will be a number of factors that come together in people’s lives that put them out on to the streets. It is not always a simple issue of finding them accommodation. There may be psychological issues, there may be issues in their lives that they need help with in one way or another. That is why the London Delivery Board is there to try to bring the agencies together and deal with rough sleepers in a holistic way.

Richard Barnbrook (AM): I would like to go back to ex-servicemen. I think everybody here appreciates what our service folk do across the world, and coming back in body bags or mentally or physically disabled. There are charities out there like Heroes for the Homeless. I have some statistics here that in this particular moment in time, 1,100 ex-service folk are sleeping on the streets; rough living. An additional 2,500 are sleeping on sofas. This information is actually coming from the MOD, York University and shelters. I would like to look at that aspect. If charities were to approach you in assisting you with getting these rough sleepers off the streets, would you open arms to them?

In saying that, a lot of the ex-service people have been made redundant and more are about to be made redundant this year. Obviously their circumstances are simply that they have left the forces. Everyone seems to think London is paved with gold and they all rush down here. How would these particular people, who have done so much for our nation, be supported by you and by the proposals you are putting forward with regard to rough sleepers?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): That is a very interesting point because I have not seen the recent figures for ex-service people rough sleeping. I did see some figures a while back --

Richard Barnbrook (AM): These chaps here are ex-service; they have given me the figures.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Actually, the figures have gone down for ex-servicemen sleeping rough very substantially. If there has been an increase then that is something that I am sure we would like to be made aware of on the London Delivery Board and certainly we are open to all offers from charities that wish to work with us to deal with the problem.

Richard Barnbrook (AM): There is this programme going forward with, I think, 600 East Europeans who have been resettled when they have come across here by dubious means, either by the sex trade or by false employment trade, and it has cost London £500,000 to send these people back at their own personal leisure. If this sort of money can be spent, can you give an indication very quickly of how much money you are hoping to spend between now and the end of 2012 to reduce the problem of rough sleeping?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I cannot give you the figure but I would be happy to update you offline.

Dee Doocey (Chair): I am sorry, Mr Mayor, I am afraid Mr Barnbrook has run of time.

64/2011 - Olympic rail travel

James Cleverly

Will the Mayor do all in his power to persuade London commuter rail firms to offer fare discounts to Olympic Games ticket holders?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): This is a difficult one. You are worried about large numbers of people coming and parking their cars and then using free travel with their Olympic ticket to get into the venues but congesting areas in South London because there is no free travel on the railways. There is a conversation to be had with the railways about this. I think it is frankly unlikely that they are going to give free travel to everybody with an Olympic ticket, if that is what you are after, but we are certainly having a conversation with them about it.

James Cleverly (AM): Thank you, Mr Mayor. You have highlighted an issue known as railheading, which is a particular concern to residents in the outer London boroughs, particularly those who live near railway stations just on the edge of the London Zone 6. Consistently people drive in from the near suburbs, park up in residential streets and then use the TfL system or suburban rail transport system to get into the centre of London. Obviously, the concern is that during the Olympics that is going to be exasperated by the increased numbers of people.

Whilst I agree with you that I doubt there will be free travel on the suburban routes, as there will be within the TfL-designated parts of London, would you at least commit to having the conversation with them about introducing a discounted fare to encourage people out of their cars and on to the trains? This will not only bring about environmental benefits but it will also ensure that my residents in Bexley and Bromley and the other residents at railheads around the edge of London are not boxed in by people parking up to take advantage of the free travel?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I am aware of the problem of railheading. We will look at the suggestion that you make. Clearly there will be financial implications for the rail companies that they had not bargained for, but we will certainly look at the arguments. I am very happy to work with you on that.

James Cleverly (AM): One of the points we want to get across to them is that people travelling to the edge of London in their car in order to take advantage of railheading, has actually lost revenue.

So whilst they may baulk and say, "Oh, well discounted fares and all that", what we are trying to encourage them is to having a slight discount on a significantly larger number of people. They should see that they will be financially better off by bringing about this discount. They will have a huge opportunity to get additional passengers, many of whom will be travelling at off-peak times. This is something which I think could be a very, very powerful signal and will echo, actually, some of the other conversations that we have about making sure that the service provided to Londoners and people travelling into London by the train operating companies is really up to scratch and is properly co-ordinated with the policies that you are putting forward for TfL.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I am certainly willing to look at that suggestion; it is an interesting suggestion. Quite how the rail companies will take it, I do not know, but let's bring it up with the Association of Train Operating Companies (ATOC).

Richard Tracey (AM): Mr Mayor, are you or the Olympic Delivery Authority and London Organising Committee of the Olympic Games talking about possible park and ride facilities with developers who may have land that is undeveloped in 2012? I am thinking particularly in my own constituency, there are quite a number of hectares or acres, whatever you want to call them, in Nine Elms, Battersea Power Station and so on. I guess that they will not have started building in some of those areas by 2012, so it seems to me an absolutely logical thing with the various railway stations, with the boat transport and so on. Vauxhall Station is very close to Nine Elms and they could park and then get on a train to get to the Olympic Park. Are you making a few overtures to people to do that?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): That is a very interesting idea and we will certainly have a look at it.

191/2011 - Housing

Nicky Gavron

How many affordable homes have been started in each year since you were elected?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Thank you very much, Nicky. I can tell you the figures for the year since I was elected in 2008/09, there were 11,382 starts. In 2009/10, there were 15,114 starts and we are currently forecasting around 12,000 starts for 2010/11.

Nicky Gavron (AM): Yes. You claim these starts to be a record number. True, you have claimed them?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): For instance, last year there were 35% more affordable starts in the last financial year - that is 2009/10 - than in the last year of the previous incumbent and if you look at the overall projection, which we are still confident we can deliver, in spite of incredibly difficult circumstances, 50,000 by 2012, we are still confident that we will do that and that will be more than delivered over any four-year term.

Nicky Gavron (AM): When I asked the question about starts for a written answer, I was referred to the Department of Communities and Local Government (DCLG) figures and they show year-on-year that your predecessor, Ken Livingstone, had more starts. They are the only figures I can really go to because the figures you are quoting, Homes and Communities Agency (HCA) figures, are not. Before that it was the Housing Corporation and there are no publicly accountable figures. So going by Government figures, what you have said is misleading when you claim a record there but I think you would --

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I agree. I think you would be very, you guys --

Nicky Gavron (AM): I think you would agree, Mr Mayor, it is better for us to talk about what is delivered on the ground. Would you agree with that? It is better that we look at what has been delivered on the ground in terms of completions.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Your question is about starts and you have just accused me of misleading on starts. I have given you the HCA figures. If you want to dispute the HCA figures then that is your prerogative but I think you are in danger of degrading this debate. I have given you the HCA figures for starts: 11,382 in 2008/09, 15,114 in 2009/10 and the average in the first two years of my terms as being 13,248 whereas the average number of starts under the previous incumbent was 11,409, so that is nearly 2,000 more per year so far. You are arguing about statistics.

Nicky Gavron (AM): Can I just say there are no comparable figures for before from the HCA, so all you can do is look at it. If you want to look at your predecessor's starts, you have to go to Government figures and the Government figures do not show what you are saying, so I am just saying that is misleading. I was referred, in that question when I asked it, to Government figures. So I just want to say there is something very misleading about you claiming that record.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): No, Nicky, you are wrong.

Nicky Gavron (AM): I would like to talk about completions.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I would like to correct you because insofar as you are relying on DCLG data, that DCLG data is known to be incomplete and is frequently revised whereas, as far as I am aware, the HCA information I have given you is authoritative.

Nicky Gavron (AM): So where do you get the predecessor figures from when there was no HCA?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): The HCA, as you know --

Nicky Gavron (AM): The HCA did not exist before 2008.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): -- is the successor body to English Partnerships and all the other bodies and it has, as far as I understand --

Nicky Gavron (AM): The Housing Corporation.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): The Housing Corporation; it has authoritative figures.

Nicky Gavron (AM): They are not publicly accountable. They are not available, so I am just saying --

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I am just making them available. They are perfectly available. There is no mystery about these figures.

Nicky Gavron (AM): They are not publicly available. The Housing Corporation was not publicly accountable. They are not available, so we cannot make those comparisons and you are claiming that your record on starts is far more. I can give you your quote to the Conservative conference, "It was far more than was thought possible, far more than my predecessor".

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): It is true.

Nicky Gavron (AM): This is when you were claiming 12,000 and it just is not true. If we look at completions, which is what is delivered on the ground, you have made --

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): The DCLG itself --

Nicky Gavron (AM): Can we look at completions?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I do not see why you are so aggressive.

Nicky Gavron (AM): You cannot live in a start, Mayor; you cannot live in a start. You can only live in a completed home.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): You cannot have a completed unless you start it.

Nicky Gavron (AM): Yes but let us look at completions. Let us look at completions where we do have comparable data. We can compare and then we can compare with your own and your monitoring here at the GLA and we can compare with DCLG. What we find there, and we can compare with HCA even, is that we can compare those two sets of figures with HCA. What we find there is that although there is a little bit of variation, your predecessor had produced 28,000 in his last two years and you produced 26,000. So on completions, it is not just misleading; it is not accurate, it is not true.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Your question was about starts of affordable homes and, by the way, your point about saying the HCA data I have given you, because you do not like the facts and you do not like the fact that we have achieved more than you thought possible, and we have achieved more than the previous regime, you are going away to try to quibble with the data. We have had to face the most difficult set of economic circumstances this country has had for a very long time and we have kept the London housing market moving in spite of incredible difficulties. The number of starts that we have achieved I think has been very, very considerable and remarkable and I give you the figures again. By the way, you say you do not like the HCA data but --

Nicky Gavron (AM): I did not say I did not like it; I just say you cannot compare it.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): The DCLG itself prefers the HCA data --

Nicky Gavron (AM): I am not comparing the DCLG data; it is the Government statistics.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): The DCLG itself prefers the HCA data to monitor housing delivery in London and I think the record of the HCA and everybody involved has been very, very remarkable, but I think the really interesting question, and I think this is where you should take your line of interrogation, is what do we do now? What do we do in the next three or four years? How are we going to keep this thing moving because with the affordable rent model, there is no doubt that we have a very significant challenge? We are no longer using the National Association of Home Builders funding model. We have to make a very different system work.

Nicky Gavron (AM): I am with you on that, the question is on what we already know. I just want to say we have had £5 billion from the Labour Government, you have had kick-start money. Most of what you have completed came from your predecessor and you have to eat into your next round of money in order to get your completed figure of 50,000. I would like to say that you have misled us on your starts, you have been inaccurate on your completions and in terms of the 50,000, it has been delivered by, if it is delivered at all, it is going to be by a record Labour Government legacy of money.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): You cannot have it all ways, Nicky, you cannot have it all ways. We have been able to keep housing investment in London going in spite of incredibly difficult circumstances and contrary to all the predictions of gloom that you were making, and you have been making for the last two years sitting here endlessly carping and criticising. We have achieved and we

are going to achieve a record number of new affordable homes over four years. No previous administration has achieved that and I think you should pay tribute to that.

Nicky Gavron (AM): Even if you achieve it, it will be less than your predecessor.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): That is not true. It is not true, Nicky. Over a four-year period, I am given to understand the 50,000 will be a record.

Nicky Gavron (AM): It will not be.

Mike Tuffrey (AM): Those numbers are good under the circumstances; one has to acknowledge there is a kind of momentum on planning permissions and so forth but that is good.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Thank you, thank you, Mike. That was a very courageous thing to say, thank you.

Mike Tuffrey (AM): Do not worry; I am not all sweetness and light this morning, so just wait for it.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Why not?

Mike Tuffrey (AM): Can you just confirm, if you have the information, how much of that is built on London Development Agency (LDA) land?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I cannot give you the figure now. I will get back to you.

Mike Tuffrey (AM): Because my suspicion is not that much and that may be the answer to the future, so we really need to get these assets.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Which is why we are setting up the Housing Investment Task Force under Peter Rogers to look at what we can do to leverage that land and to de-risk it for developers and get more housing and that is going to be part of the solution. I think the interesting point is we have achieved heroic things over the past few years. The difficult question is what do we do over the next four years?

Mike Tuffrey (AM): Can I just go back, I have a question later (Q153/2011), which we may as well do now, where I was asking you about your manifesto commitment where you said that you would build the 50,000 by 2011. I am not going to accuse you of misleading or even duping or hoaxing or hoodwinking or misinforming or misrepresenting or rooking or bilking or tricking or conning, but I will, if you do not admit that your manifesto commitment was 50,000 by 2011 and that your Housing Strategy is 50,000 by 2012. Just say you admit it.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): We came clean on this thing a long time ago because there was no way. We are facing an incredibly difficult financial crunch.

Mike Tuffrey (AM): As long as it is on the record. The manifesto commitment was 2011 and you have added --

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): To be fair to me, to the point I have made to you about two years ago, or whenever it was, a year or two ago, but I am grateful to you for reminding me of it.

Mike Tuffrey (AM): It is very different. Thank you, Chair.

Steve O'Connell (AM): I am speaking on behalf of the borough, which is about the only borough that is actually building council houses. We should be talking about outcomes, Mr Mayor; hopefully

you will agree on that. Some of these debates around figures have a certain surreal nature to them and my residents who need this housing, if they were watching this, would be completely bemused by some of the lines of argument particularly from the other side. All we can focus on, Mr Mayor, would you agree with me that the previous Mayor certainly let down Londoners with his building campaign; he did not meet his target. You, however, promise to deliver and build, complete 50,000 affordable homes, which is all frankly we need to worry about. Do you share my confidence, enthusiasm that you will deliver that target, as promised, by the end of your term?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Yes. I think it is an incredible record and I think that what you are seeing from Nicky and others is a sort of rage of Caliban that this party they think did not care about this issue has achieved this or is on course to achieve this and it is a tribute to the HCA and also to the dynamism of this administration generally. I pay particular tribute to Rick Blakeway who has earned a lot of respect in the housing sector for the way he has led some of the arguments.

Steve O'Connell (AM): I would like to go on record that the work that Rick has done, and yourself in difficult circumstances. We are in the midst of a Labour created recession - worst one since the war - so it has to be looked at in that perspective, the fact that you will deliver this housing in that recessionary period I think speaks volumes for your mayoralty.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Thank you. I agree with that.

Dee Doocey (Chair): Jennette Arnold has a point of order.

Jennette Arnold (Deputy Chair): Yes, Chair. A second Member, Steve O'Connell, has misled the Assembly. In his statement that his is the only borough building council houses, this is totally untrue. I can give him an example of the London Borough of Islington which is currently building social housing.

Steve O'Connell (AM): We welcome that.

199.2011 - Increase in Congestion Charge

Murad Qureshi

Do you anticipate raising the congestion charge above £10?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): No, Murad; I do not expect to increase the congestion charge and, therefore, I am certainly not going to anticipate it.

Murad Qureshi (AM): Can I remind you what you said during the televised mayoral debates, where you said you would certainly not allow the congestion charge to go up above £8, which the previous Mayor promised not to let happen before and then broke his promise as usual? In reality, over Christmas, you have increased the congestion charge by 25%. Is that not an inaccuracy on your part to have made that statement as a mayoral candidate and then, once in office, increased the congestion charge by 25%?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I do not remember making that commitment on the congestion charge.

Murad Qureshi (AM): There is a record here.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I am interested that you say that; I do not remember it. The thing I do remember --

Murad Qureshi (AM): I did not use it; I said inaccurate but you say --

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): The thing I do remember is saying that we would consult on the Western Extension Zone of the congestion charge and we did consult on it and the thing I do remember saying is that we would bring in an automatic payment system which would take away a lot of the misery of the congestion charge. We delivered on that. We delivered on the Western Extension Zone and we have delivered on an automatic payment system. Frankly, I do not remember making any particular undertakings about the rate of the congestion charge. It has been at £8 for a very long time and I do not think it was unreasonable given that we have bisected and removed a considerable part of the congestion charge zone.

Murad Qureshi (AM): That is not the issue.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Given that we are introducing Auto Pay, I do not think it was unreasonable to have a moderate increase in the congestion. By the way, I would remind you that it is not £10; it is £9 if you pay by auto pay. Most people are going to pay by Auto Pay and I think that is the way to go. Most people understand that there will be a loss to TfL.

Dee Doocey (Chair): Thank you, Mr Mayor. The Labour Group are now out of time.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): There will be a loss to TfL in fine and revenue and there will be a reduction, therefore, in aggravation and misery for Londoners --

169/2011 - 10:10

Mike Tuffrey

Did City Hall cut its emissions by 10% in 2010?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Mike, I am told we are still collating the figures but we think that it is at least 8% or 9% but it could be more depending on what we have achieved on air travel. That is where we are at the moment and other targets.

Mike Tuffrey (AM): Thank you. That is part of the point I was trying to make because way back in February, a year ago, February 2010, you answered my question and you said that you would be reporting CO₂ emissions from City Hall real time on our website. There is a little piece of software that can be put on there. Back in February, you said it would be from the Spring. Now, that still has not happened. Each time I have asked you, I have asked you about four or five times this year, the date's go back

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): What were you asking me four or five times?

Mike Tuffrey (AM): Real time monitoring from CO₂ emissions. It is technically very feasible. Back a year ago, they were saying it could be done.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I think I am getting amnesia. I do not remember you asking me this four or five times.

Mike Tuffrey (AM): Absolutely. I can read it out to you. You said in February 2010. Sorry, this is written questions in City Hall, not verbal.

"We will publish CO emissions as well as its commitments from 10:10 on our website from spring 2010."

We are still waiting. It is just you promised, so my question is did you not promise that you would be a leader in this area? I quote your vision, "The GLA group leads the public sector on reporting CO₂ emissions" and we have not even been able to get on to the website here, CO₂ emissions. Will you fix that?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Come on, we have done brilliantly in reducing our CO₂ emissions. We think we have reduced it by 8% or 9% but it is possibly more. We will give you the full figures and insofar as I made this pledge about - do you want some sort of gizmo saying, "CO₂ is currently emitting X amount"?

Mike Tuffrey (AM): Yes. It is real time energy and that concentrates all your minds and puts you on a leash. It is perfectly technically feasible if there is the leadership there and you promised us the leadership

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Where do you want it placed? Above your desk there?

Mike Tuffrey (AM): On the website. Can I just remind you of the history?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I am certainly going to have a look at it.

Mike Tuffrey (AM): Can I remind you of the history of this because the 10:10 campaign launched in September 2009. At that point, you said, "Oh yes, we support it". Until I actually asked you whether you had signed up to commit; it turned out that you had not. I then put a motion to this Assembly, and I hope you are aware that the Conservative Members walked out, so this Assembly could not debate the issue. We finally had them sitting in their seats long enough, a couple of meetings later, to have a unanimous verdict in favour of 10:10. Since then, it has been very slow getting you to take action. Can I ask you about the fire? The Fire Chairman is not with us, but the Fire Authority only in December came up with its commitments for the 10:10 campaign, a full 15 months after you pledged to play a leadership role.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Come on, the Fire Authority has been in the lead across London with what they are doing in some of their fire stations.

Mike Tuffrey (AM): Precisely my point. You tootled along in the Spring and opened some fire station, yes? You took the headlines - going back to earlier questions - you launched a fire station with all energy efficiency then precisely nothing happened from April until December when they finally named the ten stations they are going to roll out, named with the 10:10 campaign. My point is that you are not showing the leadership you have promised on this issue.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Nonsense. I think we have done exceptionally well and I would like to see whether any other departments or any other parts of local Government have done as well either as London Fire and Emergency Planning Authority (LFEPA) or indeed as one of the GLA.

Mike Tuffrey (AM): LFEPA took the spending on energy efficiency out of last year's capital budgets. Our amendment put it back in; they did not vote for it. They are now bringing it back in 12 months later. They have missed a year's worth of action on this issue; so much for leadership from you on behalf of the GLA family.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Come on, I think you are being uncharacteristically unfair. I think that we have shown incredibly dynamism on this issue and we are carrying on with our campaign to reduce London's CO₂ emissions by 16% by 2025.

Mike Tuffrey (AM): I am pleased with the action that you are talking about but the fact is you came into office with a record as a climate change denier. Since being in office --

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Rhubarb. Rhubarb.

Mike Tuffrey (AM): Since being in office --

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Are these people allowed to say this kind of drivel?

Mike Tuffrey (AM): Since you have been in office, you have talked a good talk. What I am probing into is the lack of action even on something as simple as getting real time energy monitoring, which will at least cement this in.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): You are wrong. Obviously you have asked a lot of written questions about real time energy monitoring. I do not think you brought it up with me four times in this place. I will see what we can do to give you the gizmo that you want, provided it is not too expensive. You can see how much hot air you are emitting at any given moment.

Caroline Pidgeon (AM): Boom, boom.

Mike Tuffrey (AM): Exactly. If you are sticking to your leadership position you have aspired to in your climate change mitigation, can you tell us what this year is going to look like in terms of the actions you are taking?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): You are talking about City Hall?

Mike Tuffrey (AM): Yes, in terms of further reductions here for example.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): It follows from what we have done in reducing head count. There will be a proportionate reduction in CO₂ and that goes for --

Mike Tuffrey (AM): Only if the heating is turned down and the lights are turned off at night.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): There is a campaign to reduce the on time of the lighting system but apparently it is dated in its design, but we are confident of making further savings.

Mike Tuffrey (AM): All right. Let me offer you something you can get your teeth into. TfL, a big user of electricity on the Tube. What progress of switching them to renewable energy for the electricity supply for the Tube?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): As you know, there is a huge amount of work that has gone into making sure that the rolling stock uses regenerative braking to reduce consumption.

Mike Tuffrey (AM): I am talking about the primary source of electricity into the Tube network.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Plainly, it would be a great thing if we could run the Tube network entirely on renewable energy. That is not currently achievable but we, of course, were determined to do it.

Mike Tuffrey (AM): That would be a big prize for 2011 to finally get that one cracked, so can you promise us today that you will try to do that?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): We need a reliable system for energy on the Tube. It is a big consumer, you are absolutely right, Mike. It is a big consumer of electricity and we certainly have been looking at ways to run the Underground on renewable, but so far, I have to tell you it is not possible to run the whole Underground network on combining power and renewable energy though I have asked repeatedly about this. It has been something that I have wanted to do.

Mike Tuffrey (AM): Thank you.

Dee Doocey (Chair): Thank you. The Liberal Democrats are out of time. James Cleverly.

James Cleverly (AM): The questioner made the point about the Conservative Group withdrawing when the motion of the 10:10 was originally debated, so do you find it ironic that in the latest environment champion's league table for which floors turn off the most computers at night, the sixth floor, which contains the Conservative Group, has actually done better at a 95% turn off rate than the seventh floor, which contains the Labour Group, the Liberal Democrat Group and the far left Green Party is actually on at 93%? Do you find that as ironic as I do?

Mike Tuffrey (AM): What about the eighth floor, which is the worst?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I do and yet again, they say one thing and they do another. Are they misleading Londoners?

James Cleverly (AM): Particularly the far left Green Party, misleading London. Say one thing; do another.

Dee Doocey (Chair): Thank you. That is the end of the question and answer session.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Thank you.